

THE IMPACT OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT
NETWORKS: A CASE STUDY OF
A SMALL TEXAS PUBLIC
SCHOOL DISTRICT

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis project focuses on a small independent school district in Texas that serves a high-poverty population yet excels at graduating economically disadvantaged students. Using the concepts of cultural and social capital as a theoretical framework, the paper discusses ways that schools can build institutional support networks that can help students succeed. The study focuses on efforts within the high school, using personal interviews to discover the foundations and methods of the school's supports. Findings include the importance of building trust among staff members and staff members working as a team, therefore building internal social capital that students can then access within the school. The district and school set high expectations for students and provide a broad spectrum of supports to help students reach those goals. Also, leadership and staff alike view building relationships and working with students individually as key elements of the students' and the school's success and actively support such efforts by faculty and staff.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the current debates in education policy is whether or not the school alone can overcome the achievement gap between students of different economic backgrounds. A disagreement at a 2004 Brookings Institute conference illustrates the debate. A paper by Eric Hanushek and Steven Rivkin concluded, essentially, that the teacher is everything. After ranking teachers based on value-added assessments of their students, they found that “having five years of good teachers in a row... could overcome the average seventh-grade mathematics achievement gap between lower-income kids (those on the free or reduced-price lunch program) and those from higher-income families” (p. 20). At the same conference, Richard Rothstein objected to their findings, stating that “most researchers conclude that families contribute considerably more than schools” (p. 26) when it comes to student achievement. This is not simply an academic disagreement; if a policymaker believes that schools alone can increase student achievement, then policy decisions will be quite different from those made by someone who views families and community as key causes of inequalities in education outcomes. The literature regarding unequal educational outcomes clearly finds correlations between outcomes and students’ socioeconomic status, typically highlighting a lack of equal opportunities within the public school system (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2009; Ravitch, 2010). Though the schools cannot address the root causes of poverty, they can make a significant impact on students’ educational opportunities. Funding disputes continue in many states, as well as debates about the efficacy and importance of funding equity. The concepts of social and cultural capital provide a lens through which to view these income-related educational

outcome gaps, and the literature suggests this focus may positively impact school practice and ultimately improve student achievement (Coleman, 1988; Conchas, 2006; Hampton & Gruenert, 2008; Plagens, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The research presented in this paper explores how a successful high-poverty public high school is achieving such positive outcomes.

1.1 Literature Review: Achievement Gaps

Inequalities have existed in American public schools for over a century, and they continue to persist. *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Coleman et al., 1966), or the Coleman Report as it is more commonly known, finds that the impact of differences in school resources is much less than the impact of differences in family background. The importance of differences in family background, such as education and income levels of parents, points to factors that in many cases are outside of the school's direct control. A popular but oversimplified view of the findings is that "schools don't matter," at least not as much as we think, leading to policy arguments against the efficacy of equalizing funding or taking other measures that would assist schools in closing the various gaps students bring with them to school. One must take into consideration, however, that the Coleman Report looks at school inputs such as facilities, funding, student body characteristics, and teacher qualities without analyzing how these inputs interact within the school to produce certain outcomes (e.g., standardized test scores). By using an input-output model that treats the school as a black box (Gamoran & Long, 2006), the Coleman Report misses the opportunity to delve into the functioning of schools and discover what actions a school can take to help students succeed.

Nearly three decades after the Coleman Report, the racial and socioeconomic gaps in math and reading were still consistently about 25 points on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), or around a 10 to 15 percent difference (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). Socioeconomic differences have actually increased; a July 2011 study from Sean F. Reardon at Stanford University finds that, "[t]he achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families is roughly 30 to 40 percent larger among

children born in 2001 than among those born twenty-five years earlier” (p. 1). In other words, the achievement gaps that so much policy has been written to negate are not closing and, in regard to socioeconomic divisions, may actually be getting worse.

There are numerous factors contributing to this gap that are out of the school’s control. These factors, including inadequate medical care, food insecurity, and family and neighborhood stress factors, are related to a whole host of poverty-induced problems that students bring with them to school, producing excessive absenteeism, behavioral issues, and cognitive development problems (Berliner, 2009). Anyon (2005) discusses the interactions between factors such as transportation, job availability for parents, and the residential concentration of poverty as they negatively affect children’s ability to succeed. Lareau’s (2011) exploration of family life in different social classes reveals the various ways in which childrearing can either prepare a child to navigate through school easily or can lead to behaviors and ideals that are less accepted by institutions such as schools. These three works discuss various out-of-school factors that impact students’ abilities to succeed in school, situations that schools themselves cannot fully address and current education policy does not consider. In fact, the current policy focus on testing has led to some negative results. Perna and Thomas’ (2009) exploration of the effects of testing regulations on college enrollment finds that “high-stakes testing may be seen as structurally diverting the attention of schools and students who are least well prepared” for the college application and enrollment process (p. 473). By using counselor time for testing instead of college counseling, undermining community support, and leading students to question their own abilities, the focus on testing, according to Perna & Thomas (2009), is actually causing harm. Their review of the literature regarding the impact of testing includes studies finding increased dropout rates, narrowing of curriculum, problems with teacher retention, and cheating scandals.

1.2 Literature Review: Social and Cultural Capital

Clearly the current way of viewing, assessing, and supporting student achievement is ineffective in closing socioeconomic achievement gaps. Current policies focus solely on schools, while many counterarguments (Anyon, 2005; Berliner, 2009; Ravitch, 2010) stress the need to fix out-of-school factors before any meaningful education reform can occur. The concepts of social and cultural capital may provide an effective middle ground.

Pierre Bourdieu (1974, 1986) is one of the “founding fathers” of the concept of cultural capital. He defines cultural capital as “symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (1974, p. 57). For example, Bourdieu would argue that those who know who Rachmaninov and Renoir are have more of a cultural advantage than those who do not when interacting with official or institutional organizations. An example Bourdieu uses that is relevant to this study has to do with culturally preferred forms of discourse. Whether it is word choice, sentence structure, level of formality, or accent, in certain situations speaking a certain way can give the speaker an advantage or disadvantage. Bourdieu’s point is that in official or institutional interactions (e.g., schools, courts, city council meetings, or job interviews) the favoring of the culturally dominant discourse over more marginalized ways of speaking favors the powerful over the powerless and aids in reproducing the social class system. In regard to education specifically, Bourdieu points out that schools use the dominant cultural language and norms to transmit information, an arrangement which gives preference to those students who come to school with the dominant and preferred forms of cultural capital. A key aspect of cultural capital is that it is hidden (Bourdieu, 1986). Its transmission costs time and depends on the existing cultural and economic capital of the household; however, because it comes from the household and is transmitted primarily at such an early age, it is often misrecognized as legitimate competence as opposed to a form of capital. For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is somewhat more visible. He defines social capital through three aspects of an individual’s social

network: how big the network is, the capital (in any form) already held by those within the network, and how easily the individual can mobilize that network to his or her advantage.

Coleman's (1988) take on social capital differs somewhat from that of Bourdieu (1986) in that some of what Coleman calls social capital, such as the time parents spend transmitting their education to their children, Bourdieu would have labeled cultural capital; however, both men use the term "social capital" to describe the networks that individuals use to succeed. Thirty years after the seminal Coleman Report, Coleman (1988) writes more extensively about the aspects of families and communities that help students persist in school and ultimately graduate. He finds that intergenerational closure, a form of interpersonal network that provides consistent messages to young people across contexts (e.g., school, church, and friends' homes), is an important factor in keeping students in school. This form of social capital is communal and intentional; Coleman (1988) discusses how these networks help reinforce norms as well as how they are easily destroyed and take group effort to build and support. Though Coleman's (1988) focus is on the community outside of schools, his study relates social capital to academic success (in the form of high school persistence and graduation), therefore bringing these community ideas into the schoolhouse. He highlights trust within relationships and a sense of obligation among actors/organizations as key ingredients in building social capital. Coleman also discusses how social capital forms information channels among and between individuals and organizations while also establishing the norms and expectations of a given social group.

Both Putnam (2000) and Fukuyama (1996) take the concept of social capital and expand it out to communities and, for Fukuyama, entire societies. For both these authors, trust is a key aspect of functioning social capital. Putnam discusses how "social trust" facilitates "coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (p. 63). Fukuyama states that trust is a necessary ingredient for functioning social capital. He also points out that there is "no single bridge to sociability beyond the family that spans all cultures" (2000, p. 336). In other words,

what works to create and sustain social capital is context dependent; there is no magic policy bullet. However, the importance of trust as a sustaining force within social networks runs through the work of Putnam (2000), Fukuyama (1996) and Coleman (1988). Like a plant needs sunlight, social capital depends on trust for its existence and growth.

1.3 Literature Review: Social and Cultural Capital's Impact on School Practice

Numerous studies suggest that social and cultural capital are contributing factors in students' level of academic success. Through specific family case studies, Lareau (2011) points to differences in childrearing and how those experiences translate into different levels of advantage in institutions such as schools. She highlights the "organization of daily life, language use, and interactions between families and institutions" (p. 11) as key areas of difference between middle class and working class or poor students' familial experiences. When students from working class or poor families sense a difference between their family interactions and their interactions with the school, they may feel what Lareau (2011) calls an "emerging sense of constraint" (p. 31). This sense of unease or disconnection at minimum puts an extra barrier between the student and the school that students from the middle class homes in this study did not experience. Lareau's (2011) study therefore provides evidence that Bourdieu's (1974) description of the benefits paid to a student who has the dominant cultural capital (and the roadblocks in the way of students who do not hold that form of capital) is alive and well in the 21st century.

Lareau (2011) finds some benefits from parent interaction with and involvement in the school. Coleman (1988) also finds that adult networks that link different areas of a student's life (such as home and school) help support student achievement. Coleman's (1988) study links the significantly lower dropout rates found in private religious schools to the tighter community formed at both the school and the religious institution, a situation that allows for more closure in social networks. Hampton & Gruenert (2008) explored what schools can do even without strong parental or community involvement. They studied schools with demographically similar student

bodies but different levels of academic success (measured as meeting Adequate Yearly Progress, a test-based measure). Through interviews with faculty and staff, they found the presence of more social capital (more trusting relationships inside the school) as the most significant factor in making certain schools more successful than others. Similarly, Plagens (2010) found a positive correlation between teacher and principal perceptions of trust and social capital and student test scores. Focusing on tests alone, however, can damage the trust within a school. Heilig's (2011) study of English language learners in Texas reveals a negative impact of testing on social capital. He finds that Texas's high stakes testing system harms the forms of trust found in the culture of immigrant families from Mexico. Repeated failures on state tests can erode students' and families' sense of *confianza*, trust based on the belief that the school has "one's best interests in mind" (p. 2639). In addition, Heilig (2011) states that this lack of trust, vital to social capital, is linked to higher dropout rates.

Social capital theorists support various efforts aimed at building and supporting social capital for students and schools. Hampton and Gruenert (2008) studied school governance and policies to find key aspects of well-performing schools. One key element is what they term "internal commitment," relationships between teachers and from leadership to staff, as well as with students, that support the sense of investment and accountability of everyone involved. A team approach to problem-solving and working with students supports this internal commitment and reinforces teachers' sense of accountability to the staff and the students. Hampton and Gruenert's "internal commitment" is a sort of internal (school-based) closed network, functioning as Coleman (1988) discusses to create and reinforce norms. Conchas' (2006) study of within-school academies in a California high school addresses the way different in-school norms can impact students. One of the two academies within the same high school set up an intentionally inclusive and supportive culture: they recruited lower-performing students, actively built academic supports, kept the students in cohorts to form supportive student-to-student bonds, kept high expectations, and helped students chart their post-graduate plans in order to motivate

them to succeed. They eschewed competition, a major aspect of the culture of the high school's other academy, in favor of cooperation, and in the process they helped previously dropout-bound students graduate from high school.

Ricardo Stanton-Salazar's (2001) work studying the networks of students in a San Diego high school provides a concrete framework for how schools can build and support students' social capital. His six forms of institutional support include the following:

- funds of knowledge, such as techniques for moving through the educational system
- bridging, where school personnel work as connections to key outside contacts such as university campuses
- advocacy, when staff protect or promote the interests of students
- role modeling effective techniques and coping mechanisms
- emotional and moral support
- personalized advice and guidance.

This is not an exhaustive list of possible supports but those he sees as most impactful and important. For Stanton-Salazar (2001), these types of institutional supports are "forms that are distinctly created in order to help low-status individuals cope effectively with the marginalizing forces in society and to enable them to socially advance in spite of these forces" (p. 267). In other words, these are ways that institutions (or actors within institutions) can address gaps in students' cultural and social capital that would otherwise, as Bourdieu (1974) discusses, limit students to their existing cultural, social, and economic roles.

A number of these forms of support have been explored by other researchers as well. Perna and Thomas (2009), in their study of the negative effects of the testing focus in high schools, find support for the importance of school personnel as resources of funds of knowledge about college options, planning, and applications. They find that counselors' time is diverted by testing-related tasks, lessening the amount of time they have to support students through the

college-linking process. The result is that those students who are most in need – those students who do not have familial funds of knowledge in this area – are less likely to persist and succeed in college selection and attendance. Likewise, Hill (2008) finds that college-linking structures, such as the time counselors can spend on college counseling, play an important role in student college enrollment. Hill (2008) also discusses the importance of college-going norms within the school, which is akin to Stanton-Salazar's (2001) concept of role-modeling as well as Coleman's (1988) discussion of the importance of community norms that guide and support students toward graduation. Lastly, Hallinan (2008) finds that teachers' emotional and social support of students plays a large role in whether or not students like school. This finding relates to Stanton-Salazar's (2001) discussion of the importance of moral and emotional support for student success.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

2.1 Research Question and Site Selection

The main question this research project aims to explore is “How can a high-poverty public high school help students be successful in terms of high school graduation?” This question begs some definition and follow-up. Firstly, what makes a district “high-poverty”? The state of Texas labels students as “economically disadvantaged” if they are eligible for the federal free or reduced-price lunch programs or if they qualify for other forms of public assistance (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2011). School data is disaggregated by socioeconomic level as a way to monitor schools’ progress in assisting these students. In 2011, the average percentage of a Texas public school’s population that was considered economically disadvantaged was 60.4% (TEA, 2012). Arguably, a 60% poverty rate is already quite high, but I searched for a district with at least an 80% poverty rate, splitting the difference between 100% poverty and the state’s average. Also, instead of initially imposing an arbitrary definition, I researched area school districts to look for those that both served a high-poverty student population and showed above-average performance on the various state measures of student achievement (such as graduation rate, completion rate, test scores, and school ratings). Although any single state measure is an incomplete view of student success, they provided a starting point for my research.

The selection of Progress Independent School District (PISD), a high-poverty and high-achieving district on the edge of a major Texas city, fit my research requirements well. (Note: the name of the district and names of personnel have been changed.) Progress ISD is a small district (approximately 5300 students) comprised of ten schools, including a single high school, grades 9-12 (just over 1200 students). The district’s demographics have changed quite

drastically over the years. The area was predominantly agricultural and white until the mid-eighties, at which point the area began to suburbanize and become more diverse (D1, p. 1). (References to information or quotes from informants are annotated with a code and the page number from the interview transcript. Codes indicate the category of the informant: B, school board member; D, district administration; H, high school administration; CT, core content teacher; E, elective or special education teacher; C, coach; or P, high school paraprofessional.) By 2003 the student population was 60% African American, 24% Hispanic, and 15% White. Over the past decade, the percentage of Hispanic students has grown; currently the student population is roughly 50/50 African American and Hispanic. During that same time period, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students has steadily grown from slightly over half to over 80%. The most recent state data (for the 2011-2012 school year) shows the student population as 48% Hispanic (46% for the high school), 44% African American (46% for the high school), and 6% White (the same for the high school). For that school year, 87% of the district's students and 81% of the high school's students were categorized as economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2012).

Given my interest in the challenges of educating children who grow up in poverty, the fact that 87% of Progress ISD's students are labeled "economically disadvantaged" by the state of Texas (TEA, 2012) made it a perfect match. Also, the lone high school in PISD, Progress High School (PHS) performs well in regard to one important state measure: graduation (TEA, 2012). Texas uses a number of measures to track whether students complete their secondary education. One such measure is of cohorts of students starting in the 9th grade to see if they graduate in the expected four year term. These data are disaggregated by various demographic groups, including economically disadvantaged students. When comparing PHS's four-year graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students to that of the state, we see that their graduation rate for that subgroup exceeded that of the entire state in six of the last seven years by an average of nearly 5% each year (Figure 2.1)

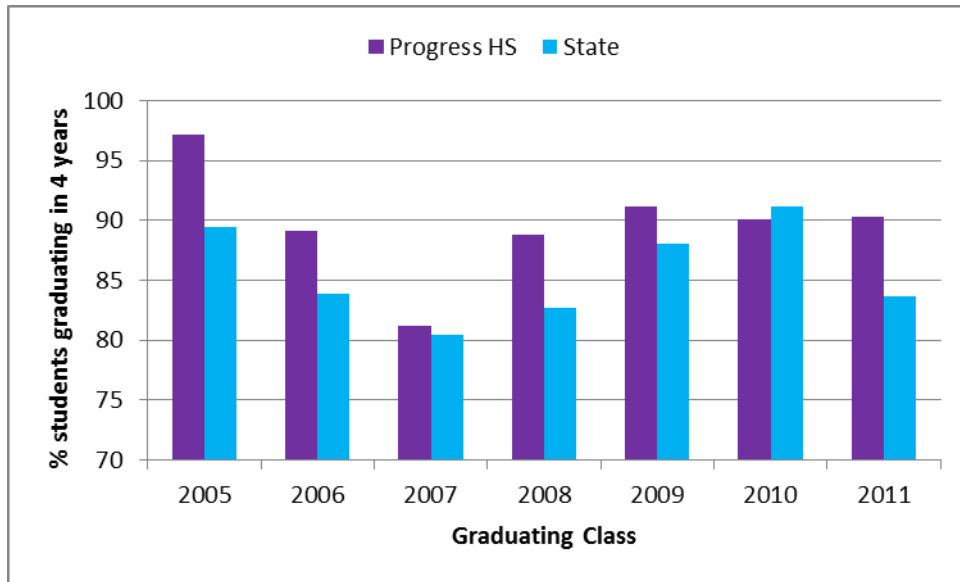


Figure 2.1 Four-Year Graduation Rates, Economically Disadvantaged Students

Another way to look at how well a school helps students complete their education is to look at dropout rates. These percentages are annual measure of students who drop out of grades 9-12 (a dropout is someone who does not graduate, continue, receive a GRE, or move to another school yet does not return to school). For economically disadvantaged students, PHS has beaten the state dropout rate every year since 2006, with the exception of 2010 (the most recent year for which data is available), when it matched the state average (Figure 2.2)

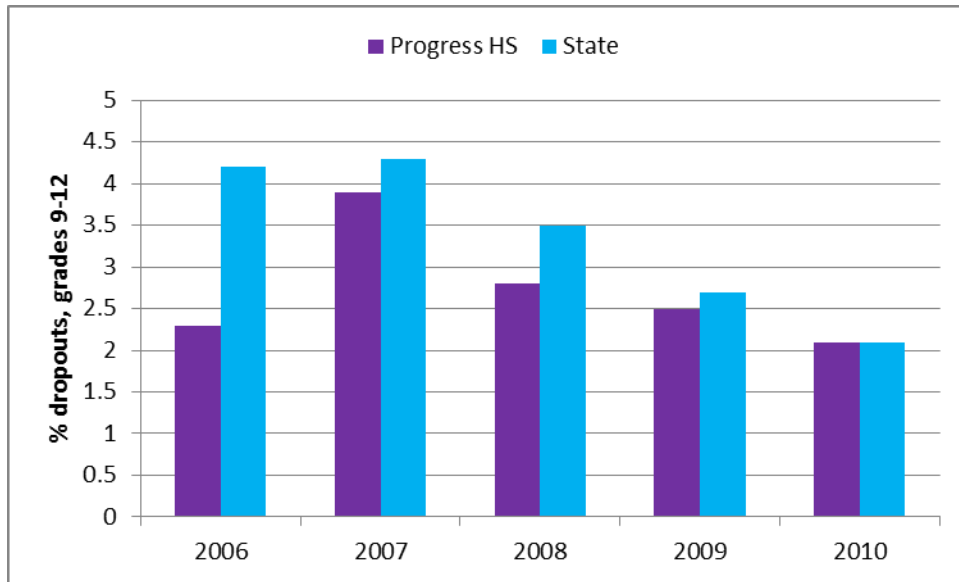


Figure 2.2 Annual Drop-out Rates, Economically Disadvantaged Students

Every year, the Texas Education Agency builds campus comparison groups for every campus in the state, sets of 40 demographically-similar campuses (including measures of economically disadvantaged students, students who have limited English proficiency, amount of student mobility, and racial and ethnic breakdowns). These groups form another way to view a given school’s performance on a given measure. PHS’s four-year graduation rate for all students exceeded that of its comparison group in three of the last four years, including 2009, when the high school also outperformed the state average by over 2% (Figure 2.3). Looking at dropout rates, PHS again outperforms its comparison group with rates at or below the comparison group average for five of the last six years (Figure 2.4).

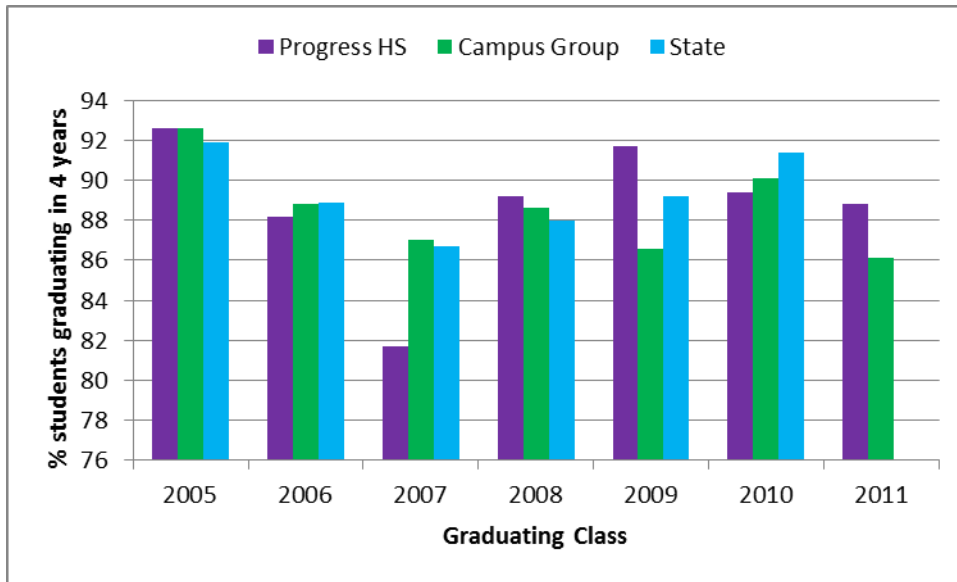


Figure 2.3 Four-Year Graduation Rates, All Students

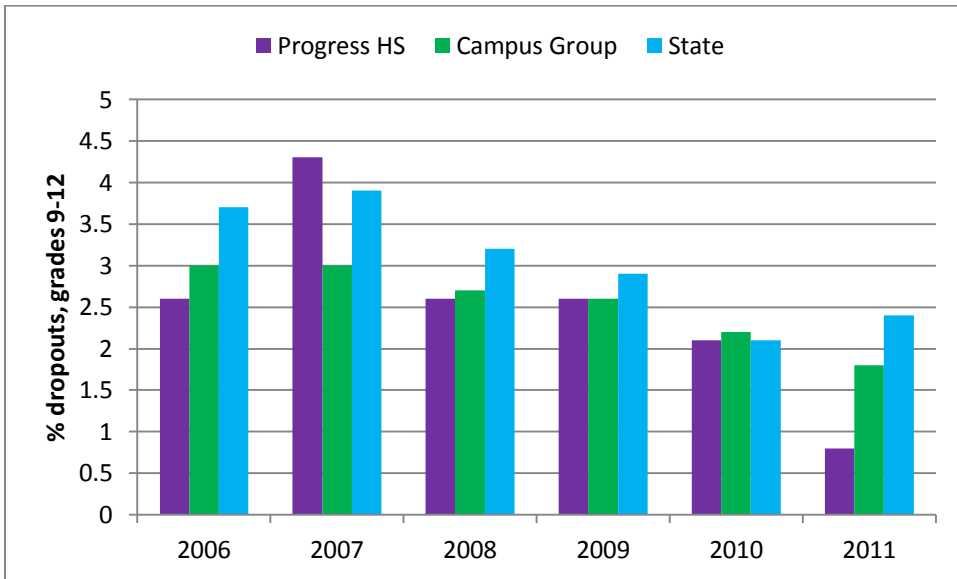


Figure 2.4 Annual Dropout Rates, All Students

2.2 Theoretical Approach & Use of Mixed Methods

As discussed in the previous chapter, I chose the concepts of social and cultural capital, as well as Stanton-Salazar's (2001) ideas about institutional supports, as my theoretical approaches to the research question. My focus on teachers and administrators stems from my

interest in policy and my desire to see what roles these institutional actors may play in graduation and other forms of student success. No students or parents were interviewed for practical purposes (i.e., the scale and timing of my research), a choice which limits my findings. I chose to employ one-on-one interviews with select faculty, staff, and administrators in order to gain a full understanding of the practices and culture of PISD. Although state data led me to define success as graduation, I also wanted to gather information on personal definitions of “a successful student” and ways individuals and the school or district supported that brand of success. Would a unified view of success emerge? Would staff opinions about how the school practices supported that success reveal a unified effort? If so, how did that unity come into being and persist? Would there be certain aspects of school culture or policy that contributed to (or detracted from) student success? I knew that in order to fully explore this and other aspects of my research question I would have to sit down with varied individuals from the district and have a conversation. I also used a survey, disseminated to high school and district-level faculty and staff in the fall, to broaden the size of my sample and to triangulate data gathered from interviews (Maxwell, 2005).

2.3 Survey Design and Dissemination

The survey sought to explore both the attitudes of respondents regarding student success and the practices they see being implemented. The survey questions [see Appendix A] gather demographic data about recipients; ask Likert-type questions about definitions of success, supports that they see occurring, their impression of students’ adult networks, and their efforts to assist individual students; and include a number of open-ended items aimed at gathering new perspectives or information I had not anticipated. The survey was disseminated before the interviews; in retrospect, since the survey was used primarily to confirm or challenge interview data, it would have been more effective to write the survey and gather data after the interviews. That would have allowed for a shorter and more direct survey, where all items would be focused on refining interview data.

After receiving approval from the University of Texas at Arlington Institutional Review Board as well as permission from the superintendent and high school principal to contact staff, I sent an email to every staff member of the high school as well as all members of the district administrative team. The superintendent provided a list of all high school staff addresses, and I used the district website's list of administrators to gather those addresses. In total, 159 people received the survey, 133 at the high school and 26 administrators and board members. The initial email was sent on October 22, 2012; by the end of the data collection period (November 15), 89 people (56%) had responded, including 59 (37%) who completed all questions.

2.4 Interview Protocol Design and Sample Selection

My initial analysis of the survey findings did not drastically change my interview protocol [Appendix B]. The interview protocol aimed at exploring informants' backgrounds as students and as professionals; their ideas about student success as well as efforts they see occurring in the school to support student success; their understanding of students' adult networks, especially the roles that staff play; their thoughts on the school's graduation rate and how they see that occurring; and their opinions on policies and aspects of school culture that impact (positively or negatively) student success.

In order to select a sample to contact regarding interviews, I first had to decide on the size and composition of the sample. I had about one month in which to conduct interviews. My flexible schedule and my previous interviewing experience made me comfortable contacting a sample of about 50 people, in the hopes of getting at least half that. I also wanted to ensure I heard different perspectives. I was concerned that if, for example, I heard from an inordinate number of district-level informants, I may miss details of what happens in classrooms. Conversely, if all informants were teachers, I may miss details of leadership decision-making and culture-building that would likely be outside of an individual teacher's purview. Using the district website list of faculty and staff (which is broken down by job title or teaching department), I created a list of district administrators and high school staff and created groups

for district administration, school-level administration and professional support (such as counselors), school-level paraprofessionals, teachers (both core content and electives) and coaches. I chose to split the teachers into core content and electives in anticipation of differing views on testing and other pressures that stem from state requirements. I also chose to split out coaches as their own group (despite the fact that they are also teachers) because of findings in the literature (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) that coaches are unique, multi-year contacts who can play important roles in students' networks. I labeled each person according to this grouping, figured out what percentage of the overall population each group represented, and then calculated how many people would need to be in each group to create a representative sample of 50. Rounding created an actual sample size of 53.

Each of the 53 members of the sample group were contacted via email, beginning on January 7, 2013, and including two follow-up emails in the weeks to follow in an effort to get the highest possible response rate. In total, I interviewed 30 people. The makeup of the actual interviewee sample is relatively representative of the overall population, with a slight over-representation of administrators (both district and school) and a slight under-representation of teachers. Given the large percentage overall of teachers interviewed (including all but one of the four coaches interviewed also being teachers), I do not believe that this slight under-representation caused gaps in understanding that group's point of view.

All interviews were conducted either in administrators' offices or on campus in classrooms or the library. The only exceptions were the two board members, who were interviewed at area places of business. Interviews typically lasted between 35 and 45 minutes in order to fit within the constraints of the school schedule (teachers' off periods are only 50 minutes long). I took notes and recorded the audio of all interviews and then transcribed each.

Transcribing each interview on my own proved very helpful as I began analysis, as my first analytical reading of a given interview was actually the third time through it. By the time I completed the interviews, I felt I had hit the point of data saturation; with some minor variation, I

was hearing the same sorts of responses. This repetition helped guide me as I read through and annotated/coded each interview, looking both for those commonalities and for the moments that ran contrary to those dominant findings. It was at this stage that I then returned to my survey data, using it to confirm or adjust what I was seeing from the interview data. My initial coding of interview transcripts focused on Stanton-Salazar's (2001) six forms of institutional support. I quickly realized that a number of the codes were coalescing into a few broad categories: a focus on individual students' needs, including non-academic needs, and the key role of relationships and trust among the staff.

2.5 Limitations & Validity Issues

One of the primary validity issues that my data present is the impact of self-selection bias. Participation in the survey and the interviews was voluntary, as was stated in all emails to informants. There are many reasons why one may choose to participate in these activities or not, and it is difficult to account for such variation. One concern, however, was somewhat reinforced through interview data: a number of informants, including administrators themselves, alluded to past friction between leadership (district and especially school-level administrators) and teachers. Though I reiterated confidentiality throughout the process, some recipients may have linked my research to the leadership. The presence of any fear of reprisal may have led some people to not want to participate; conversely, a sense of wanting to support the leadership may have led to an over-representation of people who share the same views as the leadership. This type of bias in my informants should temper my discussion in the following chapter regarding a unity of vision and purpose within the district.

This research project is a case study presenting one particular district; therefore, attempts to apply the findings presented here to other districts need to take into consideration the full context of this particular school, including important aspects such as leadership style or community culture that are nearly impossible to fully define. The correlation of some of these findings to other case studies (Conchas, 2006; Lareau, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2001)

strengthens an argument for trying to replicate those particular institutional supports, but as with any case study, one cannot just import ideas out of context and assume they will function in the same way. It is also important to note that this case study is not just a snapshot of one particular place but also of one particular moment in time. Over time, staff members change, leadership changes, there are changes in state and federal policies, and student populations change. All of these temporal issues affect the validity of these findings and inhibit their application even within the district over time. This project also focuses on only the high school; therefore my findings regarding district-level leadership and culture are tempered by the understanding that there are nine other campuses within the district which were not addressed in this study.

The fact that no students were surveyed or interviewed in this project also leaves much room for questioning the validity of findings regarding student networks as well as what school efforts are truly impacting student success. Without this point of view and the details students could provide, all findings need to be tempered by the fact that the information comes from a teacher and staff point of view only. Student input would provide much more complete answers to a number of the questions explored in this study.

Lastly, my own personal experience, as well as the theoretical lenses through which I chose to explore what is occurring in Progress ISD, may bias some of my findings. In interviews, as well as in email invitations for the survey, I used my own teaching experience to build rapport with informants. While I believe sharing my teaching background was helpful in allowing teachers to open up in interviews – often there would be a moment in interviews where I would be able to nod in agreement or share a knowing laugh – it may have led non-teacher informants to hold back in regard to their discussion of teachers. I did not sense that any of the administrators were holding back, but it is difficult to give weight to what is not present; therefore, this possible effect of my own experience should be noted. Also, the theoretical lenses through which I approached the survey and interviews may bias my findings. For

example, when one informant discussed a firm belief that socioeconomic differences did not have a large impact on student performance, I felt – though resisted – the urge to debate instead of just listen. There are some basic understandings (i.e., that there are aspects of poverty that impact students' school success, that adults outside of the home can help fill gaps in students' social and cultural capital) that provide a foundation for my project. When I ask a question such as “what roles do school personnel play in students' lives?” the question implies that staff should act beyond the stated parameters of their job. An informant might therefore feel uncomfortable simply stating their job description. Again, I did not sense that this was the case; in fact, a few informants did just that. Also, the similarity in the responses to this and other questions revealed a real trend and not a smattering of off-the-cuff responses. However, as with any study, knowing the theoretical position the author comes from is important in considering the validity of the findings.

2.6 Demographics of Respondents

Before presenting the results of the surveys and interviews, a discussion of the demographic makeup of the samples, especially the extent to which the sample seems representative of the population being explored, is worth consideration. There are only slight demographic differences between the survey respondents and the interviewees; in fact, there is quite a bit of overlap between the two. Sixty-six percent of interviewees reported that they had filled out the survey. If their self-report is accurate, that means that 19 of 89 respondents, or 21% of the survey sample, consist of interviewees. The interview group has slightly higher representation of people over the age of 50 as well as a slightly higher percentage of administrators (district and school) as well as school board members. Given the experience requirements for administrative jobs, these two issues might be related.

Texas's Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data, which includes demographic information about staff members' age, experience, and race, allows for some comparisons between the sample and both the high school staff and overall district staff. These

comparisons are somewhat muddied by the fact that my sample includes specific, small groups outside of the high school staff (district administrators and school board members), but overall the sample seems relatively representative. Within my sample, there is a slight underrepresentation of people with under five years of education experience and a slight overrepresentation of people with 11 or more years of experience. As with the age issue discussed above, this may be a result of my stratified sample targeting leadership positions. The largest discrepancies were in regard to the racial makeup of the staff. My sample overrepresents Black staff members by over half (my sample is 38% Black while the whole staff is 22% Black). Whites are therefore under-represented (46% of my sample but 62% of the district), as are Hispanics (9% of my sample but 15% of the district) (TEA, 2012). While no obvious issues related to these discrepancies represented themselves, the difference is worth noting.

CHAPTER 3
RESULTS AND ANALYSIS
INTRODUCTION

The staff of Progress ISD have a fairly unified vision of success as effort, determination, and ultimately graduation. Students are supported through a focus on individual needs, including those that are not academic. There is a “whatever it takes” approach to supporting students, and the staff work as a team to assist students. This team approach forms a kind of internal reserve of social capital that both reinforces positive norms and provides a network students can access.

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Definitions of Success

Most of the definitions of success that both interview and survey respondents shared included graduation as a key element. On the survey, “The student is on the path to graduation” was marked “absolutely vital” to success by 61% of respondents and marked either “absolutely vital” or “very important” by 88%, both the top percentage responses. Likewise, graduating was the second most commonly discussed element of success raised in the interviews, with 20% of informants specifically mentioning it; however, all of those who directly mentioned graduation were administrators or board members, not teachers. For teachers (as well as some in the leadership), student effort and growth was most important. Some aspect of student effort and growth was the single most common element discussed in response to the interview question about the informant’s definition of “a successful student,” appearing in 27% of all responses. This focus is echoed in the survey findings, where the other two top responses

addressed “work ethic” and the student’s “determination to succeed” (both marked very important or absolutely vital by 88% of respondents).

Both the survey and the interview data indicate that the ability to communicate well with adults as well as knowing how to ask for help are also seen as important skills for successful students to have. Eighty-one percent of survey respondents said that these skills were very important or absolutely vital for a student to be called “successful.” Although these skills were mentioned by only 13% of informants in regard to their definitions of success, many interviewees considered teaching and role-modeling interpersonal skills important elements of the support system that the school can provide (see the two sections below for discussion of this finding).

Both the survey and interview respondents agree on one thing: success is not defined by grades. “The student gets A’s and B’s” came in dead last in the survey’s question about what makes a student “successful.” The most common response from interviewees (tied with effort and growth at 27% of respondents mentioning it) was that grades are *not* the defining characteristic of success. Interestingly, when asked about what other definitions of success might exist on campus, the most common response was that others might define success via grades. Either that definition exists within the district and my sample missed it, or their assumption about other staff members is inaccurate. The same dichotomy exists regarding the view of testing: respondents did not indicate testing as a part of their own definition of success, but testing was the second most common suggestion of how others may define success. The fact that over a third of interviewees shared a belief that most staff members would define success in a manner similar to their own may indicate that the ideas of grades or test results equaling success could be coming from outside the district (i.e., the state and federal focus on test results and other quantitative measures). That being said, students do have to pass their classes and the state tests in order to graduate, so these definitions of success are implied within the clear focus on graduation.

Table 3.1 Definitions of Success, Survey Results

Definition	Percent marked “absolutely vital” or “very important”	Response ranking
Graduation	88%	1
Effort/Growth	88%	2
Communication with adults and asking for help	81%	3
Grades (getting As and Bs)	52%	12 (last)

3.1.2 Efforts to Support Success

The survey and the interview protocol ask about institutional supports in different ways. On the survey, the question does not mention student success; it asks how frequently the respondent sees any of the 18 listed activities occurring in the district. The list is closely related to the different types of institutional support discussed by Stanton-Salazar (2001) and is therefore limited in focus. The interview protocol question, however, follows immediately after the informant has discussed his or her definition of a successful student and is about ways that the district (administration, school, and/or individuals) helps students succeed. Because of this difference in approach, I view the survey data in a more corroborative sense, as another data source telling me what happens and how often within the district.

The common thread running through nearly all interviewees’ responses regarding supports for student success was the importance of focusing on individual students’ needs. The most often cited specific support was academic: after-school tutorials and informal tutoring efforts. These activities were also highly ranked in the survey, with nearly 90% of respondents saying they are “a daily/near daily occurrence” or “happen pretty often.” Tutorials allow teachers to give one-on-one attention to students, learn about the specific problem areas for that student, and get the student back on track. When asked specifically about how the school graduates such a high rate of its students, one teacher replied, “I think a lot of it has to do with the staff and the fact that we will stay up here until every kid has done every piece of work that

they need to do to graduate” (CT9, p. 5). The individual focus extends up to the superintendent as well, who said of the district’s individualized efforts, “We track them, we chase them, we hound them. We do after school, Saturday, summer, online, at night... So we just...don’t let them go” (p. 10).

All interview responses about supports for student success moved beyond the academic rather quickly, if they discussed that at all. As one assistant principal put it, the students “have much more than just academic needs, so we want to meet all those needs” (H5, p. 2). This focus on the whole child is seen in the campus administrators, who “are so supportive of helping kids as people, not just as students. We see them as human beings” (CT9, p. 4). It goes all the way to the district administration as well, where one administrator’s job is to work one-on-one with struggling students and families in need, connecting them to outside resources and being their liaison with the school. Interviewees also discussed the importance of mentorship and role-modeling. Whether through a formal mentoring program or informal individual efforts, these forms of assistance were seen as important to student success. The survey results support that these efforts are common, with over 80% of respondents stating that personal counseling, role-modeling decision-making skills, and discussing college with students are all daily or often-occurring.

It was clear from the interviews that Progress ISD uses a team approach to student support efforts. Many teachers and high school staff mentioned the district liaison as a positive force in helping students succeed and supporting their efforts as well: they know they can pass on concerns about specific students and they will be addressed. Staff referring students to other staff was in fact the second most common support reported on the survey, with 88% of respondents saying that such referrals happen daily or often. Members of the campus leadership discussed how they “put together a team of people that really care about [struggling students]” so that “in the long run they end up being successful” (H1, p. 2). Numerous teachers discussed times when they worked with another teacher to help a student they had in common,

often because one teacher was struggling with a student academically or behaviorally and knew the student was somehow successful in the other teacher's class. Survey respondents also reported high rates of meeting with or contacting other adults on campus regarding specific students, with over ¾ of respondents saying that such informal discussions happen often or all the time.

Table 3.2 Most Common Supports, Survey Results

General Support Structure	Specific Support	Percent marked "daily" or "often"
Individual Focus (Academic)	Tutorials	90%
Non-Academic Supports	Role-modeling decision-making skills	83%
	Personal counseling	82%
	Discussing college	81%
Team Approach to Support Efforts	Referring students to other staff members	88%
	Informal discussions with other staff members regarding specific students	76%

3.1.2.1 Efforts to Support Graduation

One question in the interview protocol specifically addresses the high school's high graduation rate. Respondents were asked to explain how the school was reaching such a high graduation rate. Interviewees discussed the importance of the leadership's focus on graduation and the district's combination of high expectations and a "whatever it takes" concept of student support.

Over half of interviewees specifically discussed the leadership focus on graduation. The principal makes clear her intention to see 100% of the seniors graduate every year, a goal often mentioned or alluded to by interviewees. One teacher's answer to how the school helps students graduate directly addressed this key ingredient: "Leadership. It starts with the principal and the willingness to be an advocate for students and then try to surround herself with

advocates for students” (E28, p. 6). It is a district-level policy that students should graduate under the state’s recommended plan and will only be allowed to graduate on the minimum graduation plan under exceptional circumstances. The minimum plan requires 22 credits, four fewer than the recommended plan, including lower requirements for math, science, and social studies, as well as no foreign language requirement. Most four year universities require students to have the courses required under the recommended plan; in other words, graduating under the minimum plan means that students will likely not be able to attend a four year college right out of high school (though community colleges are still an option). Therefore, a practical result of requiring graduation under the recommended plan is that more students graduate college-ready. The superintendent discussed this policy with the entire district staff at convocation, and it was mentioned by numerous interviewees. One teacher discussed her view of this policy:

It’s not like they really present them with an alternative. It’s, you graduate recommended because you can do that. It’s not like we’re withholding information; it’s more, you’re perfectly capable of doing this, so let’s do it. So that’s just the mentality. And the interventions that are in place and being developed all surround that. (CT30, p. 3)

In fact, Progress HS’s percentage of students graduating under the recommended plan has exceeded that of the state in each of the last six years by an average of over 11% (Figure 3.1).

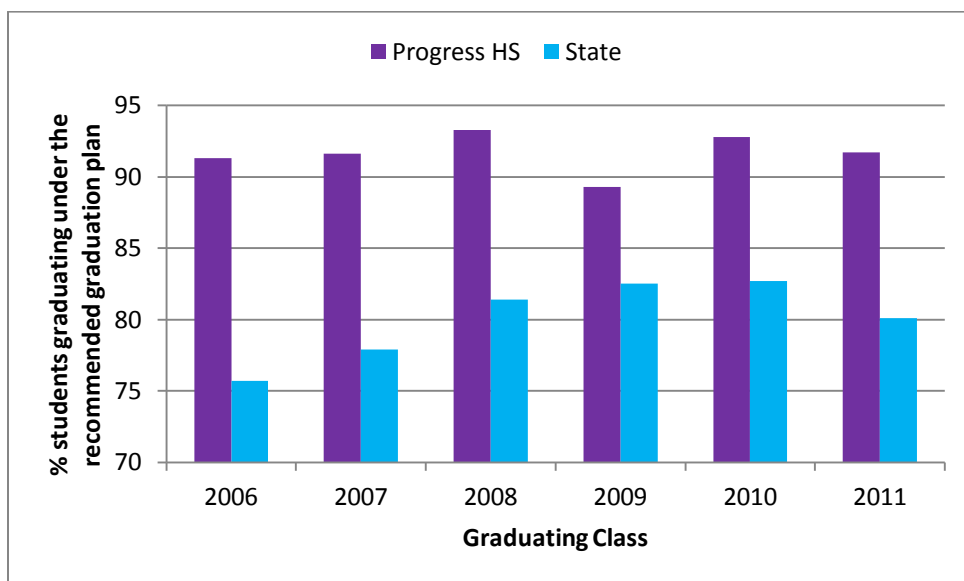


Figure 3.1 Percentage of Students Graduating Under the Recommended Plan

The combination of high expectations and strong support was at the heart of many interviewees' responses. Teachers and staff indicated a willingness to do whatever it takes to help a student succeed. A district administrator discussed lending books to a student who had dropped out, saying she wanted her to be prepared when she returned to school – and she did. A teacher discussed repeated attempts to figure out why a student who understood the math in class could never pass a test, ending in the realization that if he simply read the test aloud to the student instead of making him read it the student would get an A every time. One teacher described the consistent message students receive even when they are in trouble. Students may think they can escape their work by acting out, but teachers in In School Suspension and even at the alternative campus are all focused on student academic success:

This sounds bad, but there's no escaping your work. There's no escaping your responsibility. We are going to hold you accountable. And if you happen to not graduate, it is because you have fought everybody from your kindergarten teacher who will call all the way up to [the superintendent], who will come to talk to you... It kind of

goes back to that [Progress] attitude of we're gonna do it come heck or high water and so are you. (CT9, p. 7)

Students receive a consistent level of expectation and support, which faculty and staff see as playing an important role in the school's high graduation rate.

Table 3.3 Most Commonly Mentioned Supports, Interview Results

General Support Structure	Specific Support
Individual Focus	Tutorials
	Teacher and staff accessibility
	Empathy and caring
	Mentoring or counseling students individually
Non-Academic Supports	On-campus mentoring program
	Personal counseling
	Teaching adult register and communication skills
	Field trips, including college campus visits
Team Approach to Support Efforts	Referring students to other staff members, including knowing which staff members are supports for which students
	Consistent messaging regarding graduation, including recommended plan policy
	Support for teachers/staff to tailor assistance to students' needs
	"No excuses" and "whatever it takes" mentality regarding student success and staff expectations

3.1.3 Students' Adult Networks and the Role of the School

The results regarding student networks are limited to the perspective of the respondents, none of whom are students. Therefore, these findings are perhaps more insightful regarding staff beliefs and attitudes as opposed to them being incredibly accurate indicators of students' actual circumstances. However, given this project's focus on what institutions and school-related individuals can do to support student success, this limitation does not negate the value of the results.

The interviews revealed a belief that home support was lacking for many students. Many interviewees discussed difficulties engaging with parents and getting parents to come to school activities. Most interviewees acknowledged the economic aspect of this problem, mentioning parents working odd shifts or more than one job and therefore having little time available. The most often-cited home support was grandparents, followed closely by other extended family. Most interviewees who discussed their own interactions with families found that, when they could be contacted, they were typically supportive of the teacher's or school's efforts.

Most interviewees moved quickly into discussions of how school staff act as key members of students' adult support networks, often saying that those networks were adequate only because of the school's efforts. As one teacher put it, "They don't always have [adult resources] at home. A lot of the kids come here for that. We're aware of that here at [Progress]" (E5C, p. 4). Teachers and coaches were most often cited as important connections for students, though there were also discussions of students forming bonds with particular administrators or counselors. The most commonly discussed roles that school adults play in student lives were as academic support (e.g., tutoring, individual help), acting as a counselor or just someone to listen, sharing information about how to pursue future plans (e.g., how to apply to college, how to position yourself competitively), helping students build their adult register and communication skills, and as mentor or even parent-like figure. The survey results reveal that staff members expect to form deeper bonds with students. Nearly every survey respondent (95%) indicated that students leave the high school with more helpful adult connections than when they arrived, with 91% saying they go beyond the normal expectations of their work to help at least one student every year. In fact, the largest percentage of respondents (34%) said that they typically go above and beyond their job requirements to help more than ten students each year.

Vital to all of these in-school network connections is the forming of relationships, which itself depends on the staff members expressing empathy and caring. Sentiments such as “these kids need to know that you love them” (CT30, p. 1) or “if these students know that you understand and you care, they will run through a brick wall for you” (E28, p. 1) indicate the belief that caring must come first before students can succeed at their highest level. Teachers are accessible to students outside of their class time. An assistant principal discussed walking by “classrooms, and teachers are supposed to be at lunch, and you have five or six students in the classroom. I know at that point that it’s not necessarily – some may be academic, but I know it’s a safe haven at that point” (D2, p. 6). A teacher also commented that “throughout the day... students are finding doors open for them to always come to a teacher” (E5C, p. 3). The school’s on-campus mentoring program was often mentioned as an important support for student success. The program is open to all students and meets weekly on campus right after school. The adult mentors are all campus staff and faculty, who participate on a volunteer basis. After-school meetings, sometimes split by gender and sometimes not, allow open discussion of any issues on students’ minds and allow the adults to share their experiences and advice. The fact that this program was mentioned so often in relation to students’ academic success reveals the focus in Progress ISD on relationship-building as a foundation for all student support efforts. A number of interviewees discussed sending students to other teachers or particular administrators who they know have a close relationship with the student; for example, one core content teacher who said, “I’ve got two or three, when they get upset, they [say], ‘I need to go to Ms. Smith’s.’ [I say,] ‘Okay.’ So they go out... and they know they can do that in there and then they come back” (CT28, p. 8). The administrators work on their relationships with students intentionally. One campus administrator explained her reason for volunteering for hall duty to greet students every morning:

I've got to meet them, have some impact on their life, and send them to [the next grade]. I've got so many in so little time, so I've got to go to a place where I can meet them and that they can see me and they can feel comfortable meeting me. (H5, p. 2)

Such administrator efforts are not uncommon and, as one teacher shared, help both students and teachers:

They are out there learning kids names, learning their lives, building rapport with them. That once again supports us as teachers because we can say, oh, well I know so-and-so has a good relationship with Ms. Jones so let me send her to her when she's having trouble. (CT9, p. 3)

These types of connections also offer an outlet for teachers who may feel overwhelmed or at a loss as to how to deal with a disruptive student. Teacher collaboration helps them know a colleague who can reach a student or has a relationship with him or her that helps the student act out safely and release stress. This aids the teacher, knowing that faculty and staff members are available as resources for both students and for the teachers themselves. It also reaffirms the institutional culture that the school is a community coming together to help students in need.

3.2 Analysis

3.2.1 Issues of Cultural and Social Capital

The concepts of social and cultural capital provide a lens through which to view poverty-related achievement gaps and ways in which those gaps can be filled. In Progress ISD, we see acknowledgement of the deficits that some students may have in these areas as well as attempts to address these issues.

3.2.1.1 Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) argues that it is essentially impossible to effectively augment one's cultural capital; you can try, but there will be aspects (e.g., speech, demeanor, dress) that reveal to the dominant group that you do not quite fit. Whether Bourdieu's point is accurate or not, the staff at Progress ISD recognize some of the gaps in cultural capital their students have

and attempt to address them. Numerous teachers discussed working with students regarding how to speak with adults. One teacher shared how she supports students in regard to adult discourse:

I've gone with kids to talk to other adults to teach them how to talk to adults. I think that's one thing that we're really good at is holding them accountable and teaching them that more formal register of speaking, the formal talking, because they don't have that at home, because a lot of their parents are not necessarily in an environment where they need that a lot. (CT9, p. 3)

As discussed above, communicating well with adults and asking for help were both considered important aspects of student success. These skills are addressed informally by individual staff members on a one-on-one basis as well as through the school's formal mentoring program.

A number of interviewees expressed a concern that students might not feel comfortable speaking with adults or asking them for help, a problem Lareau (2011) also found in her study of working class and poor families. Numerous interviewees brought up this issue in our discussions of students' adult networks. One teacher commented on students' different levels of comfort in asking for help: "The kids that really want help, they'll seek you, they'll find you. And I sometimes worry about the kids that don't know how to" (E31, p. 5). Another teacher discussed how students' home circumstances may make them hesitant to reach out to school personnel: "The personal issues that these students here may deal with, they may not be comfortable sharing it. So they're going to be reluctant to go to anyone... It's going to be hard for you to crack that shell" (E28, p. 4). No interviewees indicated that there were any formal efforts to discuss this particular problem or find ways to address it; however, awareness of this problem led many teachers to repeatedly state in class their availability and desire to be a resource for students.

The district's generous use of field trips – something that is lacking in the current world of slashed public school budgets – stems from the district leadership's understanding of

students' lack of exposure to various experiences. The superintendent spoke at length about these efforts, including trips to area museums and performances, a camping trip for the entire fifth grade, trips to Austin that include visits to the capitol, and numerous college trips:

It's real important to me that they know what college is in elementary school. We have college days in elementary school. We take the 7th graders on a field trip to TCU so they can see a major university. And you want to talk about eyes just this big around... When we get back every 7th grader in Progress is going to go to TCU... The point is that they know what a college is. And then from that point forward we try to steer them to looking at at least five colleges. We take a college trip with the juniors. We'll take them to Grambling and back and stop everywhere in between. We'll go to UT and stop everywhere in between. (p. 6)

The field trips are an attempt to positively impact students' cultural capital. Numerous interviewees acknowledged poverty's effects in terms of a lack of exposure to experiences. The staff seemed comfortable discussing this aspect of cultural capital differences. There is an extent, however, to which Bourdieu's view that cultural capital is hidden still seems to apply here. When one teacher discussed her efforts to teach students study skills, skills she had taken for granted in her former work in a wealthier district, she whispered:

A lot of our kids are challenged with, um, what's a nice way to say it? They haven't learned how to learn yet. And so I'm trying to teach them all these little skills about breaking down problems and picking out words, and thinking – trying to teach them how to think. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have whispered. But that's really what I'm trying to teach them, is just to think. (CT31, p. 2)

When staff were asked about their efforts to address these kinds of cultural capital gaps, they often indicated it was not something directly addressed by school leadership. This kind of gap should be discussed at a high-poverty school, but here we see the societal tendency to not want to talk about it, as if the lack of that kind of capital is somehow inappropriate to mention.

3.2.1.2 Social capital

Although the term “social capital” was never used by informants, the focus on building relationships with students and working together to help each child both point to a school community that holds a lot of social capital for students to access. There are a number of factors adding to the strength of the school’s social capital.

Fukuyama (1996) and Putnam (2000) both discuss the importance of trust in building social capital, and trust is a vital element of Progress ISD. The school board actively works to maintain the community’s trust. A board member discussed the importance of transparency: “We have a bond election, we spell it out, that’s what we do. We don’t do anything the people don’t tell us to do” (B2, p.1). A recent bond discussion involved remodeling campuses, including a historic building that is important to the community. Even in this cash-strapped district, the board members felt “we’ve got to keep it because it means so much to the community” (B2, p. 3). The board in turn places trust in the district’s administration. One board member discussed their trusting style: “We have the people tell us what they need and that’s what we give them... We feel like they’re in a position that they know what they’re doing. Because there’s no way we can all understand what’s happening as far as school business” (B2, p. 5-6, 8). The board recognizes their administrative staff as professionals and trusts their judgment.

This sense of trust filters down to the high school campus. In response to a question about what the district and school do to support student success, the high school principal’s first response addressed the importance of trust:

I guess it’s like what my superintendent does for me. She trusts me. I think putting people in the right places to get the job done. She takes a chance that I’m not going to break the law, I’m not going to break the policy, I’m going to do whatever it is I need to do to make it happen. And in turn I do the same thing for my staff. (p. 7)

Teachers are given latitude to address individual student issues and given administrative support when they need it. One teacher shared her experience:

I think our teachers are very good at being flexible at [addressing individual student issues]. I know whenever I have to do that, I usually tell an administrator if it's something that I feel like it's really beyond my job description to where I feel like I'm not the only one who needs to know about it. And I can go to them and there's never any judgment... They get involved and they want to help so that just builds their support network for that kid. I don't think you get that everywhere. (CT9, p. 4)

This trust builds social capital within the school organization, as seen in the ease with which teachers refer students to other adults, knowing the student's needs will be addressed. This network expands what individual teachers can do and is a key element in building a "whatever it takes" attitude regarding helping students.

Numerous interviewees discussed the need for students to trust them in order for the students to be helped and then succeed on their own. A number of programs and policy decisions reveal the district's and school's effort to create opportunities for trusting student-adult relationships to grow. The on-campus mentoring group, mentioned so often as an important support for students, is built specifically for this purpose. A staff member who participates in the program shared that at the "meetings, they always say, you don't [just] come to my school, I'm here to be your friend. I'm here to do things with you, to help you, to talk to you about anything" (P9, p. 3). When discussing these sorts of deeper relationships with students, some faculty members mentioned concerns about how such situations can leave teachers vulnerable to misunderstandings or even being sued. These teachers indicated that, though they had these concerns, they felt supported by campus and district administrators. For example, teachers are encouraged to chaperone school events and field trips, allowing students to get to know their teachers outside of the classroom context. The high school also has a large number of coaches, who often form multi-year and multiplex relationships with students (Gluckman, 1967,

as cited in Coleman, 1988). These multiplex relationships allow for the trust established in one situation to encourage students to trust that person regarding other matters as well. One coach spoke at length about the different ways that the coaching relationship can positively impact students, including acting as a counselor, being a conduit to other on-campus resources, and helping mediate any issues with other teachers (E5C, p. 6).

Despite the district's efforts to support relationship-building, there is not full closure (Coleman, 1988) in Progress students' networks because of the lack of strong parental/familial engagement with the school. Arguably, however, there is some measure of closure within the building given that staff frequently interact in relation to specific students (e.g., working with each other to help specific students or helping students access staff they've formed bonds with). Closure within a network helps reinforce the norms of the group; this type of internal closure helps the school function effectively (Hampton & Gruenert, 2008). At least at school, then, students are hearing very similar messages from the staff: the focus on graduation, clear from both interviews and the survey; the high expectations of graduating under the recommended plan, a district policy discussed by many interviewees; and the "whatever it takes" support mentality that leaves students with no excuses to abandon their work. The end result is everyone aiming at the same goal, therefore reinforcing norms that guide students toward success, and then supporting those goals with consistent and personalized assistance.

The view of many staff members that students' home support is lacking and it is the job of the school to be that support echoes Fukuyama's (1996) finding that strong non-kin relationships tend to exist in areas where kin relationships are weaker. In this sense, then, the school network rises to the same level of importance as family, which may be related to the staff's focus on each individual student. Nearly all interviewees indicated that getting parents involved in the school can be a struggle. Most linked this lack of engagement with economic factors (i.e., parents having to work multiple jobs or odd hours and therefore not being physically able to attend), though some indicated that they felt that some parents did not seem

to care as much about their child's school work as the teacher or administrator might like. Many interviewees discussed what was seen as a common or even natural lessening of parental involvement at the high school level (as opposed to elementary school). The actual cause of low parent involvement cannot be explained through this study, as no parents were interviewed. The school and district have made efforts to engage parents, including providing food and child care at parent events, but overall the staff focus seems to be more on compensating for this lack of engagement. A number of interviewees, including men, became emotional when discussing the students, saying that "they're important and we need to do our best for them" (H5, p. 5). That level of caring creates a network for all, not some, and grows the school's reach. It would be interesting to ask students about this effect of the staff's attitude, whether some students were made to feel more comfortable asking for help or approaching adults because one of their friends had received assistance. It would also be instructive to explore parents' experiences engaging with the school to see if the staff's focus on their own efforts is seen as helpful by parents or not. Either way it is clear that Progress ISD, and specifically Progress HS, works to build strong networks that function as social capital resources for their students.

3.2.2 Applicability of Stanton-Salazar's Institutional Support Typology

Looking at the practices at Progress ISD through the lens of Stanton-Salazar's (2001) institutional supports typology, we see that all six of his supports are present, though to varying degrees. Stanton-Salazar's first support, funds of knowledge, is strongly represented in Progress ISD. Academic knowledge is clearly at the forefront, as it should be given the primary mission of any school, with the focus on tutoring and individualized assistance. Informants also discussed in interviews (and revealed on the survey) the importance of modeling and teaching adult discourse, sharing information regarding college preparation and application, and modeling and teaching problem-solving skills (especially regarding interpersonal problems with adults). All of these efforts fall under the umbrella of "funds of knowledge."

Role-modeling and emotional and moral support are two forms of support that are also present in Progress ISD. The high school's formal mentoring program, mentioned by so many interviewees, provides a forum for both, as does the open-door attitude of so many staff members. Progress ISD provides bridging support, both to experiences outside of the district and to key contacts within the district. There does seem to be a lack of bridging to specific individuals or groups outside of the district (e.g., admissions officers at area colleges or business groups from the area). Pulling these resourceful contacts into the school (e.g., by expanding the high school's mentoring program to outside adults) would grow students' individual networks in addition to the district's current efforts to expand students' horizons.

The one form of institutional support that did not appear within Progress ISD was advocacy. Stanton-Salazar describes this form of support as "intervening on behalf of another for the purpose of protecting or promoting their interests" (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p. 268). Perhaps this type of support is not as necessary in a school where there seems to be such unity and where staff members are comfortable referring students to other adults within the building. It also may be the case that such instances would be underreported, as feeling the need to *intervene* indicates that one is concerned that the student may not be treated well. In other words, interviewees may have been reluctant to report that some staff members were not, in their estimation, doing their jobs well. If one focuses on the phrase "*promoting* their interests," then the informal discussions with other staff members and the fact that teachers will refer students to other adults could be viewed as a form of advocacy.

Stanton-Salazar's "personalized evaluative feedback advice and guidance" combines both the passing on of funds of knowledge and another of his forms, emotional and moral support. In short, this support indicates a relationship, and relationship-building is considered vital in Progress ISD. While the other forms of institutional support are present in Progress, this last one plays a turnkey role in the effectiveness of all others. Overall, it seems that in Progress ISD, personalized advice and guidance as well as sharing funds of knowledge receive the

greatest emphasis. Role-modeling, advocacy, bridging, and moral support happen once a relationship is formed and provide methods for passing on knowledge. Stanton-Salazar's typology may not work as a perfect measure of every school's efforts, but it does provide a useful tool for examining what schools can do to for students.

3.2.3 Attitudes Toward Poverty and Testing

As discussed at the beginning of this paper, study after study find strong correlation between poverty and low student performance. Such evidence could lead to what George W. Bush called "the soft bigotry of low expectations" (Karen, 2005) or it can ignite the kind of passion and drive found in Progress ISD. An understanding of poverty as an obstacle that can be overcome with hard work from both students and school staff came through in numerous interviews. Often this idea was linked with a willingness to do "whatever it takes" to help students succeed within and beyond high school. As one teacher said, "It's like we don't dwell on the situation that they're coming from, although it's taken into account. It's just the future, let's go" (CT30, p. 2). A district administrator echoed the idea that "poverty is a state, but it's not the barrier that keeps you from moving forward. We can overcome that. ...You can escape that. And I'm not willing to let that be a rationale or a reason for you not being successful" (D10, p. 2,5).

The network closure that stems from the teamwork approach helps to reinforce these norms, but it also takes leadership initiative. One administrator said that it can be "a challenge for me as one of the leaders on the campus to try to encourage that culture and keep the focus on the high expectations for our kiddos" (H5, p. 2), pointing to the intentional actions needed to maintain this particular focus and culture. The campus leadership's focus on graduation instead of test scores may seem to be splitting hairs, given that attaining the former rests on passing the latter. However, Conchas (2006) found in his study that discussing college and post-college plans with students leads to increased interest and improved academic progress. The test is a step before graduation; graduation is the first level of achievement that means anything

practical for students (i.e., the ability to continue on to college). Essentially, the focus on graduation instead of testing is a focus on the students instead of the school. This idea echoes the interviewees' views that grades and testing are less important than getting to know the individual student. The combination of the right focus, individual attention, and a team approach form a strong institutional support network for the students of Progress ISD.

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

When the Texas school funding lawsuits began in the fall of 2012, the state wanted to talk to the superintendent of Progress ISD. They wanted to know how a majority-minority, high-poverty, under-funded school was graduating so many of its students on the college-ready recommended plan. While the state was likely looking for either an admission that miracles can happen for under \$5,000 per student per year or a few easily-replicated (and hopefully inexpensive) reforms to pass onto other school districts, it ends up that what is happening in Progress ISD is a bit more complicated. As one board member put it, “it depends on who you got in place and what they’re doing” (B2, p. 10). In other words, it is all about people: individuals, relationships, teamwork, and valuing each student.

Leadership and vision certainly are important. From the district leadership on down there is recognition of the challenges of teaching students who come from poverty and the immense importance of the work that they do. The superintendent calls education “one generation’s righteous obligation to the next” and “a battle against poverty,” telling new teachers each year, “if you can’t do what our kids need, I will help you find a job somewhere else” (D14, p. 4). Leadership sets the bar high for teachers and, importantly, provides support to help them meet those expectations. School leaders aim for 100% graduation: all students are important. Teachers are given the trust of their leadership and the support of a team approach to assisting students. With leadership, staff, and faculty working together, the school builds an internal network that both reinforces the norms of individual attention and accountability for each student and also provides a reserve of social capital that students can then access. Policies and other leadership decisions feed into this system, establishing norms (e.g., setting the 100%

graduation expectation or requiring after school tutorials) and giving staff avenues for building relationships with students (e.g., the on-campus mentoring program or the district's large coaching staff). The end result is a cohesive network of people aiming for the same goal. One coach's description of how the district functions and leads to student success captures this unified effort:

Good kids making the effort and good teachers making the effort and principals that care and a superintendent that's really good at what she does as far as leading and she has a vision and all that – all those buzzwords that you hear, but it's true.... If you have a group of people trying to accomplish a goal and it's important to all of them, they're going to get there most of the time. A lot of people want these kids to graduate, including the kids and the parents and the teachers and the administrators and the staff, so dammit let's get them graduated then, let's go get it. And that's what happens. (C16, p. 7)

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Recommendations for Future Research

In order to gain a more complete picture of the networks in Progress ISD and the effectiveness of various supports, interviews with parents and students would be needed. The dominant view of staff that home support is lacking may help them focus on what they can do inside the school, but it may also have negative, alienating effects on parents. Also, the connection between the supports available to students and the students' academic achievement would be made much clearer through discussions with students about what they find most helpful. Investigating other campuses within the district would also prove informative, especially in regard to the district's culture. Is the high school an anomaly or are the cultural aspects discussed here found throughout the district?

Similar research conducted in other districts could explore the generalizability of the findings in PISD. Research in another high-poverty district with a high graduation rate could

search for similar supports or reveal entirely different answers to the question about how they help students succeed. Likewise, researching demographically similar but less successful high schools could explore whether the lack of the supports found in PISD are related to a lack of success.

4.2.2 Policy Recommendations

There are some lessons to be learned from Progress ISD. Firstly, relationships are the cornerstone for all other efforts. Students need to trust teachers in order to feel comfortable asking important questions and to be open enough to listen. In order for teachers to extend themselves beyond their classroom duties, they have to feel supported by campus and district administration. The existence of trustworthy relationships within the staff allows teachers to refer students to other adults with the assurance that the students will be taken care of.

Efforts to build this kind of internal social capital should be recognized as academic supports as much as tutoring is. In Progress, that happens; in the state accountability system, it does not. Stanton-Salazar's (2001) list of institutional supports could serve as a model for schools to create more equitable educational opportunities. Likewise, the state could use such a model to evaluate and reward schools for efforts to build social capital within the school and with the broader community.

Another important lesson to be learned from Progress ISD is the importance of intertwining high expectations with broad-spectrum supports. Interviewees spent as much if not more time discussing how important it is to care about students than they did discussing the successful academic supports the district offers. Supports for students coming out of poverty simply cannot be one-dimensional. Helping students think beyond graduation (and helping them learn how to get where they want to be) keeps students engaged and performing at a higher level. Meeting all student needs, beyond the academic, supports their overall success.

The closure of the school's internal network works to bring new teachers into the fold, reinforcing those "whatever it takes" norms, so teamwork and relationship building can help

sustain a school's positive culture. While some of what occurs in Progress is due to its unique culture, the consistency of the message does play a key role, as discussed by one teacher:

We take everybody in, come as you are, we'll make it together, and you don't give up. Giving up is a four letter word kind of situation. It's from the top down. I think that's the amazing part to me is that it's all the way from [the superintendent] down to the newest teacher, the custodians, the lunch staff – everybody does what they have to do. Period.
(CT28, p. 8)

Coleman (1988) points out how social support networks take intentional effort to build yet can be broken quite easily. Policymakers must consider the protection of these unique school cultures and work not to wantonly harm them through policies that erode trust or a school's ability to build these vital institutional support networks.

Lastly, some data improvements might help clarify the work being done by high schools. The Texas Education Agency tracks "movers," those students who move from one public school district to another (TEA, 2011). For accountability purposes, these students become the responsibility of the receiving school. What happens to those students who leave Progress ISD? Are Progress High School's graduation rates high because students who do not go along with the norms of the school choose to leave? Without better data tracking, it is difficult to answer questions such as these. If policymakers are looking for ways to improve all schools, it is important to understand this aspect of a school's policies and cultures; if they drive a certain percentage of students away, such policies may not be best applied to all public high schools. Another data deficiency exists regarding students' post-graduation activities. Texas tracks students who enter Texas public universities and community colleges, but all others fall into a single category; therefore, those who join the workforce cannot be separated from those who attend a private school. Perhaps the state of Texas could compel private schools within the state to aid in reporting this data or make use of federal data sources (such as federal

student aid records) in determining post-graduation trajectories of students in more detail. Such data would give a clearer picture of the level of success a given district's students are attaining.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Thank you for your assistance with this research study of [REDACTED] ISD. As a former teacher, I am especially grateful for the very valuable gift of your time. This letter will briefly explain the purpose and procedures of the study.

This research study is about the impact of student support networks on student success. The survey below will explore what "success" means to you and to [REDACTED] ISD. It will also explore what student networks and network supports exist in [REDACTED] ISD.

This survey is being sent to high school staff and district leadership, as well as any relevant outside partners. It is designed to take between 15 and 30 minutes, depending on how much you choose to share in the open-ended items. After that data has been gathered, up to 30 of those who received this survey will be contacted for an optional follow-up interview.

All personally identifiable information that you provide on this survey will be confidential. Names and contact information are optional and if provided will only be used for possible follow-up interview requests. All demographic information will be used only to group and analyze data. If individual responses are used, they will only be reported in such a way as to keep the respondent's identity confidential.

Please feel free to contact me about any questions or concerns at [REDACTED]@mavs.uta.edu or call me at [REDACTED].

Thank you,
Christine Fougereousse
Master's Program in Urban Affairs
University of Texas at Arlington

By accepting and submitting your response below, you confirm that you have carefully read and understand this document. If you do not understand, please contact the researcher and I will be glad to go through the document with you. You have been informed about this study's purpose and procedures, and you have received an electronic copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By accepting, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Finally, if you are unclear about any information on this form, or have any concerns about the research, please contact me. I will gladly set up an in person explanation of this informed consent form for you if desired. Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

***1. I understand and agree to the information in the above informed consent.**

Yes

No

Survey page 2 of 3

Demographic information:

(All identifying information will be removed in any reporting of data from this survey. Providing your name and email address is optional and will only be used by the researcher for a possible follow-up interview request.)

2. What is your name? (optional)

3. At what email address would you like to be contacted? (optional)

4. Which category below includes your age?

- 21 or younger
- 22-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older
- I prefer not to say

5. How many years have you worked in the education field or with educational programs?

- This is my first year
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- More than 30

6. How many years have you worked in or with ~~Everman~~ ISD?

- This is my first year
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-25
- 26-30
- More than 30

7. What is your current position in ~~Everman~~ ISD? Check all that apply.

- Core content teacher
- Elective teacher
- Coach
- Club/extracurricular activity sponsor
- School support staff
- Counselor
- School administrator
- District support staff
- District administrator
- School board member
- Non-district employee working with Everman ISD
- Other/specify

8. What is your gender?

- Female
- Male

9. What is your race/ethnicity? (Check all that apply)

- White/Caucasian
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Asian
- American Indian
- I prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

10. How important would the following attributes be in your decision to call a student successful?

	Not at all important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Absolutely vital
The student is on the path to graduation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student graduates/will graduate under the recommended plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student gets As and Bs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student passes the state tests	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student attends college (2-year, 4-year, or technical school) after graduation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student begins or continues working after graduation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student has a strong work ethic	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student communicates well with adults	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student asks for help when needed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student knows adults who can help him/her succeed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student has strong technology/computer skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student has strong communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student has a strong determination to succeed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student has a good sense of self	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student has overcome difficulties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Are there other attributes that you would consider very important or absolutely vital?

11. What is your definition of "success"?

12. Please describe your role in helping students succeed.

13. How often do you see efforts in ~~your~~ ISD to do the following? (These activities may be official or unofficial. They may be done by many people or by only a few. For these questions, "adults" are faculty, staff, administrators, or other adults involved in school programs.)

	A daily/near daily occurrence	Happens pretty often	Happens sometimes	Does not happen very often	Never/almost never happens
Teachers offering set or regular tutoring times	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers informally tutoring students outside of class (e.g., students coming by for help during lunch)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults directing students to the adults within the school who can be of most help in a given situation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults helping students connect with other students who may be able to help in an academic way	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults helping students connect with other students who may be able to help in an interpersonal way	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults directing students to help outside of the school regarding college or job resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults within the school introducing students to helpful adults from outside the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults teaching or role-modeling interpersonal communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults teaching or role-modeling study skills (e.g., note-taking, organization, time management)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults teaching or role-modeling personal and/or academic decision-making skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults teaching or role-modeling the need to ask others for help and how to	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

get help in different situations					
Informal efforts by adults to discuss college (applying, attending, scholarships, etc.) with students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal efforts by adults to discuss work (where to find jobs, applying, presenting yourself professionally, etc.) with students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School sponsored programs focused on study skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School sponsored programs focused on post-graduation plans (e.g., how to apply to college, how to find work, how to present yourself professionally)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults intervening in students' situations with other adults on behalf of that student (to protect that student or promote his/her interests)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults counseling students regarding personal problems (with peers, family, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults actively getting to know students beyond the typical, expected interaction associated with their job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify and rank)	<input type="text"/>				

14. Do students typically leave ~~the~~ High School with more helpful adult connections than when they arrive? (Helpful adults are those who students actually use to help them with academic, personal, and/or post-graduation planning support.)

Yes

No

15. If you answered "yes" to the question above, how many helpful adult connections do students gain during their time in high school?

- 1
- 2-3
- 4-5
- more than 5

16. Are there students whom you have helped beyond the normal expectations of your work? This could include academic help if you are not a teacher, personal counseling if you are not a counselor, help with future plans, connecting students to helpful adults you know outside of school, etc.

- Not typically
- Yes, usually 1 or 2 students each school year
- Yes, usually 3 to 5 students each school year
- Yes, usually 5 to 10 students each school year
- Yes, usually more than 10 students each school year

17. If you answered "Yes" to the question above, please describe what kinds of help you have provided.

18. To what extent do you feel encouraged to connect with and help students beyond the normal expectations of your work?

- I don't feel that it would be acceptable
- I feel like it is something I can do, but I am not encouraged to do it
- I feel personally that it is an important part of my job, but my supervisors and/or colleagues do not expect it
- It feels like it is expected of me
- My supervision and/or colleagues make it clear that it is an important part of our work
- Other (please specify)

19. To what extent do you feel encouraged to connect with the other adults (e.g., parents and other teachers or staff) in your students' lives beyond the normal expectations of your work?

- I don't feel that it would be acceptable
- I feel like it is something I can do, but I am not encouraged to do it
- I feel personally that it is an important part of my job, but my supervisors and/or colleagues do not expect it
- It feels like it is expected of me
- My supervision and/or colleagues make it clear that it is an important part of our work
- Other (please specify)

20. How often do you discuss student issues with parents or other adults in your students' lives in the following ways?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the time
Emails, notes, or phone calls to parents	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parent-initiated meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meetings with parents that you initiate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emails/calls with other adults on campus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formal meetings about a specific student	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal discussions with teachers or staff on campus (as opposed to discussion in meetings set for that purpose)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal discussions with parents/family at school events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal discussions with parents/family outside of school events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal discussions with staff outside of school events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am personal friends with the student's family members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am personal friends with an important adult in the student's life (e.g., a pastor)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other (please specify and rank)

21. Consider the interactions all of your students have with adults. In your experience and to your knowledge, what effect (if any) do the following adults tend to have on students' success. Certainly there would be great variation from case to case, so please respond regarding your general sense of the impact these different types of adults tend to have on students' success.

	A very positive effect	A somewhat positive effect	Little or no effect	A somewhat negative effect	A very negative effect
Core content teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elective teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coaches	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other support staff (e.g., office staff)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School administrators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District administrators	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student's parent(s)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The student's extended family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents of friends/classmates	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults who volunteer for school programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adults who work with students outside of EIGD programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (please specify and rank)	<input type="text"/>				

22. Please describe in your own words how ~~our~~ ISD helps or does not help students succeed.

23. What are some of the biggest impediments to your work in helping students succeed?

24. Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Central Research Question: How are [Progress] ISD's concept of student success and the academic support networks of [PISD] students related?

Question area: Personal and professional background

1. What is your role in [PISD]?
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. Tell me about growing up and what school was like for you.

Question area: "Success" in [PISD]

4. Tell me about [PISD].
5. How would you define a successful student?
6. Are there competing views of "success"?
7. How does [PISD] help students be successful?

Question area: Student networks

8. In your view and experience, what individuals or types of people can affect student success?
9. What kinds and numbers of adult resources does your typical freshman have? How about your typical graduate?
10. What roles do [PISD] school personnel play in students' lives?
11. To what extent does [PISD] engage the adults in students' non-school lives?
12. Have there been discussions about efforts or programs to help form connections between students and adults on campus or other adults connected to the school?
13. Are there personal characteristics or aspects of the environment that help or harm the efforts of adults be helpful to students?

Question area: Policy suggestions & contrasts

14. [Progress] High School outpaces similar schools in graduation rate. How is that occurring? How important is such a statistic to you?
15. What advice would you give to those making policy above the district level?

Question area: Closing

16. Is there anything else you would like to share with me on these topics?

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Christine Fougrousse taught high school English for over a decade in the Texas public school system. She taught various grade levels and helped start an International Baccalaureate Diploma Program at her school. Her experiences in public education led to her interest in education policy, especially at the state and federal level. Her policy interests include measures of school accountability and success, ways schools can create truly equal educational opportunities, and the professionalization of teaching.

A graduate of the University of Southern California, she is married to a fellow Trojan who works in the aerospace industry. She has lived in Texas for nearly 15 years, the longest she has ever lived anywhere, but she knows that being born in Massachusetts means she will never really be a Texan. She claims Massachusetts, California, and Virginia as home states, often depending on who is asking and whether or not the Civil War is being discussed. In her spare time she enjoys watching soccer and movies with her husband, helping former students and current colleagues edit their papers, and spending entirely too much time in coffee shops.