

NARRATIVES OF EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS: MAKING
TRANSITIONS SUCCESSFUL FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

LAQUESHA FOSTER

(Under the Direction of Diane L. Cooper)

ABSTRACT

Seldom are the experiences of Early College High School (ECHS) students studied while they are simultaneously working towards high school and college completion. Designed to assist with school reform, ECHS programs provide students with equity and educational opportunities that might not be available in a traditional high school setting. ECHS students are studied primarily to learn about ECHS policy or as first-time-in-college students, after they have transferred to a four year-institution or in comparison to other first-time-in-college students (Schlossberg, 2011). The purpose of this narrative study, utilizing Schlossberg's Transition theory, was to address the exploratory question: How do high school students navigate their transition to the community college while participating in an Early College High School program?

Unstructured interviews, narrative inquiry, and thematic analysis were used develop stories and find emerging themes to understand the lived experiences of the participants as high school students participating in the ECHS program and to understand their ECHS experience at the community college. Three themes emerged from the data that aligned with Schlossberg's Transition Theory. These themes revealed more about Early College High School students who completed two years at the high school, or the ninth and tenth grade, and have transitioned to the

community college to complete their junior and senior years in high school while simultaneously completing up to 60 hours or an associate degree

Keywords: early college high school, ECHS, dual credit, community college, Schlossberg's transition theory, transition, navigation, narrative, stories, experiences, narrative inquiry, thematic analysis

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DEDICATION

To My Grandmother

Ms. Mary Ella White

March 1, 1934- August 15, 2014

To my family:

Tanya, Thomas, Brittany, James, Angel, Terriana, Brelyn,

Uncle Sandy, Uncle Sam, Uncle Kenny, Uncle Paul, Sandra (Neat), Shirley, and

the Fosters, and the Whites,

Thank you for all your encouragement.

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“For I know the thoughts I have for you, declared the Lord. Plans to prosper you, not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and future.” Jeremiah 29:11

First, I would like to give honor to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If it were not for Jesus and Dr. Cooper (she’s a great assistant), I would not be here.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Many states have started to carefully examine and re-define traditional high school approaches to ensure that more students are adequately prepared for college or to enter the workforce upon graduation from high school. Olsen (2010) stated that the inadequacies of the traditional high school model, established in the early 1900s, of poor school performance or high dropout rates were harmful to most students, particularly students of color and students of a lower socioeconomic status. To improve educational outcomes researchers identified various methods to assist more high school students toward college completion inclusive of at least one to two years of college or a workforce credential that would enable students to begin working upon graduation (Shelton, 2013). Furthermore, many states began to examine and implement the Early College High School (ECHS) model developed through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Texas High School Project, 2017). The fundamental purpose of the ECHS model was to create smaller schools within comprehensive high schools or at community colleges. These smaller schools would concentrate on first-generation and/or low-income high school students who applied for the opportunity to begin college while simultaneously working to complete high school (Shelton, 2013; Texas Education Agency, 2010; THSP, 2010;).

This chapter will discuss the background of Early College High School students and the program, the purpose of the study, the research question, and the need and significance of the study. Next, the limitations and assumptions of the study are covered, in conjunction with the presentation of conceptual and operational definitions. Last, a chapter summary is provided.

Background Information

The educational pipeline from high school to college has evolved since the inception of the Early College High School (ECHS) model, which created additional opportunities to move students, particularly students from urban areas, from high school to college (Angeles, 2014; Born, 2006; Carter, 2004; Olson, 2010). The establishment of ECHS programs created structures and policies that enabled students who were historically underrepresented in higher education to be successful in college courses while providing opportunities for students to understand the rigors of the college environment. In 2014, College Board research stated that over the last ten years the rigor of high school increased as students took more Advanced Placement (AP) courses and exams; however, the number of students has not followed the same projections for AP students completing post-secondary education (Angeles, 2014). Regarding the Early College High School initiative, Cravey (2013) believed that the model was designed to form collaborative partnerships between independent school districts and colleges that would create a unique high school experience on the college campus. In 2011, Jobs for the Future (JFF) reported that there were over 200 Early College High Schools across the country, with the most growth in North Carolina and Texas. The onset of the model focused on creating a scope and sequence four-year plan that would align with dual credit or college credit and high school coursework. This map or plan created a pathway that resulted in the possible completion of a career pathway or a post-secondary degree plan at no cost to the student during the four-year high school career (Cravey, 2013; Jobs for the Future, 2011).

Early College High School research has concentrated on the success and impactful stories of students who participated in this type of initiative along with the study of implemented

policies regarding these students (Angeles, 2014; Miller, Kosiewicz, Wang, Marwah, Delhommer & Daugherty, 2016; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2016). However, the research has not sought to explain the experiences or stories of the ECHS students who have transitioned to college after completing the first two years of high school. The experiences of these individuals are unique since they essentially become real college students overnight as they leave the quiet confines of their high school and are mainstreamed into the general population of the college experience.

The Early College High School

An Early College High School (ECHS) is defined as an innovative high school that allows students who are least likely to graduate high school to attend college for the opportunity to earn their high school diploma and up to 60 college credit hours (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The ECHS program provides students with a college education at the community college for no cost, and the program offers rigorous instructions, academic and social support while increasing college readiness and reducing barriers to college (Texas Education Agency, 2017). The fundamental principle of the Early College High School (ECHS) model was to accelerate the college and high school experience, steering students away from the need take developmental classes once they became college students. As the program progressed the purpose of the ECHS was to provide first-generation, lower socioeconomic status, and/or underrepresented high school students with equity, access, and opportunity towards college or career and to level the transition from secondary to post-secondary education (Texas Education Agency, 2017). Fleischmann and Heppen (2006) explained that this targeted population of traditionally underrepresented students in post-secondary settings established the broad goals for serving these students along with rigorous instruction, relevant curriculum, and supportive friendships.

The ECHS model consists of four to six-year plans that aligns high school curriculum with college curriculum that intentionally leads the student to high school and college graduation through dual credit courses (Angeles, 2014; Peralez, 2014). By participating in the dual credit program through the ECHS model, students can ease the transition of their college experience and culture. The dual credit or ECHS model enabled traditionally underrepresented students who initially decide not to enroll in college course, but may be successful (Peralez, 2014) to work towards college credit while still in high school.

The Blueprint and the Core Values of the ECHS program

Core principle one: Early college schools are committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education.

Core principle two: Early college schools are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success.

Core principle three: Early college schools and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program, so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion.

Core principle four: Early college schools engage students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion.

Core principle five: Early college schools and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement. (Barnett, Bucci, Hinojosa, & Kim 2013, p. 2-3; Early College High School Initiative, 2008; Texas Education Agency, 2017)

The central principles of the Early College High School Initiatives were developed to provide a framework to ease students' academic transition from secondary to post-secondary institutions. These principles were established on the idea that "every young person needs a postsecondary credential to thrive in today's world" (Peralez, 2014, p. 4). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation supported the global idea of change and to assist states in the re-design of their

traditional high school models and to partner with local community colleges. A substantial secondary and post-secondary relationship is needed to sustain a dual credit program, ECHS program or the relationship that has the structures in place to establish a dual credit program within the high school according to the research of Kisker (2006) and Stebleton and Soria (2012). By creating smaller schools within the high school, students are able to leave with their high school diploma and conceivably an Associate's degree or one to two years of college credit. By changing the traditional high school structure and accelerating the first two years of college, an Early College High School supports the idea that high schools and community colleges will improve graduation rates and better prepare students for entry to into the workforce (Lieberman, 2004; Shelton, 2013).

Additionally, the vision of the ECHS was to create a pedagogical environment that immersed students into the curricula and culture of the college and to remove “financial, academic, and psychological hurdles” (Peralez, 2014, p. 34). However, these hurdles would often hinder students from pursuing or completing their college studies (Early College High School Initiative, 2008; Hoffman, Vargas & Santos, 2009; Peralez, 2014; Wolk, 2005). This vision articulated that the purpose was to empower students to attain a post-secondary degree and pinpoints challenges that may prohibit students from enrollment, persistence, and matriculation at the college. Through these partnerships, Lieberman (2004) believed that the success of an Early College High School could “destroy the hierarchy between secondary and high education while building an equal partnership between high schools and local community colleges” (p. 3).

The Early College High School Student Meets the First-Generation Student

For first-generation students, the ECHS works to create real structures for students to engage with faculty and their peers, along with the creation of an environment that encompasses the rigor and academic success that students will need for completion and success. Early in their

academic careers, before pursuing an ECHS program, this targeted population of students was categorized as students with poor attendance, high risk and who lacked motivation about their educational studies (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Miller, Fleming, & Reed, 2013). By this targeted population of students participating in the ECHS program they were able to experience positive student-teacher relationships, engage in rigorous coursework, and move toward a positive academic path (Miller et al., 2013). Miller et al. (2013) stated that Early College High Schools focused on students who were indeed first-generation and students of color to create opportunities for students who may have historically lacked access to higher education. According to the ECHS Initiative (2012), 75% of ECHSs are predominately Black or Latino; while almost 60% of ECHS students are eligible for free or reduced lunch. The evidence provided by this data indicated that commitment to an ECHS would create opportunities for students who are underrepresented in higher education.

Texas and the Early College High School Program

The Texas High School Project (2012) reported that Texas Early College High School Initiative began in 2004 when the model was initially introduced in the state of Texas. In 2005, Texas Legislature defined the purpose of the Texas High School Project (2012) as that “early college high schools are for students who are at risk of dropping out of high school or who wish to accelerate completion of the high school program” (p. 1). The purpose of the Texas High School Project, which created a public and private alliance within the state, was to ensure that all students in Texas a successful path to high school graduation, college and career (Shelton, 2013).

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded funding to the Community Foundation of Texas and the Texas High School Project to support the establishment of the Early College

High Schools along with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) (Nodine, 2010; Peralez, 2014; Shelton, 2013).

According to TEA (2016) and Jobs for the Future (2016), across the state of Texas, 36% of Early College High School students attended high schools in districts that were in economically disadvantaged areas. TEA (2016) reported that the more economically disadvantage that students were who attended the ECHS program, the more likely that the high school would see an increase in the students who attended and participated in the ECHS program. On average male student population who participated in an ECHS programs could range between 20 to 25%, whereas the female student population who participated in the ECHS program could be upwards to almost 75 to 80% participation (www.tea.org). TEA reported the group of ECHS students that were typically considered at-risk which was 59% of the ECHS student population, along with Hispanic students, who represented 63% of the ECHS student participants, while African American ECHS students represented almost 30% of participants across the state. Dounay (2008) reported that students of a lower-socio economic status and students of color are disproportionately affected because there are fewer resources to address the various levels of this disparity.

The main goal of the ECHS Initiative was to provide students with the opportunity to work towards and complete one to two years of college credit and possibly an associate degree upon completion of 60 semester credit hours while simultaneously completing high school requirements (American Institute of Research [AIR], 2008). It was important to understand that interventions must be created for all ECHS students at the onset of the ninth grade because many of the students may not have the “necessary skill level to commence or complete the demanding curriculum that some ECHSs have imposed,” (National High School Center, 2007, p.3).

Purpose of the Study

Rarely are the experiences of ECHS students studied while they are simultaneously working towards high school and college completion. Primarily ECHS students are studied alongside first time in college students after they have transferred to a four-year institution and are considered to be transfer students (Angeles, 2014; Born, 2006; Fleischman and Heppen, 2009; Giani, Alexander, & Reyes, 2014). They are often studied as cohorts whose ninth-grade ECHS experience began at the community college in lieu of the traditional high school setting (Angeles, 2014; Howerter, 2011). Also, very little research has been conducted on ECHS students who leave their high school to take classes at community colleges to complete college and high school or on the impact of the transition from the high school to community college from the perspective of the ECHS student (Edmunds, 2012; Edmunds, Willse, & Arshavsky, 2013). The rationale of this narrative inquiry and analysis is to examine the experiences of Early College High School (ECHS) students who have transitioned from the high school as high school Juniors to the community college to complete the last two years of high school and possibly their college degree. This study will carefully examine the lived experiences of how ECHS students are navigating their transition and finding a fit through academic and social integration after transitioning from the high school to the community college; specifically students who have completed the first two years of high school at the high school campus (ninth and tenth grade) and the last two years of high school at the college (eleventh and twelfth grade) in order for students to graduate simultaneously from high school and the community college. Specific areas of interest include (a) how ECHS students navigate their college experience; and (b) how the

students balance high school and college studies through the power of place (Smith, Fischetti, Fort, Gurley, & Kelly, 2012).

The research question for this study is the following:

- a. How do high school students navigate their transition to the community college while participating in an early college high school program?

Significance of the Study

Much has been written about the Early College High Schools, Early College High School models, preparing students for college, implementation and impact of Early College High School models, and the transition from the high school to a four- year institution. However, there is limited research on the Early College High School student experience, precisely how ECHS students find a fit or academically or socially integrate while at the community college and how they come to understand their transition. Given the increasing number of studies that focus on ECHS programs and models and their impact for the students they serve (An, 2013; Carnvale, Smith & Strohl 2013; THECB, 2016), it is imperative to study the experiences of ECHS students and how they navigate their transition while participating in the ECHS program along with fitting in at the community college. This study is significant to current research studies as it focused on how students navigate their community college experiences while they are still high school students. This research will explore the need for theory and framework and how community colleges can best support this group of students. The purpose of the study is to understand the ECHS students' experience and how they define themselves. Through a narrative approach, it believed that the research participants are trying to understand the world in which they live, work, and learn (Creswell, 2014).

Narrative Approach

A narrative approach for this study was used to reconstruct the ECHS student experience. This approach was used to enhance the experiences of the ECHS students, validate their stories and find their place at the college. This qualitative approach may enable an individual to learn how the students define their transition and how the Early College High School students fit into the college community.

The narrative approach allowed for the construction of the participants stories or the recounting of their experiences, and the sharing of common structural features of themes. These two assumptions of narrative inquiry shaped how the researcher interviews the participants and analyzed the data (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Riessman, 2008). The first belief of narrative approach is the need to investigate and document the unique voices and experiences of all ECHS students (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Riessman, 2008), which will enable us to listen to the ECHS students voice and experience (Bulter-Kisber, 2008; Creswell, 2014; Crotty, 1998; Riessman, 2008). The second belief of narrative approach involves the social construction of student identity and roles as the high school student and the college student (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Crotty, 1998; Riessman, 2008).

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

To understand the experience of the ECHS students and how they navigate their own experiences as they transition from high school to college, Schlossberg's Transition theory guided this study. The focus of Schlossberg's transition theory concentrates on the individual's ability to cope and adjust to changes in their environment (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Schlossberg, 2010). Schlossberg (2011) reviewed the transition theory through three steps, (1) perception of transition by the individual, (2) characteristics of the pre-

transitional and the post-transitional environment, and (3) characteristics of the individual going through the transition (p. 213).

The transition for ECHS students involves various individuals and situations which can be driven by the experiences that students may have while in high school. Schlossberg's Transition theory provides the theoretical foundation for this study. The concepts of transition theory were used to inform the focus of the methodology and analysis of this research of experiences of the Early College High School student and how the students integrated academically and socially at the community college. The theory was also utilized is to examine how the ECHS students' transition from the high school to the community college as ever-evolving students.

Definition of Terms

Dual Credit- Refers to students being enrolled, concurrently, in two distinct educational institutions, which enables the student to receive both college and high school credit for the course (edglossary.org, 2017). Dual credit is a process through which a student may earn high school credit for completing a college course that provides advanced academic instruction beyond, or in greater depth than, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for a corresponding high school course. The “dual credit” earned is college credit and high school credit for one course (Texas Education Agency, 2011, www.tea.texas.gov, 2017).

Dual Enrolled- Can be used interchangeably with dual credit.

College Readiness- Students who equipped with the knowledge and skills deemed essential for success in the university, community college or community college programs (edglossary.org, 2017; www.tea.texas.gov, 2017).

Early College High School (ECHS)- An ECHS is a school designated by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) that provides the outreach, curricula, and student learning and support programs that enable the participating student to combine high school courses and college-level courses during grades 9 through 12. Students in an ECHS are able to complete the Recommended High School Program or the Distinguished Achievement Program while earning up to 60 semester credit hours toward an associate or baccalaureate degree by the fifth anniversary of their first day of high school. All ECHSs must be approved and so designated by TEA (Texas Administrative Code §102.1091 and §4.153) (TEA, 2017, www.tea.texas.gov, 2017).

Inter-Local Agreement (ILA) (or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU))- Collaboration between the high school and the college is a crucial element of a dual credit program. The written agreement (often referred to as an articulation agreement, an institutional agreement, or a partnership agreement) drawn up between the public school district and the institution of higher education should define the nature of this collaboration. The Texas Administrative Code, §4.84 and §9.144, requires that any dual credit partnership between a secondary school and a public college include a written agreement (often referred to as an articulation agreement, an institutional agreement, or a partnership agreement) approved by the governing boards or designated authorities of both institutions. The agreement must address at least the following elements:

- Eligible Courses
- Student Eligibility
- Location of Class
- Student Composition of Class
- Faculty Selection, Supervision, and Evaluation

- Course Curriculum, Instruction, and Grading
- Academic Policies and Student Support Services
- Transcription of Credit
- Funding (TEA, 2017; www.tea.texas.gov, 2017)

Partnership- Dual Credit Partnerships provide high school student the opportunity to take college credit-bearing courses (National Association of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships, 2017).

Texas Education Agency (TEA)- The Texas Education is a branch of the state government of Texas responsible for public education (tea.texas.gov, 2017).

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board- is an agency of the state of Texas' government that oversees all public post-secondary education(www.thecb.state.tx.us).

Conclusion

In 2012 it was reported that there were 230 Early College High School programs that serve over fifty thousand students across 28 states (www.jff.org, 2016). Due to the continuous growth of the number of potential students, some states have seen a 650 % increase in the number of ECHS programs being offered and the number of students being served (www.air.org, 2018). This has altered the traditional high school model and enhanced the ECHS movement for better education for underrepresented, first-generation high school students, with the overarching goal of the ECHS to bridge the gap between high school and college, while creating support mechanisms for students to engage with faculty, to strengthen peer relationships, and to expose students to the rigors of academia.

In chapter one, a brief overview was provided throughout the background information, along with why the study is needed to understand the student's experience of how they find fit or sense of belonging after the transition from the high school to the college. This information will

aid in the understanding of how ECHS students make meaning of their transition as students who simultaneously work to complete high school and college.

While the research connecting the intersection of these two topics is limited, the next section of this study will closely review available data and research of the ECHS students, their experience, and their identity. Furthermore, the theoretical framework and literature review will serve as a foundation for how the research will be conducted.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

By the 2010-2011 academic year, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2013) reported that over one million high school students had taken at least one dual credit course within their junior or senior year and over two million dual credit courses were completed nationwide. These data indicated that there had been a seven percent increase each year since 2002-2003, for students who registered in dual-enrolled college courses (NCES, 2013). The development of the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) created supportive and nurturing bridges between the high school and the college for students to earn college credit, workforce credential or an associate's degree (Arshavsky, Edmunds, Miller, & Corritore, 2010; Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010; Valadez, 2013). With the establishment of Early College High Schools, the number of students who were participating in college courses increased, along with the number who were graduating from high school.

While research around the ECHS programs is growing, the research regarding the student's transition from high school student to community college is insufficient. The studies that exist asserts that there is need to understand their student experience and the individual ECHS factors that are related to student success (Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Nodine, 2009; Smith & Zhang, 2009). Despite these limitations, this section will examine and critique the current research concerning ECHS and the concepts of its partnerships with the community college.

The Community College and High School Connection

The creation of the community college helped the United States preserve its promise of providing educational opportunities for all, regardless of socio-economic status and academic standing (Rice, 2009). While community colleges were initially defined as two-year institutions

that prepared students to transition to four-year institutions, that has changed over the years. Community colleges are defined as comprehensive institutions that serve a variety of functions for their communities through vocational, general, community and remedial education (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Rice, 2009). Rice (2009) defined vocational education as “career track” education, which involves a prescribed curriculum that enables students to earn an Applied Associate of Science (AAS) or various certifications in a particular industry. Community or continuing education classes, are non-credit bearing college courses that serve the interests of community members; while general courses are lower-division courses that are taken by students towards their associate’s degree and potentially the Bachelor’s degree (Rice, 2009). Community colleges provide students with flexibility, offer low tuition rates, and established open-door admissions policies for students which provided opportunities for at-risk, first-generation and/or disadvantaged individuals who have the desire to attend college (Rice, 2009).

Cohen and Brawer (2008) observed that the original design of community colleges was to serve the needs and interests of American communities. The developments in community colleges reflect the political and social changes in American society. For example, through the years the students' needs have changed, and institutions have moved from transitional secondary to postsecondary "junior" colleges to colleges of first resort for many students regardless of social status or race (Cohen & Brawer ,2008). Rendon (2002) suggested that community colleges should regard themselves as unique and vital institutions whose sole purpose is to provide students with unlimited access to higher education.

As the establishment of community colleges increased, various stakeholders realized the need to share resources between secondary education and post-secondary education. The leading initiators of the concept of the community college, President William R. Harper the first

president of the University of Chicago and Bradley University, and Dean Alexis F. Lange of the University of California at Berkley, believed that the last two years of high school should align as an extension with the two years at the community college (Erby, 1928; Outlaw, 2017).

Because these leaders foresaw the potential benefits that students could receive, Outlaw (2017) stated that it was believed that the two entities should support the link of shared coursework between the college campus and the high school.

In a 1921 address to the Texas Teachers Association, George Zook, a U.S. Bureau of Education representative, declared that too much time was spent at the four-year institutions by professors on assimilating recent high school graduates (Kisker, 2006). Kisker (2006) stated students focused on secondary coursework or development coursework in their first and second year. Building the argument for the integration of the community college and the high school, this continued to push forward the idea well into the 20th century that most community colleges were extensions of high schools well into the 1960s (Kisker, 2006; Outlaw, 2017). The need for a smoother transition between high schools and colleges provided an opportunity for high school students to complete high school, college certifications, and degrees (Smith & Zang, 2009).

The Progression of the Early College High School

The launch of the Early College High School is not a new concept, nor it is unique, and it has existed for much longer than perceived by the public. Initially, developed by educator Leonard Koos, the first concept of the Early College High School was established during the 1930s and 1940s as a model to integrate secondary and post-secondary education (Kisker, 2006; Koos, 1946). Known as the "6-4-4 plan," the purpose was to increase college enrollment and save both the public school system and colleges numerous resources, particularly financial resources (Kisker, 2006; Koos, 1923; Peralez, 2014). Adopted by several states, including California, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Mississippi, the 6-4-4 plan was designed for

students seventh through tenth grade to begin high school early and for rising eleventh graders to start college courses at their local community college (Kisker, 2006; Peralez, 2014). Koos (1946) asserted that the purpose of the 6-4-4 plan was to connect the last two years of high school to the first two years of college. Koos (1946) found that the curriculum in high school and the freshman and sophomore college curriculum were inherently repetitive. This connection to higher education was deemed more of a necessity to upper-class high school students than to secondary education as to assist students with their adjustment to the college.

Educational psychologists and researchers challenged Koos that this created a possible break-in intellectual maturation for students who participated in these initiatives (Outlaw, 2017). Koos (1946) argued against that idea and believed that student growth would impact the educational environment which would lead to the continuous growth of the student and enable the constant progress of the 6-4-4 plan (Koos, 1946). Moreover, Koos (1946) argued that by aligning grades 11-14, this would permit for financial savings in construction, housing, maintenance, and operations. Furthermore, the alignment of the curriculum for grades 11-14 would eliminate the need for developmental coursework and would enable the student to transition from general coursework to specialized coursework (Koos, 1946; Outlaw, 2017). Enriching the student academic experience as students would have access to courses beyond the public high school curriculum (Wechsler, 2001).

Due to lack of funding and changing regulations for both secondary and post-secondary institutions, the 6-4-4 plan soon became obsolete (Kisker, 2006; Peralez, 2014). Eliminated after World War II due to its lack of "traditional" structure of the previous secondary structure for education that consisted of grades 9th through 12th grade.

The Establishment of Middle College High School

Variations of the plan re-emerged during the 1970s and served as a precursor for the establishment of the Middle College High School (MCHS). The inception of the Middle College began at LaGuardia College in New York, and its purpose was to cater to low income, urban students of color and serve as a catalyst for higher education. Janet Lieberman, the founder of the MCHS, believed that this model would possibly prohibit students from dropping out of high school, as early as the ninth and tenth grade (Lieberman, 1986; 2004). Lieberman (198) assumed that due to the age and the vulnerability of young students, this created a lack of educational persistence in the students and anomalies toward the "functions of school" (p.74). Lieberman proposed that the college implement a program that focused on students between the ages of 16-20 years' old who identified as potential participants in the program to change their ideas regarding education and school (Carter, 2004; Lieberman, 1986). Working to change the structure of secondary education and to establish procedures to integrate secondary education with higher education efficiently, Lieberman sought to improve student development by improving leadership training for administrators, raising student aspirations, while incorporating opportunities for student-focused collaborations (Lieberman, 1986; Peralez, 2014). Students were placed in a rigorous academic environment that provided support and integrated coursework that required the students to maintain high levels of academic success because of these changes (Hawkins, 2005; Kisker, 2006; Lieberman, 1986, 2004; Peralez, 2014).

The primary mechanisms of the MCHS model centered on a flexible curriculum that would permit students to progress at their own pace and experience the following:

- after demonstrated college readiness students would have the opportunity to enroll in college courses;
- a cooperative educational program that included field trips, internships, and apprenticeships; and
- a counseling structure that would encourage a student to engage and build faculty relationships, cooperative learning, student visibility, and individuality (Wechsler, 2001, p. 167).

Unfortunately, the MCHS model initially struggled to integrate high school and college completion. According to Wechsler (2001),

LaGuardia's Middle College High School became neither a grades 10-14 school for at-risk students nor a top school-level department preparing at-risk students exclusively for one community college. Novelty was limited when the state compelled high school attendance but left postsecondary education volitional, when the need for revenue tempered collaboration, and when the age gap between community college and high school students widened. (p. 167)

Despite the challenges, the MCHS was able to regroup and meet the need of the at-risk students. Data generated from the New York area compared the LaGuardia Middle College High School students to non-MCHS students in the same area to review the success of student participants through student attendance and graduation rates and college readiness. The results illustrated are in Table 1.

Table 1: Comparison of MCHS Students vs. Non-MCHS Students

MCHS Students				
Attendance	Graduation	Dropout Rate	College- Readiness Reading	College- Readiness Math
81.0%	87.8%	5.8%	98.2%	49.5%
Non-MCHS Students				
Attendance	Graduation	Dropout Rate	College- Readiness Reading	College- Readiness Math
69.0%	86.4%	40%	77.0%	47.0%

Note: as reported by Pollock, 2009

Through additional research, MCHS was able to examine the benefits that students received through their collaborative efforts and student-centered focus. Cullen (1991) reported that students perceived the program as collaborative and student-centered and that the faculty was interested in their development as learners, which motivated the students to seek success. Students indicated that through this new motivation they felt enriched by the curriculum, and through the collaborative efforts of instructors and administrators' students felt as though everyone was actively involved in his or her self-development, academically and personally (Cullen, 1991).

Within the next decade, the establishment of the MCHS progressed from one institution to 20 MCHS across the country along with additional student and financial resources to sustain each program. The consistent funding and the benefits of the Middle College High School programs provided the MCHS with the prolonged existence that the 6-4-4 plan could not offer to students. Due to the success of the MCHS, it served as the precursor to the Early College High School blueprint.

Goals of the ECHS Programs

The 6-4-4 plan and the Middle College School programs centered on educational attainment for a targeted group of students who would not otherwise seek the opportunities provided through traditional educational structures and institutions. While these were both short programs, their potential to effectively impact the rates of first-time in college high school graduates served each program well. Peralez (2014) stated that each program efficiently integrated secondary and post-secondary education along with supporting the transition from high school to college. The ECHS model targeted at-risk students, which was like the MCHS model in the approach of immersing students in a collegiate culture (Lieberman, 1986, 1990, 2004; Webb, 2004). However, these two models differ in the types of curriculum offered and the age at which students begin taking college-level courses (Jacobson, 2005; Lieberman, 1986, 2004; Manzo, 2005; Roberts, 2008).

The design of Middle College created a bridge to expose high school students to the college environment by immersing the students within their last two years of high school. However, the focus was on completing high school diploma requirements and not through a blended high school–college curriculum (Lieberman, 2004). In the last two years of high school, Middle College students were encouraged to register for general education college courses and to transition to a degree program after finishing high school graduation requirements. The Early College also differs from the Middle College in its approach to the high school and college curricula and its end goal. The Early College was intended to accelerate the curriculum by blending the high school and college curriculum such that by taking both high school classes and college classes, a student could fulfill high school graduation requirements while simultaneously

earning up to one to two years of college credit or an Associate's or an Applied Associate degree.

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation generously funded the Early College High School Initiative, along with private funding from the Lumina Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation and Carnegie Mellon Foundation of New York (Lieberman, 2004). All these efforts and generous monetary gift revived the concept of the Early College High School Initiative with MCHS serving as the foundation (Arshavsky et al., 2010; Hoffman et al., 2009; Peralez, 2014). The organization served as the driving force for the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), and its goal was to re-structure and re-design the relationship of the high school partnership with its local community college (Kisker, 2006). The ECHSI recruited partners to help make connections between secondary and postsecondary institutions. These relationships enabled these partnerships to find additional financial support and national and state political advocacy, along with organizational and structural support, and training for all who associated with the Early College High School.

The national Early College High School Initiative specified that the purpose would be to expand the enrollment of high school graduates and to prepare at-risk students to attend college intentionally. The experience of the ECHS program would position students to "encountering the rigor, depth, and intensity of college work at an earlier age inspires average, underachieving, to become well-prepared high school students who strive to achieve academically and personally. Also, the early college high school model helps reduce financial and admissions barriers faced by many low-income students" (Edmunds, 2010; Jobs for the Future, 2005, p. 3). In 2008, the American Institute for Research (AIR) reported that the goal of the national ECHS

Initiative was to recruit and enroll traditionally underrepresented students at postsecondary institutions who were missing in the classroom (p.5). Students would have diverse backgrounds and could potentially be in one or more categories. The categories for students would include:

- English language learners,
- first generation,
- at-risk,
- possibly lack access to necessary academic preparation for postsecondary enrollment,
- students of color, and
- lack the financial means to attend college (Edmunds et al, 2012; Outlaw, 2017; Peralez, 2014).

The Early College High School program design was bold, yet purposeful in its concept to attract students to the program (Stout, 2005). Lieberman (2004) highlighted that an ECHS is a small school within a school or at a community college from which students could move through high school and college while simultaneously earning a high school diploma along with an Associate's degree or one to two years of college credit. Consequently, by changing the structure of the high school years and compressing the numbers of college years, this led to higher high school graduation rates, college completion, and for placement into top skills positions in the workplace (Lieberman, 2004; Shelton, 2013; Stout, 2005).

Early College High Schools in Texas

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and American Institutional Research (Miller et al., 2018) reported that between 2000 and 2016, the total enrollment of high school students taking at least one dual-credit course increased from 18,524 to 204,286, an

increase of more than 1,100%. Furthermore, during this time the number higher education institutions across the state Texas delivering dual-credit education increased from 52 to 108 (Miller et al., 2018). Presently, 79 community colleges (99%), 29 universities (59%), and 1,650 high schools (93%) provide students with dual-credit educational opportunities in Texas (Miller et al., 2018).

Since 1995, Texas has increased the number of opportunities for dual credit and Early College High School opportunities by enacting legislation that has made it easier for more students to participate in these programs. The establishment of these laws created additional funding streams for dual credit instructional delivery along with increase the number advanced hours that students could work toward which would include 12 college credit in dual credit (Miller et al , 2018; Shelton, 2014). In 2015, THECB lobbied for legislation to be passed that offered students the possibility to complete more than the standard 12 semester credit hours, and additional access for students through the passing of Texas House Bill (HB) 505, which stated,

No limits on the number of college courses high school students can take for dual credit. Furthermore, students can participate in dual credit programs as early as their freshman year, rather than their junior year (www.dcccd.edu/dualcredit).

While HB 505 offered colleges and universities the option to give restrictions or write their own rules, most higher education institutions utilized this occasion to market dual credit and Early College High School and to deliver additional access to students who were interested in taking dual credit courses. Moreover, many two-year institutions used the opportunity to promote college access and completion.

Characteristics of the Early College High School

In partnership with a community college or a university, an ECHS is a self-governing school managed by the local school district. This program offers a personalized and caring

learning environment that provide students with care, support, and high expectations for at-risk or underprepared academic students (Outlaw, 2017; Pollock, 2009; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). The goal of the ECHS program is to assist ninth grade students in gaining insight into college and the college culture as well as the self-management skills necessary to create and follow a postsecondary program plan, even when they face obstacles (Morrow & Torrez, 2012).

Commonly known in the Early College community as the 3 R's, the ECHS Initiative framework is constructed around rigor, relevance, and relationships, (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). This structure is categorized by individualization, respect, responsibility, high expectations, performance-based decision making, use of technology, common focus, and collaboration (Berger et al., 2010; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). These characteristics construct the foundation for the ECHS program and allow them to serve as a welcoming place where students and faculty can engage, build relationships and pursue a common task based on high academic achievement for all students (Berger et al., 2010; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Also, the ECHS program created a professional community among educators that championed collaborative partnerships and student-focused learning (Berger et al., 2010; Webb & Gerwin, 2014).

To begin the EHCS process, students undergo an interview and application process lead by the high school and community college. To ensure an appropriate fit between the student's learning needs and the program goals and to measure the “grit” and determination that the student has towards matriculation through the program (Born, 2006; Cravey, 2013; Edmunds, 2012). Students and parents receive information that their student may not have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities such as athletics, band, and clubs. ECHS students may have to forego extracurricular activities to gain the benefits of cultivating a small, engaging

environment (Cravey, 2013; Miller, Fleming, & Reed, 2013; Edmunds, 2012). However, students are required to participate in extensive service learning projects of their choice until graduation (Edmunds, 2012; Miller et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2012; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). The ECHS curriculum also does not offer many electives, and students only take their core course requirements (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011).

While ECHS students may participate in some accelerated or pre-advanced placement courses that the high school offers to prepare them for the rigor of college, a student is not required to participate in those courses to complete their program (Oliver, Richard, Witt, Alvarado, & Hill, 2010). In the first two years of the program, students typically complete their required high school courses along with one to four college courses (Edmunds, 2012). Although many schools provide college classes in the first and second years, students may enroll in one to two college courses at their high school and receive instruction from high school credentialed instructor or college instructors at their high school (Edmunds, 2012). ECHS staff closely monitor academic progress for each student's while providing support and guidance throughout the start of college coursework. Pedagogical strategies and program curriculum alignment between college and high school courses are specifically designed to provide an academic and social bridge for successful college integration through an acceleration process (Edmunds, 2012). Students become accustomed to the rigor of college-level work through preparatory and dual credit courses completed under the supervision of high school teachers, credentialed high school instructors or college adjuncts, students transition to college courses taught solely by professors (Edmunds, 2012).

By the third and fourth year, students take between 12-15 credit hours per semester and are mainstreamed or enrolled into classes with traditional-aged or returning adult college students (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). An ECHS counselor is assigned to each cohort in college courses at the college who maintains regular contact with students to monitor and support their progress as well as to aid in areas such as time management, placement exams and navigating the new college environment (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). Figures 1, 2, and 3 illustrate the ECHS model, the four-year scope and sequence plan as it relates to Early College High School students.

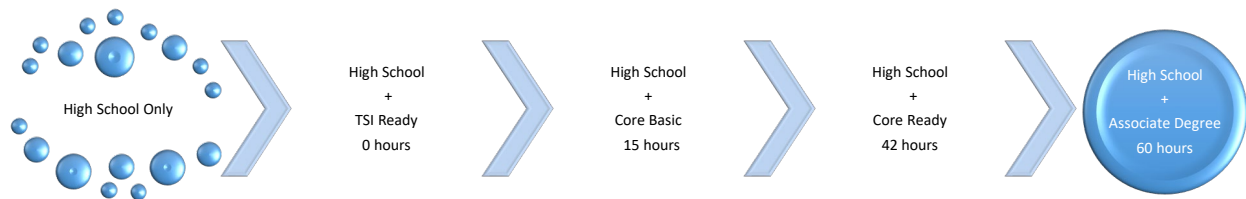


Figure 1: The Early College High School Model

Note. As reported by Dallas County Community College District, 2018

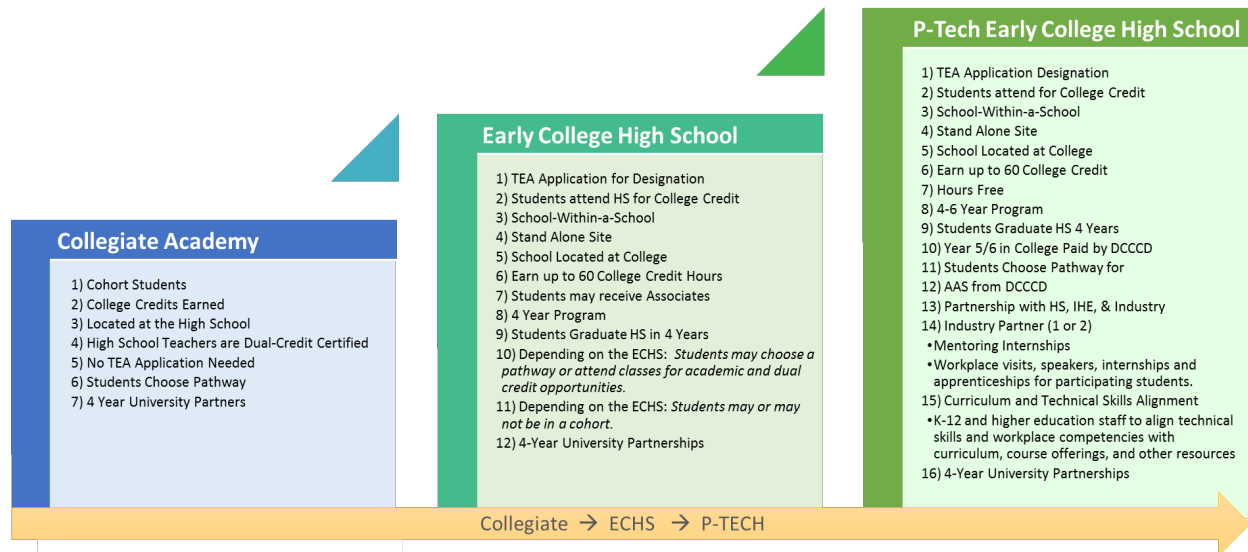


Figure 2. Collegiate Academy vs. Early College High School vs. P-Tech ECHS.

Note. As reported by Dallas Independent School District, 2017

Participating ISD:		Dallas		Career Pathway Program – 4-yr Plan		Participating Colleges:		Brookhaven College and Eastfield College				
Participating HS:		W. T. White Early College High School Bryan Adams P-Tech ECHS		(Recommended Graduation Plan)		AA Degree:		Associate of Arts in Teaching EC-6				
HS Plan:		Education		Academic Year 2017 – 2018								
HIGH SCHOOL/SECONDARY								COLLEGE/POSTSECONDARY				
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Semester I (Fall)	Semester II (Spring)	Semester III	Semester IV
1	English I		English II		English III		English IV ENGL 1301 - Composition I	English IV ENGL 1302 - Composition II	(+) Dual Credit Fine Arts Appreciation options: See counselor/advisor for placement #4403 Studio Art I (DC) Sem1 <i>ARTS 1301 – Art Appreciation</i> #8878 Dance Appreciation 1 (DC) <i>DANC 2303 – Dance Appreciation I</i> #8845 Theatre I (DC) Sem1 <i>DRAM 1310 – Introduction to Theatre</i> #1547 Humanities (DC) <i>HUMA 1315 -- Fine Art Appreciation</i> #8853 Theatre I (DC) Sem2 <i>DRAM 2361 -- History of Theater</i> #8837 Music Appreciation (DC) Sem2 <i>MUSI 1306 -- Music Appreciation I</i>			
2	Algebra I/Geometry		Algebra II		Pre-Calculus (Sem1) MATH 1314 – College Algebra	#2851 Pre-Calculus Math 1316-Plane Trig.	2639-Independent Study MATH 1350 - Mathematics for Teachers I	2640-Independent Study MATH 1351 - Mathematics for Teachers II				
3	AP Human Geography		World History		US History HIST 1301 - US History to 1865	US History HIST 1302 - US History Since 1865	Government GOVT 2305 – Federal Government	Government GOVT 2306 – Texas Government				
4	Biology		Chemistry		Physics		#7875 Scientific Research and Design BIOL 1408 - Biology for Non-Science	#7875 Scientific Research and Design GEOL 1401 - Earth Sciences for Non-				
5	#7838 MAPS (TSI Preparation)		World Languages I		World Languages II		New Course Request PHYS 1415 - Physical Science I			(*) Dual Credit MATH options: See counselor/advisor for placement Anyone course required for AS; options for second Math required for high school: #2723 Advanced Quantitative Reasoning <i>MATH 1332- Contemporary Math I</i> #2918 Independent Study <i>MATH 1324- Math for Business & Social Science</i> #2619 Statistics <i>MATH 1342- Elementary Statistical Methods</i> #2850 Pre-Calculus (Sem 1) <i>MATH 1314 - College Algebra</i> #2850 Pre-Calculus (Sem 2) <i>MATH 1316 - Plane Trigonometry</i>		
6	Fine Arts			Fine Arts Appreciation, Art, Music or Dance (+)			Economics	Independent Study ENGL 2332 – World Literature I				

7	PE (0.5 credit)	DISD: #TBD DCCCD: EDUC 1300 Learning Frameworks	Comm. Applications SPCH 1311 - Intro to Speech Communications	#7952/7953 Human Growth & Development TECA 1354 – Child Growth and Development	# TBD Lifetime Nutrition & Wellness BIOL 1322 – Nutrition & Diet Therapy	#TBD Principals of Education and Training EDUC 1301 - Introduction to the Teaching Profession	#7936/7937 Instructional Practices EDUC 2301 - Introduction to Special Populations				
8	Health (0.5 credit)		DISD: #TBD Physical Education DCCCD: PHED 1164								
Total possible college credits completed in high school = 64											
High School Courses						Dual credit courses					

****** - Students must have four science credits to graduate at the distinguished level of achievement.

#TBD - Dual Credit Course Number to Be Decided

Participating ISD:		Grand Prairie		Career Pathway Program – 4-yr Plan		Participating Colleges:		El Centro College/ North Lake College				
Participating HS:		Grand Prairie Early College High School		(Recommended Graduation Plan)		AAS Degree:		Associate Degree Nursing				
HS Plan:		Health Sciences		Academic Year 2017 – 2018		Towards BSN Degree:		Bachelor of Science, Nursing				
HIGH SCHOOL/SECONDARY									COLLEGE/POSTSECONDARY			
Periods	9 th – MVC		10 th – MVC		11 th – ECC/NLC		12 th – ECC/NLC		Year 5 –		Year 6 –	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Sem I	Sem II	Sem III	Sem IV
1	English I		GPISD# ENGL1301	GPISD# TBD ENGL 1302	US History		Federal Government	Economics				
2	CTE Medical Terminology		English II		New GPISD# RNSG 1125 Professional Concepts	New GPISD# RNSG 1126 Professional Nursing Concepts	New GPISD# RNSG 1137 Professional Nursing Concepts	New GPISD# RNSG 2138 Professional Nursing Concepts IV	**If a student takes HS Physical Education summer between Grades 9-10, then that student will receive credits.			
3	Algebra I		Geometry		New GPISD# RNSG 1216 Professional Nursing Competencies	NEW GPISD # RNSG 1128 Intro to Concepts						
4	AP World Geography		Chemistry		New GPISD# RNSG 1430 Healthcare Concepts	New GPISD# RNSG 1533 Healthcare Concepts	New GPISD# RNSG 1538 Healthcare Concepts III	New GPISD# RNSG 2539 Healthcare Concepts IV	**Student takes BIOL 1406 the summer between Grades 9- 10			
5	Biology			New GPISD# PSYC 2314 Developme								
6	GPISD#0 3350100 PSYC 2301 Intro to Psych	New GPISD# ARTS 1301 Intro to Art	World History		GPISD# TBD New Course Request RNSG 1161 Clinical I	GPISD# TBD New Course Request RNSG 2362 Clinical II	GPISD# TBD New Course Request RNSG 2363 Clinical III	GPISD# TBD New Course Request RNSG 2360 Clinical	** - Students must have four science credits to graduate at the distinguished level of achievement.			
7	Principals of Health Sciences		GPISD# TBD **Biology BIOL 1406 Biology for Science	GPISD# TBD New Course Request Anatomy and Physiology BIOL 2401	GPISD# TBD New Course Request Anatomy and Physiology BIOL 2402	GPISD # TBD NEW Course Request Biology 2420 Microbiology	GPISD# TBD ENGL 2332 World Lit	GPISD# TBD New Course Request SPCH 1315				
8	World Lang		World Language		Algebra II							

High School Courses	Dual credit courses	<i>Courses in red are NOT part of the AAS degree.</i>	College courses that are NOT taught as dual credit
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Figure 3. Four-year Scope and Sequence Curriculum Map.

Why the Need for the ECHS Program?

In the initial planning stages of the ECHS, the purpose was to serve at-risk, urban students of color who are first-generation and/or low income, who may not have access to the necessary resources to attend college (Hawkins, 2005; Nodine, 2009). Jobs for the Future (2015) reported that of the 80,000 students who participated in an ECHS program, 73% were students of color and 60% were receiving free or reduced lunch. Initially, predicted that this targeted population of students were not likely to succeed to in high school. However, research indicated that in the last ten years ECHS students are 90% more likely to graduate from high school and college than their non-ECHS peers when compared to the national high school graduation average of 78% (Jobs for the Future, 2015). Due to the success of ECHS programs, it has improved student academic success and matriculation to college which supported the creation of additional Early College High School programs.

To encourage and support this type of learning and academic success, the design for the ECHS program that would cultivate an environment of learning that creates a balance between high school and college. To create this environment or a new school culture that embraces this idea of high school teachers, staff, and administrators going beyond the high school boundaries to help students achieve who could have given up on possibly completing high school (Cravey, 2013; Howley, Howley, Howley, & Duncan, 2013).

Critique of the Early College High School

Since the early inception of the ECHS program, it has it received various evaluations regarding its existence. Though the ECHS program serves as a bridge between the high school and the college, it does not deter the challenges that the students may face in their lives outside of academia (Born, 2006). The 6-4-4 Plan, Middle College High Schools, and Early College

High Schools chose to work with students who may not be innately motivated to perform well academically or may come from homes where they may be the first in their family to graduate from college or even high school (Born, 2006). The location of the majority of the ECHS programs are in urban communities that have high rates of violence, teen pregnancy, drugs, and were being a high school dropout is very common (Born, 2006; Outlaw, 2017). It is imperative that these secondary institutions work to build a support system that counters bad influences and possible harmful habits that students can potentially bring to the learning environment (Born, 2006; Outlaw, 2017).

The period from high school to college may be a challenge for some ECHS students. Born (2006) and Outlaw (2017) reported that while students enrolled in ECHS programs to remove some of the financial burdens and to accelerate their path to college completion early, it is not an easy decision or challenge that they were prepared to meet. Students may feel alienated by their college-aged peers and by college faculty. These students are accustomed to various levels of flexibility while in high school. If the student misses the assignment or is allowed time for revisions the high school will work with the student; however, students later find that some college courses are not always structured towards leniency (Born, 2006; Outlaw, 2017). Students' indicated that college presented challenges for them and this created unforeseen problems during the college semester. The community college instructor facilitated a student-centered approach in their teaching style to encourage learning in the classroom, which differs from the high school classroom setting of teaching students (Williams & Southers, 2010). In turn, the college faculty may feel disconnected with students who are not self-directed which

may cause the ECHS students to question if they are ready for this learning style (Williams & Southers, 2010).

Conclusion

Though not all students may not be a good fit for ECHS, the program does offer a small and comfortable learning environment for the students who have found their fit and are interested in the ECHS program. The participants of the program can gain a better understanding of engagement, faculty and peer interaction, and to find the determination to complete the program. As the value of high school education and diploma have aligned itself with the community college Associate's degree and enabled students to work towards their Bachelor's degree or preparation for a high-skilled workforce upon high school graduation. It has become vital that students simultaneously graduate with the high school diploma and degree or workforce credential at state and national levels, which has rapidly launched many initiatives to implement college-readiness strategies and programs for high schools, including increased access to college classes (Edmunds, 2012; Outlaw, 2017). While the ECHS program makes college seem more attractive, accessible and affordable by bridging the gap between the high school and the college for underprepared and underprivileged students of color (Jobs for the Future, 2015), it also provides students the opportunity to make college a reality for their future. As more students are vying for a spot within the ECHS programs, this increases the number of students that are going through the pipeline, but it does not speak the needs of the students who are not seeking that route for educational opportunities (Cohen, 2001).

The research for the Early College High School is quite limited, especially regarding the transition from the high school to the community college (Edmunds et al., 2013; Howley et al., 2013; Miller et al., 2013; Oliver et al., 2010). The research conducted suggested that Early

College High Schools do have an impact on postsecondary enrollment, but the missing component of ECHS student experience data after graduation or participating in a 2+2 ECHS programs, which is two years at the high school and two years of college. More research is needed that illustrates Early College High School students transition from the high school to the community college and how they find fit once at the community college and fully captures the students' voices as to how they experience the transition into college.

Introduction to Theoretical Framework

Schlossberg's Transition (1989) theory provides the theoretical foundation for this study. The concepts of transition theory, in general, were used to inform the focus of the methodology and analysis of this research of experiences of the Early College High School student and how the students find their fit at the community college. Another focus of transition theory is to examine how the ECHS students transition from the high school to the community college as ever-evolving young students.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

The academic, social and emotional changes that students experience as they transition from high school to college may influence their persistence, matriculation, and graduation (Banning, 1990; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). For Early College High School (ECHS) students this transition begins earlier than high school graduation as they are eligible to start taking college courses as early as the ninth grade. To understand how these students navigate the ECHS experience, one must understand Schlossberg's transition theory.

Schlossberg's transition theory, a psychosocial development theory fixated on growth and development in studies to understand the transition through one's life cycle (Schlossberg, 1989; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman's (1995) definition of transition stated as "any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships,

routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) explained that college students experienced three types of transition, anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. An example of an anticipated transition would be going to college or high school graduation. An unanticipated event would be a death in the family. Non-events were considered transitions that were anticipated but did not occur (Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995) such as the expectation of a new job and later the individual learns that he or she was not hired.

Schlossberg's (1989) research on adults centered on how individuals transition through life situations and to demonstrate the numerous ways adults manage change (Braxton, 2003; Schlossberg, 1981). Though not initially developed for college students, Braxton (2003) clarified that this theory is relevant to college students' development as their life events affect how they cope with each situation. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) work provided an understanding of aspects that are related to the transition, the individual, and the environment—all of which are likely to determine the degree of influence that a given transition will have at a particular time.

To consider an individual's readiness for a transition, two separate appraisals must be made: one of the transition itself (positive, negative, or neutral) and the individual's ability to cope with the transition (Evans et al., 2010), and one of the four S's, which describe the individual resources for coping with transition. Based on Schlossberg's previous research, a range of factors influenced an individual's ability to cope with the transition. Defined by Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) as the four S's (situation, self, support, and strategies), these four factors describe the experiences in how individuals cope with change and distinguish between potential assets and liabilities in their readiness for transition. The first "S" characterizes aspects of the situation: the timing, the duration, role change, concurrent stressors, and triggers. The second "S" refers to the self, characteristics of the individual such as race, gender, age,

socio-economic status and psychological resources that might help cope with the transition. Support, the third "S," manifests in the form of family, friends, neighbors, institutions, and communities. The final "S" is strategies, which includes situation modifications, controlling the situation, and managing post-transition stress (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Though the growing body of literature portrays the ECHS transition as successful, the research indicated that every student who starts their academic career at an ECHS program will transition to a four-year with ease due to experiencing the college culture during high school (Outlaw, 2017; Rincon, 2016). However, the literature does not focus on the student who participates in 2+ 2 ECHS program and their transition from high school to the college. While Early College High School students may have potential assets, it is not guaranteed particularly regarding self (young, healthy, and psychologically healthy) and support (family, friends, and high school faculty), the liabilities they may encounter, situational and strategic factors, affect their readiness for transition as well (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Transition Theory and College Students

In the higher education setting, Schlossberg's transition theory applies to adult learners and traditional-aged learners. Over time, Schlossberg's transition model was utilized as a framework to understand how transfer and first-year students move through their transitions by their responses (Rincon, 2016). When designing developmental interventions for adult learners, many researchers found Schlossberg's theory useful when applying to students transitioning in, through, and out of college. The theory helps to inform the development of productive students supports at institutional levels (Champagne & Petitpas, 1989; Chickering & Schlossberg, 1995; Chickering & Schlossberg, 2001; Evans et al., 2010; Schlossberg et al., 1989).

When transitioning one has to understand how one copes with a transition, and Schlossberg's transition theory is utilized to comprehend how students move in, move through, and move out. While studies have shown that by applying the approach one can understand how one moves in and out of educational institutions, however, this model has not been used on younger individuals that are coping with the transition from an early college high school to a community college to complete their degree of workforce credential.

Transition Theory and Early College High School Students

The most appropriate concept of the Schlossberg's transition theory for Early College High School students is the idea of "moving in," "moving through," and "moving out" as it effectively speaks to the idea how ECHS students navigate the experience of transitioning from their high school to the community college (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Outlaw (2017) stated that ECHS students are "moving in" as they leave the high school to their new collegiate environment at the community college, to moving through by navigating the community college, to last, moving out to graduate from high school and college simultaneously. Outlaw (2017) indicated that ECHS students who start at a high school located at the college encounter a smoother transition as those students received personalized individual attention during their first two years. However, the research does not include students who start at the high school with one or more college courses and then move on to the community college to complete high school and college.

Focused on the change in environments or "moving through" ECHS students begin to adjust to their new community. During this time of adjustment or moving through, Rincon (2016) indicated that students might have questions, such as "can I commit to the transition?" Or "did I make the right decision?" as they move through this phase (p. 47). As ECHS students

transition from high school to college, they must also transition academically and socially faster than their peers, as they are mainstreamed or enrolled into classes with other traditional aged or older college students.

As ECHS students transition, they must also learn coping skills, how to advocate for self and how to speak for themselves (Rincon, 2016). Rincon (2016) stated that these students are continually learning how to navigate a culture, which empowers them to challenge themselves and others, along with developing strategies and finding academic support. However, Rincon's (2016) research centers on ECHS students after they have transferred from the two years to the four years. With limited, but growing research, the experiences of Early College students has focused on students who start at a small high school housed on the community college campus than students who participate in the 2+2 model.

An additional area of research on ECHS students is how students must utilize all components of the ECHS program to be successful academically and socially. Through the partnership between the high school and the college or university, the advising personnel has a personal stake in assisting the students through their program of interest or “major” (Oliver et al., 2010; Outlaw, 2017). The ECHS guidance counselors work diligently to offer informational activities that assist students and provide a base that leads to a possible successful transition to the college or university.

Early College High School Students and College Integration

The principle idea of integration was defined as “the extent to which an individual identifies with or shares and incorporates the normative attitudes and values of his or her instructors and classmates and becomes a member of the college community” (Napoli & Wortman, 1996, p. 420). Tinto (1975, 1993) and Astin (1975, 1977, 1993, 1999) highlighted the need for academic and social integration for the successful retention of college students,

particularly as students transitioned or integrated into their new environment. Furthermore, Tinto and Astin emphasized the more a student is connected to a campus and the more content he or she is with the academic and social functions of the institutions, the more likely the student is to be integrated into the college experience.

The academic and social integration for ECHS students is particularly crucial during the introduction to college, as students begin taking college courses as early as 13 and 14 years old at their high school before beginning courses at the college. As the students transition to the community college and begin to co-exist at the college with an adult population, through classes and student activities, the ECHS student works to achieve success, Pollock (2009) stated it essential to recognize the differences between adult and adolescent learners as there is a merging of two student populations in a college environment. To assist the students in finding their fit or sense of belonging at the college, their academic and social integration is an integral component in the success of students, particularly for persistence and degree completion because it facilitates informal interactions with peers, faculty, and administrative personnel (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella, 1986). Tinto (1975) stated that “of the various forms of social interaction that occur within the social system of the college, peer group associations appear to be most directly related to individual social integration” (p. 110).

College Fit and the ECHS Student

The majority of ECHS students can have the full “community college experience” as the students have been taught by college instructors and may begin taking college courses at the college as early as the ninth grade. Finding the appropriate fit and building a nurturing environment is vital to shaping their college experience. Academic and social integration is a chief factor in the success of community college students, particularly for persistence and degree

completion because it facilitates informal interactions with peers, faculty, and administrative personnel (Tinto, 1975; Pascarella, Smart & Ethington 1986). Tinto (1975) stated that "of the various forms of social interaction that occur within the social system of the college, peer group associations appear to be directly related to individual social integration" (p. 110).

The ECHS experience is designed for students to participate in significantly smaller schools than traditional high schools. The maximum size totals between 400-500 students and they serve students in grades nine through twelve, while a few ECHS may offer a fifth year or grade thirteen (Edmunds, 2012; Edmunds et al., 2013; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010). When building the foundation of the ECHS program, the ideation is to create smaller schools that create rigorous academic programs that embrace the idea of an intimate, compassionate, and respectful school environment that builds a healthy relationship towards student success (Outlaw, 2017; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). Moreover, the ECHS staff and faculty work to cultivate positive relationships that can encourage students both academically and personally. These positive relationships are essential to those students for the following three reasons: a sense of belonging or fit, valued as a student and safe school environment (Outlaw, 2017; Shear, Means, House, Georges, Joshi, Smerdon, Shkolnik, 2008). When ECHS students' find fit or have a sense of belonging through peer acceptance in school, this increases the likelihood that they will accept and follow the school's rules and policy (Locke, 2017; Knesting, 2008). As students begin to invest into the school and the college experience, students take on the persona of feeling important and valued members of their school's community, particularly among their peers and adults (Knesting, 2008). Finally, when students feel safe in their school environment, they are more likely to take educational risks that will benefit their future (Knesting, 2008).

Summary

To understand the college experience of high school students and how they navigate the experience of moving between high school and college (Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Valadez et al., 2012). Though the research is growing around the college experience of ECHS students, there is scant research surrounding their college experience if they begin taking college classes at their neighborhood high school and then completing college and high school simultaneously while at the community college. By utilizing Schlossberg's transition theory as a guide that has infused with components of academic and social integration theory, this will hopefully enable students to articulate how they make meaning of their moving in, through, and moving out according to their stories.

Learning the details of their high school and college experiences may offer a clearer picture of the current practices, resources, and support needed from the community college. Furthermore, a more profound understanding can be gleaned from their stories to create more educational opportunities for the ECHS students before and while attending the community college.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), nearly 15,000 public high schools enrolled students in college courses in 2010, and from 2002 to 2011, dual enrollment had an annual growth rate of over seven percent. Between 2012 and 2017, in the state of Texas, dual credit enrollment grew 52%, from 132,316 to 200,892 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2016). Within the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD) there were 17, 776 (DCCCD, 2016) high school students registered for at least one college course by Fall 2016. Of that group, 3,993 students are Early College High School (ECHS) students attending one of the 31 current ECHS or Collegiate Academy programs in Dallas County (DCCCD, 2016). In the spring of 2017, 18 new ECHS programs were approved by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in Dallas County spring 2017.

As the blueprint for an ECHS program has evolved from the traditional four-year high school program at the community college, it enabled researchers to learn how students chose to identify as a college student rather than high school students since they had not attended a high school (Peralez, 2014; Pollock, 2009; Rincon, 2016). This group of students decided to immerse themselves into the college experience by engaging their faculty and non-ECHS peers, and participating in student clubs and college organizations which created an environment that enabled the students to mature into college students during the first year and second year of their ECHS program (Smith, Fischetti, Fort, Gurley & Kelly, 2012). Through the restructuring of processes for dual credit and the existing ECHS programs, high schools and colleges worked to

establish the 2 + 2 program, which allowed students the opportunity to experience two years of high school (ninth and tenth grade) and then two years of community college (eleventh and twelfth grade).

Through this new venture, it became imperative that there was a need to share the stories and experiences and learn why these students chose their ECHS or Collegiate Academies instead of the traditional high school path. Though research has focused on how traditional-aged college students have successfully navigated college, for ECHS students the navigation of college is slightly different as they begin as early as the ninth grade. The research to understand how that cohort of students became engaged with their faculty and peers at the college and the high school, has not been conducted nor have the research indicated how students come to understand their lived experiences due to transitioning to the college after two years at the high school. Also, it is vital to comprehend how students find their sense of belonging as they bridge both high school and college as the student moves past taking high school courses to take only college courses. Students will recognize that the possibility of participating in traditional high school activities may not be as readily available to students as before.

As someone who has first-hand knowledge and experience of the student support services necessary for these students at both the college and district-level, I have had the opportunity to create processes and structures for the System. These procedures allowed the seven colleges to share data, execute the memorandum of understanding (MOU) or the Interlocal Agreement (ILA) to establish a partnership between the System or College and the high school and/or the independent school district. The partnership has also led to the development of a shared advising component between the high school counselor and the college advisor that includes the requirements high school and college graduation.

The research method that is needed to guide this study is narrative inquiry and thematic analysis which will align the research question and the purpose of the study to reach answers of how ECHS students understand their lived experience once they as they navigate their community college experience while participating at the community college. According to St. Pierre (2006) these qualitative research tools are used to retrieve intricate details about the feeling, thoughts, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn when using quantitative research and that are likely to shape the mean-making experiences of ECHS students. Additionally, the focus of the research will be to answer the following research question:

1. How do high school students navigate their transition to the community college while participating in an early college high school program?

Through an in-depth interview utilizing a narrative approach, this will provide a pathway to discover all aspects of this methodology for this study.

Rationale for using a Qualitative Research Approach

To gather knowledge about the social world, one can utilize qualitative research as a means other than quantification as the primary source of interpretation (Strauss & Corbin, 1988). In qualitative studies, the primary focus is the research process in its entirety, as opposed to seeking specific outcomes (Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) described the twelve themes of qualitative inquiry as positioning under one of three tenets: (1) design strategies, (2) data collection and fieldwork strategies, and (3) analysis strategies. Patton (2002) described the first tenet of qualitative research design as the budding relationship between the participants, and the researcher “are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in practical settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest” (p. 39). These tenets explained the fundamental traits of qualitative research that it involves

genuine interaction and relationships between the researcher and the participants. To understand how the participant makes sense out of their social world, the researcher must position one's self within the participant's environment. This idea fosters a cooperating environment and aids in the establishment of an advantageous atmosphere that leads to sharing and exploring meaning between the participants and the researcher. The second tenet of qualitative research design is that the analysis is new design flexibility and assists the researcher in avoiding stiff designs that eliminate responsiveness but provides the researcher with the opportunity to pursue different paths of discovery as they emerge (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research differs with quantitative study in that it requires the researcher to find a balance between flexibility due to the possible fickleness of qualitative design and the requirement of having a clear, reliable research design plan.

For ECHS students, qualitative research provides an opportunity for the students to consider their own fluid identities, particularly how they transition between high school and the community college. A well-designed narrative inquiry study will permit the ECHS students and researcher to work together to emphasize the ECHS experience and how they navigate their experience.

The Narrative Approach

“The focus of narrative research is on the individual and the fact that life might be understood through the recounting and reconstruction of the life story” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 19). Charmaz (2009) and Weiland (1995) described narrative as the representation of the process of self in conversation with itself and with its world over time. Serve as a record of facts to how things happened, narratives create a system of meaning to makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of life (Weiland, 1995). The narrative approach creates a

collaborative nature and relationship between the researcher and participants to enable narrative researchers to tell stories by participants and are charged with telling those stories through action and dialogue with participants (Creswell, 2014). The methodology that is most appropriate for this study is narrative research, and all it entails emphasizes meaning-making through the telling and sharing of stories regarding the participants' lives. It is repeatedly noted in the literature that there is not one all-encompassing definition of narrative research and accompanying analytic procedures (Charmaz, 2010; Cortazzi, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1995; Reissman, 2002; Weiland, 1995). For instance, Polkinghorne (1995) defined narrative itself as "the type of discourse composition that draws together diverse events, happenings, and actions of human lives into the thematically unified goal-directed process" (p. 5).

A narrative approach served as a potential tool for activating positive change while developing opportunities for liberation for those who find themselves on the margins (Barnett & Johnson, 2012; Reissman, 2008) and as first-generation, urban students the narrative can create a vehicle to share their stories and experiences through the ECHS experience. Furthermore, the narrative platform allowed the participants to both generate and become "part of a written document – a testimony of what occurred at a particular moment in history" (Stuhlmiller, 2001, p. 75). This sense of empowerment is especially salient in cases where the participant feels like their voice and/or story was initially silenced or ignored or yet to be heard and maybe even more significant for participants who additionally find themselves in the social margins for other stigmatized characteristics (Barnett & Johnson; 2012; Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000). The methodology was deliberately selected to help provide a voice to the ECHS student's experience.

Participants: Sample and Selection

Purposeful sampling, relied on heavily by qualitative researchers, focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will clarify the research questions (Patton, 2002). Cases that are information-rich are those in which one can learn about the issues that are central to the purpose of the research (Glesne, 2010). The criteria for this study is the participant must 1) self-identify as an Early College High School; 2) be a Junior or Senior in high school and a college sophomore; 3) registered for at least nine hours of college courses; and 4) have completed at least one semester of coursework at the college. The students meeting these criteria will be ideal participants because they may provide rich information based on their unique experiences as Early College High School students at the community college after one semester of classes.

By utilizing different sampling strategies, this will permit the researcher to relate the experiences of the participants to the purpose of the study, while strategically leading the researcher to specific types of students (Glesne, 2010). Patton (2002) stated there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. For this study, 8-10 participants will be selected for in-depth interviews. Focusing on a few individuals and collecting detailed data from each student will ensure that the necessary amount of data is received (Creswell, 2014).

For this study, I initially emailed the Director of Dual Credit and Early College High School at the seven colleges to find students who could become potential participants. Once students agreed to participate in the study, then students received the participants email to confirm their participation in the study. Twenty students agreed to participate in the study, but only ten students confirmed that they would participate in the study along with returning all signed documents for the study and scheduling a day and time to participate.

Data Collection

For this study, the data collection methods consisted of individual interviews. This technique generated data needed to understand how ECHS students understand their transition and finding their fit at the community college.

For this study I conducted unstructured interviews so that participants can share their stories in ways that allow them to focus on what was most appropriate and/or relevant, providing an opportunity to be heard in ways that might otherwise be dismissed or redirected (Gysels, Shipman, & Higginson, 2008; Riessman, 2007). Unstructured interviews enabled me to develop open-ended questions and allowed the participant to provide open-ended responses about their experiences. Unstructured interviews approach probes more deeply to elicit stories of experience (Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2015). In addition, utilizing the informal interviews to develop in-depth conversations, a type of exchange that involves the researchers' self-disclosure about my own experiences regarding the topic as well as "listening with care and caution" enabled the interviewee to "develop ideas, construct meaning and use words that say what he or she means" (Reinharz, 1992, p.24). As the interviewer, I was concerned about building relationships of intimacy and trust and aimed for more egalitarian methods and relinquished "control" of the interview by allowing the interviewee to guide the discussion, which means my pre-determined questions are less important than the topics the participants want to discuss. To achieve this type of unstructured conversation, I identified general topics to cover but allowed the participants to direct the order, duration, and emergence of new topics during the interview (Letherby, 2003; Oakley, 1981; Reinharz, 1992).

I developed topics by utilizing the ideas of Schlossberg's Transition theory to learn about specific experiences to gain an understanding how ECHS students understand their

transition and how they navigate the experience of finding fit, academically and socially at the community college. Because my participants are minors, I created an environment in the ECHS program suite so that students would feel comfortable to share their story, as this space was considered their safe haven. After transcribing and reviewing the interviews, I forwarded the interviews to my participants to discuss and allow them to censor or elaborate on the content as they wish.

The primary data collection consisted of personal interviews with all student participants. All interviews were conducted at the end of the spring semester of the community college. The interviews took place in the afternoon once all classes were completed. To help with the interview interaction, I sent a copy of the interview guide to the interviewees before the interview to ensure that they are familiar with the topics of discussion. I conducted one interview with each participant that lasted between one to two hours. The interview were structured to learn the backstory of each participant, why they decided to participate in an ECHS program and how they perserved through the first two years of their program. During this interview, it was used to learn about their experiences in their success and challenges while participating in the program and about their high school life while at the community college. The interview included a writing prompt for each student to learn what they wish they had known before starting their ECHS program. According to the Dallas County Community College District (DCCCD), the class of 2021 that entered the 31 ECHS or Collegiate Academy programs, 40% of their parents had not graduated from high school. This research indicates that both the high school graduation and the attainment of college credits, or degree could impact the

family home in numerous ways. The demographics for parent education is illustrated in figures 4 and 5.

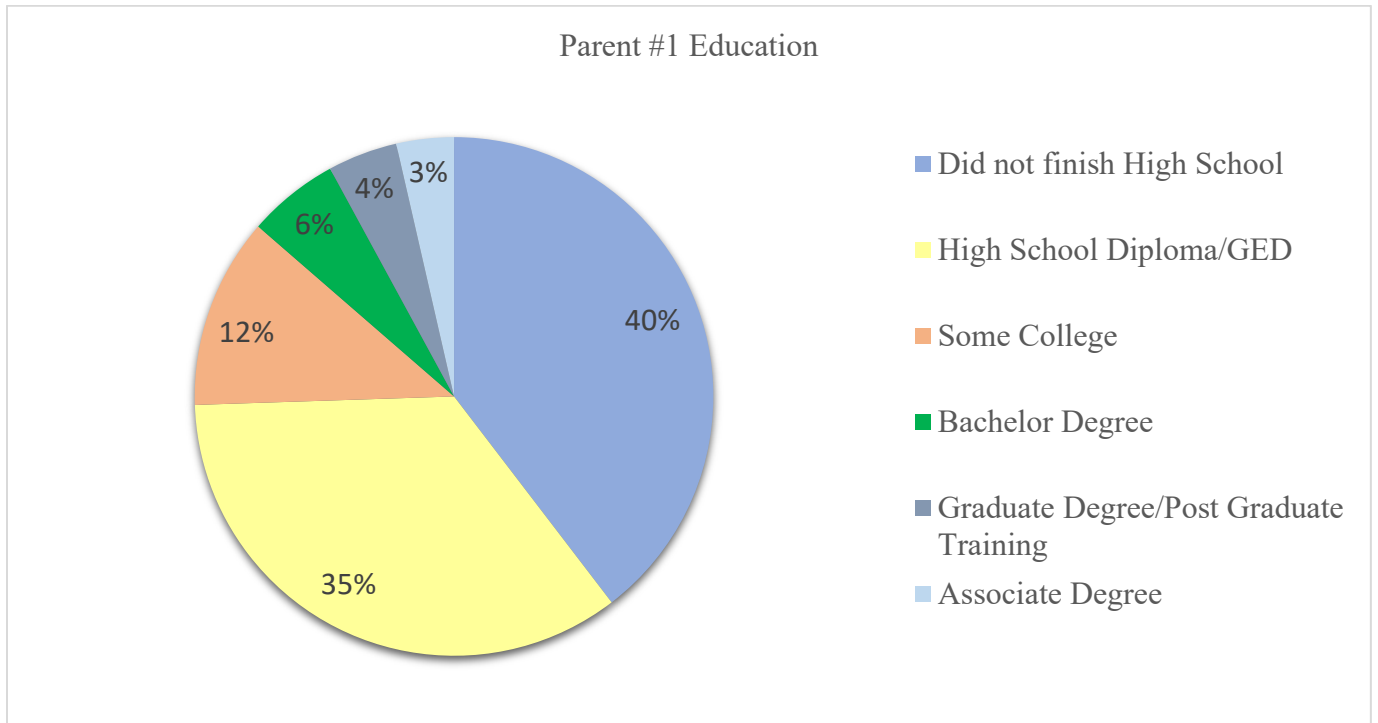


Figure 4. Cohort One Parental Education

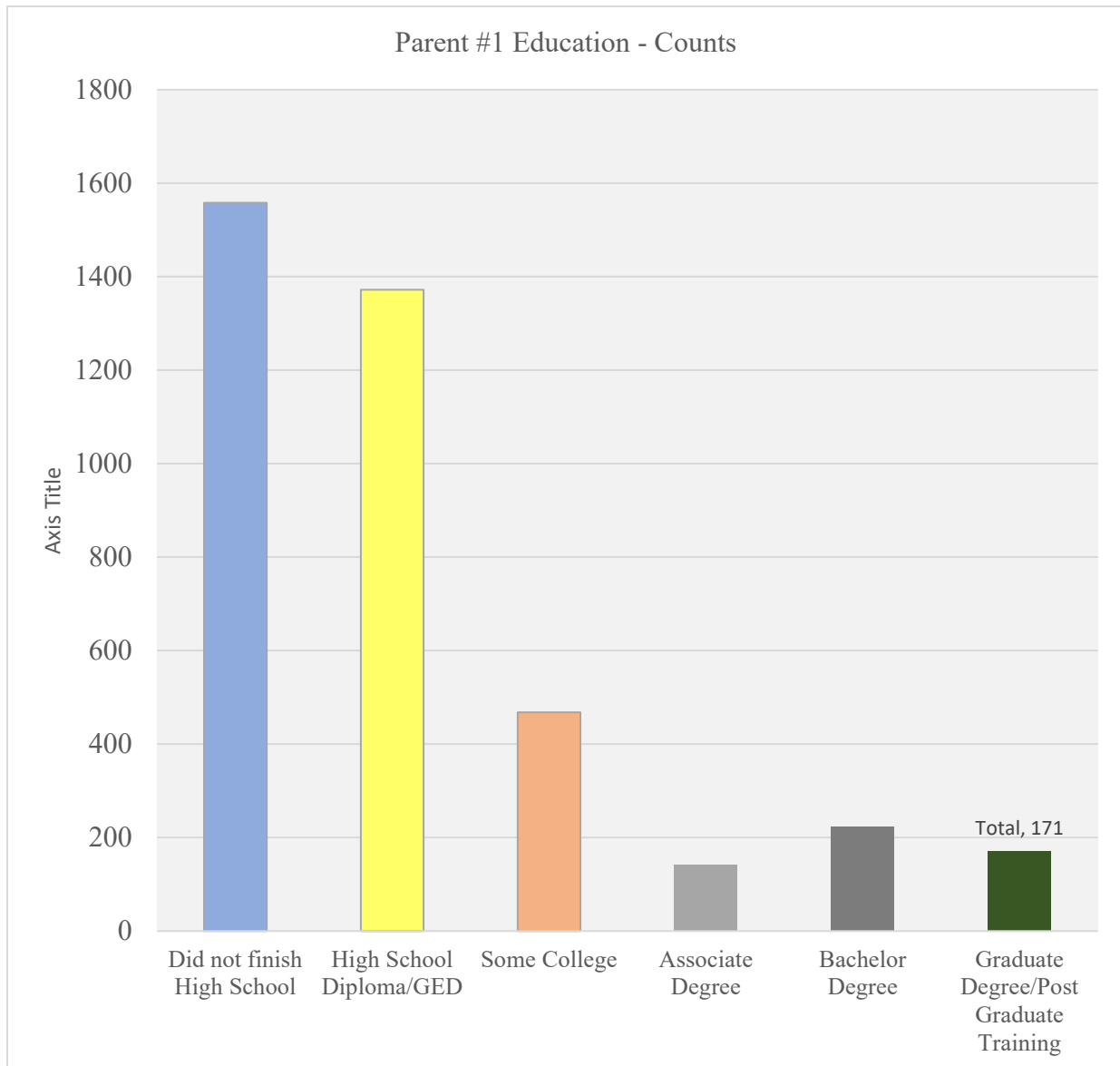


Figure 5. Cohort One Parental Education

Note. As reported by Dallas Independent School District, 2017

Notes were taken during and after each interview. Each interview was recorded with a digital tape recorder with the consent of the participant. Also, a recording program accessed via a laptop computer served as a backup method for recording the interview.

In our initial interview, I explained the consent agreement to each participant and answer any questions that the participant has before the interviews. I explained the student's participation at this time to parent or guardian during this time. All participants had the opportunity to choose a pseudonym, and if they do not, then I chose one on their behalf. A pseudonym was also given to all identifiable information from the participants.

Data Analysis

By placing primary focus on “what” is being said rather than “how” it is being said, I used Butler-Kisber's (2010) thematic analysis method to analyze the data collected for this study to keep the stories intact. Schwandt (2015) defined thematic analysis as an exploratory approach to analyzing codes or section of text according to how they contribute to emerging themes. This method is comprised of utilizing a brush stroke coding system to loosely code when transcribing interviews into thematic field text, which is important to chronicle the account of what took place (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Butler-Kisber, 2010). This technique similar to constant comparative analysis, which is “the exercise of coding to explore similarities and differences” in data where the researcher is “continually sift[ing] and comparing elements (Butler-Kisber, 2010). The broad brush stroke technique connects the actions and the events to the storyline of each participant by analyzing large pieces of data, while also allowing me to use a line by line technique to establish the names of the individuals, story development, and story connection so that one may listen to the tone of the story as told by the narrator or participant (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

For several weeks, I reviewed and compared each interview multiple times to gain an understanding of how Early College High School students comprehend their transition while also learning how these students navigate the community college academically and socially once they have transitioned from the high school. As mentioned before, I used the unstructured interview

technique to allow for flexibility and freedom and to enable the conversation to flow more freely (Hesse-Biber & Levy, 2011). After transcription of each interview, I listened to each student interview and re-read the transcriptions multiple times. The reason for this process was because the students' interview led to create stories that were not in the third person, but in the first person. After listening to each student interview at least three times, I made several copies of their transcribed interviews, which I cut into strips and began to create their stories as if they were puzzles as each piece of their story needed to connect and serve almost as an anchor to each statement that the students made. After each story was connected, I then searched for the emerging themes that I heard and saw multiple times in the interview. I then used the student's actual words to describe what they called their actual experience, instead of trying to name the shared experiences that the students provided.

In this study, I developed both narrative composites and themes using thematic analysis. I generated an individual composite narrative for how ECHS students to share stories that will help make sense of various occurrences in their lives. Thematic analysis and narrative inquiry are methods of highlighting the unique experiences and commonalities of participants and Schlossberg's Transition theory will validate the participants' voices in the data and the individual experiences of ECHS students.

This theoretical framework used in the data analysis as the interview guide will be situated in the 4 S's of Schlossberg's Transition theory. The theory provided insight as to how the ECHS students respond to the transition that takes place during the ECHS experience and how they make meaning of that experience (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg, Water, & Goodman (1995) believed that the strengths and weakness of the 4 S's could facilitate or hinder the success of a student's transition.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

The evaluation of the quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research is an essential factor to the researcher because it allows the researcher to validate findings credibly. To ensure the reliability of this study, I paid close attention to issues relating to credibility and transferability for ECHS students. Credibility considers how accurate the data is and if it refers to reality, while transferability allows you to generalize findings across different settings (Creswell, 2014).

To ensure credibility, I used a member checking technique, which will give my participants the opportunity to review the collected data and check my accuracy and authenticity of their stories (Creswell, 2014). I shared the transcribed interviews with the participants to review the transcript for accuracy and provide clarification when necessary which will give participants the opportunity to share any additional thoughts and ask further questions in the transcripts. As mentioned earlier I asked participants to read their interviews, after transcription and I will schedule a time to discuss findings and my interpretations of conclusions with each participant.

Furthermore, I used the peer review technique to ensure an external check of the research to review data and to provide the credibility of the data collected. Peer debriefing allows the researcher to seek input from professional peers to “keep the inquirer honest” (Lincoln & Guba, 1986, p. 308). Peer debriefing assisted me with uncovering biases and assumptions of the experiences of the participants. I utilized my peers in my writing group to review data and to ensure the credibility of the data collected. Peer debriefing will assist me with uncovering biases and assumptions of the experiences of the participants.

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Transferability of this study will increase by providing rich and descriptive data so that the experiences of the ECHS students interviewed will be useful for future research. Detailed descriptions of the students' experiences will enable the reader to find the truth to the realities that can be shared with other researchers, faculty, and ECHS students (Seale, 1999). This study established future implications to explore professional development opportunities for scholars who want to provide additional student services to ECHS students beyond holistic advising.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study that will lead to further research being done. The first limitation would be differences between ECHS students who are in a stand-alone ECHS at the community college vs. ECHS students who are participating in the 2 + 2 program. The experiences of these students will differ as their experiences will be different from each other due to when the transition happens from traditional public school to the community college.

The second limitation would be dual credit students who are working towards an associate degree while simultaneously working to complete high school graduation. This group of students may have the same experiences as ECHS students when taking college courses but participating in the high school experience as they are dual students who may never leave their campus for college courses. ECHS students have experienced a credentialed high school instructor along with an adjunct faculty member who may come to the high school to teach the first two years or who may teach at the college.

The third limitation to this study would be the students who were unable to meet the minimum for each component for the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA). By not

passing the TSIA within the two years of high school, we are unaware of how this group of continue to navigate their high school experience if the students pass the exam during the eleventh grade. ECHS students who are going to begin taking classes at the college must be TSIA met in all areas prior to arriving on the college campus.

Delimitation

The delimitation for this study is the numerous students will not participate in the study due to not meeting college entrance exam or Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) minimums within first two years of high school while participating in the ECHS program. The second delimitation for the study is another group of students who may meet TSIA minimums but may have recently met the minimums in reading, writing, and math and do not have the appropriate number of credit hours to participate in the study due to when they begin taking classes at the college.

Chapter Summary

This chapter is my attempt to outline, in detail, the methodological processes in which I used to conduct a qualitative study to understand how ECHS students come to understand their experiences and find their sense of belonging. I described qualitative research methods, including historical research, along with a detailed description of the theoretical framework, data collection, and analytic techniques. I also discussed issues of validity and reliability, which are essential in qualitative research but can even be articulated in such a way that aligns itself with the subjective, interactive and fluid nature of this type of research.

CHAPTER 4

NARRATIVE AND THEMES

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Early College High School (ECHS) students who are balancing college and high school courses at the college campus. Through the participants own self-reflection of their college and high school experiences, I sought to answer the question, “How do high school students navigate their transition to the community college while participating in an early college high school program?” The theoretical framework, Schlossberg’s Transition theory, was utilized to reframe the conversation regarding the ECHS student experience and how they interpret their experience as they navigate the high school and the community college. This study utilized multiple narrative methodologies to place the experiences of the participants at the forefront.

Participants

The ten participants in this study all faced various obstacles while transitioning from high school to college. There were five juniors, five seniors, six female students, four male students, four students were Black or African American and five students were Hispanic in the group. One student identified as biracial, Black and Latina, as she identified as Afro-Cuban.

Following are their stories in three parts: the Juniors (the Family), the Seniors (the Graduates) and the Community (the Juniors and the Seniors). The Juniors’ and the Seniors’ narratives were created to be told in first person and each story began with the researcher’s fieldnotes to provide additional insight to the interview with the students. The themes were created based upon the shared experiences that were created by all participants. These shared

experiences were centered on Schlossberg's Transition Theory. In sharing each experience, the students also had shared experiences that surfaced across all their stories.

Table 2: List of Research ECHS Participants

Names	Age	Gender	Race	School	Grade	GPA	Credits Earned	Student Activities/ Clubs
The Juniors								
Kade	16	Male	Black/African American	Pleasant Orchard ECHS	11 th	3.8	42	No
James	17	Male	Black/ African American	M.E. White Collegiate	11 th	3.1	39	Yes
Catarina	17	Female	Hispanic	M.E. White Collegiate	11 th	3.45	41	Yes
Jasmine	17	Female	Hispanic	Batiste ECHS	11 th	3.0	31	Yes
Ignacio	17	Male	Hispanic	Batiste ECHS	11 th	3.18	37	Yes
The Seniors								
Jackson	18	Male	Hispanic	Pleasant Orchard	12 th	3.9	60	Yes
Brittani	18	Female	Black/ African American	Batiste ECHS	12 th	3.5	60	Yes
Issa	18	Female	Black/ African American	M. E. White Collegiate	12	3.95	60	Yes
Isabella	17	Female	Hispanic	Pleasant Orchard ECHS	12	2.68	60	Yes
Gemma	18	Female	African American/Hispanic (Afro-Cuban)	Pleasant Orchard ECHS	12	2.97	60	Yes

The Juniors: The Family

To understand the stories of all the students, they must be broken down into three parts, the Juniors, the Seniors, and the Community. Throughout each of the Juniors stories, Kade, Jasmine, Ignacio, James, and Catarina, mentioned that their peers and family played a supporting role for them while in the program. To understand their collective experiences even further, each student's narrative was created to provide a snapshot of their ECHS experience. Now, I will introduce the Juniors.

Researcher Field Notes: Upon meeting Kade, I wondered how our conversation would go. He had waited patiently for his interview and was very quiet before starting. Tall and slightly awkward, with one dread loc hanging over his eye, I wondered if I would learn anything from our interview, but he surprised me. Kade was thoughtful, funny, and very determined to create his own ECHS experience at Davis CC.

Kade: I am Kade, I can do anything.

Junior, 16, 3.8 GPA, Pleasant Orchard Early College High School, Davis Community College

I wasn't supposed to go to Pleasant Orchard ECHS. I had my heart set on attending the number one magnet in the state, but due to a family issue, I was unable to attend the interview. POECHS had extended their application and interview deadlines, and my counselor suggested that I complete the application and go to the interview because I would be accepted immediately into the program. I have always been an A and B student, but I would be the first in my family to attend college, so I thought I would like I try it because I knew I didn't want the traditional high school experience. Unlike most of the kids signing up, I didn't know anyone because I had gone to school in another district and had only

been in my new district for a short while, so I started down this road without any friends. When I talked it over with my family, my mom said she supported me and trusted my decision, but I am a twin and my twin didn't want to do it. Not that we are the typical twins, we are total opposites and it's almost like we were not in the same womb. I suggested that we do it together, but he goes to a different high school with his friends.

This was a completely new experience for me and every day over the summer, especially during Summer Bridge, I wondered what I had gotten myself into. I'm glad I went to the summer bridge though, I met the other kids who were interested in the program, but it was the first time people started talking about college. I will admit, when I first heard the juniors and seniors talking about their college courses and experiences, the expectations and the faculty, it scared me, and I wondered if I could I really do this and be successful. Then I remembered I am Kade; I can do anything.

When the school year started, I had one college course and all high school courses, with a few Pre-AP courses mixed into my schedule. I can't speak for everyone, but I noticed it. There was definitely a change between my high school courses and my one college course. My college instructor, who came from the college, told us "I expect you to act like college students, even though you are 9th graders. I am not going to treat you like high school students, now let's get into the syllabus." That was the moment I became a college student; I wasn't the best at it. I still struggle with it, but I knew when I entered that room, I wasn't a high

school student. I would no longer be treated like a high school student in this room. In my other classes, I was a high school student. I got reminders; there was no real syllabus for high school, I don't even think my teachers used that word, to be honest. In my college class, I was not receiving any of those things, except in Pre-AP classes. In one of my Pre-AP classes, my Physics teacher was really good at getting us to keep his expectations. He held us accountable for our actions. It was so different, but I learned how to deal with different issues and how to become a better student. He required us to record our study times and to provide him with a study schedule. Since I wasn't studying as much for my other high school courses, this was different for me because I didn't want to lie to Mr. Allen, so I made myself study an hour a day for his class, even if it was just reviewing notes for his class. The other hour, I used for my college course, Learning Frameworks. "In my 9th-grade mind, I couldn't understand why I was doing this, but as a junior I get it. I earned a B, by the way, in Pre-AP Physics, and the college class".

I don't know if you noticed, but I am an introvert, I learned that in Learning Frameworks, so it is hard for me to get to know other people if I am required to start the conversation. But in the college class, we were assigned families, and that helped me a lot. My instructor had all these group projects, and it forced me to engage with others in a way that I had not done before. It helped me to make friends slowly, but it made me question myself and why I had trust issues. When I see my classmates, I know that we are a family, and we are just

working to get through this together, but I am the black sheep of the family because I must learn to work on trust. I am learning, it is tough though, but I am learning. One way that I am learning is by participating in the Chess Club; I started that in the 9th grade too. Again, it forces me out of my shell and to get to know people.

Once I got to the college, I realized that I had learned so much that helped to prepare me for the college as a full-time college student. All my courses were now college courses, and I could use them to get high school credit too. I hadn't studied as much in high school, but now I had to study all the time, but I wish I knew how to make more time to study, when I should ask for help or go to the tutor, and essentials I would need to be successful. Thanks to Mr. Allen, my high school Chemistry teacher, I know how to study. I was able to pass Chemistry with B and Spanish with A. Being at the college full-time came with a sense of freedom, and I had to remember to use what I learned about high school expectations for college, you know, the expectation of being there and being present. Which is hard when you know the college instructor is not looking for you, but there is the AP (assistant principal) who is walking around with other high school administrators making sure we went to class. It was hard to get to class the first two weeks, but I started playing Pokémon GO, and that is how I learned where my classes were and how to get around campus. I know how to approach instructors, and for the most part, I have had great instructors. I still struggle with my peers, but like any family, there always a few haters in the

group. I am determined to make this happen, and while my family will support me from time to time, like if it is raining, then my mom will give me a ride to school, but I lack the other support, or more like I need emotional support. When I have had a hard day, I wish my family could listen and offer advice, but I am the only one making these decisions on this path and I guess I have to make it work with my new family. “Again, my goal is to finish college, and this sacrifice is going to worth it in the end”.

Researcher Fieldnotes: Jasmine, my first interview, immediately began sharing her experience. It was as if she has practiced her speech multiple times and was ready to recite as though it was an assignment. After I explained to her that I would ask her a series of questions and that they might feel repetitive, she laughed and told me, “I was told to prepare, but I wasn’t sure how to prepare. So, you only want to ask me questions and hear about my experience? And I can’t get the answers wrong?” I confirmed that was all and that no answer was wrong, because it was all about her. I asked if she was a ready and she said without a doubt. So, we began.

Jasmine: It’s been an amazing experience, but this hasn’t been a piece of cake.

Junior, 17, 3.0 GPA, Batiste Early College High School, Ozarks Community College

I didn’t start at Batiste ECHS, I started at another ECHS program in the 9th grade and transferred to BECHS because my mom and I felt like it was not a good fit. I really struggled in the 9th grade, and my mom felt like I needed more support. I applied the end of the fall semester of the 9th grade and was accepted that spring. I attended Summer Bridge the summer of the 10th grade. Because I was going to BECHS, I knew it was connected to the community college, Ozark Community College, and I had a few family members who were or had attended

the college. They spoke highly of the OCC, but it was my older sister who truly influenced me to give BECHS a chance because she was a second-year college student paying for her college courses. Right there, I decided to attend and my mom, and I did a “tour” of the campus before the summer bridge since it was taking place at the college campus. I attended the prep course for the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) with other students before the summer bridge starting. This was so important because I needed to be TSIA college met for reading to take my first class and I really struggled with the test the first time around. I was very determined to pass (or meet the minimum) the exam so that I can take my first college course that fall.

Because I was behind the other 10th graders, I had to register for two college courses that fall and two in the spring. I initially panicked because I knew that it would require me to take the TSI Writing test and I had just passed the reading portion over the summer. My counselor explained to me that I would attend the test prep on Saturdays at the college or the high school for writing, but because of the previous test that I shouldn’t worry about not passing. The most valuable lesson that I learned was “to ask questions when it’s difficult, and to be open to change so that I can find a solution.”

When I was at the high school, I never had to think about what it meant to be around other college students, because we were told we were college students. We were instructed to build relationships with faculty and that those relationships would impact us the most because those relationships would offer additional

support once we arrived at the community college. However, I wish that during Summer Bridge they had talked to us about the difference between college and high school instructors because the difference was huge. “College professors tell you about assignments and then leave it up to you to complete the assignment, and to pass the class or not. High school teachers want you to graduate and move onto higher education, so they are constantly making exceptions for students.”

As a junior at a community college, this has been an experience. I had to adjust to how to engage faculty, which is completely different from engaging high school teachers. You have to talk to them; they aren’t required to talk to you; which is the complete opposite at the high school. My main struggle was how to study, because I learned very quickly that I didn’t know how to study and if I wanted to be successful I had to learn fast. I had to learn how to schedule my time appropriately because it could happen so fast that I was behind in a class or classes because I didn’t manage my time wisely. My fall semester was hard, because I was learning everything on the go, but once I told myself that I had to learn how to balance all my time so that I could complete my work and student clubs back at the high school campus. I am vice-president of my class, for the ECHS and the regular high school, and I am active on the student-led mentoring group for new ECHS students, which we partner mostly with freshman. It can be tough at times, but I am thankful that my family is very supported. I know during the tough times that I just have to persevere, but I know that the fun will come later. It’s kind of like if I know that my biggest hurdle is to stay focused, then I

must focus on the work, the scheduling, the studying and then my activities. I have to prioritize to make this work. This is an amazing experience, but I would tell anyone, it's not a piece of cake.

Researcher Fieldnote: When I met Ignacio, he had prepared some talking points for his interview. I asked him why the talking points, he explained to me that he always prepared for everything. Peering over his glasses, I could see that all his answers would be well thought out and that I only need to be patient as he shared his experience. With an answer to each question, there was always a pause and tilt of his head, and then he would slowly touch his glasses to let me know he was ready to answer.

Ignacio: I overpredicted my struggle

Junior, 17, 3.18 GPA, Batiste Early College High School, Ozarks Community College

In the eighth grade I had a choice between the Batiste ECHS program and the Collegiate Magnet Program (CMP), and in the beginning, I was leaning toward the CMP program. When my family and I went to the Open House, it just didn't feel like a good fit. Then as fate would have it, I missed the deadline for the application to apply. I was devastated, but I knew I wasn't supposed to be a part of the program. My friend was applying to the BECHS at the same high school and suggested that we apply together. I told him I wanted to talk to my parents about it, who were excited that I had another attempt at college as neither of them had been to college before either. After much thought, I knew it would be the right program for me as it more about the experience of going to college and not just earning the college credits. I decided to attend because I knew I was not the

typical high school student and that this would help me to engage more people and be a little bit more outgoing because I am slightly shy and reserved.

When I went to the TSIA prep course, I felt ready to take the exam. I passed on the first try and was able to take the Learning Framework class, and I was able to take a Health course as well. Both classes were great, but what really made it a good experience was that both of my instructors had assignments in Blackboard, which helped me so much when I got to the campus. Because I had prior knowledge, when a college professor came to our campus, I felt like a college student because I understand the language that he was speaking where many of peers were trying to keep up. But because I didn't always have to study for my high school courses, I had to learn how to take notes, because some courses were note heavy like Psychology, which I took the fall of the 10th grade. Fortunately, my siblings, who were in college, were able to give me some tips about studying and faculty which helped me a lot because it helped me to over prepare for everything.

Because I am always over-prepared, when I arrived here [at OCC] I wasn't really taken off guard. I understood the need for self-discipline, and I had a good understanding of how my essays should look, and I got used to going online and checking my class schedule and grades.

The one thing I wasn't prepared for the additional online resources that were available to me. My first essay, I struggled a bit because I was trying to use the online college resources through the library and I had just couldn't make sense of the process. I almost had to skip a class to get help from the tutor until she

made extra time to meet with me online so that I could get help with my paper. I think what helped me in finding different strategies to solve my problem, was talking to my peers. They were able to point me in the right direction as to how to approach the problem so that I wouldn't have to do something as extreme as missing a class. Because I always have my core group to lean on when I have a problem, it makes it easier, academically and personally, to meet my goals of graduating with an associate degree and on to a bachelor's degree.

Researcher Fieldnotes: James was excited to interview when I came to speak to his group. He called his dad and told him what he wanted to do and said, "I will bring my paperwork back tomorrow." When I arrived to start my day of interviewing, he was the first student to show up. He smiled throughout the interview and explained that he was slightly nervous and said he wanted to make sure that he gave me the right answers, but I assured him that all his answers would be good answers because they were about his experience. He smiled again and told me he had many experiences as an ECHS student and could tell me so many things. I told him I was ready to hear all about them and then we began.

James: What I learned came from asking questions.

Junior, 17, 3.1 GPA, M. E. White Collegiate Academy, Ozarks Community College

At the beginning of the 9th grade, my dad told me that I must be responsible for everything I did because I am at an institution of higher education, even though I am taking classes at the high school. He shared with me that this was the beginning of not procrastinating so that I would be ready in the 11th grade. At the time, I had no idea what he meant, but I thought I had time to figure out, I mean I had literally just gotten into the program and had taken TSIA. I

hadn't even taken my first class yet, Learning Framework. The most I had gathered was that I would have to learn, like the other 9th graders, "how to talk to faculty without my parents and that would require some maturity on my part." As I think back, the conversation makes sense now; I chose to be at M.E. White when I was in the 8th grade. I knew that I wanted to be there, but I didn't know what all being in the program and getting through the courses would entail getting so that I could graduate.

It all began in my Learning Framework class; it was where I learned what college could potentially be like for me and what type of college student I could become if I did the work. When I worked hard, I stayed ahead, it was easy, but when I was "being a goofy" not doing any work, then I got behind and had to work twice as hard to catch up. Also, this course taught me how to interact with others and how I present myself to my peers, the faculty, along with myself. The class was good for me because it reminded me of why I was in the class. My father had gone to college and my mother did not and "while I didn't have a horrible life, my goal is to continue my education so that I can reach back and help my family."

When I was starting classes at OCC, I realized I didn't know enough, and I wasn't told everything I should have known from school officials and teachers. What I learned came from asking many questions so that I could navigate this experience.

As time moved on during the school year, I finally learned it was better to be proactive, and I learned that I could schedule my own time and how to

approach each assignment because I learned that my strategy was to prioritize each assignment. With my high school classes, I never had to see what assignment should be completed first, because I knew with the high school courses that I was allowed additional opportunities because they [high school counselors] are required to get me through high school, no one is required to get me through college, but me.

Researcher Fieldnotes: Catarina almost skipped into the meeting room for her interview. She was excited to have completed the last final for the spring semester, and she would only have high school obligations for the next week until summer break. I briefly explained the purpose of the study and asked her if she had any questions. She said she was excited to be a part of the study and wanted to share the “right” answer with me. I explained to her that all her answers would be correct because I wanted to know about her experience. “That’s all?” she inquired. I told her yes that would be all. She laughed and told me, “I can totally handle this then, I thought it was final.” And so, we began, please meet Catarina.

Catarina: In high school, I felt like I had busy work, college is not busy work.

Junior, 17, 3.4 GPA, M. E. White Collegiate Academy, Ozarks Community College

I always planned to go to M.E. White Collegiate, it just seemed like a natural fit and it would help me and my family financially as well. “I am first-generation college student, and I know that I need to take as many opportunities as I can.” That is always at the forefront of my mind, especially when I attended the summer bridge program and participated in the TSIA boot camp. It was almost as if, unknowingly, I was preparing myself to be financially independent and responsible.

During my first year, I only had one college course, Learning Framework, and then my other classes were high school classes. In that one class, I felt like I learned so much about preparing for other college classes and college life.

“In Learning Framework, I feel as though that is where I started to become a college student. In that course, I learned how to study and prep for other courses; however, most importantly I learned how to interact with others and who I am when I interact with my peers and faculty.”

Furthermore, this class provided me with lots of structure that I didn't have in my high school classes. In my college's courses the instructor and even current instructors provided expectations but were lenient. It was explained early that it was my responsibility to hold myself accountable with studying, preparing for exams, taking notes, just anything. This helped as I took more college courses, because I was able to prioritize, build study groups and the occasional good study habits.

As I changed as a student, I started to notice a difference between my high school and college courses. I really felt like a college student,

“When I started taking classes at the [community] college with other college students. I felt like high school was stricter and with lots of structures; the college was more lenient. In high school, it felt like I had a lot of busy work, and college was not busy work; I had to be responsible and hold myself accountable for my actions and behavior. I had to learn because my college homework was actual work.”

Once I recognized the difference, it really changed my views about the college. The course work is more rigorous and so I have to work hard and communicate with my professors more often than I would with my high school instructors. Honestly, I think this is the secret to college, communicating with the professors.

It can take you a long way with some professors, it gives you that little push over the edge because professors can tell if you are trying and working hard and will help your grade more than expected. They can choose to round your grade as much as they see fit and this can help any student in the long run.

Juniors' Epilogue: Researcher Fieldnotes

At the end of the Juniors interviews, they believed that they were different from their predecessors, the Seniors. However, they approached their Senior year the same way as the groups before because of the behavior modeled for them often lead to successful graduation from the community college and their respective high schools. As they left the interview room and rejoined their friends, I could hear them discussing scholarship and admissions deadlines and where they could potentially go to college within the next year.

The Seniors: The Graduates

The seniors who interviewed for this study had graduated from their respective colleges and were awaiting high school graduation. Throughout each of the senior's stories, Jackson, Brittani, Issa, Isabella and Gemma, mentioned that their peers and family were the ones who played a supporting role for them while they were in the program. They spoke about how hard they worked to be the first in their program to receive college acceptance to large four-year research institutions, scholarships, and the best grades. Although these students were

competitive with one another as well as with the seniors that were not a part of the ECHS program, they were still coming to terms with accomplishing this goal. Each senior who entered the room came with a level of excitement that permeated their stories and their full four-year experiences. Now, I will, with honor, introduce the seniors.

Research Fieldnotes: When I met Jackson, he was so cool and confident when he entered the room. With his head held high and his shoulders back, he exuded an aura that conveyed he had made it and was off to do remarkable things soon. Despite this air of confidence, I could tell he was nervous. I could sense that he wanted to share his story, so it was important that I help him feel at ease without changing how he viewed himself and how he had positioned himself in his experience. Please meet Jackson.

Jackson: The first time I heard about college, I was in the 8th grade.

Senior, 18, 3.9 GPA, Pleasant Orchard Early College High School, Ozark Community College

I had no idea what an Early College High School was when I was an eighth grader, but I knew my friends were talking about where to go to school for high school. Some would seek out charter schools or private schools, while the majority would visit competitive magnet schools and apply for those programs. I wasn't sure where I wanted to go, so I thought it would be best to learn from my friends. My junior high school counselor and principal were preparing us, all the eighth graders at my school, for the Magnet and High School fair for all eighth graders within our school district. They talked to us about what to expect and possible questions we should ask while there and suggested going with our parents over the weekend. While talking to us, the principal began talking about our possible futures and how we can achieve our goals. He asked some of us to

think about what we wanted to be when we grew up and then to think about how we would get there. He said we could go to college. I was amazed, because this was the first time I ever heard about college and that everyone had a chance to go, but it started with the choices I would make in that moment. I went to the fair with classmates and my family and I wasn't sure if a magnet was the right school for me. When I met with my counselor and shared my thoughts with her, she mentioned the Early College High School program at Pleasant Orchard. She explained to me that it was for students like me, who were bright, but needed extra support to achieve the idea of college and it was free. I asked if we could talk to my family and she said yes. My counselor was great at explaining this to my parents who were genuinely excited for me to participate in the program. My father told me that he and my mother would support any way they could. My parents hadn't even finished high school, so I knew that I had to be a part of this experience for myself and my family.

When I went through the two-week Summer Bridge program, I felt so unprepared. It was as though my school didn't tell me what resources I would need to be successful. Taking that test made me doubt myself and worthiness of being in the program. However, on my second attempt, I passed [or met the minimum] to take my first college class that fall at Pleasant Orchard, Learning Framework. In this class, I felt like this is where I received practical training and resources to become successful. This is where I learned about the college experience, faculty expectations, good strategies that would help me to become

impactful as a student in the classroom. This class allowed us to have many conversations, sometimes debates, on what was appropriate behavior in the classroom, and how to express yourself respectfully.

My first two years of high school and college were heavily focused on high school and each semester the counselor and college advisor would increase the number of college courses that I could take; this helped me a lot because it trained me for what to expect when I came to the college. Except for my third year of high school English, all my classes were and have been college courses at the community college. While this was great, it was also a challenge because I had to learn how to study, take notes, and get into study groups. I had to learn how to do those things because this was a little more forced in high school or I could choose my friends for a group project, but once we came to the college I had to ask myself, “Who would be the best people to have in my study group?” “Will we work well together, and will we get the project completed?” I was forced to learn how to be a forward thinker and to find ways to support myself so that it would be beneficial for me and family down the road. I set a goal for myself to attend the flagship institution in my state and to attend graduate school at an Ivy League university. I feel like I am meant to be a business major after all of this because I want to help my family the way that they helped me.

Researcher Fieldnotes: Brittani was the first senior I interviewed, and I could tell she is counting down the wait for high school graduation. Still excited from community college graduation, Brittani smiled through the entire interview. She came to the interview from her last

final exam, and we spent a few minutes talking about how the exam went and how she felt about the test. Very confidently, Brittani answered that she had prepared well for the final and confidently stated that she felt as though she had done well, exceptionally well. After a few minutes discussing the exam, we began the interview. Please meet Brittani.

Brittani: I had no idea what I had signed up, but I knew that I wanted it.

Senior, 18, 3.5 GPA, Batiste Early College High School, Ozarks Community College

I wanted to be a part of this program. I know it sounds crazy, but I live in an area of the city that isn't known to have the best high schools, and because of that my parents were considering either a private or charter school for me and my brother. One day mom noticed some billboards around our neighborhood that announced that the neighborhood high school would offer an Early College High School for all new ninth graders who were interested in applying. I could hear the excitement in her voice, and I knew I wanted in. "I had no idea what I was signing up, but I knew that I wanted it." The idea of going to college had been a conversation in my home since I could remember, and the family night was the first time I heard word first-generation college student. I had so many questions, because I had never heard that phrase, so I realized that I needed to learn all the unfamiliar words that I heard that night.

I asked my parents, what was a first-generation student, and learned that most of the students who would potentially attend would be the first in their family. I was slightly different from most students, both of my parents had been to college, but not completed. My grandfather had been a college professor, so he was able to give me some insight that most of my friends wouldn't be able to get

from someone in their home or family. College was always discussed in our home, and I knew I wanted to participate in the program, especially because my long-term goal was to become a lawyer. A family meeting was called, and we all felt like this would be the best fit for me and my brother the following year. I mean it was two years of free college, who wouldn't want that for their kids.

I attended Summer Bridge for two weeks and the TSIA boot camp and took the test immediately after, and when school started back my high school scheduled had one college course, Learning Framework. This was first time a teacher, or college instructor, had asked 14-year-old me, "Who was I? and Who was I to others?" I feel like that class really shaped who I was as a student because it made me think about the type of student I was and the student I could become. In my high school classes, I didn't have to study as much, but this course required me to study and to think about who I would become as a future college student. I changed my study habits completely, I began studying more and trying to grasp the concepts of what I learned instead of memorizing what was written. I know I could have been more prepared coming into community college with the tools that I learned throughout the two years while at Batiste ECHS.

My strategy for my college courses was simple, to just stay organized, but to also introduce myself to faculty. I learned that from my dad, he believed that when you introduce yourself and are actively participating in the class or classes that you will stand out. I wanted to stand in a good way, not a negative way

because college classes and high school were different, and I was balancing being in two separate and different environments.

Being on time was a big change for me knowing that professors would lock the door during lectures and at the high school you are able to come in and disturb at any time. As far as in the separation of the campuses and diverse conversations you would have, I learned the hard way knowing that you cannot act the same way at a high school as you can at a college.

The respect is on a different level and the expectations are higher.

Researcher Fieldnotes: *In a Stranger Things t-shirt, Issa was running late to interview because of a final. When she came into the room she was literally running. Laughing, I asked her if she wanted water or a few minutes to relax before we started. She said she had her drink, but a few minutes would be great. Her final had started late, and she finished later than she expected. As she pulled out her water bottle from her bag, she sat down and immediately began showing me pictures from prom and various sporting events she attended throughout the year, she said, "I want you to know me before we start and that I made it here. It was hard, but I am here." She was funny, smart, and very thoughtful of her ECHS experience. As she leaned back into her chair, she sipped her water, flipped her hair and said, "I am ready whenever you are ready." With no hesitation, please meet Issa.*

Issa: I had a good experience, but I didn't want to miss out on high school.

Senior, 18, 3.95 GPA, M.E. White Collegiate Academy, Ozarks Community College

I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a part of the ECHS program, but I wanted a good high school education. Plus, there were only two high school options where I live, so I didn't have a lot of options. My mom was definitely not a champion of

the other high school and she thought this would be a better experience for me than going to a traditional high school. I think the other factor that sold my mom was the former student of the program graduated and got a full ride scholarship to Independence University. When we had our family night at the ECHS program, she came and spoke about her experience, that's when I became excited about the program. While I didn't get to meet her at that parent night event, I made it my goal to meet her later. So, I applied, I go into the program, and I attended the required summer bridge and passed [or met the minimum] for TSI Reading and Writing on the first try.

My experience was different than most cohorts from my program, because we were constantly moving. We started in a building near the first high school, then we moved two blocks over in the 10th grade, and then I moved here to the college in the 11th grade. On top of that our principal, assistant principal, and high school counselor changed in the first three years too. I was and am completely over change, but I did learn to adapt to my situation and to not be oblivious to my situations.

My first class was Learning Framework and it was great. I think it helped with the change a lot. When you ask a 14-year-old, who are you? Well let's just say we had a professor who was prepared for all our answers. I remember when our professor asked that question and I responded that I didn't know because I just wanted to be a regular student. He asked me why, and I told him I didn't want to

miss out on the fun with my friends in high school and previous students had made it seem like I would.

My professor was the first person to tell me I didn't have to miss out, but I would have to balance high school and college. I wanted the college experience or a good ECHS experience, but I didn't want to miss out on high school to do it. So, I knew this entire experience would be about the balance of both and I knew that I needed my family to make it happen.

When I shared this with my mom she told me that my only job was to be a student and to be the best student, then she would support me however she could. If she hadn't said that I wouldn't have been able to maintain a good GPA on both sides, being able to graduate from OCC last week and high school next week, being an active student at my high school, and going to prom. None of that would have happened without my parents.

While my freshman year was not the greatest grade wise, overall the experience was great. I wouldn't change my freshman year for anything. I learned so much about myself as a student and a person, it really changed and redirected me as a student. In the eighth grade, I didn't study at all, I could memorize what I needed for classes and that was enough. When I got to high school that was not an option, and I had to change that right away. It didn't happen right away, but maybe six weeks into the fall semester I learned I had to study, I had to be a part of the study group, and I needed to interact with the instructors to make it happen or to be successful. By the spring semester, I knew I

had to get on the ball with my grades and how I approached studying with all my classes, whether they were high school or college. I think what turned it all around for me was the Learning Framework class and high school Biology. I loved my sciences classes and I consider myself a Biology major and I am applying to some the best Biology programs, so I had to make sure I was a better student on both sides.

I guess once I found my passion in the program that's what inspired me to be better student. As I worked through my ECHS program, I realized that I could do this, but it would take a lot. The goal that I gave myself was to apply to number one Biology program in the nation. I knew that would be a crazy goal, but if that girl could go to Independence University then I should be able to do this right?

At the start of my junior year, the alumna from my ECHS program came back to visit and to be a part of a panel for students were leaving the high school and going to the community college. I knew then that I needed to talk to her about her experience. When we finished, I made my way to find her and I promise it was magic, fate, just something, because I took only a few steps and there she was. So, I asked her why Independence University? Can you believe she started laughing and told me she really didn't want to go to Independence University, but they gave her a scholarship and the flagship did not provide her with any scholarships? I was devastated for her. She said, "If I had to do all over again, I would have gone to the flagship." She said she really wanted to go there and be with her friends, but she's making Independence University work, and it's

been a great experience. Basically, she told me that you have to go to school where you it's the best fit for you. Once you hear something like that you know it's pretty much a sign that you have to carry out. I recently applied for STEM research fellowship, and I am waiting to hear back. If I get it, it will really help me and my family so much with the tuition. I've gotten some partial scholarships, but you know everything helps. I guess this has to be expected when you go to college out of state.

Researcher Fieldnotes: Isabella had a quiet demeanor, not shy, but quiet confidence. She arrived very early to the interview and was dressed quite nicely in her yellow summer dress. She was so excited it had only been a few weeks ago that she had participated in the DCC graduation and waiting for the Pleasant Orchard high school graduation. Please meet Isabella.

Isabella: My grandmother played a huge part in me being here, it was as if her dream was coming true.

Senior, 17, 2.68 GPA, Pleasant Orchard Early College High School, Davis Community College

When I first decided to participate in the Pleasant Orchard ECHS program, it was because my grandmother heard about the program. She was so excited about me possibly going to college, and she talked about the program every chance she got.

My grandmother played a huge part in me being here, it was her dream coming true...It's actually very funny now, I wanted to attend the large magnet near my home, but my counselor and one of my close friends talked to me about attending Pleasant Orchard ECHS and how it could

possibly be a good fit. Even though I have friends that went to that magnet school it's like I know that wouldn't have worked for me.

Since I would be the first in my family to attend college, this would give me the head start that I needed to become a teacher. However, it was hard. When I went to Summer Bridge, it started off great, I was making friends and learning about the program. Then I took the TSIA, and I just couldn't pass the test [meet the minimum] for reading. In the 9th grade, I took the test four times, so I didn't get to take any classes my first year because I couldn't pass the test. I took it two more times in the 10th grade that fall and passed [met the minimum] for reading. There was so much self-doubt like I really questioned if I should do this or not because I was struggling with the college test. But when I passed the reading part and then I passed the writing section of the test, I felt like I had a tough road ahead of me, because I still had to take Learning Framework, Speech, and Health classes, between the spring and summer before starting the 11th grade. I was stressed, but I just kept going. I remember going home and doing this assignment for the Learning Framework class, and the first question was "who am I" and who am I to others?" I remember talking it over with grandmother, and she told me I was a stubborn fighter (laughs).

She reminded me that when some of my classmates gave up after the failing the test a couple of time [not meeting the minimum] they left the program for traditional high school or transferred to other schools.

However, I was determined to keep going and to not give up on myself

even when it seemed that my best try wasn't enough. I think that talking really helped me to realize what I was supposed to do in my future and that's why I want to be a teacher. There are other students who are like me, who are struggling, and I want to be able to encourage them, but also show them ways that they can tackle this hard moment so that they can succeed.

I was always the student who had to study, but when I started college classes I had to really learn how to study (laughs). I realized that sometimes I memorized things, which didn't help me in college, because I had to be able to explain it and who wants to explain that I memorized it. Not me. So, I had to really learn what I learned, I really talked to my classmates about the work and I had to ask questions of my professors and even my high school teachers, because I needed to get in the habit of just talking to people.

I don't know if you noticed, but I am naturally quiet and shy so to have to be the conversation starter, well it's hard and no one shows you how to do that with the professors, it's really you learning on your own. Now that I've learned it's not so hard, but I learned. I guess the high school prepares you for college the best they can, but they can really only prepare you for the classroom, no one prepares you for the world outside of the classroom, you can only hope you get it right as it's happening.

Researcher Fieldnotes: When I met Gemma, she literally danced right into the room. Her last final had been her dance final. She said she danced from one building to the other because her

professor told her how well she had done and that she sent her letter of recommendation for a dance program scholarship at a nearby college. Her excitement could be felt from the moment she touched the door. The program coordinator laughed and asked her if she planned to change from her dance shoes to her regular shoes. I waited an extra 15 minutes for her, because she ran back to get her bag and change. She was so excited she left it behind. She hurriedly introduced herself and said she was ready to begin as she had to make the last school bus. And with that, please meet Gemma.

Gemma: I just wanted to dance, this made it possible.

Senior, 18, 2.97 GPA, Pleasant Orchard Early College High School, Davis Community College

I love to dance. I mean I have always loved it. So, when I heard about the Early College High School Program (ECHS) at Pleasant Orchard, I didn't understand why I would be a part of that program. I wanted to attend the performing arts magnet school, but my counselor didn't think it would be the best fit. Well, she was right, it wasn't a completely good fit, but the program was amazing.

The dance studios and the performance hall, oh my gosh, everything was perfect. I just wasn't feeling the people, you know it just wasn't right for me. So that was when I decided that I would apply to the ECHS program at Pleasant Orchard. I kept wondering if this was the right decision, but once I attended the Summer Bridge it just felt right. I liked the teachers, the counselors, and the assistant principal, and my family seemed

comfortable at the school as well. Also, it was close to my house; it really just seemed perfect for me.

During Summer Bridge, we all had to take the TSIA, well I had to take it twice.

So, in the spring of the 9th grade, I took the Learning Framework (LF) class, and that was a change.

My instructor who taught LF, Ms. Harrison was great. This class was so influential to me because it felt like it gave me my academic foundation for college. I mean my high school tried to prepare me as much as possible, teaching me about the syllabus, being in a study group and other stuff, but it's not the same as learning it when you are at the college.

When high school teachers treat their classes like college classes, it helps to make the move to the college easier, because you know what to look for when you get to the college.

I think the other thing that really helped me was my family, my older brother was in college at another local community college and he gave me so many tips. His advice was keep on top of everything, and most times it did. I think the most helpful advice he gave me was about the advising sessions and what to ask during the advising meeting. This was helpful, because I wanted to be able to take dance classes, which was great because I had completed most of my core classes. It was great, because I probably had about three to four classes that were dance classes.

I was so happy, I joined a Caribbean dance group at school and at the college, which was amazing because I am a proud Afro-Cuban and we love to dance, and

I just wanted to dance, and this program gave me the opportunity to do that. I was able to go to the dance studio and perform in the performance hall and my family was able to see me perform. Completely mind-blowing experience, I don't know if I would have had the same experience at the performing arts school. I'm not sure if I am ready to leave home and to go to college in another state, but I am ready to go to college. I've applied to two college with great dance programs and I have been admitted to the college I had to apply to the dance program. So that's why I was so excited about my professor writing the letters of recommendations. Wish me luck.

Senior Epilogue: Researcher Fieldnotes

Following our interviews, each of the Seniors graduated within one to weeks of their respective interviews. Jackson was preparing to attend the flagship university; Brittani would be attending an out-of-state Historically Black College and University; Issa received the STEM research fellowship with additional scholarship dollars; Isabella was admitted into her both colleges she applied too; and Gemma was admitted into the dance program at both colleges as well. At the end of interviews, each student asked for some advice that would be beneficial to them their freshman year in college. I shared with them to enjoy this moment; there was nothing like it. To celebrate their accomplishment with others and to be fully engaged in this experience. I told them that all the challenges had shaped them to finish their respective journeys, but again enjoy it.

The Community (The Juniors and the Seniors)

Through each of their stories, the Juniors and Seniors, shared their overall experiences while simultaneously providing a brief snapshot of their experiences and how they viewed those experiences through their specific lens. Through their stories, several themes were found regarding their Early College High School Experiences. The three themes that emerged were: 1) Coping and Situations (moving in), 2) the ECHS cycle (moving through), and 3) Strategies and Self-reflection (moving out).

Coping and Situations (moving in)

To understand the ECHS student experience, it was important to understand how they coped with the various situations throughout their four-years of high school and community college. All the participants believed that they were able to cope with most situations, and on a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest level of coping and one being the lowest level of coping, most students scored themselves a seven or an eight, only two students scored themselves a five. Kade, who scored himself a seven, stated,

I'm a great ear hustler, so I always listened to the upperclassmen, especially as a freshman, to what was causing them to panic. Because of that, I focused on how to balance my school work, both high school, and college. I mean occasionally things are going to come up, but because I had prioritized from the beginning, it allowed me to be flexible. When I was having a problem in Physics this semester, I knew that I had to get a tutor. I made sure to find out all the times that I could potentially meet with the tutor, and I used the instructor's office hours when I couldn't get to the tutor or had questions the tutor couldn't answer. I mean it's what I would have done if I was at the high school.

James agreed with Kade and added,

Also, it helped that I learned Blackboard early and then my college instructors were constantly making me use it. Because of those small things, it made me think about how to approach my work with calendar planning, task list, and just basic time management so that I could feel accomplished with how I approached my work.

Jasmine, who scored herself an eight, agreed.

You have to be flexible if you want this to work. When I started at the college, it was like I immediately knew this was going to be different, so I went to Instagram, because they have a list for everything, and I found one on how to be a college freshman. It helped a lot.

Isabella and Gemma, whom both scored themselves a five, shared the same thought on coping, “When it starts hard, you have to work twice as hard to catch up with your classmates.” Isabella added,

I scored myself five, because I am not just coping I am trying to figure out how to be a contender for the top group without it consuming me. The top group is the students who were always on target for everything; they passed all of TSIA's [met the minimum] for all classes and have super high GPAs. I mean they are model students. However, I can't always focus on the top group, if I did, then I wouldn't be able to do this, so I've learned how to be comfortable with who I am, but to know that my challenges are different while striving for top group status.

Situations

While students tried their best to deal with situations, there were some situations that students were not prepared for once they arrived at the college campus; freedom and the faculty.

Upon their arrival from the high school to the college, not only are the students trying to learn their way around, they are learning to navigate this new freedom as there are no hall monitors or detentions or instructors that the students believed were biased against ECHS students.

Freedom. All the students agreed that the first semester of the junior year was the toughest because the students were leaving behind the confines and the structure of the high school. While they all believed the high schools tried to prepare them for college, they also stressed that no one prepared them for the freedom of attending classes at the college. James said that he learned the hard way about freedom because he became a little lax in the scheduling of assignments. James continued,

This wasn't about studying, I just become a little lazy. I thought I had everything under control. I had a paper due, but I didn't put in as much effort as I would have back at the high school. Well, I submitted my paper and when the paper was returned my grade was not what I expected, and then I learned that college grade isn't weighted only high school grades are weighted. I had to change, and I had to pay more attention to the grading scale. I wasn't prepared that with freedom comes a new level of accountability.

Jackson agreed and added,

You can't afford to slack because the workload is so different. You have to change your habits completely because you are creating your own structure for yourself. It was the first time that I had to think about what worked for me."

Gemma, Issa, and James, and Jasmine all admitted that too much freedom for them lead to them cutting classes. Gemma said,

Honestly, I had to work hard not to cut classes because it was so easy. It wasn't until I failed Intro to Philosophy that I had to really rethink what I was doing to myself. I really didn't know how to handle it at all, but I only had myself to blame for what was happening.

Issa elaborated,

The freedom kind of catches you off guard, because you are just not ready for it. I failed one test in art class and I had step back and re-evaluate what I was doing to myself. I mean who fails an art exam.

Faculty. For most students their situations were created mostly by faculty as the students were not sure how to navigate unfriendly or mean faculty as they were referred to by students.

Brittani stated,

I had quite a few instructors who were international and I was just trying to find the best way to communicate, and sometimes I was met with complete silence as if it were my fault. I decided just to record the lectures that I needed to and take the study sheets and add all the notes I could to the page.

Ignacio pointed out, "I mean you can almost tell which faculty are listening and which ones don't care. I try to avoid the instructors who don't care because it almost seems like the class becomes harder because you are an ECHS student." Jasmine agreed and shared "There are some instructors who are trying to hold you to this standard, and then there are other instructors who are just mean. It's almost as if I am held to a higher standard because I am ECHS student."

While, Gemma, Isabella, and Jackson shared that they had the same classroom issues, they also believed that if they just worked harder than those faculty would accept them, and sometimes that worked. However, Kade and Issa disagreed with them and pointed out they should not have to work harder than everyone else in their class who is not ECHS. Issa stated,

When someone tells me, I shouldn't be here, I am just taking a seat from a paying student, or why don't I just go to high school, but I have passed TSIA and completed the other requirements to be here, I shouldn't have to work harder than my non-ECHS peers. I should receive the same respect as the other students.

Kade added,

I shouldn't be made to feel lesser than in any class at the college. I am earning my degree the same as everyone else. Sometimes I just want to ask all the faculty who don't want me to be here, 'What makes you think it's right to treat me like this? Why do you have a problem with me?'

The ECHS Experience: Moving Through

All the students recognized how they coped with these situations, particularly the ones with the faculty because these unanticipated situations were believed to have altered their ECHS experience. The students defined these terms as ECHS Profiling, the ECHS Cry, and ECHS Rage.

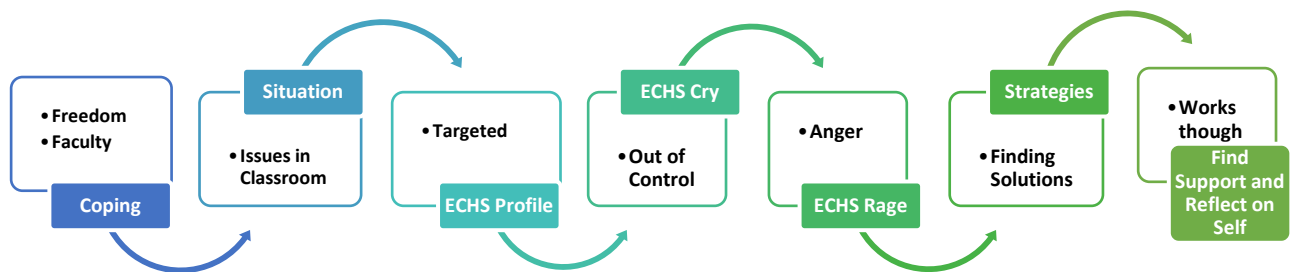


Figure 6: The Early College High School Student Experience

ECHS Profile

In trying to describe the profiling experience, Issa described the experience as a perception that faculty and other people who work on campus have of ECHS students.

James describes a similar perspective.

It's like I have a target on my back because I am an ECHS student. I mean no matter what I do to cover up that I am an ECHS student, I know that there are ways that they can identify me, without trying. We are not required to wear uniforms, but we have to wear two IDs, on high school and the college ID. Sometimes I wonder what it would be like if I could go to class without those IDs. I mean it's like two big signs that say here I am! Pick on me. I am an ECHS student. But I know I have to wear them for safety reasons, I just hate that I get singled out.

Jasmine added that,

I definitely find myself not talking in classes where I have accidentally self-identified that I am an ECHS student. I try to cover up my IDs, but there is

another ECHS program that is here, and I feel so sorry for those kids because they wear uniforms. I am mean they have to wear jackets in the summer so that the mean instructors don't know that they are ECHS students. I really wish the college had a way to deal with this because no one should have to deal with these people who don't want us here.

Catarina said,

It's just so much, you know. When you have an instructor who just doesn't want you in their classroom or at the college, you almost have to take on a new personality in order to deal with the class. I knew it was bad when a non-ECHS study group partner asked me if I was ok. It can get ugly quick.

ECHS Cry

The ECHS Cry seemed to bring about a level of sadness for students, wither it was physically crying or just an awareness of the emotion for the students. Whether the issues they faced were about faculty or failing a course, the students stated that they overwhelmed with emotions, because they felt the situation was beyond their control and they were unable to cope with the situation.

Gemma and Isabella both stated that they often felt crushed when situations got beyond their control. Isabella stated,

As a first-generation student, no one tells you how to deal with the failure or how to recover from failure. You're just trying to figure it out, but before you can get there, it's like you have to cry, because whom am I supposed to ask for help.

Gemma added, "I feel like all I could do was cry or scream because at the time I felt like I was facing a problem with no solutions or no support." Jackson stated,

I just felt like I'm depending on the situation to work out; if it does then I was required to give up something to make this other thing happen. My family could only support me so much, so they always chose the college stuff, but I had no support for the high school. So financially, I had to miss out because I couldn't ask my family to sacrifice even more. So, I would just sacrifice alone. It was hard.

Catarina clarified that the ECHS cry could only be understood by other students who were in an ECHS program.

My other friends weren't able to understand, because they weren't having this experience, so it was easier for them to say, well just don't do it anymore. But I am too far into the program to quit, or I just don't want to quit, so I have to figure out how to work it out, but its more likely that I am going to cry before I work it out.

Brittani added,

When you realize you don't have anyone to talk to about it with or no one has been in this predicament, it feels like the ultimate OMG moment, because no matter how big or small the problem you may consider quitting, but you have to talk yourself out of it.

ECHS Rage

"After a while you become angry, because you know it shouldn't and doesn't have to be this way, but now I know I have been backed into a corner, so am angry because I had find a way out," said James. Jackson declared, "it's almost like you're angry, because you know there is light at the end of the tunnel, you need to make sure

you are going in the right direction and because you don't know what will makes it worse.”

Some students were angry with themselves because they felt as though they should be able to work through the problem but have yet to find the solution that is going to work and change the situation. Ignacio stated,

I tried to have all the resources, but occasionally I don't know what to use. So, I feel like that slows down the process, and it feel like I have to have an answer right now. So now I am stressed because I have to keep trying to find out what will work and will not.

Issa added, “It's almost like I have forgotten how to get to the result, and that frustrates me because I know better than this and I have to find the answer that is going to solve the problem.”

Strategies and Self-Reflection: Moving Out

As the student's transitioned from rage to strategies, they realized that there were solutions to problems that would effectively resolve their respective situations and that would reflect on their own experiences and strategies (Schlossberg, 2011).

Strategies

Most of the participants mentioned that finding strategies required having support from either family or friends. This was beneficial because it allowed students to share their experiences and potential strategies with others, particularly with their peers who are going through the ECHS program as well. Ignacio stated, “I just try to think about what will be helpful and what I should I do, but the main thing is not procrastinating. Because I am stubborn, I am going to keep working until I find the right solution.”

Brittani added that she too tries to think through all her options to get to a decision. “I have to think before I do is the basis of everything,” she said.

James decided to focus on what was in his control and to be strategic about how to make the best of that for himself. He declared,

I learned to adjust to freedom and instructors who did not support me and to be strategic with my time. While I couldn’t control the instructors’ behavior, I could control my own or at least continuously work at it, so that I could make the most use of my time.

“I just try to take it all in and then I try to go from there. I feel like I need to have as much information as possible to make the best decision for myself,” said Issa. She continued, “I understand that not everything is given to you and in college, you have to work for everything and be willing to communicate that you have a need, even if that person doesn’t support you.”

Support from Family. While most students felt as though their families might not understand what they were experiencing, participants reported that their families wanted to support them since they were first-generation college students, and sometimes potential first-generation high school graduates. “My parents really just tried to keep my spirits lifted. If I were having a tough day or a tough time with an assignment, my dad would always make me talk about it, which would eventually help me get to an answer,” said James. Gemma felt the same way,

My mom was so interested in my day and each class that when I had a problem, even though at times I wouldn’t tell her everything right off, she was always

willing to sit down and talk through my options. When she could not help, she was just a great sounding board, and that helped me so much with stress, just the fact that she was listening to me. Because I love her and her encouragement, I generally left motivated to keep working to find the right answer for myself.

Unfortunately, Kade differed from the group because he questioned the level of family support that he had. Kade stated,

I know that my family cares and that they love me, but I am on my own, so I am constantly looking inward to find the answer. I have to ignore various issues that may stop me from being my best self. I always want to do better, so I am willing to change and take guidance when I can get it, especially emotional support to keep me going.

Support from Friends. The students had already established that they would need to seek support from other ECHS students or their friends who were in the program.

Isabella, Catarina, Issa, and Jasmine talked about how friends suggested *Rate your Professor* to learn about instructors who were great with ECHS students. Also, they made it a point to share by word of mouth good instructors who treated ECHS students as they treated other college students.

James stated, “Being in this program has really made me be less introverted and a little more outgoing because there were things I needed to know that my classmates could share with me. I appreciate the insight they gave me about instructors or about cutting class.” Jackson agreed and said, “My friends shared with me which instructors to take when I came to college. Because of these conversations, it helped me to learn which

instructors I could be comfortable with and which instructors I could not.” James added that it humanized the instructors who enjoyed teaching ECHS students.

Gemma and Isabella pointed out the difference it made having friends in the program because they could have those hard conversations that were needed. Gemma shared,

This sounds funny, but for my friends who still cut class, it is easier for me to have the conversation with them about cutting classes than our assistant principal. I mean you can get in trouble with the AP (assistant principal), but I am going to tell you how stupid it is to cut class and I am going to make you think about what you are giving up. Last, I am going to be able to share back pieces of your dream that no one else knows because we are friends and we share our goals and dreams. I can at least persuade my friend to maybe go to class more often than the AP can.

Self- Reflections

As the students reflected on their experiences, each student also acknowledged their roles in navigating those experiences. Jasmine recognized that she was her biggest hurdle and that for this to work, she had to stay focused on her goals. Ignacio admitted, “I noticed that I had to become more outspoken and less of an introvert along with creating space to strive to be the best student I can continuously.” Isabella shared,

I realize that not every student is going to be in that top group, there are going to be many students who will be just like me. Those students need a roadmap and a guide, and if I can figure it out how to do this successfully, then I can be that guide for other students. So, I am glad that I did this because I know that I will be able to help many people who are just like me in the future.”

Kade insisted that the program was causing him to grow as a person. He continued, “initially, I started this, and I wasn’t sure if everyone cared as he or she said or if he or she could be trusted, but as I continue to go through the program I know I have to open up to others.” Issa added,

This experience was me versus me, and now at the end, I have realized that I am the only one could have stopped me from completing this journey. However, I know that I have done my best, and that is all I can ask of myself for every step of this journey.

Conclusion

All the participants were able to reflect on their experiences before the transition to the community college and their experiences while at the community college.

Although there were many challenges and moments of self- reflected, the participants were able to examine how they had been supported or would need to be supported as they continued through their experience.

This chapter elaborated on the students’ individual stories as well as their shared experiences as they navigated their transition from the high school to the college. The themes that arose from their individual stories connected to Schlossberg’s Transition Theory; particularly moving in, moving through, and moving out. Participants indicated that their coping skills assisted them as they moved through various situations. These same skills helped them develop the strategies they utilized to transition through those situations.

During their time in the ECHS program, students were able to navigate the college, but the participants were unsure about how to navigate challenges that they faced

when learning to manage their new-found freedom the college environment offered. Similarly, participants reported difficulty interacting with or engaging instructors they perceived as insensitive at the college campus. In addition to these situations, the students were trying to comprehend their own ECHS experience, through the ECHS profile, cry and rage. As a result of the exercise, students found support through their strategies and were able to employ self-reflection to prepare for future situations.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This qualitative study addressed how Early College High School students navigate their college experience, particularly when transitioning from the high school to the community college. Schlossberg's Transition theory served to frame inquiry and guide analysis of the data. Participant narratives were viewed through the lens of Schlossberg's four S's: self, support, strategies, and situations as well as the concept of moving in, moving through, and moving out. The research question addressed was "How do high school students navigate their transition to the community college while participating in an early college high school program?"

Findings from this study illustrate that the participants relied on high school experiences throughout their transition from the high school to the community college. Previous transition events on which students relied such as summer bridge participation, taking the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA), and enrolling in their first college course, were used as indicators by the students to determine their success in the program. Students' experiences were developed as brief first-person narratives that reflected their individual experiences. Themes became visible during the development of their narratives leading to the analysis of the following themes: coping and situations, the ECHS experience, and strategies and self-reflection. Next, this chapter discusses how the findings connect to the theoretical framework and the literature. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of suggestions for further research and the study's limitations.

Findings

While each student's story was told from the first-person perspective, three themes emerged from the data. These themes aligned with Schlossberg's transition theory which focuses on how students engaged the transition process, cope and in new situations evident through the moving in process, while the ECHS experience was reflected in the moving through stage, while evidence was of moving out could be found through the strategies and self-reflection of the students' experience. (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg, 1985; Schlossberg, 2011). Viewing transition as a constant process, Schlossberg posed that everyone in the transition process is either moving in, moving through or moving out of their various situations (Anderson et al., 2012; Battle, 2017).

The ECHS Student and Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Although all the participants were unsure about how to cope with uncomfortable situations, they were able to share how they felt their experiences impacted them while at the college. The students reported they were made to feel as though they could not share concerns regarding faculty. A few students believed that they could sway instructors with their hard work, while most believed that should be treated equally as their non-ECHS peers. Issa believed that in not addressing the issue with those faculty members, it would cause further issues for students and their success. Participants also believed that "hiding" the fact that they were ECHS students was more beneficial because it decreased chances of creating a negative classroom experience for themselves and others.

When students discussed the consequences of not having a similar structure that they were familiar with at the high school, they felt as though they could take risks or stretch

boundaries, such as skipping class, due to the consequence of parents being called later that day or being found by roaming administrators who were checking the hallways for students. At the college, no one was looking for them in the halls and most instructors were not taking attendance of any kind. However, they owned their behavior due to the impact that behavior could have on them after cutting classes. Gemma, Isabella, and Jasmine discussed that when they cut classes, they later realized they would not be able to make up exams, quizzes, and test because they did not have a real justification as to why they were not in class. Again, while the consequences did not surprise the students, the participants were not prepared for the occasional failing grade or failing a class that came with that decision.

Whether the student faced an anticipated such as skipping class or an unanticipated event such as negative treatment from faculty, both instances served as a trigger for the situation, through the timing of the situation, the level of control of the situation, the levels of stress, and the individual's assessment of the positive or negative situation. DeVilbiss (2014) stated that these anticipated transitions, or missing classes, were an asset to the transition as they assisted the individual with timely growth, such holding oneself accountable or responsible for their role which led to the participants feeling more settled in their environment. While the unanticipated events, or the insensitive treatment from faculty, were more complicated, the participants indicated they felt less in control and felt higher levels of stress which caused the student to feel less comfortable in their environment at the community college than when they were at the high school. DeVilbiss (2014) added this leads to students feeling less empowered and possibly angry as the student is unable to find the necessary solution needed to move the student toward finding independence from the situation.

Moving In: Coping and Situations

All participants spoke about being able to cope with their new environment and situations that enabled them to have a smooth transition from the high school to the community college. Specifically, the students relied on previous situations and resources that were available when the students were at the high school full-time. When coping with their newfound freedom at the college, students were tried to find a way to provide themselves with a structure that was similar to the high schools but allowed them to be responsible for how they managed their time, classes, and classwork. Ignacio and James focused on learning what resources were available to them from the college that would assist them in being successful. They became aware of and utilized Blackboard and calendar planning, which they believed would assist them in staying ahead in the classroom. Furthermore, they overgeneralized how their college experience could potentially impact them and began working to change how they strategized their time and efforts before their first college course. The efforts that were made during summer bridge and within the first year empowered them to make positive gains within that first year and beyond and to use resources made available by the college.

In the eleventh grade, students were moved from the high school to the college and began, taking classes at the college full-time as high school students. As students worked to adjust to their new environment or campus, they also need to understand what is expected to them (Anderson et al., 2012; Rincon, 2016). There were many challenges that the participants faced and were not always prepared for during their new ECHS experience, that included the freedom of being college students in addition to their negative experiences with faculty, these were situations that were not expected by the students when they began go to the college and these factors hindered the transition. Due to these experiences, the students struggled with the

leniency of the college and were unsure of how to approach the insults and harmful words that they received from college instructors (Born, 2006; Outlaw, 2017). As Gemma, Issa, Brittani, Catarina, and James shared they were not prepared on how to deal with insensitive instructors who made the students very aware of their positions on the ECHS students being on campus, and specifically in their classroom.

Moving Through: ECHS Experience

As the students were navigating through unknown territory at the community college, the students began to feel as though faculty or other campus administrators had targeted them for anything that happened on campus. While the students understood that their campus experiences would be different from other traditional students, they were unable to comprehend why the faculty and other campus administrators who profiled ECHS students, and what they deemed to be appropriate and inappropriate ECHS behavior.

ECHS Profiling. The students defined ECHS profiling as when students were recognized by wearing two ID badges or if the students were made to wear uniforms.

While none of the students who participated in the study were required to wear uniforms, they did recognize the students who did wear uniforms had to go to extra lengths to cover up their ID badges as well as their uniform before going to classes or interacting with any faculty or staff at either community college.

ECHS Cry. Students defined the ECHS cry as when students were in the middle of the situation and felt very out of control. While they know there are solutions, the students felt as though they were unable to find the correct solutions due to stress. The frustration that students faced was due to having supports as at the high school but feel as though

there were no supports at the college when students have faced a setback (Rincon, 2017).

At the high school students were able to seek out support even if there was tension between the student and the instructor. Gemma, Isabella, and Catarina stated that at times they felt as though they should “cry it out” or scream to help them towards a path that would allow them to attempt any sense of control. James pointed out that occasionally students were trying to simplify college like high school and realized that not all the tips and resources that they learned in high school would work would for college. Eventually, they would have to know the answer, go to class, or they would have to find a way to deal with the instructor.

ECHS Rage. As the students were trying to find solutions, they invariably became angry with the situation or the individuals who placed them there because they had not found a viable option or the level of support they assumed they needed to work through the issue. Due to the need for an appropriate solution, students created a space that enabled them to breathe and think through how to find the right answer to their problem. The ECHS students noticed that they wanted to solve the problem sooner than they could, however, Rincon (2016) stated that ECHS students seem to take longer to process as they are not only reviewing their short-term goals, but they are more focused on what is coming next after the attainment of their high school diploma and Associate degree.

Moving Out: Strategies and Self- Reflection

As the ECHS students start to find solutions, they also found out that their families and their friends in the ECHS program who were willing to support their efforts and support them through the challenges while in the ECHS program. The students recognize that while their families may not completely understand the concepts behind the ECHS program, they discovered

that their families are willing to sacrifice and provide support in other ways that the students recognized. This began the process to move the students toward long-term benefits that were helpful in the end. The strategies, which eventually led back to students being able to cope, consider how the person adapts to the situation, controls the meaning, and manages stress in the aftermath (Patton et al., 2008; Kennedy, 2010).

With their peers who were in the ECHS program, they recognized that these individuals have a better understanding of their experience because they are living through similar situations. While they do maintain their friendships outside of the ECHS program, they recognize that their non-ECHS friends may not understand what the student is working towards and may suggest leaving the program or just simply giving up, even though the ECHS student is looking for someone to listen and provide some support or advice regarding their situation. Furthermore, it was noticed that the female students were able to seek out support more often than their male counterparts. The female participants approached the moving through phases differently in comparison to their male counterparts. The female students seemed to know how to seek out support from others, whereas the male students assumed that family and friends had already made the ultimate sacrifice by supporting them once they were accepted into the program.

Connections to Theoretical Framework

This study focused on how Early College High School students navigate the community college after two years at the high school by following the theoretical framework of Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981, 1984). This section will discuss how the findings of the study relate to the theoretical framework. The purpose of Schlossberg's Transition theory is to concentrate on the individual's ability to cope and adjust to changes in their environment (Evans,

Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Schlossberg, 2010). In reviewing the aspects of Schlossberg (2011), the transition theory centered on the (1) perception of transition by the individual, (2) characteristics of the pre-transitional and the post-transitional environment, and (3) characteristics of the individual going through the transition.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1981) reframes the discussion for ECHS students and how they transition and navigate their experiences. It also focuses on what this group of students are missing to provide with them a better transition. Specifically, it speaks to how these students move in, move through, and move out of anticipated, unanticipated, and non-events. As previously mentioned, students were able to transition and cope through most situations, have strategies, and were able to understand the types of support they would need from others and self. According to Jackson, they had been trained for most anticipated events, through interactions with faculty at the high school, using Blackboard, and following the syllabus, but it was unanticipated events that left students feeling as though they may not be able to move forward. The negativity of the college faculty caused the students to reevaluate who they should turn to when they needed additional support when on the campus. The unanticipated events seemed to change their need for support and changed how students viewed themselves regarding the dynamics of the situation.

Connections to Literature

To review, Early Colleges High Schools have traditionally served an underrepresented group of high school students who are typically first-generation college students. According to Outlaw, (2017) Pollock, (2009), Thompson & Ongaga (2011) and Morrow & Torrez (2012), the purpose of the ECHS program is to offer a personalized and caring learning environment that provide students with care, support, and high expectations for at-risk or underprepared

academically students. Morrow and Torrez (2012) indicated that the goal of the ECHS program is to assist ninth grade students in gaining insight into college and the college culture as well as the self-management skills necessary to create and follow a postsecondary program plan, even when they face obstacles (Morrow & Torrez, 2012).

Secondly, the literature described the support that ECHS students received from instructors and high school administrators when they began the program. When the students were attending the high school, they were able to seek out and find teachers and some college faculty who were champions for the ECHS program. However, once the students transitioned to the community college from the high school, they met instructors who challenged the idea of post-secondary level staff and faculty supporting this population of students toward high school and college graduation. Due to these negative experiences, it strengthens the argument and the stance by Gardner and Jewler (2001) on the purpose of transitioning and the actions and role of a college, by stating, “All students should be able to succeed in their first year of college. As educators and scholars, it is our responsibility to provide dedicated support, customized to a variety of students’ unique needs” (p. vii). By re-designing the ECHS classroom and working to support students, this should build upon the student foundation for success.

The literature also showed that ECHS students are accustomed to a certain level of structure, and when they arrive on the college campus, they must adjust to the leniency. (Born, 2006; Outlaw, 2017). Student participants narrative are in line with the literature in that students were trying to find a way to recreate some structure while on the college campus as when they lacked structure. They had to find ways to handle the new freedom that they were not privy to at

the high school. All the participants mentioned that to regain structure they relied on what they learned in high school to create structure throughout their college day. Brittani stated,

I created a task list for each day along with scheduling time when I could go to the tutor or the library and lunch. This gave me a feeling of control of my day and limited the amount of free time that I could potentially have throughout the week.

Researcher's Reflexivity

As the researcher and the research instrument for the study, I struggled at times with the honesty of the students when they had negative experiences. I later felt as though I should have dug deeper to get a better understanding of how the student responded to the feeling of lack of resources, negative instructors, and the unknown territory of the colleges. While I support seven colleges, 38 ECHS, and P-TECH and almost 6000 students in ECHS programs across our county, I wonder if the colleges are taking a systematic network approach to provide the best service and experience to the students. There were moments where I openly cringed due to the sheer rawness of their words and expressions. While there were some positive moments, there were more negative moments that left students with the idea that they would not want to relive this experience if they had to do all over again.

As I write this, I wonder what impact this will have on the colleges that I serve. While I know we do good work, I question if our good work is negated due to the negative attitudes of current faculty members who refuse to be a part of this heavy lift for our community, both present, and future. I hope that that few who refuse to be a part of this effort, realize the impact that everyone has made and realize the impact they can potentially have for years to come.

Limitations

This study has two limitations. All the students who participated in this study were Black and Latinos who lived in predominately Black and Latino communities in the southern half of the city. While there are many ECHS programs across the city, none of the participants came from the northern half of the city all the participants lived in southern half of the city composed predominately of people of color. Do students who live in various parts of the city or the surrounding suburbs have different experiences due to the demographics of their community? Additionally, all the participants were a part of one community college district or system. Would students who were participating in an ECHS program at community college districts or single community college or even rural community colleges have similar experiences and how would their experiences compare to the participants who live in urban community?

Learning more about the various experiences and how students transition to the community college from the high school could create additional resources and services or a re-alignment of resources and services that would be beneficial to all Early College High School students. Furthermore, it was imperative to explain that “individuals will react differently to the same type of transition and why the same person reacts differently at different times”

(Schlossberg, Waters, Goodman, 1995; p.57).

Future Studies

There is a wealth of opportunities for further research as a result of this study. First, this study could examine the students who had too much freedom and may have decided to return to the high school or were required to return to the high school due to academic standing and/or low GPA. By learning what additional factors may have caused students to return to the high school

and how they described their new experiences at the high school may help the college learn what interventions that they could put in place before students arrive on the campus.

Data also showed the importance of a slight comparison of students who had a positive experience with faculty versus students who had a negative experience with instructors. By comparing the relationships and how they impact student success, and the additional challenges students may face beyond this study could be identified. Furthermore, additional study could focus on the negative influences that students have experienced with faculty at the high school and the community college.

Another possible study for further research is the study of the differences between male and female ECHS participants making the transition to the community college. For this study, the emphasis was on ECHS students and the navigation of their transition at the community college, but there were some differences in how female participants approached the moving through phases in comparison to their male counterparts. The female students seemed to know how to seek out support from others, unlike their male counterparts. While it is important to understand the types of supports that both genders need, it is important to understand why the male students chose to remain silent regarding the support that was needed to be successful. It is imperative to understand why the female students seek out supportive relationships to guide them through the ECHS process as well.

Recommendations for Practice

The findings suggest several questions regarding the partnership between the college and high school regarding the transition of these students and how to best support them as they prepare for the change of taking classes at the community college.

Support of Students Before the Transition

The findings illustrated that most communication regarding the college took place at the high school and was facilitated by the high school team. This would lead to the first practical recommendation for additional support programs for the ECHS students and the community college taking a more active role when before students' arrival on campus. When asked about their interactions with the college before the first class at the college, all students spoke of their interaction with faculty, but not student services. As Brittani pointed out,

My impression of Ozarks CC was based upon faculty, beyond that, I had very little interaction with student services. By the time that I realized there were other services that I could use, such the Dual Credit Office, academic advising, and interacting with student clubs, I was a senior. It was too late for me to have that part of the college experience.

Brittani's experience underscores the importance of providing support services and making students aware of the student life services that are available to all dual credit and ECHS students who are taking dual credit courses with the college. While Brittani was a member of the National Honor's Society at the college, she was not made aware of meetings or activities that she could potentially attend during the academic year.

ECHS Orientation

Another finding is the lack of awareness of student services or student affairs areas on the campus. While the students were area of the tutoring center, and the library services, they were unaware of additional services to the student that may have assisted them once they were on campus. What else could student affairs practitioners do to facilitate the process of students

moving through and moving out? What additional services could be used by ECHS students while they were in the moving in stage upon their arrival to campus?

While students do have the experience of the Summer Bridge program that allows them to spend a few days on the campus, the focus of the two-week program is to acclimate students to their new high school experience and to have them take the TSIA for demonstrating collegiate readiness. If students were to participate in an ECHS orientation, then the orientation should not only focus on the introduction to the campus but also all the transition and retention support systems available to the student once they begin taking colleges courses at the community college (www.nodaweb.org/mission). Also, this ECHS orientation should enable students to connect to their campus as well to individuals who initially support their transition and understand that while students come to campus with credits earned, they are limited in their time on campus. By engaging students more in the spring of the 10th grade, this will help students learn about the college experience versus just doing going as Issa shared.

Because the students referenced Learning Framework, a freshman seminar class that provided students with opportunities to learn more about college expectation, this course may be helpful in serving as a capstone to the ECHS student experience to discuss expectations, and the transition over their four- years of high school. Aligning both the orientation beyond the summer bridge program enables students to continue to build their skills prior to moving from the high school to the college.

Faculty Engagement

The ECHS students consistently spoke of engaging faculty; they also were highly aware of faculty who did not want them on the campus. While some students tried to

insist that if they worked harder they could change faculty, many believed this was not the case at all. This illustrates that ECHS students were profiled as students who should not be on the community college campus and that they would need to be aware of faculty sharing insensitive and sometimes vile thoughts regarding their presence in their classrooms. Such examples from faculty that were shared by the students were instructors telling the students they hate them or that they, the faculty, did not sign up to teach high school, or that the students were wasting their time taking this course. This led to practical implications of emphasizing the importance of civility in the classroom and re-training of instructors whose evaluations show indifference to ECHS students. When asked about the comments they have heard from faculty, some students shared that various faculty between the two community colleges shared how much they hated working with this unique student population. As Issa pointed out, “Not every instructor was into teaching ECHS students or high school students. I wasn’t prepared to be targeted because I was still in high school or better yet to be told I shouldn’t be there because I took someone’s place.” While these students do have impactful and successful moments with instructors, the negative interactions overshadow the positive experiences for these students.

The students who did have positive experiences with the faculty, the students believed that it was because the faculty addressed the some of the negative issues that students may have experienced and worked to humanize themselves with the students. As James stated,

When you have an instructor who is going the extra mile to change your negative experiences, you want all your friends and classmates to take that person, but that person never has enough sections to accommodate all of us. If we wait on that person to have another open class the next semester, then you place yourself in the position of possibly not graduating with your class because we are all trying to take the same instructor.

Conclusion

The Early College High School model will continue to grow and has the potential to change the landscape of traditional high school. As the student population steadily grows, it is imperative that community colleges prepare to serve ECHS students and seek to understand how they navigate their transition experience.

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Early College High School students who have transitioned from the high school to the community college while still in high school through a narrative approach of experience sharing. Due to limited research focusing on students who are ECHS students who are simultaneously working through high school and college, this study sought to determine areas of significant emphasis for secondary and post-secondary educators who serve this student population. The narratives of ten ECHS students revealed how they navigated their transition and challenges while underscoring the importance of their experiences. Through their experiences we can learn how students experience the college community using Schlossberg's Transition Theory, particularly how students move in, move through, and move out of one educational sector to another.

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Appendix A--- Recruitment Email to ECHS Students

Dear Early College High School Student and Family,

Early College High School (ECHS) program are consistently growing in numbers across the United States, but very little research exists that explains the what happens to ECHS students after they transition from high school to begin dual credit courses at the community college. As a doctoral candidate, I am interested in learning how Early College High School students perceive their transition to the community college and the factors that hinder or enhance their experiences.

I would like to hear your story and allow you the opportunity to be heard. Your story may be instrumental in assisting secondary and post-secondary educators towards a better understanding of the ECHS experience. The information from your experience will help educators in continuing to building efforts, resources, and support for future ECHS students.

If you are interested in participating in this study, you would only need to agree to in-person interview lasting one to two hours. Your story or the data will be used confidentially for research purposes only. You will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym to use which will ensure that your identity is confidential.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email me directly at fosterl@uga.edu. Your participation is greatly appreciated and important to the success of Early College High School students.

Sincerely,

LaQuesha Foster

Appendix B- Informed Consent Form for Students and Parents

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

The 2+2 Scholar: The narrative stories of the Early College High School transition

Researcher's Statement

I am/We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: LaQuesha Foster
College Student Affairs Administration
fosterl@uga.edu

Purpose of the Study

This study will explore the Early College High School student's transition from high school to the community college and how the students understand their experience. This study will also explore the factors that enhance or hinder how they integrate academically and socially into the college culture and community.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to ...

- To give insight about your transition from high school to the community college.
- Student will be asked to participate in a face-to face interview for in-depth interview session last no more than one to two hours on the college campus about the students' experiences.
- Student is allowed to skip any questions that student does not wish to answer and will be allowed to terminate the interview at any time.
- Interview questions will focus on Schlossberg's Transition theory and will guide the conversation.
- Interviews will be recorded for transcription. Upon transcription of interview, student will be contacted via email to set a time and place to review their interview transcripts to ensure that students story has captured their collegiate experience

Risks and discomforts

- There are no foreseen risks to participating in this study.

Benefits

The benefits of this study are to provide a better understanding of the transition experiences of Early College High School participants and how they integrate academically and socially at the community college. Currently, very little research exists that explores this study population as ECHS students transition from the high school to the community college, and this research will contribute to the literature surrounding this population of students.

Incentives for participation

There are no incentives for participating in this study.

Audio/Video Recording

The number of is small, less than 12 participants, a written roster matching pseudonyms with participants will be not be needed. Handwritten notes from the interviews will be recorded in one iPad and will be secured at the residence of the researcher, which is also password protected. Audio files of the interviews will be stored on the iPad of the researcher as well. Emails will only be used to coordinate interview appointments and to check in on participants, not to send transcripts or not to request responses to interview questions. Emails from participants will be stored in a password protected folders and will be deleted immediately following the completion of the study. Transcripts will be stored on the researcher's personal computer in password protected folder. Data will be stored using filenames without identifying remarks. Care will be taken in the writing of the final report to eliminate references that may link the student to the study. Students will not be asked to write their names on any materials so that no one can match their identity to the answers that were provided.

Please provide initials below if you agree to have this interview audio recorded or not. You may still participate in this study even if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

_____ I do not want to have this interview recorded.

_____ I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Researchers will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent unless required by law.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is LaQuesha Foster, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Diane Cooper [principal investigator's name] at dlcooper@uga.edu or 706-542-4051. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in

this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Attachment C—Student Interview Protocol

This study seeks to provide understanding to the transition experiences of Early College High School students who completed the first two years of high school, ninth and tenth grade, and have transitioned to the community college complete the last two years of high school and complete their college degree. Furthermore, this study will provide an understanding of how these students integrate into their new environment while trying to integrate academically and socially. The research question:

- b. How do high school students navigate their transition to the community college while participating in an early college high school program?

The interview questions are situated in Schlossberg, Goodman, and Waters (1995) Transition theory and guided by the 4 S's, situation, self, support, and strategies. Schlossberg et al. (1995) have also validated the idea of transitions being a part of a more extensive series of phases that enables students to have the following experiences: moving in, moving through, and moving out.

Interview Questions

Background Questions: (Purpose to break the ice, to help the participant feel comfortable and to establish rapport).

1. How is your semester going so far? What classes are you taking?
2. What was your favorite class last semester?
3. What is your major? Are you working to complete your AA or AS or AAS?
4. What are your plans after graduation? Will you graduate with both an HS diploma and college degree? Or will you have to stay additional time to complete your degree?

Moving In: Preparing for the College Experience: Let's start by talking about your high school experience, before coming to the college campus.

Situation

1. Tell me why you choose your particular ECHS program at <<insert HS Name>>?
2. Did the community college influence your decision to participate in this particular ECHS program? If so how?
3. What influenced you to attend/participate in the ECHS program the summer of the 8th grade?
4. How did your summer bridge program prepare you for the first two years of your ECHS program?
 - a. How did the Maps course prepare academically and socially? Was it a benefit to you? If so, how? If not, how?
 - b. In what ways did the first two years of college and high school prepare you for the community college?
5. Tell me about any interaction and perceptions of the faculty or staff from the community college before coming to the community college?

Self

1. Before you started at the community college, how did you feel about the potential move to the college? (Possible probes: excited, anxious, overwhelmed, stressed, etc.)

2. Have you had any other experiences that were similar to taking classes at the high school? What changes did you notice?
 - a. How did that change impact you?
 - b. On a scale of 1-10, how would you say you coped with the change? Why did you give yourself that score?

Support

1. In what ways were your family members supportive with helping you prepare for this experience?
2. In what ways were your family members supportive of you participating in the ECHS program at <<insert HS name>>?
3. Was there anyone who was not supportive?
4. Are any of your friends participating in an ECHS program? In what ways were your friends supportive of choice to attend the ECHS program?

Strategies

1. What was your first reaction when faced with a new problem or situation? How did you handle it?
2. While in high school, what strategies did you use when you faced a difficult situation?
3. When you are faced with situations where things are not working out, how do you manage the situation? Do you quit, keep working until you find a solution or do you try to change yourself? (possible probe: change classes, or teachers? Do you find a study group? Do you drop the class?)

Moving Through: College Courses at the College Campus

Let's begin talking about last fall (if a HS junior) or the fall semester that you begin taking classes at the community college. We will focus on how you managed high school and college your first semester and your college experience now.

Situation

1. Could you tell me about the academic rigor (may need to define rigor) for the courses you took last semester in comparison to your dual credit classes at the high school?
2. Did you have to study in high school? Do you have to study now?
3. In what ways did the ECHS program prepare you for the for the community college academically? How did it develop you socially for the community college?
4. In regards to academics, what surprised you the most since you have been attending classes at the community college?

Self

1. Have you experienced any additional changes or transitions since you have been at the community college?
 - a. Could you tell me about that change and how it has impacted you?
 - b. What did you change to help you overcome or become successful in that situation?
2. On a scale of 1-10, ten being the highest, how would you rate yourself on dealing with problems? Why did you give yourself that score?

Support

1. In what ways have your family supported you in navigating the college and high school life?
2. What types of support does your family offer, if any? (Probes: affection, feedback, etc.). Could you give examples of their support?
3. What types of support have you received from the college, if any? Do you feel as though the college as a whole offers you support to make sure that you are successful? Could you give me examples?
4. Have you experienced anyone who has not offered any support?
5. What has been the most beneficial or positive experience when interacting with faculty? Staff? Students? What negative interactions?
6. What do you think are the differences between high school and college expectations?

Strategies

1. Are you involved in any extracurricular activities at the college and/or at the high school?
 - a. What made you decide to get involved in those activities? Campus?
 - b. What made you decide not to get involved on campus?
2. What techniques or strategies have you learned to help you navigate the college campus?
3. What has been the biggest hurdle that you have needed to overcome since taking classes at the college?
4. How have you learned to deal with change since coming to the college?

Moving Out:

1. If you had it to do all over again, what would you make the same decisions? Why or why not?
2. What motivates you to stay in your ECHS program?
3. What are two things you wished you had known before coming to college?

What additional questions do you have for me?

Thank you so much for participating in the study.

Appendix D—Student Demographics Information

Demographic Questionnaire:

Please complete the following questionnaire to the best of your ability. All information provided will remain confidential.

1. Gender Identity: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Class Year: _____
4. Race/Ethnicity: _____
5. Name of Early College High School: _____
6. What is your major or degree or pathway _____
7. How many credits have you earned: _____
8. What your current cumulative GPA: _____
9. Highest level of education completed by your mother?
 - a. Did not complete High School
 - b. High School Graduate/ GED
 - c. Some College
 - d. Bachelor's Degree
 - e. Master's Degree
 - f. Advanced Graduate Work or Ph.D.
 - g. Not sure/ Not Applicable
10. Highest level of education completed by your father:
 - a. Did not complete High School
 - b. High School Graduate/ GED
 - c. Some College
 - d. Bachelor's Degree
 - e. Master's Degree
 - f. Advanced Graduate Work or Ph.D.
 - g. Not sure/ Not Applicable