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**PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE TECHNICAL,
CULTURAL AND POLITICAL DOMAINS OF THE YES COLLEGE PREP
MODEL**

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MODEL**

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Deborah Ann Blue.

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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This study sought to identify characteristics found within technical, cultural and political dimensions of the YES College Prep middle school model that typify the college-going culture of the organization. This qualitative study utilized grounded theory and ethnographic approaches in a three-phase research plan seeking to answer the question: How can the college-going culture of the YES Prep Middle School System be described, and what characteristics of the school model can be useful for building college-going cultures in mainstream schools? Teachers and administrators were the primary units of study, and data was collected in the form of documents, interviews and ethnographic field notes.

Data from phases two and three built upon theories developed in phase one. Using Kirst, Venezia and Antonio's typology of college-going cultures, YES College Prep schools fell under the category of schools with strong college-going cultures. Five dominant themes emerged as all three phases of research were synthesized: (a) student achievement, (b) quality teaching, (c) exposure and opportunities to learn, (d) college-going discourses, and (e) unified mission. Characteristics holding potential relevance for mainstream schools were the unified mission, academic rigor, the extended day and year, the Comprehensive

Counseling Model, the Teacher Excellence Program and the people-oriented business model.

This study adds to the body of research demarcating middle school as a critical point in the educational continuum. The YES College Prep model provides usefulness for researchers interested in such areas as organizational culture, educational pipeline models, and middle school reform models.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In the year 2000, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) adopted the Closing the Gaps by 2015 plan in response to a growing body of research indicating that the Texas economy would experience an inevitable decline within the next two decades as a result of the decreasing levels of educational attainment in the state's population. With an increasingly diverse population, a rapid aging of the educated populace, and an increase in the number of economically disadvantaged, the already small percentages of students entering higher education in Texas threatens to grow even smaller (THECB). The THECB has demarcated middle school as the first "critical gap" in the pipeline, indicating the first period at which students begin to terminate their educational tenure before high school completion. Researchers have indicated that the middle school years represent the beginning of the process of decision-making regarding postsecondary education (Wimberley & Noeth, 2005; McDonough, 2004). However, they also note that the American middle school has traditionally been riddled with problems, and educational success often begins to taper during these years (Yecke & Finn, 2005; Mullis, Rathge & Mullis, 2003).

For students traditionally underrepresented in higher education (African American and Latino or economically disadvantaged students), middle school represents a critical crossroad in their paths to higher education. YES College Prep was formed as Project Youth Engaged in Service in 1995 by Chris Barbic, a Teach for America Corps intern, to address this critical gap in education (Newstead & Howard, 2006). Barbic, then an elementary level teacher in Houston's East End, along with a group of parents, teachers, and community leaders, developed Project YES to "address the high rates of illiteracy, truancy and juvenile crime consuming students in the East End (YES Prep, 2010, para. 2) YES Prep became an

open-enrollment state charter school in 1998, opening its first campus in Southeast Houston. Frustrated with the available alternatives for students leaving elementary schools and entering middle schools and convinced that college preparation begins in sixth grade, YES Prep began as a grade 6–12 model, taking a “comprehensive view of student development, preparing youth for four-year college graduation while at the same time instilling values of community service and good citizenship” (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 2).

Michelle Knight noted that not only does the culture of the school directly relate to its levels of student achievement, but that schools with cultures that can be typified as college preparatory or college-going find more success in bridging the gap between K–12 and postsecondary education. Knight (2002) defined the process of creating a college-going culture as follows:

In creating a college-going culture... the technical, political and cultural dimensions of institutional and interpersonal structures are essential for youth to make well-informed decisions in preparing for and choosing a college/university, and particularly to enable them to successfully negotiate college-going processes during their 9th–10th grade years (p. 541).

This study examines the technical, political and cultural dimensions of the YES College Prep school model. To elaborate, technical components of college readiness programs involve the “structures, strategies and knowledge necessary to prepare students for admission, enrollment and graduation from college (Oesterreich, 2000, p. 2).” Political dynamics involve “matters of authority, power and influence, including the negotiation and resolution of conflicts and moral issues of justice and fairness (Johnson, 2007, p. 173).” Cultural, or normative, dimensions of analysis are “values, beliefs and school norms, both in terms of a general ethos and competing perspectives that contend with each other.” (Johnson, 2007, p. 173)

Purpose of the Study

This study sought to identify characteristics found in the YES College Prep model that typify the college-going culture found in Campus B and Campus A middle school campuses. Researchers have used the term school effects to describe features and characteristics of an institution which impact students' long-term decisions regarding postsecondary education (Rutter, 1983; Selstrom & Bremberg, 2005; Young, 1990). The term school effects separates those characteristics of the school's learning environment from influences found outside of the school, such as the home environment, family background or socioeconomic conditions of the community (Rutter, 1983; Selstrom & Bremberg, 2005; Young, 1990). The research plan sought to uncover characteristics found within the technical or political and cultural (normative) dimensions of the day-to-day learning environment that characterize the college-going culture of YES College Prep schools.

ACT (formerly American College Testing) describes the years of early adolescent schooling as "the forgotten middle" (ACT, 2008, p. 2). Research published by ACT asserted,

There is a critical defining point for students in the college and career readiness process— one so important that, if students are not on target for college and career readiness by the time they reach this point, the impact may be nearly irreversible. (p. 2)

ACT researchers designated this critical point as the end of the eighth grade. They added, "The level of academic achievement that students attain by eighth grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school" (p.2). An abundance of research can be found that designates middle school as the essential point of focus in dropout prevention (Wells, 1989; Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009; Cohen & Smeardon,

2009). In addition to this, a small body of research has recently emerged suggesting that middle school is the nexus point at which students' long-term educational trajectories are determined.

This study is framed within a social constructionist lens, drawing heavily from socio-cultural and social constructivist theories of education. Social constructionism and social constructivism are concerned with how social phenomena emerge within social contexts. Social constructionism claims that patterns of behavior within social groups lead to the development of social constructs from actions and patterns of behavior that typify the reality experienced within this group. Ultimately, institutionalization results as actions and patterns of behavior begin to form meanings and these meanings become embedded in the routines, historical memory, and core of knowledge of the institution (Berger & Luckmann, 2002). Proponents of social constructivism posit that knowledge and meaning are co-constructed in shared social spaces (Berger & Luckmann, 2002).

These theories hold value for this particular research, as students' decisions regarding their college-going futures and identities are shaped within the multiple interacting social and cultural contexts they exist within. YES College Prep schools are viewed as places where institutionalized norms shape the social and cultural spaces where students interact and form a collective knowledge base. YES College Prep schools also provide a space where negotiations of the complex interacting social and cultural dynamics students face in their daily lives shape their college-going identities and behaviors.

Knight (2002) cites McDonough's 1997 study, stating that that students underwent a continual process of "making meaning of and negotiating the multiple dimensions of their identities and K-16 college-going policies and practices in their multiple worlds of school, work, peers, extracurricular activities, and family" (p. 2). According to Bourdieu (1986),

Socio-cultural theory spoke to the process of accumulating social and cultural capital to reach higher levels of attainment.

Statement of the Problem

Although a body of research exists delineating the middle school years as the definitive place where postsecondary paths are formed, little research can be found on the efficacy of the middle school as an institution in supporting students' postsecondary aspirations. Students from populations traditionally underrepresented in higher education face a complex web of barriers to school completion throughout their educational tenure, including limited resources and structures for support, inadequately qualified teachers, and lack of social, cultural, and generational capital (Collatos et al., 2004; Nora, 2004). Schools may assist in alleviating many of these barriers by developing organizational cultures that facilitate the college-going process. To better understand how middle schools build college-going learning environments that assist students in successfully negotiating their college-going identities and acquiring the social and cultural capital needed to pursue long-term educational goals, a thorough examination of the technical, political and cultural dimensions of one particular model that claims success in this area was warranted. The goal of this study was to thoroughly examine the YES College Prep grade 6–12 model to excavate the organizational characteristics found within each dimension that describe the YES College Prep college-going culture.

Research Questions

The overall question guiding the scope of this study was: How can the college-going culture of the YES Prep Middle School System be described, and what characteristics of the school model can be useful for building college-going cultures in mainstream schools? The following three questions provided a framework for the research plan of the study:

1. What technical, normative and political characteristics of the YES College Prep model can be described as attributes of a college-going culture?
2. What characteristics are embedded in the organizational culture and framework of YES that support and sustain the college-going behaviors of students?
3. What characteristics of the YES College Prep model can be replicated and/or generalized in mainstream public schools?

Significance of the Study

This study informs federal and local institutions in their efforts to develop grade 6–12 models that distinguish middle schools as critical focal points in policy and programming and seek to build college-going learning environments for students.

YES conceived itself as an alternative to mainstream public education, providing low-income or minority students with an educational program designed to improve students' prospects for higher education attainment (Newstead & Howard, 2006). This study sought to identify organizational characteristics of the YES Prep model that are potentially replicable in mainstream public schools. The demographic profile of the students of YES Prep schools mirrored what was found in its closest, and largest, neighboring school district, the Houston Independent School District (HISD). The student body at YES was 78% economically disadvantaged, while 81% of HISD students were economically disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2009). However, according to the TEA, the dropout rate at YES middle schools (seventh and eighth grades) in 2008 was 0%, while HISD held a dropout rate of 0.5%. In addition, 100% of students at YES graduated with a college-ready diploma in 2008, while only 86% of HISD students did the same. The position of YES within what was, at the time of this study, the geographical area of the fourth largest city and the seventh largest school district in the country yielded

valuable information for researchers and policymakers in designing middle school programs that could effectively improve students' chances for long-term educational success.

When this study was conducted there was little research available linking college attrition with middle school education. This study will expand the body of research available that links college-going behavior to middle school culture. Finally, this study attempts to broaden the body of research available demarcating middle school as a nexus point between K-12 and postsecondary education.

Scope of the Study

This study examines the technical, political, and cultural (normative) dimensions of the YES College Prep school model. YES College Prep public schools consist of seven campuses housed in six different locations serving students from grades 6- 12. This study includes data from teachers, administrators and other adults within the YES organization to answer each research question.

As this study is qualitative in orientation, the bulk of the observations and interviews took place in two of the YES campuses, YES Prep Campus A and YES Prep Campus B. These two campuses were chosen with intentionality to add a layer of richness to the data collection process. Research in YES Prep Campus B provides a historical perspective that serves useful in uncovering many of the school effects embedded in the institutional fabric of the YES model. Research on the innovative and distinctive characteristics of YES Prep Campus A provides a more nuanced perspective of the college-going culture of the institution. YES Prep Campus A and YES Prep Campus B are the sole campuses to serve all grade levels (6-12).

Adults are the primary units of analysis for this study, as organizational culture

must be observed through those who lead and carry out the goals of the organization. The research plan followed a prescribed three-phase timeline, using ethnography and grounded theory as the primary methods of data collection. The timeline is provided in Chapter Three, which details the methodology and data collection process. The first phase of research consisted of key informant interviews, during which a theory of the educational model emerged based on interviews with key individuals within the YES Prep system. The second phase included participant observation and more in-depth interviews during which data from the first phase of research was synthesized with field notes and interviews to uncover more embedded elements found within each dimension of the YES model. The final phase synthesized data from phase 1 and phase 2 to uncover identifiable characteristics in the YES Prep model that may be replicable and generalizable in mainstream public schools.

Limitations of the Research

The nature of qualitative research presupposes a level of subjectivity that is not assumed in quantitative or other studies that seek objectivity or attempt to prove preconceived hypotheses. Hence, a level of personal bias is inherent as the researcher is an active participant in the research setting. Explicit disclosure of my positionality within the research enables reflexivity to occur, providing an avenue to minimize these biases. In addition, accessibility of the research setting limits the scope of the data collected. Since adults were the principal subjects of the research, access to students was not necessary in the data collection process. The absence of students from the study, however, limited the ability to truly gauge the impact of the perceived school characteristics on their attitudes and college-going behaviors.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to uncover characteristics within the technical, political and cultural (normative) domains of the YES College Prep educational model that typify the college-going culture of the organization. This section presents a review of existing literature relevant to this study. As this study attempted to provide a comprehensive description of the college-going culture of the YES Public School System, ethnographic methods viewed through a social constructionist lens draw heavily from socio-cultural and social constructivist theories of learning. The historical narrative includes research and literature highlighting the importance of the early adolescent years of schooling, typically termed middle school, within the educational continuum.

Macro-Political Context

In a study conducted by Venezia and other researchers at the University of California at Berkeley, researchers conducted focus group interviews with teachers from junior high schools in Texas to describe their interactions with students regarding college preparation. The teachers stated that they often felt overwhelmed with curricular demands and received little information about college admissions policies (2004). These teachers also stated that they believed that by the eighth grade, students have become tracked and rarely switch tracks. In light of this, teachers still expressed that they believed other teachers and staff would maintain the status quo (i.e., not helping students prepare for college) unless they were mandated to change (Venezia, 2004).

Venezia added that lines of communication between K-12 education systems represented in the study and participating universities were unclear, resulting primarily from agency on the part of university officials to ensure that students were aware of

changing university admissions criteria (Venezia, 2004). K-12 educators, namely junior high school and middle school administrators and staff, noted that notification of changes in state or university admissions requirements often occurred several years after implementation, generally after the feeder high school enacted policy changes in response to new or altered requirements (Venezia).

In light of this example, middle school counselors and teachers continue to express that college preparation should begin as early as sixth grade (or earlier), and college-related information should be provided to all students, especially those least likely to enter postsecondary education after graduation (McDonough, 2004; Wimberley & Noeth, 2005; Brown, Anfara & Roney, 2004). Murdock (2002) wrote:

The non-Anglo populations of Texas will increasingly become the Texas population. This pattern suggests that the State's future will be increasingly tied to its non-Anglo populations and that the way non-Anglo populations grow and change will largely determine the future of Texas.

The baseline patterns of population change presented here suggest that, in the absence of changes in the socioeconomic resources of population groups in Texas that show reduced levels of education, reduced incomes, increased levels of poverty, and related increased rates of use of a variety of State services, demographic change in Texas is likely to produce socioeconomic change. Under these baseline conditions of population change, Texas would have a general population that would be poorer, less well educated, and more in need of numerous forms of State services than its present population but would be less able to support such services (pp. 85-86).

According to Murdock, future projected demographic patterns suggest that Texas will likely be predominantly comprised of individuals from non-Anglo backgrounds and lower socioeconomic income levels. Given that these groups comprise the profile of those students most often absent in higher education (THECB, 2000), it is logical to conclude that higher education enrollment in Texas will experience a decline unless deliberate action is taken to counteract this trend.

In response to Murdock's research, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

enacted the Closing the Gaps by 2015 initiative. In their 2000 report, the THECB stated:

At present, a large gap exists among racial/ethnic groups in both enrollment and graduation from the state's colleges and universities. Groups with the lowest enrollment and graduation rates will constitute a larger proportion of the Texas population. If this gap is not closed, Texas will have proportionately fewer college graduates (p. 5).

The THECB sought to "close the gaps" in four areas: (a) participation, (b) success, (c) excellence, and (d) research. The goal of participation indicated a desire to enroll an additional 630,000 students in higher education by the year 2015. The goal of success included an increase of the number of degrees, certificates and other "identifiable student successes" from institutions of higher education (IHE's) by 50% (p. 3). The goal of excellence included a substantial increase in the number of programs and services that are recognized on a national level, and the goal of research included an increase of federal science and engineering research funding (THECB). The College for Texans initiative was developed under the office of Participation and Success, and for the purposes of this study, the goal of participation will be focused upon exclusively. According to a 2010 progress report of the College for Texans initiative, the college student population in 2009 reached 1,421,000, just 2000 students short of the 2010 goal (THECB, 2010, p. 1). African American and White student participation was expected to continually rise and meet 2015 target goals. Hispanic student participation, however, was not expected to reach its targeted number. The progress report read:

"While Hispanic enrollment has increased at a faster rate than for African Americans and whites since 2000, the enrollment of almost 413,000 in fall 2009 was 263,000 students short of the 2015 target, putting Hispanic enrollment well below the target trend line." (p. 1)

Historical Background

Middle schools in the United States. While little research has been conducted on

the process of developing a college-going culture in middle schools, much has been written about the middle-grade education in the history of American education. The history of middle schools in the United States is situated within a political and social climate concerned with maximizing the efficiency of public education. At the end of the nineteenth century, the majority of American public schools were configured according to an 8/4 model, with elementary school consisting of the first eight grades and high school comprised of the final four grades. Concerns over the appropriateness of curricular models used in the late elementary grades led to a shift towards a 6/6 model, with grades 7 and 8 added to the high school years (Yecke & Finn, 2005; Juvonen et al., 2004). Following this change, the first junior high school model was proposed in order to split the high school years into junior and senior levels. This was done in order to allow students who were not expected to graduate from high school the opportunity to obtain 3 years of schooling beyond elementary school (Yecke & Finn, 2005; Juvonen et al., 2004; Spring, 1986). Following World War I and resulting increases in urbanization and immigration, American elementary schools experienced a burgeoning in enrollment, further justifying the efficiency of the junior high school model. Many of the junior high schools provided a refuge from harsh urban living conditions, which drew students toward these institutions. While providing such social services, educators created what was, at the time, called Americanization programs. Such programs were meant to ensure assimilation into mainstream American society (Juvonen et al.). In spite of the social services offered in junior high schools, only about one-third of students in public schools reached the ninth grade between 1907 and 1911 (Juvonen et al.; Van Til, Vars & Lounsbury, 1961).

Junior high schools generally included grades 7–9 and mirrored high schools in structure and academic organization (Yecke & Finn, 2005; Juvonen et al., 2004). Although

these schools struggled to meet the needs of students on a large-scale basis, the number of junior high schools increased by 600 percent between 1922 and 1938 (Juvonen, et al.; Bossing & Cramer, 1965). While junior high schools varied minimally from senior high schools in curricular design and organizational structure, educators soon began to grow concerned with the differences in academic abilities and diversity of interests and learning styles in junior high school students, specifically the socialization needs of adolescents at this stage of development (Yecke & Finn; Juvonen et al.). Discontent with junior high school education reached an acme during the 1960s as the disconnection between the operational design of the school and the developmental needs of the students became more pronounced (Juvonen et al.; Brough, 1995). Secondary school enrollment began to decline while elementary school populations mushroomed as a result of the Baby Boom and the increasingly popular early childhood and kindergarten programs. This resulted in a push toward integrating the sixth grade into the junior high school (Juvonen et al.; Alexander, 1984).

The advent of the Civil Rights Movement added to the conundrum surrounding school grade-level configurations, as desegregation plans shifted enrollment patterns across districts and schools nationwide (Juvonen et al., 2004; Brough, 1995). Overcrowding became an imminent issue facing school administrators, causing a renewed focus on the efficiency of public schools, with a narrowed focus upon the middle years. The middle school model began to emerge as a result of the demands for reallocation of space, establishing the organization that is most commonly found in public school systems, 5/3/4. Not only did this impact the organizational structure of the school, but changes in the student body characteristics created a demand for a new educational model (Yecke & Finn, 2005; Juvonen et al.). Building on the life-adjustment movement that gained stamina

between the 1940–1950's, which advocated a philosophy of education centered on socialization, minimizing the intense focus on academic rigor previously found in junior high schools, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development published *The Junior High School We Need* (Hartman, 2008; Yecke & Finn, 2005). This publication called for a change in focus toward building skills that lead to happy and successful living rather than academic disciplines. Yecke and Finn cite A. H. Lauchner, principal of a junior high school in Champaign, Illinois, in his 1951 address to the National Association of Secondary School Principals:

When we come to the realization that not every child has to read, figure, write and spell... that many of them either cannot or will not master these chores, then we shall be on the road to improving the junior high curriculum (Yecke & Finn, 2005).

Advocates of the life-adjustment movement envisioned a new middle school model, not simply a new organizational arrangement. The National Middle School Association (NMSA) was formed in 1973, asserting that middle school would have a completely different identity from its predecessor, the junior high school. Competing visions, however, threatened the development of a clear identity for the American middle school, and for 15 years, the NMSA struggled to establish a coherent and unified vision and creed (Yecke & Finn, 2005). In 1970, Midjaas, as cited in Yecke & Finn (2005), addressed the Northern Michigan University Planning Symposium. In his speech, he outlined his vision for a middle school model:

The program in the middle school would most probably include limited instruction in what could be termed the learning skills—the abilities to read, write [and] perform arithmetic computation... Students should be as free as possible to come and go, to study or not study, to take this course or that course... The curriculum would likely emphasize the development of healthy relationships between people, encouraging the social development of the individual while helping each human being better understand his own needs... Learner achievement would most probably be evaluated in ways, which avoided comparing one student to another... [and] the curriculum would likely discourage any emphasis upon working independently. (p.

8)

Although Midjaas did not publish any of his ideas, many of these ideals were reflected in subsequent publications and issue statements from organizations and individuals sharing his vision for a middle school educational philosophy (Yecke & Finn). Adding fuel to the life-adjustment movement was brain periodization theory, which emerged in the late 1970's, predicated upon the tenets that brain growth in children between the ages of 12–14 begins to taper, and the brain subsequently ceases growth. At this point, science supported the views of advocates of life-adjustment approaches to middle schooling. Teaching complex and abstract concepts to students during these years would have damaging effects on their neurological development (Caskey & Ruben, 2007; Yecke & Finn; Epstein & Toepfer, 1978).

Following the publishing of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, public education in the United States faced an unprecedented level of pressure to improve the quality of services provided to children. Noting a significant decline in the academic performance of American students in comparison with other industrialized nations, the report warned, “The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people.” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) This pushed public discourse in education away from efficiency and toward excellence. Prior to this publication, in 1981, Alexander and George (as cited in Juvonen, 2004, p. 12) published their seminal work *The Exemplary Middle School*, in which they pontificated on the ideal middle school, stating:

The concept of a bridging school is not enough, however, because children of middle school age have their unique characteristics and needs which cannot be subordinated to the impact of the elementary school nor to the demands of the high school. An effective middle school must not only build upon the program on earlier

childhood and anticipate the program of secondary education to follow, but it must be directly concerned with the here-and-now problems and interests of its students. Furthermore, the middle school should not be envisioned as a passive link in the chain of education below the college and university, but rather as a dynamic force in improving education.

This search for excellence in middle school education would be further elucidated by educators and politicians in the following decades as education grappled to regain a positive image following the publication of *A Nation at Risk*. In addition, critics of the middle school model challenged that the developmental needs of students at this age were being ignored, and a push toward holistic education followed. Renewed interest in the full-service middle school model seen in turn-of-the-century junior high schools began to emerge (Juvonen et al.).

Middle school as a critical point in the education pipeline. Often regarded as the Father of the American Middle School (Ohles, et. Al., 1997), William Alexander (2005) wrote, “From its beginnings, the junior high school has sought to be a transitional or bridge institution between the elementary and the high school” (p. 2). He added:

However needed a transition is between the elementary and the high school, there are grave doubts as to the functioning of the junior high school in this regard. It is an interesting commentary on this function of the entire junior high school that after these schools had been widely established, a return from their departmentalized organization a la high school was sought in the block-time or core program. The chief justification of this program is to ease the transition from elementary to junior high school—a clear admission that the usually departmentalized program and organization of the junior high school tended to defeat the transitional function. Other evidence abounds that the “junior” high school has typically been a secondary school following the 4-year high school model rather than being an in-between school bridging a gap between elementary and secondary education (p. 2).

In this work, originally published in 1965, Alexander established that the function of the middle school as a place of transition between elementary and high school is inadequate, as it fails to address the unique needs of students in this particular age group (2005). Alexander calls for a revised middle school model that includes “individualization,” in order

to offset the “resistance to schools and schooling which begins to be expressed even in third and fourth grades,” which would include more guidance and diagnostic services, time spent with teachers and more self-directed learning experiences (p. 5). Alexander called for “a flexible curriculum, permitting and indeed aiding pupils to progress at different rates and to different depths,” as well as an “emphasis on values,” to offset the conflicts in values systems often found among high-schoolers (p. 5).

Alexander’s new school model viewed the middle school years as a “unit” in a “vertically planned educational system” (p. 6). The middle school “unit” would have the following characteristics:

1. It would give this unit a status of its own, rather than a “junior” classification.
2. It would facilitate the introduction in grades 5 and 6 of some specialization and team teaching in staffing patterns.
3. It would also facilitate the reorganization of teacher education sorely needed to provide teachers competent for the middle school; since existing patterns of neither elementary nor secondary teacher training would suffice, a new pattern would have to be developed.
4. A clearly defined middle unit should more easily have the other characteristics already described as desirable, than the typical junior high school: (1) a well-articulated 12- to 14-year system of education; (2) preparation for, even transition to, adolescence; (3) continued general education; and (4) abundant opportunities for exploration of interests, individualization of instruction, a flexible curriculum, and emphasis on values (pp. 6-7).

Alexander’s model demarcated the middle years as a critical nexus in the education continuum he described as a “vertically planned educational system” (p.6).

The beginning of the emphasis on the middle school as a critical point in the education pipeline can also be found in the late 1980s with research conducted by Simmons and Blyth (1987), which compared students in two distinct grade distributions: junior high school students beginning in the seventh grade and seventh graders in a K-8 school. The findings of this study indicated that students in the junior high school configuration performed more poorly than their K-8 school counterparts. Seventh graders in junior high

schools held lower self-perceptions and negative attitudes about school, and received lower grades (Juvonen et al., 2004; Simmons & Blyth).

Juvonen cites a 1989 study by Eccles and Midgley, which yielded similar results. These researchers underscored the transition to junior high or middle school itself as the reason for these declines. The researchers noted that the type of educational structures poorly matched the developmental needs of students at this level and programs found in junior high and middle schools, and the need for students to have stability at this level was disrupted by such a brusque transition (2004, p. 13). In 1989 the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development's published *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (cited in Yecke & Finn, 2005). In this report, the council blamed the public and traditional education for the perilous situation faced by middle grade students. They cited the millions of "at risk" American youth, "These youth are among the estimated 7 million young people – one in four adolescents – who are extremely vulnerable to multiple high-risk behaviors and school failure." (p. 21) The Carnegie report drew attention to the inherent problems in this critical transition by drawing the model of the mismatch between students' developmental stage and their environment. In their report (cited in Juvonen, 2004), the Carnegie Council presented eight recommendations for educating young adolescents:

- 1 Dividing large middle schools into smaller communities for learning;
- 2 Conveying a core of common knowledge to all middle grade school students;
- 3 Organizing middle grade schools to ensure success for all students;
- 4 Empowering teachers and administrators;
- 5 Preparing teachers for the unique needs of middle school students;
- 6 Promoting good health and fitness;
- 7 Allying families with school staff through mutual respect, trust and communication;
- 8 Developing partnerships between schools and communities (p. 14).

The Carnegie Council report prompted a wave of research surrounding the developmental needs of students, termed the developmental responsiveness era (Juvonen et al. 2004). This era focused mainly on students' socio-emotional needs in the process of schooling. Researchers have noted that the increased emphasis on the socio-emotional dynamics of middle school education may have occurred at the expense of cognitive and academic needs, resulting in a "dumbing down" of the curriculum (Yecke & Finn; Juvonen et al.; Goodenow, 1993; Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Research from this time period indicated that, although students' cognitive abilities grew during this developmental stage (including abstract thought and diversity of perspectives), instructional approaches became less cognitively demanding (Yecke & Finn; Juvonen et al.; Keating, 1990). Other researchers noted that the curriculum offered during middle school years was characterized by rote and repetition (Juvonen et al.; Schmidt & Valverde, 1997). Hence, there was a mismatch between students' developmental process and the school experiences they underwent during the middle grades.

Middle schools and underachievement. Current studies on middle grades education indicate troubling trends in the achievement levels of preadolescent students. In a study conducted by the Southern Regional Education Board, researchers found more than 14,000 public middle grades schools in the United States, with middle schools comprising more than half this number and Junior high schools accounting for approximately one third (Heller, Calderon & Medrich, 2003). This represents a significant change from previous decades, during which junior high schools comprised approximately 0.75 of all middle grade schools (Heller et al.). In a 2008 research report by the United Way of Greater Los Angeles, President and CEO Buik stated:

We are facing a serious crisis in our middle schools. Youth are expected to learn and succeed in nearly impossible environments where 11-12 year-olds transition from a school of 500 students with few classroom changes and consistent teacher and staff relationships to a school of over 2,000 students with multiple classroom changes, and fewer caring adult relationships (Introduction).

The United Way of Greater Los Angeles cited four key factors that influenced student success in middle school:

1. The unique social and emotional characteristics of adolescent development,
2. Access to quality teachers
3. College planning, and
4. Increased academic rigor (p. 2).

In addition, in 2009, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) noted that student progress in eighth grade reading has remained stagnant since 1998. Progress in math has increased little during this time period.

Researchers have noted the widening gap in academic achievement levels between low income and minority students and their wealthier White counterparts (Eccles, 2008; Heller et al., 2003; Cooney & Bottoms, 1998; Schmidt, McKnight & Raizen, 1996). This achievement gap has steadily widened since the 1990s as a result of a lack of strong curricula and well-prepared teachers in their schools (Heller et al.; Cooney & Bottoms: 1998; Schmidt et al.) as well as a decline in individual motivation and self-confidence (Eccles, 2008; Kurlaender, Reardon, & Jackson, 2008). Further, schools serving low-income and minority students were often less likely to offer extensive remedial courses or accelerated instruction (Heller et al.: MacIver & Epstein: 1990).

Much research has been dedicated toward the crisis of disengagement in the middle grades. Various factors contributed to disengagement, including lack of relevance in curriculum, lack of rigor and alignment in elementary and middle school curricula, lack of strategies to encourage student motivation, and developmentally inappropriate

instructional strategies (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008; Heller et al., 2003; Goodlad, 1984; Cummins, 1984, 1989; Goodenow, 1993; Arhar, 1992; Kramer, 1992; Allington & Johnston, 2000; Sosniak & Stodolsky, 1993). Researchers also noted that school size and grade configuration had a negative impact on student success in the middle grades, noting that smaller school size positively influenced student achievement and, while research is limited in this area, flexible grouping and instructional teaming produced positive results in students' outcomes (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009; Heller et al.; Jackson & Davis: 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Flowers, Mertens & Mulhall, 2000). Heller et al. (2003) stated the following in an attempt to draw attention to the nature of transition as a critical element in students' declining levels of achievement:

The tripartite schooling organization, which is the norm in most parts of the country, requires that students make at least two transitions within the K-12 system. Most critics point out that student achievement often lags the year after the transition to a new school. (p. 9)

The research on school transitions—from elementary to middle grades and from middle grades to high school—reveals patterns that seem to affect student achievement and that may relate to student engagement. After the transition to high school, especially, students' grade point averages and attendance often decline (Barone et al., 1991; Reyes et al, 1994), and the transition tends to be more difficult for those who did not perform well in the middle grades. (p. 9-10)

Horwitz and Snipes, Heller et al. and Cooney and Bottoms again highlight a pattern of disengagement in the process of schooling to account for the alarming number of students who disconnect from the educational pipeline following the middle grades. They note that students who under-perform in middle grades tend to find extreme difficulty in transitioning to the demands of high school academics (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008; Heller et al., 2003; Cooney & Bottoms, 2002). In addition students unprepared for high school courses are less likely to take college-preparatory courses, such as geometry and chemistry. Wimberley and Noeth (2005) noted that slightly more than half of seniors in low-income

schools take geometry, compared with 74% of students in more affluent schools (Lippman, Burns & McArthur, 1996). With insufficient academic preparation, these students are less likely to graduate from high school or enter postsecondary education beyond high school (Wimberley & Noeth).

SREB followed this research with a 2009 report highlighting the break in achievement along the educational continuum during the middle years. The authors stated:

The tough reality is that many middle grades students say they are bored and disengaged in school, often losing interest and falling behind just as they should be preparing for the rigor of the high school curriculum. The result is that the ninth grade becomes a roadblock for these students — especially the ones who falter in reading or math, quit coming to school regularly or get into disciplinary trouble in the middle grades. These are the students who eventually drop out (p. 1).

Researchers from the National Middle School Association posited that students began to develop off-track indicators, increasing their odds of falling off the high school graduation path, as early as sixth grade (Balfanz, R., 2009). They added that sixth grade, much like ninth grade, is a critical make it or break it year in the educational pipeline, since most students developed off-track indicators in sixth grade.

Researchers, such as Eccles, Carlson et al., Roesner et al., Brown et al. and Obach, have noted the pattern of academic and emotional characteristics of adolescents during the middle grades. Some of these characteristics include low academic motivation, poor academic achievement, depression, truancy, low self-esteem, aggression and disciplinary problems, and difficulty in peer relationships (Eccles, 2008; Carlson et al, 1999; Roesner, Eccles & Sameroff, 1998; Brown et al., 2004; Obach, 2003). The combination of these characteristics with external changes in the school environment, including school size and grade level configuration, organizational culture and philosophy, and pedagogy are said to result in a progressive disengagement in and disconnection from the educational process

for many students, specifically those students characterized as at risk, as indicated previously (Wimberley & Noeth, 2005; Roesner et al.). Roesner cited Eccles, et al. (1996) and Rutter (1993), noting "... middle school represents a central context of development during adolescence, a context that has a significant impact on outcomes other than academic motivation and achievement." (p. 345). These researchers underscored the critical elements in middle schools that facilitate the transitions to and from this level of schooling, including positive teacher-student interactions, instructional practices that encourage initiative and individual effort, and support for students' needs for autonomy (Roesner et al.).

The College Pipeline

McDonough (2004) stated, "The pathway to college is marked by vast disparities in college preparation, college knowledge and college culture within schools" (p. 5). Three key elements are iterated in this statement: (a) college preparation, (b) college knowledge, and (c) college culture. The diversity of experiences students encountered in their educational tenures can be typified according to these three categories. Placing these experiences on a continuum, ideally college-bound students would be fully prepared for college (academically and socially), would possess a significant level of college knowledge (a holistic understanding of the postsecondary system), and would have internalized a college-going culture (through educational and family environments). However, the marginally college-bound student would lack the academic and social experiences and abilities needed to succeed in higher education, would possess a narrow degree of college knowledge, and would have a limited exposure to college-going cultures. While students of all backgrounds generally express their aspirations to attend postsecondary educational institutions to a significant degree, many of these aspirations are undermined as a result of the lack of

college experience and preparation they have received throughout their educational tenure (ACT, 2008). Over 90% of high school seniors expressed a desire to attend college, and over 70% of these students actually enrolled in higher education upon graduation (Kirst & Bracco, 2004; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Education Trust, 2002). However, research indicated that over 50% of students entering postsecondary institutions in the United States will take remedial courses, and 41% of all students earning ten credits or more never complete a 2 or 4 year degree program (Kirst & Bracco; Adelman, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2001; American Council on Education, 2002). Furthermore, across achievement levels, students from the lowest socioeconomic brackets are less likely to apply or attend college than those from the highest brackets (McDonough, 1997; Gardner, 1987). Students of color are also less likely to begin or finish college and are more likely to attend colleges with higher dropout rates (McDonough, 1997; Levine & Ndiffer, 1995; Hearn, 1984).

Parents' educational background is also a significant factor in the educational patterns of college-bound students. In 1992, 82% of students with college-educated parents enrolled in college directly from high school while only 54% of students from parents with only high school diplomas enrolled, and only 36% of students whose parents had less than a high school diploma enrolled (McDonough, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Researchers documented the historical role of precollege outreach and intervention programs developed by federal, state and local governments and postsecondary education institutions in providing schools and communities with resources to assist students in preparing for college. The Higher Education Act of 1965 established the TRIO programs as a part of then President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. The Upward Bound program (originally established in 1964) was integrated with Talent Search and Student Support

Services as initiatives designed to provide interventions to families in preparing students for higher education (McDonough, 2004). These programs were originally founded to provide exposure and opportunities for academic support to potential first-generation college students. Eventually, as a result of funding shortages, top priority was given to economically disadvantaged students exclusively (McDonough, 2004). In 1998, Congress established the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP) program, using federal funding for students beginning in the sixth grade, to assist in overcoming social and cultural barriers to postsecondary education (McDonough, 2004). GEAR-UP and Talent Search represented the largest efforts by the federal government to reach out to students beginning in the middle school years.

In addition to these federal efforts, 15 states have instituted intervention programs and programs targeting students in the K–12 years (McDonough, 2004; Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore., 1997). The most famous of these initiatives was the I Have A Dream program, which provided financial support to more than 13,000 low-income students in 26 states (McDonough, 2004; Perna & Swail, 2002). Other programs, such as AVID Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) and Mathematics, Engineering and Science Achievement (MESA) have gained popularity across several states in recent years (McDonough). While federal and state efforts to increase higher education opportunities to first-generation and low-income students have been effective for select groups of students, more widespread policies and efforts will be needed to increase access for large populations of students. The agency of institutions of higher education to broaden access for students traditionally underrepresented in higher education is an important factor in eliminating these barriers. Citing Chaney, Lewis, and Farris (1995), McDonough (2004) stated that one in three colleges and universities offers some form of outreach program to broaden access

for low-income or first-generation college students. McDonough noted, however, that most of these programs sought to provide opportunities for individual students rather than change opportunities for access across the educational pipeline. Hence, these programs, while well intentioned, were by nature inequitable as a result of the limited number of students allowed to participate. Furthermore, these programs provided supplementary services while doing little to change the conditions within the schools that created barriers to students' access to higher education (McDonough).

Kirst, Venezia and Antonio (2004) emphasized the vital need to connect the Pre-K through higher education systems of education in order to reach beyond fragmented and program-oriented initiatives and provide a more streamlined system of access to educational opportunities across schools, districts, and states. This connection, illustrated by the metaphor of the educational pipeline, has commonly been referred to as a P-16 system of education. Kazis (2006) stated:

Increasingly, governors and state policymakers are reconceptualizing public education as a K-16 (or perhaps better yet, Pre-K-20) "pipeline" rather than a set of distinct systems. The metaphor makes visible how students "flow" in and out of different institutions, at which points and for which students the leaks are most serious, and how to target institutional and systemic improvement efforts to plug the leaks. In this framework, high school completion becomes a means rather than an end, a transition point in the progression to a college credential (p. 12).

The educational pipeline provides a visual means of understanding the process by which students participate in the educational continuum. The pipeline metaphor is problematic when considering students who are traditionally underrepresented in higher education. Green (2006) elucidated this point in her analysis of the dilemma of historically underserved students:

The educational pipeline has become increasingly problematic for underserved students due to misalignments between K-12 and postsecondary curricula, graduation requirements, and college admissions requirements that focus heavily

on high school courses taken and performance indicators, including class rank and achievement test scores. Because minority student populations are emerging as the majority in two-year colleges (Laden, 2004) and are currently the majority in many large urban school systems, they are more affected by pipeline leaks and misalignment than other students (p. 23).

Researchers and organizations have drawn attention to leaks in the educational pipeline in discussions concerning P-16 reforms (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Green, 2006). The term leak refers to the most prevalent points in the educational continuum at which students fall away from schooling. The following figure, illustrates the persistence trends among various ethnic groups along the educational continuum. Figure 1 illustrates the educational trends of various ethnic groups from kindergarten through four years of postsecondary education.

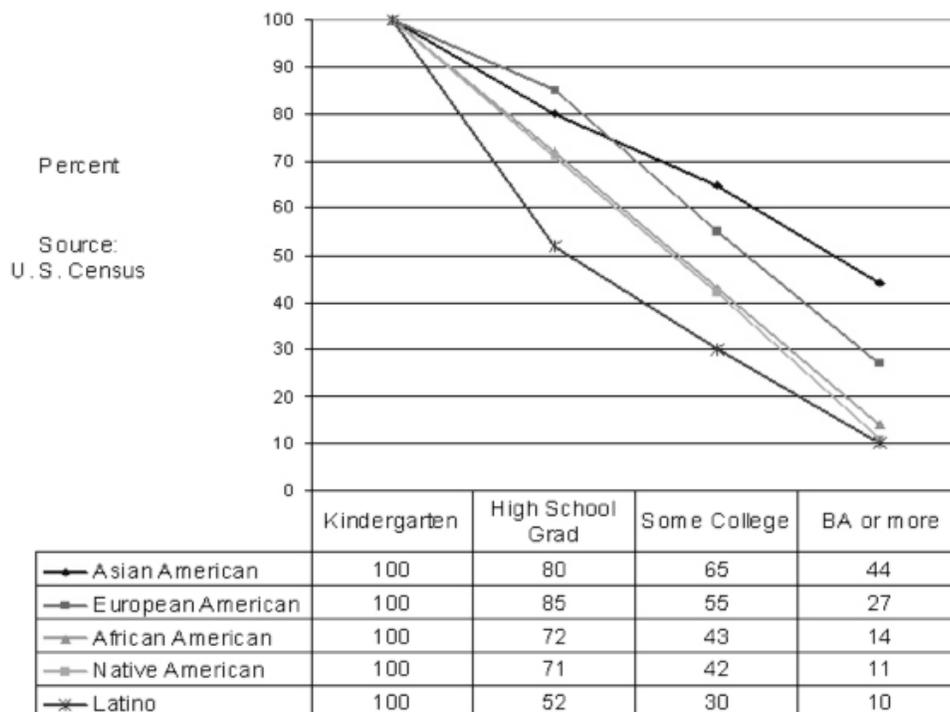


Figure 1: The academic pipeline problem: Persistence through school within five ethnic-racial groups. BA = Bachelor of Arts degree (Cooper et al., 2005, p. 408).

Provided that students of all backgrounds enter kindergarten (as a result of free and equal

access to public education) with 100% participation, the decline in the number of students from African American, Native American and Latino backgrounds is significantly more prevalent than their European American and Asian American counterparts. Even more troubling is the reality that, even among the ethnic group with the largest percentage of students completing four years of college, less than half of those who began their education followed the educational pipeline to its completion. Cooper et al. asserted that promise is held in applying a socio-cultural theoretical lens to the circumstances of learning found in the home and school environments of students traditionally underrepresented in higher education. They stated:

[Socio-cultural theory] builds on Vygotsky's (1978) proposition that families in all cultural communities develop goals, values, and skills that allow them to adapt to their environments and establish meaningful lives (e.g., Harkness, Super, & Kever, 1992; Rogoff, 2003; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Weisner, 2002). Children learn by participating with more expert members of their cultural communities in *activity settings* such as household chores, classroom lessons, homework, sports, or religious activities (Gallimore, Goldenberg, & Weisner, 1993; Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995). In each activity setting, researchers map the *personnel* (who participates), *goals and values* held in that setting (why the activity happens), the *scripts* (regular patterns of communicating), and the *participant structure* (social organization for the activity, such as whether children do homework alone or in groups) (p. 410-411).

In addition, they stated that, "Socio-cultural researchers describe how cultural discontinuities or "mismatches" can arise when conflicts or gaps between families' and schools' goals and values, activities, and styles of communicating impede students' development (Cazden, 1988)" (p. 411). The main tenets of socio-cultural theory claim that learning exists as a complex dialogical process by which the cognitive and socio-cultural spheres constantly interact with each other (Cooper et al.). Individuals navigate these interactions using history as a tool from one experience to the next. The proceeding sections build the case for studying the college-going culture of a middle school, using a

social constructionist lens and drawing from socio-cultural and social constructivist theories to lay the theoretical foundation for the research plan.

College-Going Culture Defined

Few researchers to date have examined the characteristics of college-going culture in middle schools. In order to fully operationalize the concept of the college-going culture for this study, it is important to begin with an exploration of organizational culture and the living organization. A conception of the school as a living organization is central to this study. Since organizational culture is central to the research design, an understanding of organizational and system dynamics is necessary to conceptualize the plan of the study. Hannay, Smeltzer Erb, and Ross (2001) cited DeGeus's 1997 study of living companies to develop a profile of a living organization. Hannay et al. (2001) outlined DeGeus's four characteristics of living organizations: sensitivity to the environment, cohesion and identity, tolerance and decentralization, and conservative financing (p. 273). Hannay et al. stated,

The first three characteristics are relevant to educational organizations, as they stress the importance of continual organizational learning, acceptance of divergent perspectives, incessant adaptation to contextual needs, and the means of collaborative interaction (p. 273).

Living organizations have distinct personalities. Carter McNamara (1997) states that the organization's culture is its personality:

Basically, organizational culture is the personality of the organization. Culture is comprised of the assumptions, values, norms and tangible signs (artifacts) of organization members and their behaviors. Members of an organization soon come to sense the particular culture of an organization. Culture is one of those terms that's difficult to express distinctly, but everyone knows it when they sense it... You can tell the culture of an organization by looking at the arrangement of furniture, what they brag about, what members wear, etc.—similar to what you can use to get a feeling about someone's personality (p.1).

Cooper and Liou used the phrase opportunity to learn to describe the "conditions or circumstances within schools and classrooms that promote learning for all students (2007,

p. 44).” Kirst, Venezia, and Antonio (2004) have developed a typology of school cultures to describe their proclivity toward equipping students with the social and cultural capital needed to navigate efficiently through the educational pipeline toward higher education. This typology differs from schools characterized as college preparatory because it encompasses the range of attitudes, beliefs, values and norms found in college-going school environments in addition to academic preparation. The typology is described by Kirst, Venezia and Antonio as follows:

In schools with a strong college-going culture, almost everyone and everything is geared toward college preparation and the expectation is that virtually all students will continue directly to college (McDonough, 1997). This culture fosters a high level of expectation for academic achievement that the conversations around postsecondary options focus more on which college students would attend, not whether they would attend college (p.11).

In schools that displayed a minimalist college preparatory culture, counseling efforts were reactive, as counselors responded to student or parent demands for counseling but did not proactively promote special advising or discussion programs... the schools that exhibited a minimalist college-going culture were less aggressive about changing the status quo than the schools that exhibited strong college-going cultures (p.17).

At schools with non-college-going cultures, teachers and administrators spoke of “minimal expectations,” “low teacher morale,” “student attendance problems,” “and low student performance.” These problems have forced these schools to worry more about maintaining discipline, keeping students in high school, and helping students to graduate from high school instead of also helping them to pursue postsecondary opportunities. They typically have a less wealthy, more urban, and more racially diverse student population (p.22).

Oakes (2003) described the college-going culture in terms of adults’ expectations of students, the subsequent actions they take to help students meet these expectations and the identities students develop as a result, stating:

In a college-going culture, teachers, administrators, parents, and students expect students to have all the experiences they need for high achievement and college preparation. Adults encourage students to exert the necessary effort and persistence throughout their entire educational career, and adults work diligently to eliminate school-sanctioned alternatives to hard work and high expectations. These

high expectations are coupled with specific interventions and information that emphasize to students that college preparation is a normal part of their childhood and youth. Students believe that college is for *them* and is not reserved for the exceptional few who triumph over adversity to rise above all others (p. 2).

Oakes stressed the importance of the college-going culture on the identities of students, specifically minority students who, “in particular, perform poorly when their teachers do not believe in their abilities” (p. 2). She emphasized the equity of opportunities to learn and high expectations for all students, irrespective of demographic background. Oakes’s model for the college-going culture underscored the development of students’ college-going identities and the resources provided by the institution and adults within it to assist in this development.

McClafferty and McDonough (2000) framed students’ college-going trajectories within the institutionalized normative expectations that were manifested in their interactions with adults. Cooke and Szumal (1993) described normative beliefs and shared behavioral expectations as follows:

Normative beliefs are cognitions held by an individual regarding others’ expectations for his behavior as a member of a particular group or organization... *Shared behavioral expectations* are those normative beliefs that are held in common by the members of a group or organization (Homans, 1950; Mills, 1967). Such expectations, standards, or “norms” specify the ways in which all members of an organization—or at least those in similar positions or organizational locations—are expected to approach their work and interact with others. These behavioral prescriptions (and proscriptions) generally are viewed as an important component of group or organizational “culture” given that they reflect and are shaped by the basic assumptions and values held in common by members... (p. 1299)

McClafferty and McDonough (2000) have defined organizational culture in terms of the shared beliefs and expectations that create patterns of behavior and interactions within an organization. McClafferty and McDonough (2000) asserted that the notion of college does not traditionally exist in the organizational culture of most public schools until the high school level; however, by this point most students have already made the decision whether

they will attend college or not. McClafferty and McDonough delineated the difference between culture and climate in describing the internal organizational environment.

McDonough (2000) stated:

Culture is deeply held, static, and enduring, while climate consists of the current, malleable perceptions and attitudes that are the contemporary manifestations of culture... If the culture is successfully transformed to the point that all students see college as an option and are able to make decisions about their futures in informed, reasonable ways, then the impact of the program will be long-term and much more profound (p. 7).

This study will seek to develop a thick description of the culture of YES College Prep schools regarding students' college-going trajectories.

Oakes, Rogers, Lipton and Morrell (2000) cited six conditions that were essential for students to gain admission to and succeed at UCLA. These conditions were: (a) college-going culture, (b) rigorous academic curriculum, (c) high quality teaching, (d) intensive academic and college-going support, (e) a multicultural, college-going identity, and (f) parent-community connections regarding college-going and academics (p. 7). Oakes et al., defined a college-going culture as one "where adults and peers see college-going as expected and attainable, and where they see the effort and persistence that preparation for college requires as normal (values, beliefs, and expectations)" (p. 6). This study integrated the definition created by Oakes et al. into the research design as a guiding principle in uncovering embedded characteristics found within the technical, political and cultural (normative) dimensions of the YES College prep model that describe the college-going culture of the organization.

Social Constructionism and Social Constructivism

This study approaches research from a social constructionist standpoint. To state this theory in the simplest possible way, Allen (2005) stated, "Social constructionists

maintain that humans construct the world through social practices” (p. 36). DeLamater and Hyde (1998) stated that social constructionists rejected the notion that “certain phenomena are natural, inevitable, universal & biologically determined” (p. 10). Social constructionism critiques views of reality as objective as well as notions of universal truths and suppositions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Berger and Luckmann also stated that, “Social order is a human product, or more precisely, an ongoing human production” (p. 52) The objective reality referenced by positivist and essentialist theories of knowledge, in the eyes of the social constructionist, is the consequence of institutionalizations.

Institutionalization of social practices, norms and forms of knowing results from actions and patterns of behavior that have risen to the forefront of a society’s collective knowledge base and ways of living (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Social constructionists attempted to uncover social constructs, or concepts or practices that form the perceived, institutionalized reality of the social group. A socially constructed reality is dynamic in nature, subject to change (Berger & Luckmann).

Social constructivism is concerned with the manner in which individuals gain meaning from social and cultural contexts. Vygotsky (1978) pioneered the social constructivist school of thought in the seminal work, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Regarding Vygotsky’s work, Wells (1999) stated,

Vygotskian theory suggests that the principal goal of education is to provide an environment in which students, however diverse their background, engage collaboratively in productive, purposeful activities which enable them to:

- take over the culture’s tool-kit of skills, knowledge and values so that they are able to participate effectively in the practices of the larger society
- develop the disposition to act creatively, responsibly and reflectively in achieving their own potential and constructing a personal identity (p. 335)

Social constructivism views the learner as actively involved in constructing knowledge in the effort to gain the instruments and resources of the culture that allow them to

successfully participate in larger society. Both social constructionism and social constructivism view reality as inter-subjective and co-created by members of the specified social group. While social constructivism concerns itself with the individual learner, social constructionism attempts to uncover the artifacts, or social constructs, that shape the social and cultural worlds of the specified group.

Socio-Cultural Theory and the College-Going Culture

Socio-cultural theorists assert that learning does not occur in a vacuum. Socio-cultural theory was developed against a predominance of psychological and cognitive theories of learning and human development (Thorne, 2005). Vygotsky (1978) stated,

Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of concepts. All the higher functions originate as actual relations between human individuals (p. 57).

Central to an individual's learning process is the context in which learning takes place. Context not only refers to the physical environment but also to the complex interactions between cultural, social and interpersonal spheres that produce norms, beliefs, values and patterns (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev & Miller, 2003). Knight (2002) cites McDonough (1997), who noted that students underwent a continual process of "making meaning of and negotiating the multiple dimensions of their identities and K-16 college going policies and practices in their multiple worlds of school, work, peers, extracurricular activities, and family." (p. 2) The socio-cultural dynamic is a fundamental facet of students' negotiation of the multiple interacting spheres they encounter as they navigate through the educational pipeline. While socio-cultural theories have generally focused upon the individual's interaction within the context of learning, this study drew upon socio-cultural theories to examine an organizational culture that creates the context within which students may

nurture their college-going identities.

Social and cultural theories provide substance in understanding the social and cultural contexts of learning. Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) cite Coleman (1988) and Lin (2001). They state, “Social capital is an asset, embedded in social relations, which can be used to improve one’s life outcomes. It includes *norms* and *information channels*, available through relationships with others, referred to as *social networks*.” (p. 101) Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.” (p. 248) Social capital refers to resources gathered through networks of relationships and interactions that enable a person to gain access to a higher quality of life and opportunities to progress to higher levels of social status (Bourdieu). In this sense, education itself is a form of social capital. However, as educational opportunities and experiences are not uniformly and equitably distributed across schools, access to social capital also varies.

Cultural capital is defined as the forms of knowledge, skills, and educational experiences that provide access to higher social status (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital is classified in three subtypes: the embodied state, the objectified state and the institutionalized state (Bourdieu). The embodied state is the existence of resources within the individual, in the form of education, experiences, knowledge, and other inherited and acquired properties. Elements of the embodied state are transmitted through socialization, cultural traditions and language (Bourdieu). Bourdieu’s chief concern with cultural capital was the manner in which transmission and accumulation have created patterns and structures of inequality (Reay, 2004). Bourdieu separated individual agency from educational success and defined it according to the amount of cultural capital students

inherit (Reay, 2004). Bourdieu classified cultural capital as “subtle modalities in the relationship to culture and language.” (1977, p. 82) These modalities encompass a variety of cultural elements including formal language, patterns of interactions and behaviors, preferences and orientations that create class differences (Reay; Bourdieu).

Pagett (2006) describe the process by which students navigated through the socio-cultural environments of school and home during which they underwent a continual constructing and reconstructing of their identities as “code switching.” (p137) In describing South African students’ reluctance to use their home language at school, Pagett (2006) stated:

Their embodied capital—linguistic practice—is not reflected in the school’s (institutional) capital, if that is defined as ‘academic qualifications and awards’ (Carrington and Luke, 1997, p. 102). Standard Assessment Tasks, the results of which may have significant political capital for the school, are administered in English and do not reflect the variety of linguistic capital multilingual learners may have. English is valued and rewarded institutionally and socially in school contexts and the children seem to have aligned themselves with this. Their use of English allows them to build social capital, defined by Carrington and Luke as “access to cultural and subcultural institutions, social relations and practices” (p. 102), which, as immigrants without the majority language and culture, may be crucial to their chances of success (p. 143).

Hence, the dimensions of students’ identity development becomes more clear as they navigate through the valued forms of cultural and social capital found in the school and those resources found in the home. If one were to follow cultural and social capital theories in their true philosophical forms, this study would examine the misalignment between students’ and families’ resources and those valued forms of social and cultural capital needed to move forward in the educational continuum. However, this lies beyond the scope of this particular study. This study sought to uncover identifiable characteristics of the organizational culture of an institution that assist students in amassing social and cultural capital in their college-going quests.

Technical, Political, and Cultural (Normative) Dimensions of School Culture

Knight (2003) applied a social constructivist lens to her analysis of Black and Latino students' perceptions and interpretations of their college-going realities. She states that these students "are making meaning of and negotiating the many facets of their identities and the K-16 college policies and practices in their multiple worlds of school, work, peers, extracurricular activities, and family." (p. 532) Knight's research described how students navigate through the technical, political and cultural dimensions of their educational worlds. Knight also included data regarding "technical, political and cultural dimensions of institutional and interpersonal structures are essential [in creating a college-going culture so that students can] make well-informed decisions to successfully navigate college-going processes." (p. 541) Knight drew from Oakes, Quartz, Ryan and Lipton's (2000) work in her analysis. In their research methodology, (described in *Becoming Good American Schools: The Struggle for Civic Virtue in Education Reform*) the authors applied a constructivist paradigm in their conceptual framework. In their study of middle school education at the state level, the authors analyzed the three "dimensions of change" to "describe the strategies that widely contrasting states use to build middle-grade education." (p. 329) Oakes et al. illustrated their framework of the dimensions of change in figure 2.

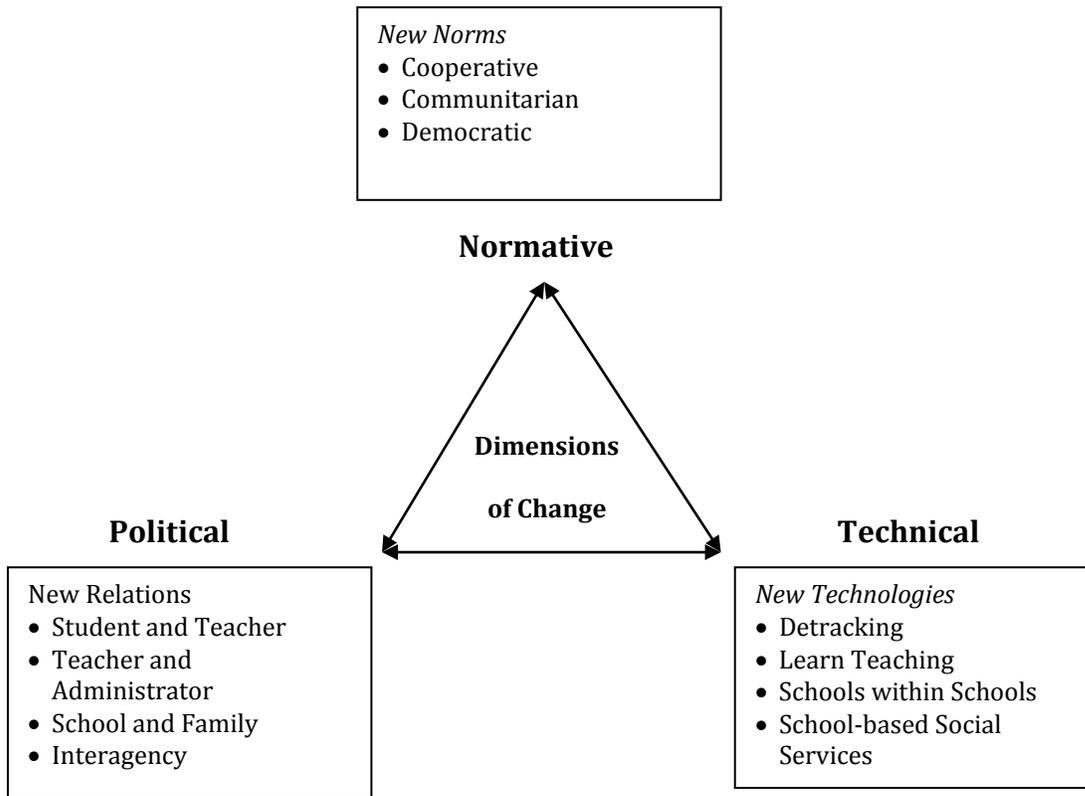


Figure 2 Oakes et al. (p. 331).

Oakes et al. emphasized the “interconnectedness of norms and politics with the technical aspects of reform,” emphasizing “deeply entrenched beliefs, values, relationships, and power dynamics that characterize the cultures of most schools” (p. 331).

Oakes et al. (1993) expanded on this rudimentary framework in *Creating Middle Schools: Technical, Normative and Political Considerations*. Oakes et al. (1993) described the three perspectives that served as a “lens that magnifies one particular practice while temporarily filtering out the others” (p. 463). They describe the *technical* perspective as the “structures (e.g. arrangement of space, time, people and materials), strategies (e.g. curricular, pedagogical, governance), and knowledge (e.g., adolescent development, teacher training) that are central to achieving the reform’s goals” (p. 464). They referred to the

normative perspective as those norms, which constituted the moral foundation. Oakes et al. (1993) asked the following questions when examining the political perspective

Who has the power to grant or limit changes? What changes? Whose need, whose turf, whose resources are likely to be enhanced or threatened? What interactions among those who hold decision-making authority are relevant, and how can these interactions be altered or changed? (p. 472)

It can be concluded that the political perspective has to do with the distribution of power and resources in the organization.

Oakes (1992) further elucidated the three perspectives in *Can Tracking Research Inform Practice? Technical, Normative and Political Considerations*. Oakes described the technical dimension as a dimension encompassing the “organizational, curricular, and pedagogical strategies required to provide diverse groups of students with access to a common body of knowledge” (p. 17). Oakes described the normative dimension in terms of the norms that “consciously or unconsciously—drive the day-to-day educational practices and their attendant inequalities” (p.18) and are grounded in institutional beliefs and values (p. 19) . Oakes’ description of the political dimension is concerned with the competing interests of various constituents and the redistribution of power.

An analysis of the technical, cultural (normative) and political dimensions of institutions can be found in Tichy’s (1983) *Managing Strategic Change: Technical, Political and Cultural Dynamics*. Tichy’s work focused on organizational management, highlighting the relevance of the three dimensions of change to any organizational model. The technical change strategies he proposes “alter the information-processing capacity of the organization” (p. 203). Tichy described the political dimension in terms of degrees of political uncertainty. Political uncertainty, Tichy contended, was a “degree of stability and predictability with regard to the bargaining and exchange relationships among interest

groups over the allocation of resources, power, prestige, etc.” (p. 231) Finally, Tichy defined the cultural dimension in terms of cultural congruence, in which:

1. a majority of the active organizational members should accept the beliefs, endorse the values, and abide by the norms; and
2. individual members should be made aware that the beliefs, values, and norms have collective support (p. 134).

Oesterrich (2000) provided an additional perspective on the technical, cultural and political domains of education. She described the technical components of pre-college programs as follows:

The technical components of pre-college programs cover the structures, strategies, and knowledge necessary to prepare students for admission, enrollment, and graduation from college (p. 2).

She cited Jun and Tierney (1999) and Knight et al. (2000) in describing the cultural domain of pre-college programs:

Students' cultural beliefs and norms must be integrated into program curriculum, teaching strategies, and educational resources, and they must be built upon in a positive manner (p. 4).

She cited Knight and Oesterreich (2002) and Oakes et al. (1993) to describe the political domain of pre-college programs:

The complexities inherent in implementing effective pre-college programs are augmented by both internal and external politics. Program policies and practices must be sensitive to the agendas and concerns of the government and private agencies that fund, license, and/or host them. They must also respond to the sometimes conflicting goals and priorities of individuals with a stake in them: administrators and teachers, community members, parents, and the students themselves (p. 5).

Anderson's (1996) definition of the technical, political and cultural dimensions of education hold the most significance for this study, and these definitions will provide structure through which the research plan is framed. Anderson applied a constructivist theoretical lens to a study of the reform efforts of nine schools. Johnson, citing Anderson's

1996 study, provided a description of Anderson's explanation of the three areas of analysis as follows:

According to Anderson, *technical* areas for analysis were related to 'professional knowledge and skills, and the means by which they are acquired' (p. 38). *Political* areas for analysis were 'matters of authority, power and influence, including the negotiation and resolution of conflicts and moral issues of justice and fairness' (p. 38). *Cultural* areas for analysis were described as, 'values, beliefs and school norms, both in terms of a general ethos and competing perspectives that contend with each other (2007, p. 173).

This study defines the three areas of analysis as follows:

Technical dimension—knowledge, skills, structures and systems of support that define the college-going environment of the institution.

Political dimension—policies, governance systems, discourses and places/spaces where power is situated that frame the context through which a college-going culture is built, and the barriers or pathways to fostering students' college-going behaviors that are formed as a result.

Cultural (normative) dimension—organizational norms, patterns of behavior, beliefs, and cultural artifacts that have become institutionalized, typifying the collective reality relating to the college-going trajectories of students.

Synopsis

In summation, the history of middle school education in the United States has been enveloped in discourses of efficiency and excellence while struggling to maintain legitimacy as an institutional structure in the K-12 educational process. Middle-level education, while initially constructed as a response to issues of overcrowding and as a problem-solving tool in the education of immigrant and minority students, has grappled to develop a unique and comprehensive identity and culture of its own, grounded in developmental and socio-cultural theories of learning. However, research has indicated that the points of transition found in middle and junior high schools present significant barriers to the smooth transition of students through the educational pipeline, creating the first leak, or place where students begin to fall out of the educational process.

Analyzing the college-going culture in a middle school environment requires an examination of the social and cultural constructs that have become institutionalized into the collective consciousness of the members of the school environment. Further, an investigation of the socio-cultural and organizational dynamics, the opportunities for students to gain social and cultural capital and the pliability of the school as a living organization viewed through the technical, political and cultural (normative) dimensions provide a perspective through which further research and policy may be filtered in understanding the components necessary in developing a college-going culture in middle schools.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides an overview of the qualitative research design and theoretical framework for this study. The purpose of this study was to uncover identifiable characteristics found within the technical, cultural (normative) and political dimensions of the YES College Prep middle school model that describe the college-going culture of the organization.

Qualitative Research, Ethnography and Grounded Theory

The qualitative paradigm is an appropriate research approach in a study examining organizational culture. Qualitative research follows several schools of thought with distinct ontological, epistemological and axiological orientations (such as postmodernism, critical theory, and postpositivism). This study applied a social constructionist lens to the research, analysis and theory development, while the ethnographic approach will incorporate socio-cultural theoretical approaches to research.

In qualitative research, “the activities of collecting and analyzing data, developing and modifying theory, elaborating or refocusing research questions, and identifying and addressing validity threats are usually all going on simultaneously, each influencing all of the others (Maxwell, 2005, p. 2).” The research becomes necessarily reflexive in nature, the role of the researcher is interactive with the research, and his or her assumptions, beliefs, and views are incorporated within the context of the study (Finlay & Gough, 2003). This contrasts with positivist perspectives, in which the researcher is removed from the research, and the quest for objectivity and truth based on empirical facts and observation surround the research design (Crotty, 1998).

This study utilized ethnography and grounded theory as principal methodologies.

Genzuk (2003) described traditional anthropological and sociological ethnography as follows:

Ethnographic methods are a means of tapping local points of view, households and community "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990), a means of identifying significant categories of human experience up close and personal. Ethnography enhances and widens top down views and enriches the inquiry process, taps both bottom-up insights and perspectives of powerful policy-makers "at the top," and generates new analytic insights by engaging in interactive, team exploration of often subtle arenas of human difference and similarity. Through such findings ethnographers may inform others of their findings with an attempt to derive, for example, policy decisions or instructional innovations from such an analysis (p. 2).

Grounded theory is situated upon the premise that the researcher does not initiate a research project with a preconceived theory; on the contrary, the researcher seeks to develop theory through the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). They stated, "Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action" (p. 12). Grounded theory entails an ongoing process of collecting data, analyzing (coding) the data, developing theories, and using these theories to guide further data collection (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006). The use of grounded theory in this research provided a foundation for future research on socio-cultural dynamics of middle school transitions in the education pipeline.

The fundamental question asked in using grounded theory was, "What theory emerges from systematic comparative analysis and is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed (Patton, 2002, p. 125)?" A key component of grounded theory as a form of methodology is coding. The purposes of coding procedures, according to Strauss and Corbin (1998), were:

1. Build rather than test theory.
2. Provide researchers with analytic tools for handling masses of raw data.
3. Help analysts to consider alternative meanings of phenomena.

4. Be systematic and creative simultaneously.
5. Identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory (p. 13)

In grounded theory approaches, coding systems appear through themes emerging in the data. Coding schemes were developed according to the system described in the data sources subsection.

Research Setting

History. Chris Barbic, founder of YES College Prep, stated, “You hear a lot that not everyone's cut out for college. But for a lot of the kids we serve here, those decisions get made for them before they even get to college, or even high school” (Edutopia, 2009a, para. 2). The YES College Preparatory School System was founded in 1998 by Barbic, then a sixth-grade teacher-intern through the Teach for America Corps at a Houston area elementary school. Barbic began to experience frustration at the decline of his students’ performance when they entered middle schools. He founded Project YES at Rusk Elementary School, in the Houston ISD, in order to “address the high rates of illiteracy, truancy and juvenile crime consuming students in [Houston’s] East End (YES Prep, 2010, para. 2).” The program began with a group of 58 students before the parents and staff made the decision to expand the program to include high school and apply for an open-enrollment charter from the Texas Education Agency. Beginning as a small network of pre-fabricated modular classrooms, YES earned the distinguished honor of the highest performing high school in the state after only two years of operation (YES Prep, 2009). Since the first campus found a permanent home in Southeast Houston in 2001, YES has expanded to seven campuses, strategically placed in areas where high concentrations of students from low-income families reside, with an administrative office location housed separately. To date, the 3,500 students served in grades 6–12 by YES Public Schools have the benefit of a small

school district built over time and grounded in the same principles and ideals that existed when the first program of 58 students began (YES Prep, 2009).

To date, the YES Public School System consists of seven campuses in each geographic quadrant of Houston. On their website, YES listed the following statistics:

- 90% of YES students are first generation college-bound
- 80% of YES students are economically disadvantaged
- 95% of YES students are Hispanic or African American
- Most students enter YES at least one grade level behind in Math and English (YES Prep, 2009)

The stated mission of YES Prep public schools follows:

YES Prep Public Schools exists to increase the number of low-income Houstonians who graduate from a four-year college prepared to compete in the global marketplace and committed to improving disadvantaged communities (YES Prep, 2010, para. 1).

In addition, YES Prep states that it is the first public school in the nation to combine 6th through 12th grades in one school. The core values of the institution were listed as:

- Achieve excellent results through continuous improvement
- Attract and develop high-caliber people as the source of our strength
- Build and maintain positive relationships
- Create opportunities that would otherwise not exist
- Achieve social justice (YES Prep, 2009)

In addition, YES iterated its standards for success as:

- Parents, students and teachers sign a contract that states they will do *Whatever It Takes* to succeed at YES Prep
- "YES" stands for Youth Engaged in Service and students dedicate one Saturday each month to community service projects
- Teachers have school-sponsored cell phones for students to contact them during the evenings and weekends with questions
- YES mandates that students participate in longer school days, college research trips, summer school and summer opportunities (YES Prep, 2010)

In addition, each graduating senior is required to gain admittance into a four-year college or university to earn his or her high school diploma, and each graduate must apply to at least

three post-secondary schools: an out-of-state school, an in-state (Texas) school, and a Houston area school (DuBois, 2008).

YES Prep Campus A and YES Prep Campus B. The YES Prep motto is “Whatever it Takes,” and at the original campus, YES Campus B, 100% of graduates have entered college, and 90% of these students are first-generation college-goers (YES Prep, 2010). YES Prep Campus B is comprised of 784 students in grades 6–12. In 2009, the campus earned an Exemplary rating by the Texas Education Agency (YES Prep, 2010). Located in a community in South Houston, in 2009, YES College Prep Campus B was ranked 68 out of the nation’s 100 best high schools, earning U.S. News and World Report’s Gold Medal designation (U.S. News and World Report, 2009). The community surrounding YES Prep Campus B was comprised mainly of moderately educated families, with the majority of its residents having attained some level of education beyond high school, but few holding postgraduate degrees¹.

YES Prep Campus A is comprised of 761 students in grades 6–12. In 2009, this campus also earned an Exemplary rating by the Texas Education Agency (YES Prep, 2010). YES Campus A is located in a community in North Houston. While 91% of students in this community are from minority (African American and Latino) backgrounds, 99% of students at YES Campus A are from minority backgrounds, and 80% of students at YES Campus A were classified as economically disadvantaged (TEA, 2010).

Participants

As stated previously, this study sought to uncover the characteristics that describe the college-going culture at YES Prep. Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Participants in the study included the following groups:

¹ Community data gathered from <http://www.city-data.com>.

Administrative. During phase one of the study, key informant interviews were conducted with two system-level administrators, Greta Holcombe and Charlie Scott. Greta oversees academics and human resources for the YES Prep system, while Charlie manages college planning. Interviews with Troy Carter, a school administrator and Scott Johnson, a college counselor, were conducted during phase two.

Instructional. Key informant interviews and field notes from daily classroom visits to the Campus A and Campus B built the foundation for interviews with teachers and academic division heads. Two teachers were interviewed during phase 2 of the study, Jessica Katz and Lisa Harris. Notes from participant observation of professional development meetings among instructional and support staff assist in triangulation of data.

Data Sources

Phase 1 sought to create an overall description of the college-going culture at YES Prep. An initial content analysis was conducted to develop an initial coding scheme. Web-based articles, including a special report on YES Prep conducted by the George Lucas foundation, as well as documents developed by the YES organization were analyzed and coded to uncover broad categories and themes to guide inquiry during phase 2.

Phase 2 included ethnographic field notes from daily school visits, faculty meetings, school events, school activities and classrooms. Field notes were coded and analyzed throughout the course of the study in a manner that built on each successive observation in an effort to develop grounded theory. This method was described by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). They stated:

By making frequent comparisons across the data, the researcher can develop, modify, and extend theoretical propositions so that they fit the data. At the actual working level, the researcher begins by coding data in close, systematic ways so that he can generate analytic categories. He further elaborates, extends and integrates these categories by writing theoretical memos, (p. 143).

A coding system was established early in the data collection process in order to build upon a theoretical foundation in successive field notes. The aim of theory-building through ethnographic note-taking was to glean the attitudes, beliefs and values inherent in discourse and communication in order to deconstruct the college-going culture of the institution.

Another source of data included individual interviews with key informants (two system-level administrators). In addition, interviews with members of the teaching and administrative staff were conducted in phase 2 and 3, respectively. Six additional interviews, excluding key informant interviews, were conducted throughout the course of the study.

Data Collection

The data collection process in this study was designed around the central goal of uncovering characteristics found within the technical, political and cultural (normative) domains that typify the culture of YES Prep middle schools. McDonough's (2009) nine elements of an effective college-going culture provided a valuable background for examining the technical, cultural and political dynamics of the school. Table 1 provides a description of the research questions as they will frame each phase of the study.

Table 1

A description of the research questions as they frame each phase of the study.

Domain	Element of Study	Phase I – Initial Description of Organizational Culture and Design	Phase II – Description of Embedded Characteristics in Organizational Culture and Framework	Phase III – Description of Replicable Characteristics for Mainstream Schools
Cultural Political	College Talk	How are students' postsecondary aspirations discussed among adult members of the organization?	What organizational norms and beliefs can be gleaned through discourse on postsecondary aspirations? How are power relationships handled by adults?	What principles and frameworks for organizational design and professional development can be ascertained?
Cultural Political	Clear Expectations	What are adults' expectations of students' lives after high school?	What norms and practices exist that validate these expectations?	What policies, practices or organizational characteristics authenticate these expectations?
Technical	Information and Resources	What structures exist for students to access information on postsecondary education?	How can these structures for support for students be typified? *	Which structures of support can be replicated in mainstream public schools?
Cultural Political	Comprehensive Counseling	How are students' needs and barriers to postsecondary access handled by adults in the school?	What is the overall attitude of adults in the school toward individual students' needs in the area of postsecondary access?	What standards of practice for addressing students' individual needs can be ascertained?
Technical	Testing and Curriculum	How is testing addressed as a part of students' long-term academic trajectories? What systems of academic support are available for students?	What attitudes and beliefs are found regarding testing and academic achievement of students?	What characteristics can be found in the culture of the organization that differ from those found in mainstream schools regarding testing and curriculum?

Table 1 continued.

Cultural Political	Faculty Involvement	How is postsecondary access discussed and handled by faculty?	What major attitudes and beliefs regarding postsecondary access are present among adults in the institution?	What standards of practice for pedagogy can be ascertained?
Technical	College Partnerships	What types of postsecondary partnerships are found?	How does the institution regard its relationships with postsecondary institutions?	What models of communication and articulation can be ascertained?
Cultural Political	Articulation	What patterns of articulation between elementary, middle and high school centering on postsecondary access can be found?	What are the institutional norms and expectations regarding vertical articulation?	What aspects of articulation can be generalized to mainstream schools?

In addition to the content analysis, data were collected from three sources to ensure triangulation: participant observation (in the school environment, classrooms, meetings, and school-wide events), key informant interviews, and individual interviews of selected instructional and administrative staff.

A coding system was developed in order to uncover themes that created a portrait of YES College Prep according to Kirst, Venezia and Antonio's (2004) typology of *college-going cultures*. This coding scheme was modified and refined throughout the data collection process.

The data collection process followed the timetable shown on Table 2.

Table 2

Data collection process timetable.

Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gather data on school culture through visits and document review and analysis. 2. Conduct initial key informant interviews. 3. Begin participant observations. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue ethnographic observations in classroom settings and professional development meetings. 2. Conduct first set of interviews from random sample. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct second set of interviews from random sample. 2. Finalize ethnographic observations and analyze field notes to develop a final theoretical model. 3. Analyze data using established coding scheme and theoretical model.

The study took place over the course of one school year. During the first semester, contact was made with the CEO and system-level administrators to familiarize individuals within the organization with the research design and to establish contacts at the campus level. The bulk of data used in this study (in the form of interviews and participant observations) was collected during the spring semester. Preliminary observations at several YES Prep campuses led to the decision to focus exclusively upon the two campuses described in this study. The following table illustrates the timeline of participant observation data collection.

Table 3.

Timeline of ethnographic observations

Fall Semester	Spring Semester
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Established contact with system-level administrators in September. 2. Laid groundwork for research plan. 3. Established contacts at campus level. 4. Conducted preliminary observations at various YES campuses. 5. Decision was made to focus research on two YES Prep campuses on a going-forward basis. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ethnographic observations of school surroundings, classrooms and professional development meetings began at two school sites. 2. Observations were conducted weekly. 3. Length of time of observations ranged from 1 hour class periods to extended periods during the school day. 4. Observations concluded in May.

Data Analysis and Ethical Considerations

Three forms of qualitative research are incorporated in this study to ensure triangulation of data: content analysis of written documents, ethnographic field notes, and interviews.

In the use of grounded theory, analysis is ongoing throughout the data collection process. The open coding process occurred in the beginning stages of research in order to develop a few broad categories and themes in order to connect new ideas and themes that emerged (Ezzy: 2002). Further stages include axial coding and theoretical coding, which involves the grouping of data around large categories or major themes that have emerged throughout the study and exist in the latter stages of research (Ezzy: 2002; Strauss & Corbin: 1998; Glaser: 1978).

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The research plan followed a three phase timeline with the goal of answering the following question: How can the college-going culture of the YES Prep Middle School System be described, and what characteristics can be useful for building college-going cultures in mainstream schools? The first phase of research sought to provide an initial description of the research setting with inquiry guided by the question: What technical, normative and political characteristics of the YES College Prep model can be described as attributes of a college-going culture?

Phase 1: Initial Description of the Research Setting

Content analysis. The initial step in gathering data during phase 1 was to conduct a content analysis of literature (web and print articles) and school-developed documents centered on YES Prep Public Schools. Data was gathered from Edutopia, a web-based clearinghouse of educational reform information developed by the George Lucas Foundation (Edutopia, 2009), web and print articles, and school-developed documents. Data was analyzed using NVivo 9, a qualitative research software program, and an initial coding scheme was developed.

The initial analysis of content from articles, school-based documents and other relevant literature yielded 45 themes, which were then analyzed according to each domain: technical, normative/cultural and political. As indicated in Appendix A, parent categories were created under each domain, resulting in the following designations:

- Technical: College-Preparatory Teaching and Learning Environment, Systems and Structures for Support
- Normative and Cultural: Core Values, Discourses
- Political: Systems, Barriers

In the technical domain, two parent categories emerged from the literature, College-Preparatory Teaching and Learning and Systems and Structures for Support. The College-Preparatory Teaching and Learning category was developed as a classification of data that clustered around the themes of curriculum, habits of mind, and pedagogy. As evidenced in Appendix A, references to curriculum included themes such as rigor, accelerated work, an emphasis on core knowledge and skills, critical thinking and learning, excellence, and parallels to the professional world beyond college. For instance, in the Edutopia selections, rigor was a concept that was often spoken of (Edutopia, 2009a). According to a 2009 Edutopia report:

Yes Prep North Central is all about preparing kids to succeed in college, and when it comes to academic work, that means one thing: rigor.

At the same time, the school has achieved the highest level of Advanced Placement test participation in Houston by requiring that every student take at least one AP course and test before graduation.

So the lessons and assessments that teachers invent are designed to be rigorous and challenging, and to give students much of the responsibility for their own learning (para. 1).

The Habits of Mind category spoke to the types of college-going cognitive strategies found in the YES Public School program as referenced in the literature. Under this sub-category, such themes as the “Whatever It Takes” slogan, mutual support (symbiosis), planning and goal-setting, long-term view (professional perspective), focus and determination, perfectionism, and hard work emerged. As shown in Appendix B, examples of references to the theme of “Whatever it Takes” can be found in the following passage found in the Edutopia web article (Edutopia, 2009i):

...and I will do *WHATEVER IT TAKES* for my fellow students and me to learn. We will always help our child in the best way we know how, and we will do *WHATEVER IT TAKES* for my fellow students and me to learn (Commitment to College Completion, Appendix B).

The category of Pedagogy referenced aspects of teaching and teaching quality emphasized throughout the literature. Under this category, the themes of excellence and quality, rigor, support, planning and goal-setting, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and learning, and expertise emerged. Finally, the parent category, systems or structures for support categorized data that spoke to structures found in the YES Public School system that served to support the work and pursuits of students. Under the Systems or Structures for Support parent category, shared responsibility, relationships and opportunities to learn emerged as sub-categories. Shared responsibility refers to the sense of responsibility shared among and between teachers and students in the quest for success and the effort to get the job done on a day-to-day basis. Relationships refers to mentions in the text about the necessity of relationships between and among students and adults in the school. Opportunities to Learn contained three sub-categories: personalization, longer time spent learning, and experience-based learning.

Under the normative and cultural domain, two parent categories were found: Core Values and Discourses. Core Values describes texts that reference the principles at the heart of the organization and that drive the mission of the organization. The categories found under the Core Values parent category were extracted from the YES Prep Core Principles. They were:

- Achieve excellent results through continuous improvement
- Attract and develop high-caliber people as the source of our strength
- Build positive relationships
- Create opportunities to learn that would otherwise not exist
- Achieve social justice (YES Prep, 2010, para. 5)

The theme of commitment was added, as various other texts referenced commitment as a core operating principle.

The Discourses category describes themes related to doctrine and predominant ideological beliefs referenced in the text. Lessa (2006) cites Foucault's 1997 definition of discourses as "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak." (p. 285) Under the Discourses parent category were themes of equity, "Whatever it Takes," passion, drive, motivation, personal and shared responsibility, inspiration, and indoctrination and unified mission. As stated in the Edutopia (2009b) report, "The passion and determination among the adults infects the students." (para. 1)

In the political domain, the parent categories of Systems and Barriers were developed to describe, (a) references to the orientation of YES Prep administrative and pedagogical systems, and (b) references to barriers in accomplishing the goals of the organization. Under the Systems parent category, the following categories were developed: teacher-centered, resources, public perception, educational pipeline articulation, and discipline. Various references to the organization's orientation toward teachers could be found in the literature. The founder of the YES Prep System, Barbic, cited in the Edutopia (2009c) article stated:

YES was founded by teachers. I'm a teacher. We're all teachers. And we wanted to create an organization that was going to be a good place for teachers to work, where teachers can have a voice in how the school is run, where every decision was made in the interest of what's going to be great for kids and teachers (para. 6).

The literature made reference to a team-based orientation and a sense of shared leadership and responsibility among teachers and leaders.

The category of Resources pointed to the availability of funding as well as the notion of what is valuable and of greatest importance to the organization. Under this category fell the subcategories of human talent and minimalism to describe the emphasis on humans as

the most valuable resource and the concept of less is more in budgeting and fiscal planning. The category of Public Perception was found in a few statements regarding planning for future growth. The Educational Pipeline Articulation category describes references to enabling student success from sixth grade through postsecondary education. The Discipline category fell under the Systems parent category because of its parallel orientation toward mutual responsibility and emphasis on relationships. For instance, one passage of the Commitment to College Completion read, “I will always behave in a way that protects the safety, interest, and rights of all individuals in the classroom. This also means that I will always listen to my YES Prep teammates and respect everyone in the YES Prep family (Commitment to College Completion, Appendix A, p. 1).”

Finally, the Barriers parent category described those barriers to organizational growth and progress iterated in the literature. Three themes were found in this category: teacher burnout, funding for extracurricular activities, and facility funding. Teacher burnout was described in the following excerpt from the Edutopia (2009d) article:

But what happens when some in the family, teachers especially, start to run out of gas? How is this level of effort sustainable? At 7:30 p.m. on a recent evening at his office, Reed said, ‘Inspiration only lasts so long when you don't see your spouse and kids more than an hour a day (para. 12).’

Funding for extracurricular activities was expressed as a barrier in the literature solely in the sense that it delineated a threshold of inequity between students at YES and their wealthier counterparts at other schools. The lack of funding for facilities, while not central in budget prioritizing, was referenced as a barrier as well. As teachers and students were highest priority in resource allocation, facility funding was found to be minimal (Edutopia, 2009c).

Key informant interviews. Following the content analysis, two key informant interviews were conducted in order to gather background information on the organization from key individuals possessing a broad perspective of the organization and whose influence impacts the daily work of adults and students within the system. Two individuals were selected as key informants, both individuals holding top-level leadership positions within the YES Prep system. These individuals were selected because their roles fell directly into the scope of the inquiry of this research project. Both key informants were given pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality. Greta Holcombe's role involved oversight and supervision of academic affairs and human resources. Charlie Scott's role involved supervision of college readiness activities for the YES Prep system.

During the interview with the director of college readiness, I became aware of a study conducted by the Bridgespan group that provided further data useful in phase 1 (Newstead & Howard, 2006). This data was added to data collected from the two interviews to add a layer of substance and perspective to the research. The coding scheme developed from the content analysis was used as a device for coding the key informant interviews and data from the Bridgespan study. Terminology used to develop parent categories and subcategories in the content analysis guided the coding scheme for key informant interviews. Table 3 illustrates the coding scheme developed in analyzing the key informant interviews with added information from the Bridgespan study.

Table 4.

Coding Scheme Developed from Interview Analysis with Additional Questions for Phase 2

Technical	Normative and Cultural (Discourses)	Political
<p><u>College-Preparatory Teaching and Learning Environment</u> Teaching Excellence Grade Level Meetings High Standards</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guardrails • District Assessment • AP Standards <p>Opportunities to Learn Rigor (Pedagogy and Curriculum)</p> <p><u>Systems</u> Professional Development College Counseling Model Database/Information Access Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher/Shared • “Non-Administrative” • Support Systems <p>Selective Hiring Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral Interview Traits (Teachers) 	<p><u>Core Values</u> Equity Core Principles/Thinks and Acts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Teaching • Continuous Improvement/Reflection • Building Relationships • Exposure • Community Change <p>(Opportunities to Learn) Mutual Respect/Responsibility High Standards/Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers • Students <p>Student-Centeredness Indoctrination Time with Students</p>	<p><u>Systems</u> Resource Allocation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People-Centered • Programming <p>Systems and Policies (People-Centered)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Excellence Program <p>Streamlining</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcoming Student Barriers • Support Systems for Long-Range Planning • 6-16 Perspective <p>Discipline Division of Labor</p> <p><u>Barriers</u> Communication</p>
Questions for Phase 2		
<p>How does the institution ensure that students do not fall through the cracks?</p>	<p>How do the dominant discourses and philosophies shape day-to-day activities of individuals within the organization?</p>	<p>What systems of power are evident that students must navigate through day to day?</p>

The purpose of phase 1 of the study was to uncover those attributes in the organization that described the college-going culture. The content analysis provided a broad perspective of organizational characteristics that have been described by individuals within the organization as well as outside observers. The purpose of the key informant interviews was to hone in on specific characteristics described by influential and informed

individuals in order to better capture the features that described the college going culture. Following the technical, normative and political model, data was coded for recurrent or dominant themes that emerged. Using parent categories designated in the content analysis, recurring or dominant themes were coded accordingly.

Combining data from the content analysis with key informant interviews, hierarchical relationships emerged among dominant themes. The theme that emerged as most recurrent and dominant in all three domains was that of teachers. As Charlie Scott stated in his interview, “We well know that the single greatest factor that will change the trajectory of a child’s life, and especially in low-income communities, is an effective teacher.” The focus upon teachers was noted as central to all planning and decision-making, and governance systems were said to be carried out with teachers as active and shared leaders. The following quote provides evidence to the centrality of teachers in the technical, normative/cultural, and political domains:

‘YES was founded by teachers. I’m a teacher. We’re all teachers. And we wanted to create an organization that was going to be a good place for teachers to work, where teachers can have a voice in how the school is run, where every decision was made in the interest of what’s going to be great for kids and teachers (Edutopia, 2009b, para. 6).’

In addition, the following quote was taken from Edutopia’s report (2009d):

Administrators at Houston’s YES Prep Campus A organize around a clear educational strategy -- invest in teachers, and help them to have strong relationships with their students. Budget and structure are dedicated to the priorities of teacher quality and the enrichment of student-teacher relationships; they are the motivating principles of management at YES (para. 1).

These statements underscore the role and centrality of teachers in the administrative domain of school life:

Forgoing traditional notions of hierarchy, staff members rely on each other for ideas and constructive criticism. They even stage an annual “observation challenge,” in which teachers pop into each other’s classrooms to observe and offer feedback.

Everyone on staff is working toward one thing -- ever-better teaching -- and no one is working alone (Edutopia, 2009b, para. 3).

The secret to YES Prep's success is no secret: It's people, people, people (Edutopia, 2009b, para. 1).

'It would be nice if the kids could have all the things a St. John's kid has, but that's the tradeoff,' says YES Prep founder Chris Barbic, referring to a private K-12 school in Houston. He adds, 'You've got to have a great teacher in every classroom. The rest of the stuff -- computers and things -- that's all dandy. But if you don't have a great teacher in the classroom, it doesn't really matter. So from the beginning, that was the focus.' (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 4)

The following snippets were taken from the interview with Charlie Scott. He underscores the importance of teachers in the YES Prep formula.

...You could do all you want to change...community and ... financial pieces or, like, culture... but at the end of the day, those things are hit or miss in what you might have. But what you have complete control over is effective teachers in the classroom, and three years of effective teaching will change the trajectory of a child's... academic growth.

If you ask any of our students, whether they're in sixth grade all the way or our kids who have graduated from college, the one thing they value most about YES. Unequivocally, almost all of them will say the relationships they've built... we think about people, when someone says...how did you get an education? What did you do, or what drove you to be where you, the kind of person you are? You know, someone will say it was a teacher or mentor. I was somebody, a coach, and it's like that positive relationship...

Finally, the following passages from the 2006 Bridgespan study highlight the importance of teachers in the YES College Prep formula:

'We want to ensure that no matter what campus a YES Prep student attends, every single YES Prep student is held to the same really ambitious standards for achievement and has teachers capable of giving them the support they need to get there.' (Bridgespan, 2006, para. 1)

Two investment areas epitomize the organization's approach to aligning everything it does to its ultimate goals:

- Providing every student with consistently excellent teaching
- Preparing every student for college success (Bridgespan, 2006a, para. 3).

An initial theory was developed based on the recurrent themes of quality and excellence in teaching standards, shared leadership, and student achievement through quality pedagogy and more time with good teachers: The college-going culture at YES Prep is centered around providing students with quality pedagogy for extended amounts of time in an environment that fosters mutual respect and responsibility and promotes teacher leadership and continual improvement. This theory provided a foundation for inquiry during phase 2.

Under each domain, recurrent themes were clustered into three dominant categories. In the technical domain, student exposure and opportunities to learn emerged as a dominant theme. The theory was that exposure to high quality teaching, learning and experiential opportunities to prepare students for college completion are central to the operational mission of YES. The following passages, from the interview with Charlie Scott, provide evidence of the emphasis on student exposure and opportunities to learn:

We're always constantly thinking about what can we do to create opportunities for our students, you know, from the summer opps to going to college, to just everything we do.

I think ultimately what drives us is... despite our challenges, despite their background, despite their difficulties, you have the same opportunities as every other kid.

What transformed the way we do college counseling was that student opportunities piece. And it was really the long and short of it... We really did it because we have rising juniors and seniors that we're like, we don't want to keep taking them through our summer school... They'd be better served doing a three-week internship, getting the real-world experience than sitting with us for three weeks. They'd be better off going to Stanford for a philosophy program than sitting with us, sort of, hey, let's talk about English.

And that's why... two thirds of our kids are not in the Houston area. They're in regional parts of Texas or outside the state... in college. But part of that is because... they're going to all parts of the country... When they're doing Outward Bound, they're doing it in Colorado. We call it, they've gotta get out of the Houston bubble, and it's even further than that, getting out of the community bubble...

Greta Holcombe also addressed student opportunities to learn in her interview, iterating that, over the course of the seven years students are enrolled at YES Prep, students have the opportunity to conceptualize the types of things that college students do (G. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2010).

Finally, the Edutopia study highlighted the importance of exposing students to the concept of life beyond K-12 schooling:

At YES Prep, educators are finding additional benefits to a packed student schedule. For one, the longer school day ensures that kids spend more hours doing constructive activities, and fewer hours without supervision. Also, says Barbic, it accustoms kids to the kind of workweek they can expect in college and later on in jobs as adult professionals (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 5).

These are the kinds of experiences that can happen naturally in the lives of wealthier kids, says Barbic, experiences that help them deepen their education and broaden their own sense of possibility. He wants YES Prep's students to have them, too (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 11).

In the normative domain, the discourses category was developed to describe the philosophies, core values, habits of mind, and methods of indoctrination that drove the mission and daily efforts of adults in the organization. The theory was developed that YES Prep operated chiefly through a unified mission centered on its core values and principles and instilled these values and principles upon the students and teachers through repetition, programming and operational design, and daily discourse. As Greta Holcombe described, the central question guiding the mission of YES Prep was: Is this in the best interest of students in meeting their long-time college success goals (G. Holcombe, personal communication, February 11, 2010)? As stated previously, the core principles document outlined the five-pronged value system of the YES Prep organization: Effective teaching, continuous improvement and reflection, building relationships, exposure, and community

change. In addition, the themes of hard work and persistence dominated discourses on teacher and student expectations.

The political domain was characterized by people-oriented organizational systems. The theory developed in this phase was that the organizational design of YES Prep was people-centered, placing priority on shared leadership structures, ongoing investment and training in teachers and staff, and programs and opportunities for students. Evidence of this can be found in the following snippets of text found in the Edutopia report:

But administrators here don't just conjure a staff of already excellent educators and then kick back and rest; they find people with passion, smarts, and potential and help them become leaders (Edutopia, 2009b, para. 1).

Forgoing traditional notions of hierarchy, staff members rely on each other for ideas and constructive criticism (Edutopia, 2009b, para. 3).

The [Campus A] budget emphasizes teacher salaries, college counseling, and student trips (supported by fundraising) for team-building and college visits (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 3).

School Director... regularly seeks ideas and feedback from his staff, and intentionally recruits teachers who are different from him, to ensure a diversity of perspectives at the school. Grade-level chairs lead their colleagues through weekly shared planning sessions, and teams of teachers learn by observing each other in sessions modeled on medical-student rounds. [One teacher] says, "I feel really valued here." (Edutopia, 2009f, para. 11)

It's hard to tell School Director... and his fellow administrators from the teachers at YES Prep [Campus A]. They all teach classes and supervise students in the cafeteria, and teachers can get elbow deep in traditionally administrative duties like discipline, coaching fellow educators, and creating new ways to improve the school. That's by design (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 1).

Noteworthy features of the people-centered YES Prep organizational model were: the teacher excellence program, the college counseling model, and standards for academics and college preparation. Further analysis of these features and how they fall within the college-going culture model found at YES Prep is discussed in Chapter 5.

Phase 2: Organizational Culture and Framework

Phase 2 of this study sought to answer the question, “What characteristics are embedded in the organizational culture and framework of YES that support and sustain the college-going behaviors of students?” Data from phase 1 was coded and analyzed to uncover dominant themes and to develop a working theory for inquiry in phase 2. Theories developed in phase 1 were:

- Exposure to high quality teaching, learning and experiential opportunities designed to prepare students for college completion is central to the operational mission of YES. (Technical domain)
- YES Prep operates chiefly through a unified mission centered on its core values and principles and instills these values and principles in the minds and hearts of students and teachers through repetition, programming and operational design, and daily discourse. (Normative and cultural domain)
- The organizational design of YES Prep is people-centered, placing priority on shared leadership structures, ongoing investment and training in teachers and staff, and programs and opportunities for students. (Political domain)

Questions emerged during phase 1 that would also guide inquiry during phase 2:

- How does the institution ensure that students do not fall through the cracks? (Technical domain).
- How do the dominant discourses and philosophies shape day-to-day activities of individuals within the organization? (Normative domain)
- What systems of power are evident that students must navigate through day to day? (Political domain)

During phase 2, data was drawn from two sources: (a) ethnographic field notes generated through participant observation of the daily educational program at YES Prep Campus A and YES Prep Campus B, and (b) four interviews with selected individuals within the YES Prep Campus A and Campus B communities. Interview candidates were selected strategically through daily observations of each campus. The following individuals participated in interviews during phase 2: one school leader, one college counselor, and two teachers. Pseudonyms have been provided for each interview participant.

Interview participants represent each domain of the adult instructional community at YES: administrative, college counseling, and instructional. It is noteworthy that parents were not included in interviews and observations. Additionally, support staff were not included in observations and interviews.

Using a grounded theory approach, inquiry in the form of participant observation and interviews used theories generated in phase 1 to shape new and emergent theories. Hence, the coding scheme developed in phase 2 built upon the scheme developed in phase 1, using parent categories and subcategories developed in the initial data analysis to analyze and interpret new findings.

Initial observations of four YES Prep campuses led to the decision to focus inquiry on two campuses: YES Prep Campus B and YES Prep Campus A. The decision to limit observations to two campuses was made in order to capture a more detailed and penetrating look at the entrenched and embedded characteristics of the YES Prep schools that promoted college-going activities of students. Defining school culture requires long periods of observation and immersion in campus life. Hence, observing two campus in a more in-depth and comprehensive manner proved to be a wise strategy. As stated previously, YES Prep Campus B was chosen for its historical value and the 6–16 perspective that could be ascertained by analyzing its educational program. YES Prep Campus A was chosen due to the innovative and unique program elements observed in early observations; in addition, the first commencement for this campus would take place during the year of this study. Upon mentioning these choices to YES Prep System leaders, it was confirmed that these school sites would prove most useful to the goals of the study.

School environment. Distinguishing features became evident upon entering each campus. These features were replicated on every campus. First, motivational phrases were

posted on signs throughout hallways and walkways on each campus. Some of the quotes on these signs read as follows:

- Our education does not end in the classroom.
- When we all pull together, we can move mountains.
- We are ready and willing to work hard.
- Excellence is a habit.
- The only way to lose is to quit trying.

These brightly colored banners, color-coded according to each campus's official school colors, marked each step. Also displayed prominently throughout the campus and in every classroom in each campus were large banners that stated: "Whatever it Takes!" and "We give 100% Every Day!" Notably prominent was the fact that every student dressed in the YES Prep uniform for that campus, shirts were navy blue or the official school color and either khaki pants or jeans, depending on the campus, with an occasional student dressed in a white shirt. Only on Fridays did one see YES Prep students out of their official uniform. On Fridays, each student dressed in a college or university t-shirt. College and university banners can be found within the majority of classrooms, and each classroom is named after its teacher's alma mater. Entering the college seminar classroom, where students in 11th and 12th grade attended college preparatory classes to move them through the multi-faceted college preparatory process, collegiate banners lined the walls along with lists of YES Alumni who have chosen to attend these colleges. At YES Prep Campus B, a glass wall separated the offices of the college counselors from students in the college seminar class. At YES Prep Campus A, the college seminar classroom was directly across the hall from college counselors' offices. YES Prep Campus B was a network of prefabricated structures with one permanent structure housing a recently constructed gymnasium and physical education center. YES Prep Campus A was housed in a former church facility with added buildings for classrooms and instruction. Both campuses were on large plots of land, with YES Campus B

resting atop a former horse farm. At YES Prep Campus B, classrooms were small and cluttered. Upon the whiteboards in every classroom, the same words were written: date, objectives, homework, have out, do first, and agenda. A “Big Hairy Audacious Goal,” or BHAG, could also be found posted on the wall in every classroom. Each classroom housed two or more teachers of varied subject matter. Notably, few computers were found in the classrooms, while the college seminar classroom and computer labs both had laptops and desktops.

At YES Prep Campus A, classrooms were less cluttered. However, once again, two or more teachers could be found in each classroom. The contents of whiteboards were identical to those found at Campus B. It was difficult not to notice the cleanliness and orderliness of the Campus A hallways. I had the opportunity to traverse the hallways during the course of an entire school day, and hallways and offices were always clean and orderly. Two distinctive features were found at Campus A, the art and technology classrooms. The art classroom was located at the end of a hallway, which displayed a large graffiti mural. Walking in the classroom, students were sitting in tables wearing ipods and working on a pointillism lesson. On the walls were a Malcolm X mural and a mural in progress. Evidence of student work in the form of abstract self-portraits lined the hallway outside the classroom. Students were seated at plastic folding tables with metal folding chairs in this room. Two technology classrooms were observed at Campus A. One technology classroom housed two rows of Apple desktop computers with large screens connected to a display projector. The technology teacher’s office stood separately and held several computers and screens as well.

Structure of a school day began with a morning meeting in each grade level. Lisa Harris, a Campus A sixth grade teacher, described the morning meeting as a time where

teachers delivered the message of *why we are doing what we are doing* and asked or answered the question *why are we here?* She noted that she witnessed students cheering for each other and was amazed at the seemingly universal belief expressed among teachers and students that all students can go to college (L. Harris, personal communication, June 2, 2010). She explained that a person could walk up to any student in the hallway and ask why he or she was at YES, and the student would answer, “to go to college.” She explained that she heard this every single period of every single day (L. Harris, personal communication, June 2, 2010). At Campus B, students in middle school have morning meeting per grade level due to space constraints. At Campus A, students in middle school and students in high school have separate morning meetings. In middle school, seniors often lead morning meeting, and Lisa Harris likens their role to camp counselors (L. Harris, personal communication, June 2, 2010).

Classrooms. As stated previously, entering any classroom at Campus A or Campus B, one could expect to find the same items written on the whiteboards as well as the same motivational signs and banners. In addition to these things, one could also expect to find elements of a “hidden curriculum,” which, as defined by Haralambos (1991), were “those things pupils learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of such institutions (p. 1).” Elements of the hidden curriculum observed were: higher-level thinking and questioning, productivity, determination and persistence and shared responsibility. Higher-level thinking and questioning were evidenced in teachers’ delivery of lessons as well as information posted on walls and whiteboards. Teachers engaged students in dialogue and questioning on the subject matter, pushing their thinking beyond the surface. In addition, they engaged students in metacognitive strategies. An example of this was found in an eighth grade classroom at

Campus B where a teacher asked students to confidently explain how they arrived at their answer. Several students raised their hands, and a student was chosen to answer. The teacher responded that the student was referring to a specific mathematical concept and that the teacher was happy with the strategies employed by the students.

Productivity refers to the sense of focused work that could be observed in each classroom. Lessons, while moving forward at an accelerated pace, were clearly focused and well-defined. Students displayed a familiarity with the lesson structure, and similar elements could be found across classrooms, such as the do first and exit ticket.

Determination and persistence were observed not only directly through the words of teachers, but also through the expectations set in the delivery of lessons. An example of this is the case in which an eighth grade classroom at Campus A serving the group of students with the lowest TAKS scores and students who were described as not quite ready for algebra. The students were engaged in a group project and were set to work independently. One particular student asked to stay for tutorials for additional assistance on the project. The teacher responded by affirming the student's response and noting his growth from sixth to eighth grade.

A sense of shared responsibility for success could be found between the teacher and students. At the end of one particular sixth grade English Language Arts class, the teacher asked the students to decide what his or her homework would be. Students then wrote their homework decision in their personal agendas. Following this part of the lesson structure, students were then given two minutes to fill out a rubric for their teammates, performing a peer assessment on the project they had completed in class. In our interview, Troy Carter, the school administrator, described this as part of the set of behaviors required to be successful in college:

I think the way you would see that every single day is that holding each other accountable, um, really messaging, you know, that college piece through our instruction, through how we expect students to interact with each other, so not just academically, but, you know, how... peer interactions and the expectations they have when they talk to each other, even our expectations for how adults model that behavior...with students. Obviously, what that looks like in a sixth grade classroom versus the twelfth grade classroom is very different. I think that's... challenging for us, but also one of the things that, when done well, is what...strengthens our culture. You know when a person knows, 'Here's how I talk to a sixth grader about why it's important that you do your homework,' and then, 'Here's how I address an eleventh grader and say why it's important to tuck in your shirt.' You know, so just being accountable for the 'why' behind why we do everything and how it's all focused on one thing, and that is, not just because we say so but because we want you to have many opportunities, and our belief is that by doing these things that when you go off to college and beyond, knowing how to interact in this way is going to, ah, set you up for success.

Behaviors expected of individuals beyond high school became a recurrent theme. In observations, I mentally noted the friendliness, hospitality and articulateness of the students and staff in my encounters at each campus. Scott Johnson, college counselor at Campus A, stated:

... You know, I think it's just the amount of time we spend just trying to develop those [traits] in students and encourage students. I'm a firm believer that all students, not all students, but the vast majority of students across the country have that in them... They just need the opportunity and they need the encouragement to develop that, so, you know, from the very beginning we tell students that if you see a visitor on campus, welcome them, talk to them... We encourage visitors, when they come to campus, to engage students, you know. We never say, 'Hey, don't talk to kids when they're in class.' But instead, if you're observing a class, ... go talk to kids. Go ask what they're doing. See what they're thinking. See where they're going to college.

In the interview with Charlie Scott in phase 1, he iterated that the YES Prep leaders continuously discussed the tension between autonomy and innovation versus structure and systems. As Troy Carter described:

So, even though we plan centrally,...we tell our teachers, 'You gotta put your stamp on it,' whether it may be lecture occasionally, group work occasionally, a combination of student engagement and,... discovery. Not just saying that every single day it's gonna be, I teach and give you all the information you need, and you

just memorize it and regurgitate it, but really thinking about how we're building college students from sixth grade on, so...

While an emphasis on student independence could be observed, lending to teaching strategies that fostered these behaviors (i.e. the writing workshop, collaborative group projects), the compression of the curriculum to meet college readiness standards led some classrooms to move into more teacher-directed activities. In several classrooms, PowerPoint presentations were used to cover large amounts of information. Critical thinking was encouraged, as teachers employed inquiry and questioning techniques to ensure students retained the information. This dynamic was especially observed at the Campus B location, where small classrooms created a space challenge, and, as a problem-solving solution, some teachers employed PowerPoint presentations and multimedia to deliver information.

Curriculum and student learning opportunities. According to Greta Holcombe, the day-to-day scope and sequence of curricula at YES Prep schools was developed by teachers who served as content specialists. One teacher served as the content leader for each grade level, and this group met periodically to review and refine standards and expectations for each grade level. Curriculum was formed in a backward fashion, beginning with advanced placement (AP) standards. Each student was required to successfully complete AP courses in order to graduate. Scott Johnson described the college preparatory curriculum as follows:

It's nice that when our students are applying and, um, working with colleges, that I can just go across the board. I can just say that this is, all of our kids are leaving here with pre-cal, you know, all of our students who graduate, go on to new schools having taken at least one AP course, you know, they've been exposed to that because I know that's one of the concerns that, that colleges have when they're recruiting minority students is that they're always worried about the level of preparation that students are getting.

As he further stated, this factor contributes YES's college remediation rate of 5%. The district assessment was developed by content leaders using AP standards, and the Texas essential knowledge and skills test (TEKS). Students were then given benchmark examinations to gauge progress towards the final assessment.

The types of courses students were offered were described by Lisa Harris as accelerated core classes in preparation for Advanced Placement classes so that students could earn credit before graduation. According to Lisa, while the middle school years focused chiefly on the core curriculum, two out of eight classes per day were electives. Sixth grade students often switched electives more often than other grade levels. In middle school, one of these two periods was a study hall. Lisa explained that often the transition to YES in sixth grade was such an adjustment that students needed more time to complete the work. She reiterated that students needed more time because the increased work was one element of the transition to sixth grade that made it difficult, as students were not accustomed to this (L. Harris, personal communication, June 2, 2010). To further ease the transition for sixth grade students, all incoming sixth graders were required to attend summer school. She explained that the purpose of summer school is culture – to teach students the systems and expectations and to assist them in getting comfortable (L. Harris, personal communication, June 2, 2010). Students in grades 6–9 participated in this summer program while grades 10–12 participated in more experience-based programs, such as internships and academic experiences on college campuses.

Grade levels met once per week to discuss student progress, challenges, concerns, and solutions. When asked what was discussed at these meetings, Jessica Katz explained that, at these meetings, teachers discuss individual student progress and that college planning is rarely discussed. Hence, personalization re-emerged as a theme. As Jessica

described, curriculum development at YES was a collaborative process of developing content, objectives, scope and sequence and assessments. She described a painstaking process of thinking of every category of reading possible to include in the scope and sequence (J. Katz, personal communication, June 4, 2010).

Students entered YES Prep in the sixth grade with an endlessly varied collection of school experiences. While the longer school day and year were designed to assist in bringing all students up to the academic standards, teachers were given flexibility to deal with those students who, through academic benchmarking, were not expected to meet the standards. In Campus A, Jessica Katz implemented a reading remediation course as an elective. She encouraged students needing assistance to enroll but noted that she never had to fight a student to take the course if it was needed (J. Katz, personal communication, June 4, 2010).

Comprehensive college-counseling model and college-going culture. The college counseling models found at YES Prep schools were designed based on a set of guardrails, or standards and expectations that guided schools in setting up their own models. These guardrails are included in Appendix C (Bridgespan, 2006e), school-based documents, and they include the guardrail, or the minimum expectation, and flexibility or the autonomy provided to the campus in developing its unique model. Some of the minimum requirements included:

- a) A college counseling department that includes a Director of College Counseling, two counselors and a student opportunities coordinator
- b) An advisory program that covers specified objectives
- c) A junior seminar class for test preparation and introduction to the college counseling application/search process
- d) Annual spring trips for all grade levels with a college focus in eighth through eleventh grades

- e) A program to support seniors in their college visits
- f) Relationships with university partners (Guardrails, Appendix C).

The college counseling departments at Campus B and Campus A consisted of a director of college counseling, two college counselors, a student opportunities counselor and a student support counselor. Each of these individuals played a unique role in providing a comprehensive support system to students in their college-going process.

According to Scott Johnson, a college counselor at Campus A, the college counseling model found in YES Prep schools was built on a private school model. He stated,

So the idea is... small case loads, as much one-on-one time as we can give students,...lots of professional development, in terms of trying to get out and visit colleges, bringing college to campuses... knowing that we are really that intermediary between the students and the colleges, so we do as much as we possibly can to bring those two together.

When asked the difference between the college counseling program at YES and that of a traditional mainstream public school, he replied,

Obviously it's different. It's a public school, and, you know we teach more classes throughout the day, but I think that's the distinguishing factor between what separates us from your traditional... school, with much larger numbers and fewer counselors per student, things like that.

The college-counseling model was designed to provide a more developmental approach to counseling. Charlie Scott described the role of the student support counselor:

It's that whole idea of moving from traditional guidance to developmental guidance. It's this whole idea of... traditional guidance... had a high school counselor that was certified in counseling and did schedules and did some college things and was sort of that whole list of things... there are two stages of the student support counselor. There is one, and the lead counselor has to be LMSW, so licensed social worker or has to be... an LPC. Like, you have to have some credentialing. And... you can have a second person who might have taken enough psychology courses... in that aspect. But even among them there's certain things that this person can do and there's certain things that this counselor cannot do... There's definitely overlap, but I think it's really clear, like, this is what you handle, this is what you handle, this is what you handle... It's that sort of collaborative piece.

In addition to the student support counselor, the college counseling team also consists of a student opportunities counselor. During his interview during Phase 1, Charlie Scott described this role:

What transformed the way we do college counseling was that student opportunities piece... We really did it because we have rising juniors and seniors that we're like, "We don't want to keep taking them through our summer school." They'd be better served doing a three-week internship, getting the real world experience than sitting with us for three weeks. They'd be better off going to Stanford for a philosophy program than sitting with us, sort of, hey, let's talk about English. And that's why... two-thirds of our kids are not in the Houston area. They're in regional parts of Texas or outside the state... in college. But part of that is because they've seen, you know, we do these spring trips, they're going to all parts of the country... we call it, 'They've gotta get out of the Houston bubble.' And it's even further than that, getting out of the community bubble.

The role of the student opportunities counselor is to seek out and coordinate experiential opportunities for students that will assist them in gaining perspective to prepare them for the college world and beyond.

Scott Johnson stated that his role as college counselor involved lots of meetings and "trying to check in with students as much as possible, during lunch periods, during their elective periods, whenever I can, sort of, get my hands on them or, you know, the flip side is when they can get their hands on me." He stated that communication with his team and with other stakeholders in the YES System ensures that the work of the college counseling team is done. He also stated that he was soon to be given the responsibility of overseeing the alumni support program for his campus since Campus A would be graduating its first class of seniors at the end of the school year. He juxtaposed his role at Campus A from that of the director at Campus B, which has experienced several graduating classes and has grown a base of knowledge for students that has become embedded in the framework of the organization and assisted students in their college-going process.

As an emerging campus, Scott Johnson stated “we’re really still trying to build that college counseling culture.” He continued:

At Campus B, I feel like students are coming into... junior and senior seminar knowing what to expect and, having talked with friends and knowing what to expect with the college admissions process. But our students, especially our current seniors they are used to playing the guinea pig role as the first class going through our school... one sense that I get for us is that we’re trying to establish, um, a certain level of high expectations right now that may already exist at Campus B because... one thing that I wish our seniors had is to get to see a group go ahead of them so that they, they know what to expect. And so, we’re working on building that. So when students are coming to us, they’ve had enough exposure and they’ve known enough people who have gone through the process to know, sort of, what to expect versus, our first group shows up in junior and senior seminar class, and they’re like, ok, what are we going to do at this point?

Scott Johnson highlighted one feature that did prove valuable in the culture of the Campus A, the notion that it was a family-oriented school. He reiterated that this notion is evident in staff but driven and cultivated by students:

... There are so many staff members here who, who just love this place, and really live for this place, and, and it shows, and I think that rubs off on the students as well... In talking with some of the seniors, you know, until you really sit down and have one-on-ones with them, you don’t realize just how much they’re gonna miss this place, how much they love this place, which is nice to hear... and I think that really starts with... the staff...but as well as the students. The students do a great job of carrying that on. We have some, you know, always in each grade I think there’s a core group of students that really drive that. And identifying those students, and making sure that we’re giving them the opportunities to develop that within themselves as well as then to try and cultivate that in their... grade levels.

Finally, the college counseling model utilizes Naveance K-12, a student database system that allows administrators, counselors, teachers, students, and parents to access information on students’ college planning progress.

Teacher leadership and quality. As stated in the Bridgespan (2006b) article:

To get a great teacher in every classroom, we have to make an investment in going out and finding people with the raw skills, the intelligence, the passion, and the ability to connect with kids, and then we have to develop a program to develop those people into great teachers (para. 1).

Teachers were the primary unit of analysis during classroom observations. As stated in interviews during phase one, teachers were selected to work at YES through an initial interview and screening process, which was based on personality and behavioral characteristics. Teaching ability and expertise were secondary qualities in the teacher selection process. Each teaching applicant had to submit to a behavioral interview in which, according to the rubric, seven attributes were examined:

- Drive (goal setting/results orientation)
- Reserve (opinion sharing)
- Rebound time (stress tolerance/resilience)
- Agreement (conflict resolution/persuasiveness)
- Perfectionism (work standards/thoroughness)
- Interpretation (outlook)
- Taking charge (leading/directing/coaching others)

A behavioral psychologist hired by YES Prep to screen potential applicants developed this list of characteristics. Teachers who were hired and subsequently accept positions at YES underwent an intensive teacher development program entitled the Teaching Excellence Program. Jennifer Hines, the Chief Program and People Officer, stated, “About 5 years ago, we realized that we needed to help develop the teachers that we needed. So once we find these people with the raw ingredients, we put them through a year of really intensive on-the-job training (Bridgespan, 2006c, para. 1).” According to Bridgespan (2006c):

The *Teaching Excellence Program* begins with 80 hours of pre-service summer training. The goal is for each teacher to feel fully prepared to tackle the intense challenge of the first semester. More than two-thirds of the time in pre-service training is spent on classroom culture and management (para. 2).

YES Prep’s Teaching Excellence Program served as an alternative certification program leading to Texas state teaching credentials. New teachers were paired with instructional coaches who were supervised by deans of instruction. These individuals were responsible for ensuring quality in the how of teaching, while course leaders and content specialists

were responsible for the substance (content) of teaching. Instructional coaches and deans ensured that classroom teachers across campuses maintained a standard of quality in pedagogy and classroom management.

The walkthrough observation notes form, the two classroom observation forms, and the post-evaluation conference form found in Appendix C, school-based documents, highlight the qualities of teaching that have been developed by YES Prep and used by deans and instructional coaches as measuring rods for quality teaching (Edutopia, 2009j). Many of these characteristics emerged as recurring themes in classroom observations, including a sense of urgency, assertive tone when appropriate, high expectations, respectful and supportive tone, positive reinforcement, redirecting inappropriate or off-task behavior, as well as strong procedures, routines, and transitions.

Collaboration and teacher leadership were observed during two professional development days. Groups of teachers were clustered by grade level and participated in what was referred to as instructional rounds. Built on a medical model, the purpose of rounds was described in the Campus A Professional Development Rounds document found in Appendix C and retrieved from the Edutopia web article (Edutopia, 2009j):

If you walk into any hospital, you will most likely see a group of doctors traveling together to a group of patients. The doctors observe each patient and then debrief as a group to determine next steps. This best practice in the medical profession can be applied to the teaching profession in a similar way. This year at Campus A, we will be implementing a professional development program called “Rounds” based on peer observation, sharing of feedback, self-directed professional development, and working towards a common goal through a scientific inquiry process (Appendix C).

The process of Rounds involved peer observation of one teacher’s classroom with anecdotal transcripts of the class period, from start to finish, recorded by peer observers. These groups of grade level-specific teachers then meet to discuss their observations and provide feedback to the observed teacher. Rounds took place every Wednesday after early

dismissal, and one teacher received feedback per week. The Professional Development Rounds document from Campus A describes this process (Edutopia, 2009j):

Observations will be focused on the group's main inquiry or goal. Rounds groups will meet the majority of early dismissal Wednesdays during professional development time to debrief, discuss, encourage, inquire, and move forward with next steps (Appendix C).

During Rounds, each teacher, one at a time, shared descriptive evidence with the aim of being absent of judgment. After sharing descriptive evidence, which included teacher behaviors, dialogue, and relevant student behaviors and dialogue, teachers exchanged what was referred to as warm and cool feedback. Warm feedback described the positive responses of peers, while cool feedback was phrased in the form of questions to provide constructive criticism. At the end, information was synthesized and analyzed for trends found in observations, and take-aways, pedagogical or practical elements to incorporate into daily teaching, were recorded for replication and to inform future practice. In one session, a physical education teacher's classroom was observed. One particular trend involved positive reinforcement. During the warm feedback portion, teachers stated:

- Students would clap for one another. So, it was positive reinforcement from you and positive reinforcement from the kids.
- I don't think it's the kids. It's the teaching. Kids don't just clap for one another. It's the culture you build.
- Kids totally trust you.
- The class was inviting. Everyone enjoyed being there.
- Kids were very constructive giving feedback.

Teachers in the group were able to take away the strategy employed by this particular teacher—using positive reinforcement to create a classroom culture of respect and appreciation.

In the second instance, a middle school teacher was observed, and the trend of intrinsic motivation emerged. During the cool feedback portion, one teacher asked whether

students were intrinsically motivated. Another noted that students appeared attached to the teacher, and the teacher did not have to use tricks to gather their attention. The teacher then questioned whether their desire to please the teacher was their motivation rather than a desire to grasp the concepts for themselves. The observed teacher responded that he began the year using extrinsic motivation techniques and that he is moving toward intrinsic motivation. Take-aways from the session involving intrinsic motivation were, “Kids have to be trained,” and “Learning happens when they are highly engaged.” A question for future inquiry was, “How do we engage children more?” Rounds were observed as an opportunity for teachers to collectively and individually impact their own practice through reflection, collaboration and examination of best practices.

Whatever it takes. As stated previously, the motto “Whatever it Takes” can be found on school signs, banners inside classrooms and school buildings, throughout hallways, and on literature. The “Whatever it Takes” motto can be observed through two structures built into the YES model that served to orient students toward postsecondary life: RISE and Wall Street.

RISE is a disciplinary management model developed for middle school students that stands for Restoring Individual Student Excellence (Edutopia, 2009j). Information on RISE is found in Appendix C, School-Based Documents. There are two categories under which students may be placed on RISE: (a) respect, and (b) responsibility. Respect RISE involved behavioral infractions such as disrespectfulness, disruption, uniform violations and dishonesty. Responsibility RISE involved organizational infractions such as unorganized backpacks or binders, illegible handwriting, tardiness, or lack of preparation. Students can be placed on RISE after multiple infractions for a period of up to 10 days. In order for students to be removed from RISE, teachers must initial on their RISE log each day,

confirming that the student has improved in the area of the infraction. According to one sixth grade teacher, RISE teaches students behaviors that are necessary for success as adults, such as getting along with others and organizational skills. She explained that RISE teaches students how to organize, how to write down reminders and how to use their agendas regularly. She explained that RISE teaches students how to be responsible people. Students wear white shirts as opposed to their regular uniform until their term on RISE is over. As one teacher described, students lose the privilege to wear the school mascot on their backs.

Wall Street is a structure built into the YES Prep system with the purpose of teaching students that they need to stay as long as necessary to get the job done. Students who have not completed required assignments are assigned to Wall Street, which occurs after the school day is over. During Wall Street, students complete necessary work with adult help when needed. Wall Street can last from dismissal (4:30 PM) until as late as 7:30 PM. Students who do not attend Wall Street when assigned are placed on RISE.

Barriers and challenges. Three themes emerged in interviews and observations that were described as barriers or challenges in the success of the YES Prep program: (a) teacher and student retention, (b) large class size, and (c) the length of the school day. The challenge of teacher and student attrition at YES was noted by the school director and the director of college counseling. These individuals contributed teacher burnout to the difficulty in retaining teachers. The lack of teacher retention can create a disruption in continuity and institutional knowledge for the organization. Because YES Prep is a school of choice, retaining students from sixth grade through graduation was noted to be a challenge. Reasons for this were cited as the long school day and increased workload. Lisa Harris explained that parents often chose to remove students and send them to mainstream

schools after noting a decline in grades after enrolling at YES. The decline in grades was contributed to increased rigor and demands involved in moving students toward higher academic standards (L. Harris, personal communication, June 2, 2010).

Jessica Katz noted large class size and the length of the school day as barriers. She noted that, while team teaching was useful and impacting, large classes limit the ability to interact with individual children more closely. In addition, she expressed concern that the long school day may cause some students to miss out on other opportunities for personal growth (J. Katz, personal communication, June 4, 2010).

Summary. Phase 2 built upon many themes uncovered in phase 1. Teachers once again emerged as central in each domain (technical, normative or cultural, and political). The research once again uncovered discourses in the form of a hidden curriculum within the normative or cultural domain. The school environment and structures such as morning meeting served as tools to indoctrinate and orient students and teachers toward the core values and mission of the organization. These emerged as dominant discourses. The technical domain was characterized by college-readiness teaching and learning structures, such as the comprehensive college counseling model, the teaching excellence program, and the rigorous college-readiness curriculum. Structures built into the day, such as RISE and Wall Street emphasized student behaviors that were perceived as necessary for postsecondary success. The political domain was once again characterized as people-oriented with shared leadership structures and an emphasis on professional development and collaboration. The discipline category was modified, adding the themes of structure and control.

Table 5 illustrates data gathered in phase 2 in response to guiding questions from phase 1.

Table 5.
Phase 2 Data Corresponding to Questions from Phase 1

How does the institution ensure that students do not fall through the cracks? <i>Technical</i>	How do the dominant discourses and philosophies shape day-to-day activities of individuals within the organization? <i>Normative</i>	What systems of power are evident that students must navigate through day to day? <i>Political</i>
College Counseling Model Naveance K-12 Team Teaching Communication/ Building Relationships Grade Level Weekly Meetings Wall Street	Pedagogy Rounds Professional Development Organizational Structures College Counseling Model Teacher Excellence Program Morning Meeting	RISE Wall Street Structure and Systems vs. Autonomy and Innovation

Phase 3: Replicable Characteristics for Mainstream Schools

The guiding question for phase 3 was, “What characteristics of the YES College Prep model can be replicated or generalized in mainstream public schools?” Because YES Prep is a small school system, many features of the educational program were uniquely suitable for its small population of students. However, a few observable characteristics are noted below. Phase 3 existed as an analysis of data collected during phases 1 and 2.

In the technical domain, potentially replicable elements within the YES College Prep model that were found in daily observations and interviews included (a) the longer school day and school year, (b) the Comprehensive College Counseling Model, (c) the uniform disciplinary policy, and (d) the Teacher Excellence Program. The longer school day provided extra time for students to meet rigorous academic standards and requirements for each grade level. The extended school year served the purpose of instilling values, beliefs and attitudes central to the YES College Prep mission within students. Greta Holcombe described this process as indoctrination (G. Holcombe, personal communication, February

11, 2010). The Comprehensive College Counseling Model ensures that each school has the minimum number of staff necessary in each college counseling department to meet the mission and goals of the YES program. According to the Guardrails found in Appendix C, each campus must have a director of college counseling, two college counselors, a student support counselor and a student opportunities counselor (Bridgespan, 2006e). Each of these individuals serves the purpose of ensuring that each student has equitable and sufficient support in the process of preparing for college. The uniform disciplinary policy, RISE, undergirds the school's mission by ensuring compliance with academic and behavioral requirements. The philosophy of RISE parallels the core values and principles of the YES system. The Teacher Excellence Program places teachers centrally in system-wide planning and policy-making. In addition, teachers are viewed as co-leaders in the administrative body. System-level leaders at YES take teacher selection and professional development seriously as evidenced in the Teacher Excellence Program (Bridgespan, 2006c).

The normative (cultural) domain found the following elements of the YES Prep model potentially replicable in mainstream public schools: (a) the unified mission, (b) the use of indoctrination to instill desired attitudes and beliefs, and (c) the incorporation of core values and principles in daily discourses. The use of a unified mission situated the work of each adult around a common guiding principle. Many schools have mission statements that presumably guide their daily work. YES Prep, however, has placed the mission in a position of centrality in system-wide planning as well as in daily pedagogical endeavors. The use of indoctrination to instill the attitudes and beliefs desired in students and adults served the purpose of ensuring that all work of adults and students moved in the direction of the

mission of the organization. Indoctrination was a tool that was used to instill the beliefs and attitudes found in the core values and principles statement.

The political domain found the following elements of the YES Prep model potentially replicable: (a) people-centered policies and (b) shared leadership. The business model at YES placed people at the focal point, and policies and investments germinated from this area of focus. Chief areas of investment centered around people, while other areas, such as facilities, were secondary. The philosophy that buttressed this business model was that the quality teaching and educational experiences were central to college preparation. Shared leadership structures allowed teachers to participate alongside school administrators in decision-making and improvement of pedagogy and curriculum. These leadership structures afforded teachers the opportunity to directly and indirectly change policies and practices that impacted their daily work.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This study sought to answer the question: How can the college-going culture of the YES Prep Middle School System be described, and what characteristics can be useful for building college-going cultures in mainstream schools? The research plan followed a three-phase process as described in Chapter 4.

Researcher Positionality

“Reflexivity entails articulation of the deep-seated (but often poorly recognized) views and judgments that affect the research topic, including a full assessment of the influence of the researcher’s background, perceptions and interests on the research topic (Hammel & Carpenter, 2000, p. 113).” Rigor in qualitative research involves transparency on the part of the researcher. In uncovering his or her positionality within the study, the researcher strives to place him or herself within the context of the study. With this in mind, a discussion of my role and positionality as a researcher within the context of the YES Prep organization is called for.

As an African-American mixed-race female educator, my interests have always fallen among the spheres of interest involving children who are at risk, less fortunate and somehow marginalized in the school system. Growing up in a middle class family with a father who devoted the major part of his adult life to teaching students from these categories, I had the opportunity to assist in his efforts, grading papers while in elementary school or volunteering to tutor while in high school. Witnessing the vicious cycle of inequity in urban, inner-city classrooms ignited a desire to change and improve the circumstances these students faced. My father ensured that my siblings and I had the opportunity to

experience the best education had to offer by enrolling us in gifted and talented programs in schools in wealthier neighborhoods. On weekends, as a freelance jazz musician, he would perform in clubs and coffee shops to pay my tuition to college.

As an undergraduate elementary education major, I took part-time jobs and volunteered in inner-city schools to assist students in passing the state-mandated exam. I would often leave dumbfounded at the achievement gap that was evident in the children I worked with and hopeless as I faced the reality that some of the students had no chance of passing the exam and would therefore not graduate. I endeavored to receive the best education possible so that I could become equipped with the skills and abilities necessary to improve these students' futures. I subsequently enrolled in my master's degree program at Teacher's College, at Columbia University and worked in the public schools in various New York City neighborhoods. I left New York with the understanding that the same inequities existed for low-income students of color that I had encountered in Texas.

After working for a brief period of time in the Houston public school system, an opportunity arose for me to play a critical role in developing a charter school for low-income students of color in the primary grades. Co-writing the governing charter proposal and serving as school director in the first year, I strove to apply the knowledge of pedagogy and curriculum I received in my undergraduate and graduate programs toward this new school. After completing my first year as school director, I enrolled at the University of Texas at Austin, assuming a position on the governing board of the charter school. At the University of Texas, I began to understand the cycle of inequity through the P-16 metaphor. My interests then began to shift toward college preparation for low-income students of

color, understanding that the achievement gap begins in the early grades. I was propelled by a belief that all students should have access to the type of education that I had received. Encountering YES Prep leaders through my work as Director of College Readiness for the Houston Independent School District, my interest in the organization was piqued when I read the college-going statistics along with the student demographics: 100% college acceptance rate, 90% first-generation college goers, 95% Hispanic or African-American, 80 percent college-bound. This organization had accomplished the mission I had embarked upon.

Theoretical Framework

The research conducted in this study was viewed through a sociocultural perspective. Sociocultural theories posit that students' identities are formed through complex interactions within the social and cultural spheres of their environments. Social and cultural capital are the assets and resources that are gathered through networks and relationships that enable an individual to attain higher qualities of life. Research was conducted on the premise that students formed their college-going identities through the multiple interacting social and cultural contexts of the YES Prep environment. Culture was viewed as the shared beliefs, norms and expectations that created patterns of behavior and interaction. Adults were viewed as "culture-bearers," or those who shaped the college-going culture through which students navigated daily. For this reason, adults were the primary focus in the research.

As stated previously, college-going culture was defined as a school environment where adults and peers saw college-going as expected and attainable, and where they see

the effort and persistence that preparation for college requires as normal (values, beliefs and expectations). This study sought to build a description of the college-going culture and uncover identifiable characteristics in the YES Prep model that would be useful in policy and planning for traditional, mainstream public schools. Kirst, Venezia and Antonio (2004) provided a typology of college-going cultures, which can be used to determine a school's orientation toward college preparation.

The findings indicate that YES College Prep schools had strong college-going cultures. While a strong focus on discipline and attendance (as indicated in the RISE program and parent, teacher and student contracts) existed, according to the four criteria developed by Kirst and Venezia: (a) almost everyone and everything is geared toward college preparation, (b) all students are expected to go to college, (c) high expectations for academic achievement can be found, and (d) conversations focused on where students would attend college, not whether they would attend. Further, the strong focus on discipline and attendance appeared to reinforce the values of hard work, discipline and persistence that were deemed necessary for college success. Hence, even these aspects of the educational program were oriented toward college readiness.

In Chapter 3, Table 1 described the framework of the inquiry process of this study. Table 1 provided a framework using Oesterreich's dimensions of college-going cultures (technical, normative or cultural, and political) and McDonough's nine elements of an effective college-going culture. (Oesterreich, 2000; McDonough, 2010) The questions included in Table 1 guided inquiry in each phase so that each element of an effective college-going culture could potentially be observed.

In the area of College Talk, which dealt with discourses related to college-going activities of students, the message that all students can and will attend college was clearly articulated through adults as well as through print sources. The Core Values and Principals served as the guiding principles for day-to-day work and programming, while the *Thinks and Acts* document, developed by students, served to unite students and orient them toward their mission while attending YES Prep. As indicated in Chapter 4, discourses of equity (every child can succeed), commitment and rigor (whatever it takes), excellence (quality teaching and learning experiences) and opportunity (exposure to life beyond the community) emerged as dominant themes in content analyses, interviews and participant observations. Various organizational structures, including motivational signs and banners, the morning meeting, and Wall Street provided avenues to indoctrinate students with these values and discourses. The question arose following phase 2—What opportunities became available for those students who, after attending YES for several years, decided not to pursue postsecondary education but rather enlist in the military or choose vocational options? In this case, no observable structures were in place for students. In addition, students seeking careers in athletics, fine arts or other areas may find YES unsuitable to their long-term goals as these areas, while offered as electives in some cases, were not widely emphasized.

In the area of Clear Expectations, findings indicated that adults universally operated under the notion that all students were capable of attending college. Educational, administrative and pedagogical program planning centered around the premise that not only were students capable, but all members of the organization were responsible for doing

whatever it takes to enable this to occur. The Commitment to College Completion, signed by teachers, students and parents, articulated specific responsibilities that each group must have agreed to in order for success in the YES Prep system to occur (Appendix B). The administrative structure, with teachers as co-leaders and collaborators, placed those individuals closest to students on a day-to-day basis in a position of leadership and provided this group an active voice in policy and planning. The Comprehensive College-Counseling Model provided a mechanism to ensure that all students received the same information and guidance in their college preparation process and in overcoming personal barriers to achieving their goals. The unified mission that drives the work of the organization was an element of the organizational design that may prove useful for mainstream public schools.

Information and resources were provided to students beginning in sixth grade and continued through high school. In high school, seminar classes served as mechanisms for college guidance, ensuring that all students received the same information on applying to college and securing financial aid. Academic standards drove the curriculum, and such structures as advisory and Wall Street ensured that students were kept on pace with demands of the curriculum. The use of Naveance K-12 provided a vehicle for equitable access to college planning for students, teachers and parents. The use of such structures as the seminar classes and study halls in middle school, while limiting students' opportunities to take electives that may otherwise interest them, ensured that students reached college readiness benchmarks. The inclusion of two college counselors and a college counseling director provided students with more personalized college guidance at a ratio of 1:35,

counselor-to-student. Finally, in middle school, college and university pennants lined classroom walls, teachers named classrooms after their alma maters, and students were continually asked, “Is this what a college-ready student would do?”

As stated previously, the area of Comprehensive Counseling can be understood by analyzing Comprehensive College Counseling model which, by design, ensures that all students receive the same information and support in college planning and preparation. Three college counselors, one student opportunities counselor, and one student support counselor serve the purpose of guiding students toward their postsecondary aspirations, providing exposure to opportunities that increase students’ potential for success in higher education and assisting students in overcoming personal and social barriers to success.

Testing and curriculum have a symbiotic relationship in the YES educational model. Students are not only assessed through the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), but they are also assessed through the locally developed District Assessment. Teachers’ scope and sequence grows from this assessment, and students are given benchmark tests periodically throughout the year to measure their progress towards this exam. The district assessment utilizes AP standards, and a group of course leaders for each subject area (comprised of teachers) and content specialists hired specifically for this purpose develop the academic standards as well as the scope and sequence for teachers and grade levels. One question emerged during observations and interviews—what structure is in place to ensure uniformity and continuity across subject areas and from one grade level to another? Because the tension between structure and systems versus autonomy and innovation existed, I often observed a disconnect between teaching and learning

experiences from one classroom to another. In a rounds session I observed, one teacher asked the teacher being observed, “How do you ensure that all of your students are grasping the information?” Structures such as Wall Street and Advisory were in place to ensure students kept pace with the workload, and this teacher’s answer to the question was that he used student benchmark data to ensure that all students were grasping the information.

In the Faculty Involvement area, as was previously mentioned, adults were unified by the belief that “all students can and will go to college,” and day-to-day work stemmed from this belief. Grade levels met weekly to discuss issues with student progress, and weekly professional development, in the form of rounds, honed in on teaching strategies for student success. The theme that emerged most dominant in all of the data is that of teachers. As an institution, YES seemed to hold the belief that teachers are central to student success, and quality teaching is the single most important factor in student success. For this reason, teachers are viewed as co-leaders and collaborators and given a prominent voice in decision-making. The hiring process at YES Prep is highly selective, using a behavioral interview based on seven traits that are most valued in the YES Prep system to screen candidates. Team teaching is utilized across the system, and, in my observation, this provided a sense of transparency to classrooms and eliminated the behind closed doors scenario. The behind closed doors scenario refers to the sense of isolation experienced by teachers in their daily work (Roebuck, 2010). The team teaching also fell in line with the discourses of shared responsibility and collaboration found in the data.

In the area of College Partnerships, while little interaction between college partners and individuals within the YES Prep organization was observed, it was evident in interviews

and observations that students were exposed to life beyond high school. In addition to spring trips to colleges and universities (beginning in sixth grade), the student opportunities counselor was responsible for securing and organizing experiential learning opportunities for all students. Guardrails specified that all schools must form partnerships with colleges and universities. However, the type of relationship varied per campus. Additionally, a few YES alumni who had since received college degrees returned as teachers in a few schools. No unified system of articulation between schools and universities was observed.

YES operates on a 6–16 model of education. Articulation was built into the structure of the system. Students enter YES in the sixth grade, where college preparation begins with a rigorous academic program, advising and exposure to college readiness concepts and environments. College counseling directors serve as directors of alumni support, whose role is to ensure that students who have graduated from YES are supported during their postsecondary tenure.

This study utilized a three-phase grounded theory approach, generating theories in each phase to develop a theoretical framework to describe the college-going culture of the YES Prep system. Initial theories in phase 1 were:

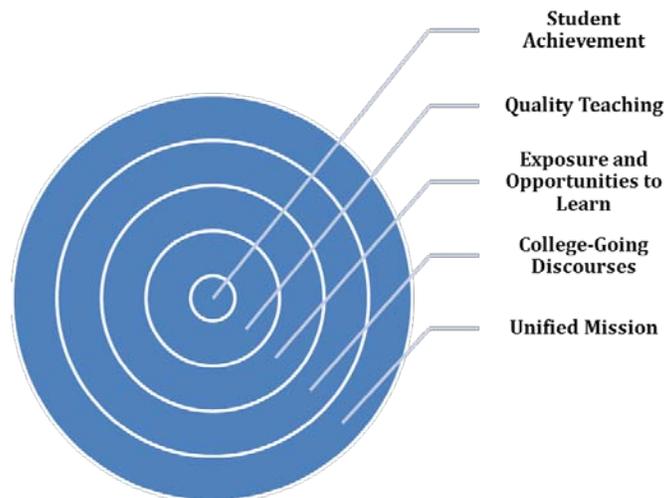
- The college-going culture at YES Prep is centered on providing students with quality pedagogy for extended amounts of time in an environment that fosters mutual respect and responsibility and promotes teacher leadership and continual improvement.
- Exposure to high quality teaching, learning and experiential opportunities designed to prepare students for college completion is central to the operational mission of YES. (*Technical Domain*)
- YES Prep operates chiefly through a unified mission centered on its core values and principles and instills these values and principles in the minds and hearts of

students and teachers through repetition, programming and operational design, and daily discourse. *(Normative/Cultural Domain)*

- The organizational design of YES Prep is people-centered, placing priority on shared leadership structures, ongoing investment and training in teachers and staff, and programs and opportunities for students. *(Political Domain)*

Figure 4 illustrates the dominant themes emerged through analysis of data in phases 1 and 2.

Figure 4. The Dominant Themes Emergent Through Data Analysis in Phases 1 and 2.



This diagram illustrates the relationship between the five dominant themes gathered in phases 1 and 2. The smallest circle represents the theme that was found to be most central in data collected. Each overlapping concentric circle indicates the relationship between its theme (labeled) and the theme it follows in the hierarchy. If placed on its side, the circles would resemble a cone, with the smallest circle forming a point toward which each succeeding circle is directed.

Student achievement was illustrated as a central focal point as it was viewed as central to the mission of YES Prep. Achievement at YES is defined as success beyond the first year of postsecondary education. Structures of support in the institution centered on this principle mission: to assist students in achieving the goal of graduating from college. The motto “Whatever It Takes” served as a guiding principle for adults and students, and included under the whatever It takes umbrella were such programmatic structures as the extended day and year, Wall Street and the Commitment to College Completion.

Quality teaching was placed on the concentric circle immediately overlapping student achievement, as quality teaching was the perceived as the backbone of the YES program. As interviews indicated, YES leaders held the belief that the most important factor in student achievement was quality teaching. For this reason, teachers were viewed as leaders and collaborators in policy and planning. The commitment to quality teaching can be found in the strict hiring policy, the Teaching Excellence Program and in professional development structures, such as Rounds.

Providing opportunities for student learning and exposure to both school-based and experiential facets of life that were viewed as useful for success in the postsecondary arena was placed concentrically immediately following quality teaching. These opportunities were viewed as critical components to successfully navigating life after high school. Wall Street was described as a place where students completed work in a parallel manner to the professional world, where one stays until the job is done. Spring trips provided students opportunities to extend their life experiences beyond the Houston community as it was conceived that these experiences were available to wealthier students and that these

experiences would ease the leaving home process. In addition, the concept that more time spent with good teachers would increase student achievement was woven as a common thread in discourse. Structures such as the extended school day and the summer program served to ease the transition from fifth to sixth grade and beyond so that students had the opportunity to keep pace with the demand of the curriculum at YES.

College-going discourses enveloped and permeated the YES environment, and they served to unite adults and students to the guiding mission articulated in the Core Values and Principles and the Thinks and Acts. For this reason, they fell on the proceeding concentric circle. These discourses were found in everyday speech, such as “Is this what a college student would do?” Conversations between teachers and students led back to this fundamental question. Structures such as morning meeting and the summer school program provided the avenue for these discourses to dominate and translate into patterns of behavior and interaction. Students were indoctrinated through such vehicles as signs and banners with motivational phrases posted throughout the campus. College-going discourses infused the environment at YES Prep, resulting in distinct patterns of speech (higher level vocabulary) and behavior (outgoingness of students, and team orientation). In addition, uniformity across the system in the form of appearance of school grounds (branding) and replication in policy and practice (guardrails, and hiring practices) further marginalized competing discourses, allowing for continuity in dominant discourses over time.

The unified mission at YES directed the language and discourses, behaviors and attitudes and daily work experiences of students and adults toward one central focal point.

The mission served as an anchor for policy and practice as well as leadership structure. Data collected in interviews and observations indicated that all behaviors and actions were measured against the common mission of the organization – enabling students to become successful in higher education.

Implications for Mainstream Public Schools

Phase 3 of the study sought to uncover characteristics found in the YES Prep model that may be replicable in mainstream public schools. The following sub-section will discuss these characteristics and the potential implications involved in replication in mainstream schools.

Unified mission. YES Prep oriented adults and students toward the core values and purpose of the organization through three primary vehicles: the commitment to college completion, constant reminders through discourse and visual aids, and structures within the program serving as vehicles for indoctrination. In addition, individuals hired were screened to determine whether their personality and behavioral characteristics were aligned with the overall mission and vision of the institution. Other school systems have utilized documents similar to the commitment to college completion, which is, in essence, a contract between parents, students and teachers. However, YES, being a school of choice, has the right to remove students who do not follow the guidelines of the contract. Mainstream schools often do not possess this ability with the exception of extreme cases, such as violence or repeated truancy. The use of visual stimulation throughout the institution could potentially prove useful in building systems of indoctrination. As YES is a small district serving 4,200 students, uniformity and replication of core missions and values

may prove difficult. In addition, the relative homogeneity in the student population allows the institution to adopt broad-range strategies. Structures built into the school day to provide vehicles of indoctrination are potentially useful mechanisms for public schools.

Academic rigor. As stated previously, YES's curricular model began and ends with the District Assessment, which was developed by a core of teachers using the AP standards. Because YES was a college preparatory school, AP standards are an appropriate measuring tool for student progress. As was indicated in interviews, many middle school students experienced difficulty in keeping up with the increased demand and rigor found in the curriculum, leading to problems with student retention. However, evidence in the form of YES alumni's college remediation rate (5%) indicates that the AP standards proved useful in preparing students for postsecondary education. The extended day and year served the purpose of both easing the transition to middle school and assisting students in maintaining their academic workload. Study halls as required electives for sixth grade students provided extra academic support. Advisory periods also provided avenues for adult interaction and support. Questions may arise from stakeholders in mainstream public school systems whether college preparatory curricula are appropriate for all students.

Extended day and year. The premise behind the extended day and year at YES was that more time with quality teachers provided students with leverage over their peers in long-term academic success. The length of the school day is 7:30 AM–4:30 PM, but for students assigned to Wall Street, the school day can potentially last until 7:30 PM. The extended year, required of all students, adds an extra 2–3 weeks to the school year. In sixth grade, the orientation program that takes place during this period serves to ease the

transition into not only the demands of middle school but also the unique demands of the YES Prep program. The ongoing structure of study hall as an elective for sixth grade students further serves to ease the transition for students. As was indicated in one teacher interview, however, some may question whether the long school day prohibits students from engaging other types of activities and opportunities that interest them.

Teaching quality and teachers as leaders. As stated before, quality pedagogy rests at the base of YES Prep's educational design. Teacher selection begins with a behavioral interview highlighting seven traits. Teachers are screened based on this criteria first, while teaching experience is secondary. Teachers who meet the criteria in the behavioral interview are provided with ongoing opportunities for training and professional development. Teachers are also viewed as leaders and collaborators in shaping policy and practice. Teachers decide what will be taught (as course leaders) and how it should be taught (through professional development rounds). While this may prove challenging in larger districts, structures such as rounds and the behavioral interview screening process are potentially replicable.

Comprehensive College Counseling Model. The Comprehensive College Counseling Model views college counseling as a holistic process, or, in the words of Charlie Scott, "moving from traditional to developmental." The counselor-student ratio was 1:35 and included two college counselors, a college counseling director, a student opportunities counselor and a student support counselor. In traditional mainstream public schools, these roles are usually found in one person or, in some cases, one person per grade level. The holistic model of the Comprehensive College Counseling Model, combined with the use of

Naveance K-12, ensured that students did not fall through the cracks. While the student population at YES was relatively small, budgeting priority lay in people and programs. Hence, facilities, technology, and extracurricular activities fell to a second tier.

Spending and prioritizing. As has been mentioned, people and programs were top spending priorities in the YES Prep yearly budget. Although additional funding for facility improvement was constantly sought out, YES's philosophy was that quality educational programs are the result of the investment in people. Such pieces as the comprehensive college-counseling model and the teacher excellence program are possible because they have become budgetary priorities.

Questions arose regarding provisions for students with disabilities. Although no students with obvious physical disabilities were observed, physical structures such as ramps and elevators were noted in campus facilities. However, future research may inquire about structures of support for students with emotional or mental disabilities or students who are visually or hearing impaired.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research conducted in this study sought to uncover identifiable characteristics in the technical, normative and political dimensions of the YES College Prep model that typified the college-going culture of YES Prep schools. In addition, those characteristics that were thought to be replicable or generalizable for mainstream public schools were identified.

Summary

Using Kirst and Venezia's (2004) typology of college-going cultures, YES Prep was found have an orientation toward the classification of strong college-going cultures. Using McDonough's (2010) nine elements of an effective college-going culture, characteristics of the YES Prep model were identified in each category: college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, comprehensive counseling, testing and curricula, faculty involvement, college partnerships, and articulation. Data was analyzed using a coding system to uncover themes and sub-categories that informed inquiry during each successive phase. Theories developed in phase 1 provided a framework for study in phases 2 and 3. The YES Prep model was characterized as one in which student achievement (in the form of college admission and completion) lay central to the mission and daily work of the organization, where teachers were seen as the most critical factor in students' success, where exposure to high quality educational and experiential learning opportunities characterized the environment of the YES Prep school model, and where college-going discourses surrounding a unified mission adhered all the pieces of the YES Prep model together.

Chapters 1 through 3. Chapter 1 introduced the study, highlighting the significance of the research within the body of literature demarcating middle school as a critical focal point in the P – 16 educational continuum. The overall question guiding the research was: How can the college-going culture of the YES Prep middle school model be described, and what characteristics of this model can be useful for building college-going cultures in mainstream schools?

Chapter 2 situated this study within bodies of research related to middle school models, the educational pipeline, college-going culture and sociocultural theory. College-going culture was defined through the literature, underscoring the importance of drawing upon sociocultural and social constructivist theories in establishing a framework for the research plan.

Chapter 3 described the three-phase research plan. Phase one consisted of an initial description of the research setting, utilizing content analysis and key informant interviews as methods of data gathering. Phase two sought to identify characteristics embedded within the YES Prep model, building on theories in Phase one and utilizing participant observation and additional interviews with members of the YES Prep organization. Phase three synthesized data from phases one and two to uncover characteristics of the YES Prep model that were potentially replicable in mainstream public schools.

Chapters 4 through 6. Chapter four discussed findings from phases one, two and three of the data collection process. Phase one uncovered seven parent categories within the three domains of the college-going culture as indicated below:

Technical: College-Preparatory Teaching and Learning Environment, Systems and Structures for Support

Normative and Cultural: Core Values, Discourses

Political: Systems, Barriers

Theories developed in phase one were used to build a framework for analysis of data in phase two. Theories developed in phase one were:

- The college-going culture at YES Prep is centered on providing students with quality pedagogy for extended amounts of time in an environment that fosters mutual respect and responsibility and promotes teacher leadership and continual improvement.
- Exposure to high quality teaching, learning and experiential opportunities designed to prepare students for college completion is central to the operational mission of YES. *(Technical Domain)*
- YES Prep operates chiefly through a unified mission centered on its core values and principles and instills these values and principles in the minds and hearts of students and teachers through repetition, programming and operational design, and daily discourse. *(Normative/Cultural Domain)*
- The organizational design of YES Prep is people-centered, placing priority on shared leadership structures, ongoing investment and training in teachers and staff, and programs and opportunities for students. *(Political Domain)*

Phase two incorporated data from ethnographic field notes and six interviews with members of the YES Prep organization to uncover embedded elements in the organizational culture of the YES Prep model. Questions arising in phase one also guided inquiry in phase two. Data collected was analyzed and placed categorically under each guiding question in Table 4.

Table 4.

Phase 2 Data Corresponding to Questions from Phase 1

How does the institution ensure that students do not fall through the cracks? <i>Technical</i>	How do the dominant discourses and philosophies shape day-to-day activities of individuals within the organization? <i>Normative</i>	What systems of power are evident that students must navigate through day to day? <i>Political</i>
College Counseling Model Naveance K-12 Team Teaching Communication/ Building Relationships Grade Level Weekly Meetings Wall Street	Pedagogy Rounds Professional Development Organizational Structures College Counseling Model Teacher Excellence Program Morning Meeting	RISE Wall Street Structure and Systems vs. Autonomy and Innovation

Phase three synthesized data from phases one and two to identify those characteristics in the YES Prep model that were potentially replicable in mainstream schools. The characteristics identified in the technical domain were: (a) the longer school day and school year, (b) the Comprehensive College Counseling Model, (c) the uniform disciplinary policy, and (d) the Teacher Excellence Program. Characteristics in the normative (cultural) domain were: (a) the unified mission, (b) the use of indoctrination to instill desired attitudes and beliefs, and (c) the incorporation of core values and principles in daily discourses. Characteristics found in the political domain were: (a) people-centered policies and (b) shared leadership.

Chapter 5 analyzed findings from Chapter 4 according to the theoretical framework presented in Chapters 1 through 3. Kirst, Venezia and Antonio's (2004) typology of college-going cultures placed school cultures on a continuum, from non-college-going cultures to strong college-going cultures. As stated in Chapter 5, findings indicated that, according to this typology, YES Prep schools were found to have strong college-going cultures. Evidence from Chapter 4 was also analyzed using McDonough's Nine Elements of an Effective College-

Going Culture (2010). Chapter five discussed five dominant themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Student achievement was central to the YES Prep model, and quality teaching was determined as essential for student achievement to occur. Student opportunities to learn and exposure to elements of life after high school were deemed critical to postsecondary success, and college-going discourses reinforced the core values and principles of the organization. Finally, the unified mission of YES Prep solidified all characteristics of the YES Prep model.

Analysis of Findings within Relevant Research and Literature

Middle school models. Models presented in Chapter 2 highlighted characteristics of middle schools that were deemed necessary for student success (Alexander, 2005; United Way of Greater Los Angeles, 2008). Alexander’s “vertically planned” middle school model included such features as team teaching, teacher education, articulation through grades 12 to 14, flexible curriculum, individualization of instruction, opportunities for students to explore interests, and an emphasis on values (2005). The United Way of Greater Los Angeles listed four key factors necessary for success in middle school. These factors were:

1. The unique social and emotional characteristics of adolescent development,
2. Access to quality teachers
3. College planning, and
4. Increased academic rigor (p. 2).

While data indicated that such features as team teaching, teacher education, P – 12 to P – 14 articulation, and an emphasis on values were evident in the YES Prep middle school model, other features, flexible curriculum, individualization of instruction, and opportunities for students to explore interests, were not evident in the data. Because YES

Prep's singular mission and orientation toward college preparation existed, programmatic structures were all focused in this direction. Hence, increased academic rigor and demands limited flexibility in curriculum and pedagogy. In addition, the ongoing conflict with structure and systems versus autonomy and innovation as well as lack of funding for extracurricular activities and electives may have been factors in the absence of observable opportunities for students to explore interests.

Data from this study indicated that three of the four key factors cited by the United Way of Greater Los Angeles were evident in the YES Prep model: (a) access to quality teachers, (b) college planning and (c) increased rigor. While some evidence indicated that YES Campuses focused on the unique social and emotional needs of adolescent learners, such as morning meeting, the summer program and advisory periods, data in this study did not highlight a strong emphasis in this area.

Middle school disengagement. Chapter 2 identified research highlighting the “crisis of disengagement” during the middle school years (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008; Heller, et al., 2003; Cooney & Bottoms, 2002; Wimberley & Noeth, 2005). Researchers cited various factors contributing to disengagement, including lack of relevance in curriculum, lack of rigor and alignment in elementary and middle school curricula, lack of strategies to encourage student motivation, and developmentally inappropriate instructional strategies (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008; Heller et al., 2003; Goodlad, 1984; Cummins, 1984, 1989; Goodenow, 1993; Arhar, 1992; Kramer, 1992; Allington & Johnston, 2000; Sosniak & Stodolsky, 1993). Data in this study accounted for a few of these factors in the YES Prep model, including rigor and alignment in curricula and strategies to encourage student

motivation. Evidence in the research indicated that these factors were addressed in the YES Prep model. Curricular relevance was indirectly addressed in the area of quality teaching; however, further research is needed to determine whether developmentally appropriate instructional strategies were found in the YES model.

Disengagement in the middle grades was also attributed to school size and grade level configurations. Researchers noted that smaller school size positively influenced student achievement and flexible grouping and instructional teaming produced positive results in students' outcomes (Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009; Heller et al.; Jackson & Davis: 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Flowers, Mertens & Mulhall, 2000). Evidence from this study indicated that small school size instructional teaming were found in the YES Prep model. Other researchers highlighted the placement of middle schools within the educational continuum, with transitions immediately before and after the middle grades, contributed to this crisis of disengagement (Juvonen, 2004; Eccles & Midgley, 1989; Heller, 2003; Yecke & Finn, 2005; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989). YES programs addressed middle schools through such programs as the sixth grade orientation program, advisory periods, and the extended day and year.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The goal of the *Closing the Gaps by 2015* initiative in the state of Texas was to close gaps in the educational pipeline from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary and enroll an additional 500,000 students in higher education by the year 2015 (THECB, 2000). The YES Prep model holds significant value for policy-makers and practitioners interested in building college-going models that streamline transitions from middle school to

postsecondary education.

P-16 transitions. YES Prep schools utilize a 6-16 operational model. Students enter YES in their sixth grade year, and structures for support are in place for students until they complete four years of higher education. While budgetary priorities have prevented YES from extending its programming into the K-5 arena, articulation of academic and support systems occurred across the 6-12 grade span. Support systems extended beyond high school into higher education through the directors of alumni support (college counseling directors). The transition from elementary to middle school was facilitated through an intensive orientation program providing initial immersion into the guiding principles and ideals of the YES Prep system and a foundation of support for academic demands that subsequently follow. Ongoing support structures for students in middle school were found in study halls (academic support) and advisory periods (social-emotional support). The Comprehensive College Counseling program ensures that all students have access to the same information. In high school, college orientation was facilitated through seminar courses, which provide a continuity of support as well as ensure that all students receive the same information and preparation for higher education.

In Chapter 2, research citing the differences in student performance among students in K - 8 schools and those in junior high school models indicated that students in junior high schools held lower self-perceptions and negative attitudes about school and received lower grades than those in K - 8 schools (Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Juvonen et al., 2004). While further research is needed on the impact of the grade configuration on YES Prep student performance, the YES Prep model holds value for policy-makers interested in 6 - 16

systems of articulation. While the unique orientation of the YES Prep program allows for a more streamlined approach to higher education access, student enrollment data, as illustrated below in Table 6, retrieved from the Texas Education Agency website, illustrates decreasing numbers of students enrolled at YES Prep from sixth grade through grade twelve.

Table 6.
Student enrollment per grade level on PEIMS Snapshot date for school year 2009 – 2010

Grade Level	Student Count
Sixth Grade	1,002
Seventh Grade	717
Eighth Grade	578
Ninth Grade	453
Sophomore Year	292
Junior Year	203
Senior Year	129

Source: Texas Education Agency (2011). 2009-2010 student enrollment. Retrieved April 28, 2011 from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker>.

While factors contributing to declining enrollment counts in each higher grade level are not explained in this table, data conducted in interviews indicated one possible factor as parents' dissatisfaction in the decline of student grades after enrolling in YES Prep. In addition, data on student retention rates indicates higher patterns of retention in middle school and the early high school years. As indicated in Table 7, retrieved from the Texas Education Agency website, students were retained in grades 6, 7 and 9 at rates higher than any other grade level.

Table 7.

Grade-Level Retention, by Grade, 2008-09 Yes Preparatory Public Schools, District Number 101845 Harris County

Grade	Retained	Students	Rate (%)
Grade 6	-	<700	8.1
Grade 7	-	<700	10.8
Grade 8	-	<500	6.2
Grade 9	-	<400	15.5
Grade 10	-	<300	6.7
Grade 11	-	<200	4.3
Grade 12	-	<100	2.5

Source: Texas Education Agency (2011a). Grade-level retention, by grade, 2008-09 Yes Preparatory Public Schools, district number 101845 Harris county. Retrieved April 27, 2011 from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker>.

Retention rates for the largest neighboring school system, the Houston Independent School District, reveals differing patterns, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8.

Grade-Level Retention by Grade, 2008 – 2009, Houston ISD, District Number 101912, Harris County.

Grade	Retained	Students	Rate (%)
Grade 6	224	12,657	1.8
Grade 7	322	12,361	2.6
Grade 8	218	12,455	1.8
Grade 9	2,682	14,265	18.8
Grade 10	1,110	11,115	10.0
Grade 11	827	9,239	9.0
Grade 12	1,241	9,768	12.7

Source: Texas Education Agency (2011b). Grade-level retention by grade, 2008-2009, Houston ISD, district number 101912, Harris county. Retrieved April 27, 2011 from <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/cgi/sas/broker>.

Table 8 indicates much different grade level retention trends with the highest rates in middle and high school found in grades 9, 10 and 12. This comparison is useful for future replication models as it illustrates the fact that students in Houston ISD high schools were retained at disproportionately higher rates than students in middle school. Contrastingly,

YES Prep retention patterns reveal higher retention rates in middle school and the early high school years. Replication of YES Prep's 6 – 16 model would require a more in-depth look at factors related to student retention per grade level, including but not limited to increased academic demands and workload for students, longer school day and year, and parent perceptions of students' progress at YES.

College-going educational models. Phase 3 of this study identified characteristics in the YES Prep model that are potentially replicable in mainstream public schools. School districts seeking to develop college-going cultures in middle and high schools may find value in the YES Prep model, centering budgetary priorities on providing quality pedagogy, intensive and rigorous curricula based on college readiness standards (such as AP), providing opportunities for students to experience the world of higher education and developing educational structures that unite adults and students toward a unified mission in the form of core values and principles. As stated in Chapter 5, the notion that people and programs comprise the bulk of budgetary priorities is central to fiscal planning and management at YES. This principle is translatable to mainstream school systems.

Three educational structures rose to prominence in the analysis of the technical dimension of the college-going culture of the YES Prep organization, the comprehensive-counseling model, the teacher excellence Program and the curriculum and assessment model. The comprehensive-counseling model represented a shift from traditional counseling models to developmental counseling models with a counselor-to-student ratio of 1:35. Funding priority placed on this model, along with the use of seminar courses and Naveance K-12, enables YES Prep to ensure that all students receive equitable support and

preparation and that no student “slips through the cracks.” The teacher excellence program screened prospective teachers on behavioral traits that are selected in alignment with the core values and principles of the organization. Selected applicants were then given ongoing support and educational opportunities as novice teachers. Teachers were viewed as collaborators and given a position of shared leadership and decision-making in the organization. The curriculum and assessment model works backward, beginning with the AP standards, which teachers and content specialists utilize to build a college readiness content standards for each subject area as well as the district assessment, which was the system mandated exam. The district assessment covered these standards, and students were given benchmark tests periodically to determine their progress toward these standards. Standards developed for the district assessment were conceived to be a more rigorous than statewide standards for each content area.

Upon enrollment at YES Prep, parents, students and teachers must sign a contract entitled the *Commitment to College Completion* (Appendix B), stating that they agree to the provisions laid out in the contract. Failure to comply with the provisions outlined in the contract results in subsequent removal from the YES Prep organization. Data from the Texas Education Agency reveals that, during the 2009-10 school term, 20 of the 3,572 students enrolled at YES Prep were expelled from the program (Texas Education Agency, 2011c). Data from interviews indicates that fighting resulted in automatic expulsion from the YES Prep program. While reasons for student expulsion were not ascertained, data from this report indicated that reasons for incident reports (including in- and out-of-school suspension) were controlled substance/drugs, violated local code of conduct,

fighting/mutual combat and non-illegal knife. The category “violated local code of conduct” comprised the vast majority (120 of 147 counts) of incidents (Texas Education Agency, 2011c). The expulsion rate indicated above is relatively low in comparison to the overall enrollment indicated in the Texas Education Agency report, indicating that few students were removed from the YES Prep program as a result of failing to comply with the tenets of the *Commitment to College Completion*.

Unified mission and college-going discourses. As previously stated, one of the most prominent features of the educational design at YES Prep is the seemingly universally held belief that all students can succeed in higher education. Not only do the core values and principles and thinks and acts serve as guiding documents for staff and students, these documents form the foundation upon which the entire institution operates. Teachers were selected based on the core values and beliefs of the organization. Students, parents, and teachers must sign a contract at the beginning of the year declaring their commitment to the values and principles of the institution. Structures within the system were designed to further immerse students and staff in the core values and principles of the institution. While circumstances involved in implementing such a pronounced and prominent system of shared beliefs may prove more challenging and intricate in mainstream public schools, steps can be made to align structures and programs toward core values and principles of college-going schools.

One barrier indicated in the research was teacher retention. As proposed in interviews, teacher turnover was attributed to burnout. Factors contributing to burnout were proposed to be the increased workload, longer school day and longer school year. The

teacher turnover rate for the 2009-2010 school term, according to the Texas Educational Agency, was 30.0 percent compared to the statewide rate of 11.8 percent. Future research on factors contributing to the higher teacher turnover rate at YES Prep schools would prove valuable for policy-makers and researchers interested in the unique college-going environment of YES Prep schools. Questions proposed by this study are whether features within the YES Prep model place burdens upon teachers and staff resulting in the increased rate of teacher turnover or whether other factors (such as teacher pay or average age or experience of teachers) contribute to this rate.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study provided a useful model for researchers interested in educational pipeline models, such as K-12, K-8 or P-16 designs. The 6-16 orientation of the YES Prep model was unique in its approach, focusing upon strengthening academic rigor and structures of support in the middle years. Further research in such charter schools as KIPP, which served students from grades Pre-K-12 and boast similar college-going statistics, will contribute to the body of research to which this study contributes.

A theoretical model was developed according to the data collected in each phase of this study which may prove useful in research seeking to delineate the orientation of structures and programs toward the overall missions and guiding principles of educational institutions. Other research may build upon the identified college-going characteristics of the YES model, which provided a useful framework for research and inquiry into college-going school cultures.

Absent in this study were the voices of students and parents. Future research may

glean valuable insight into the lived experiences of students in schools with strong college-going cultures. Studies focusing on the experiences students and parents as they navigate through the structures and discourses found in such organizations as well as the impact of these environments on their college-going identities would complement the research presented in this study.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS

Technical		
College-Preparatory Teaching and Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum Rigor • Accelerated Work • Core Knowledge and Skills • Critical Thinking and Learning • Excellence • Parallels to the Professional Arena 	<p>YES Prep North Central is all about preparing kids to succeed in college, and when it comes to academic work, that means one thing: rigor (Edutopia, 2009, para. 1).</p> <p>So the lessons and assessments that teachers invent are designed to be rigorous and challenging, and to give students much of the responsibility for their own learning (Edutopia, 2009g, para. 1).</p> <p>At YES Prep, educators are finding additional benefits to a packed student schedule. For one, the longer school day ensures that kids spend more hours doing constructive activities, and fewer hours without supervision. Also, says Barbie, it accustoms kids to the kind of workweek they can expect in college and later on in jobs as adult professionals (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 5).</p> <p>The public charter school's name stands for Youth Engaged in Service, and its mostly low-income students moved through city neighborhoods like young social workers, practicing their academic skills by collecting information on bus routes, health clinics and many other real-world topics (Mathews, 2006, para.1).</p> <p>At YES College Prep, every student is required to gain acceptance to a four-year college in order to receive their high-school diploma. By setting the bar high, YES expects every student to graduate from college—no excuses (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 2).</p>

APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pedagogy • Excellence and Quality • Rigor • Support • Planning and Goal-Setting • Creativity and Innovation • Critical Thinking and Learning • Expertise 	<p>Ideal YES Teachers typically have clear goals that are associated in some sense with becoming "number one" in a given context: becoming School Leader, obtaining "exemplary" rating in TAKS, promoting high student achievement, establishing a new record, winning an award, or the like (7 Personality Traits, Appendix D).</p> <p>The staff members' fixation with constant improvement makes YES Prep unusually nimble. A couple years ago, DiBella and another teacher visited a school in Boston that did great work with team teaching. When they told their colleagues about it, the sixth-grade teachers put in a few extra days over winter break, implemented some plans on the fly, and reopened in January with team teaching in place. In the education world, schools simply don't adapt that fast (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 5).</p> <p>Ideal YES Teachers throw in extra time, resources, and effort in order to produce a highly refined and polished product. They epitomize the continual improvement philosophy, always looking for ways to set a higher standard (7 Personality Traits, Appendix D).</p> <p>Every minute of every day is designed to ensure every student completes college and is committed to improving disadvantaged communities (Commitment to College Completion, Appendix A).</p> <p>Ideal YES teachers may show great interest in the other's needs and may be excellent listeners, but, at the end of the day, will likely only agree to the other's needs if it is conducive to success (teacher's, student's, team's, or school's success). They enjoy being persuasive in a sensitive and considerate, even though unyielding manner. Also, they are more likely to deal with conflict rather than avoid it (7 Personality Traits, Appendix D).</p> <p>At YES Prep North Central in Houston, Texas, teachers work together weekly as creators of curriculum (Edutopia, 2009g, para. 1).</p> <p>But administrators here don't just conjure a staff of already excellent educators and then kick back and rest; they find people with passion, smarts, and potential and help them become leaders. Through weekly professional development, one-on-one sessions with the dean of instruction, and built-in time for teamwork, everyone here is working toward ever better instruction. And no one is working alone (Edutopia, 2009h, para. 1).</p> <p>At North Central, this drive is not to be confused with traditional drill-and-kill. Educators at this International Baccalaureate-certified school believe in the power of project learning to make lessons relevant and to build critical-thinking skills. So they weave opportunities for collaborative, creative work into their lessons, always providing detailed rubrics so students know just what kind of high-quality work they're expected to produce (Edutopia, 2009, para. 1).</p>
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APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS

Systems/Structures for Support		
	<p>Shared Responsibility Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalization • Longer Time Spent Learning • Experience-Based Learning 	<p>So the lessons and assessments that teachers invent are designed to be rigorous and challenging, and to give students much of the responsibility for their own learning (Edutopia, 2009g, para. 1).</p> <p>Teachers and students at YES Prep use the extra time for more -- and longer -- classes. At Saturday sessions, students do some academic work, such as SAT practice, and also help teachers organize community activities, like a carnival on the athletic field and a door-to-door outreach campaign, both designed to build the school's relationship with its neighbors (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 7).</p> <p>Summer sessions also are an important part of YES Prep's extended learning program. Students in the lower grades must attend a two-week summer school for an academic boost. (For entering sixth graders, it's all about getting to know the ropes at YES.) (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 8)</p> <p>Past activities for students at YES Prep North Central have included National Outdoor Leadership School wilderness trips, college-prep immersion programs on university campuses, and service trips to India and Ghana. North Central's college counselor helps students find scholarships for these experiences (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 9).</p> <p>These are the kinds of experiences that can happen naturally in the lives of wealthier kids, says Barbic, experiences that help them deepen their education and broaden their own sense of possibility. He wants YES Prep's students to have them, too (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 11).</p> <p>Personalized college counseling and annual class trips to colleges nationwide (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 2).</p>

APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS

Normative/Cultural		
Core Values	<p>Excellence Commitment Continual Improvement Human Talent Opportunities to Learn Community-Family Focus</p>	<p>Yet they are all in a school where college graduation is the expectation (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 2).</p> <p>The charter school, serving grades 6-12, exists to help children from low-income homes complete college and thus rewrite their families' futures (Edutopia, 2009g, para. 1).</p> <p>Educators at YES Prep are on a mission with far-reaching goals. They want to prepare kids, many of them from disadvantaged families with few, if any, high school graduates, to attend college. But the aspiration doesn't end there: They want to make sure their students succeed in college once they get there, a step they believe will change the fortunes not only of their students but also of the kids' families and communities (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 1).</p> <p>"You hear that not everyone's cut out for college," he says. "But for a lot of the kids we serve here, those decisions get made for them before they even get to college, or even high school." (Edutopia, 2009e, para. 12)</p> <p>YES takes a comprehensive view of student development, preparing youth for four-year college graduation while at the same time instilling values of community service and good citizenship (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 2).</p> <p>Ask anyone at YES Prep North Central about the key ingredient of the school's success, and he or she will say, "People, people, people." (Edutopia, 2009b, para. 2)</p> <p>YES' leadership believed that a college education represented a ticket out of poverty for families. Accordingly, they always had made it clear that acceptance at a four-year college was a minimum standard of success—it literally was a pre-requisite for graduation from a YES high school. As the leadership team members discussed the topic, however, they realized that the full definition of success varied among them from "every student graduates from a four-year college" to "every student is college ready" to "a large percentage of YES students gets into top colleges." (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 5)</p> <p>Additionally, YES' leadership recognized that their deepest satisfaction came from seeing students succeed in college, regardless of which college they attended. Ultimately, they committed to a single goal for their students: graduation from a four-year college (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 5).</p>

APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS

Discourses		
<p>Equity "Whatever It Takes" Passion/Drive/Motivation Personal/Shared Responsibility Inspiration Indoctrination/Unified Mission Leadership</p>	<p>The passion and determination among the adults infects the students (Eduutopia, 2009b, para. 1). In my previous school, if there was a problem, it would get swept under the rug," English teacher Emily Shisler recalls. Here, teachers are allowed, even encouraged, to disagree. The agenda for one staff meeting was titled "Killing Sacred Cows." (Eduutopia, 2009d, para. 4) Combined with the school's outright obsession with higher education, and the college pennants hanging from almost every wall, it can seem a little Orwellian. Barbic explains, "When they're not here, they're bombarded with a whole other set of messages. There really has to be a marketing campaign every day around why college is important and the kind of kids we want our kids to be." (Eduutopia, 2009d, para. 8) Additionally, YES' leadership recognized that their deepest satisfaction came from seeing students succeed in college, regardless of which college they attended. Ultimately, they committed to a single goal for their students: graduation from a four-year college (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 5) "You hear that not everyone's cut out for college," he says. "But for a lot of the kids we serve here, those decisions get made for them before they even get to college, or even high school." (Eduutopia, 2009e, para. 12) YES Prep is not just a school. YES Prep is a way of life (Eduutopia, 2009f, para. 10). Pennants, posters, and slogans on almost every wall of the school broadcast the ultimate goal of getting into college. Members of the school faculty insist that every student will go to college, and they take students to university campuses to give them a flavor of the experience (Eduutopia, 2009f, para. 3). Before each student starts at YES Prep, a staff member visits his or her home to collect signatures on the family contract... which details the rigorous requirements of a college-prep program. Educators use the contract as a way to engage with parents, and to emphasize that success is possible only when students, parents, and teachers work together. Later, if the student's commitment slips, they can use the contract as a teaching tool to help get the student back on track (Eduutopia, 2009f, para. 10). They realized that some students still would need extra time to become college ready, so they would reinforce the YES culture where being held back a grade was seen as an investment for the future, not a punishment (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 8).</p>	

APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS

Political			
	<p>Systems</p>	<p>Teacher-Centered</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team-Orientation • Shared Leadership and Responsibility <p>Resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Talent • Minimalism <p>Public Perception</p> <p>Educational Pipeline /Articulation</p>	<p>YES was founded by teachers. I'm a teacher. We're all teachers. And we wanted to create an organization that was going to be a good place for teachers to work, where teachers can have a voice in how the school is run, where every decision was made in the interest of what's going to be great for kids and teachers (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 6).</p> <p>Barbic and his leadership team initially kept the organization small, wanting to prove the YES educational model worked before expanding. But by 2004, with one integrated 6-12 campus in operation, two others in development, and 10 years of experience with the model, they were ready to grow (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 3).</p> <p>The alumni identified two support mechanisms that were vital to their success in college: their YES peers and the YES faculty. While a formal YES alumni-support program did not exist, several YES faculty members had been dedicating time to this activity. The service was highly valuable, but, with a burgeoning alumni base, the days when it could be an informal effort of a few senior faculty members were numbered (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 7).</p> <p>DIBella resists the notion that teachers will move on and wants to make YES Prep North Central a place where they build a career. So he's creating more personalized professional development and working with the main YES Prep office to offer hefty salary bumps to master teachers. "It's an enormous challenge, because ultimately, when people ask me what it takes to make North Central great, it truly is the people," says DIBella (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 14).</p> <p>What are his chances of retaining teachers for a decade or more? "Not good," he says. "But for a lot of things we've achieved, the chances weren't good. That doesn't mean we don't try." (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 15)</p> <p>Administrators at Houston's YES Prep North Central organize around a clear educational strategy -- invest in teachers, and help them to have strong relationships with their students. Budget and structure are dedicated to the priorities of teacher quality and the enrichment of student-teacher relationships; they are the motivating principles of management at YES (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 1).</p> <p>"We put all our resources into the teachers and students," says operations manager Michael Olson. "As for facilities, if the lights go on and we stay dry, that's fine." (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 2)</p> <p>The North Central budget emphasizes teacher salaries, college counseling, and student trips (supported by fundraising) for team-building and college visits (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 3).</p> <p>The YES-Bridgespan team studied the philanthropic landscape for education funding and found a large Houston community foundation and multiple national foundations interested in supporting Houston education reform. YES would need to earn a nontrivial but still relatively small share of the total funding these foundations were expected to inject into Houston education reform. YES' leadership and Board believed that a Houston-focused strategy would be compelling to foundations and they committed to pursuing expansion in Houston (Newstead & Howard, 2006, p. 9).</p>

APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS

	Discipline	
		<p>Next to the boosterism, a strict discipline system at North Central is in place, which prohibits even untucked shirts or talking out of turn. The business of getting prepared for college is too serious for such distractions. Five marks for misbehavior in a week puts a middle school student "on the RISE" (Restoring Individual Student Excellence), which entails wearing the equivalent of a scarlet letter, a white T-shirt instead of the uniform polo. For five days, a student must wear the shirt, eat lunch alone, and speak only to teachers, while earning points for positive participation in class. Each day of missing these targets means another day on the RISE (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 9).</p> <p>The stigmatizing may seem harsh, but the kids who have been through RISE agree it's fair. Most have to do it only once or twice before they step into line. (North Central had only two fistfights last year.) When they complete their week of penance, students read an apology letter aloud to their classmates, who then grill them -- vigorously -- on what they did wrong and how they plan to change (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 10).</p> <p>"This is a family," says Reed. "We couldn't fake what happens here." (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 11)</p> <p>I will remain after school for Wall Street on any day that my homework is not neat, complete, accurate, or turned in on time (Commitment to College Completion, Appendix A).</p> <p>I will always behave in a way that protects the safety, interest, and rights of all individuals in the classroom. This also means that I will always listen to my YES Prep teammates and respect everyone in the YES Prep family (Commitment to College Completion, Appendix A).</p> <p>Staff members emphasize that students are responsible for themselves and their school community at YES Prep, and they work proactively with kids to build good behavioral skills, which include appearance as well as demeanor. (Shirts must be tucked in at YES Prep.) The policy is working: There were only two fights on campus last year (Edutopia, 2009f, para. 2).</p>

APPENDIX A: CONTENT ANALYSIS

		<p>Barriers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Burnout • Facility Funding • Funding for Extracurricular Activities 	<p>But what happens when some in the family teachers especially, start to run out of gas? How is this level of effort sustainable? At 7:30 p.m. on a recent evening at his office, Reed said, "Inspiration only lasts so long when you don't see your spouse and kids more than an hour a day." (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 12)</p> <p>Barbie acknowledges that most teachers will stay at YES Prep only five to seven years. He says the days of the 30-year career doing the same job "are over in every other industry, and to expect teachers to be different is unrealistic." Still, he says the school is taking active steps to keep teachers interested and the environment vibrant enough so they'll want to stay on longer (Edutopia, 2009d, para. 13).</p> <p>"We put all our resources into the teachers and students," says operations manager Michael Olson. "As for facilities, if the lights go on and we stay dry, that's fine." (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 2)</p> <p>The school has two computer labs (also supported in part by grants), but not many other bells and whistles in plain sight. Students at North Central can take basic art electives and participate in standard after-school sports, but the school doesn't intend to excel at those things. As basketball coach, teacher, and high school principal Bryan Reed says, "We're not going to be the YES answer to Duke on the basketball court anytime soon." (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 3)</p> <p>"It would be nice if the kids could have all the things a St. John's kid has, but that's the tradeoff," says YES Prep founder Chris Barbie, referring to a private K-12 school in Houston. He adds, "You've got to have a great teacher in every classroom. The rest of the stuff -- computers and things -- that's all dandy. But if you don't have a great teacher in the classroom, it doesn't really matter. So from the beginning, that was the focus." (Edutopia, 2009c, para. 4)</p> <p>YES leadership had anticipated improvements in the policy environment that would ease funding needs for new facilities, but these changes have yet to materialize. As a result, the organization is exploring various contingency approaches to securing new facilities (Newstead & Howard, 2009, p. 10).</p>
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APPENDIX B: COMMITMENT TO COLLEGE COMPLETION

- We understand that our child must remain after school for Wall Street on any day he or she arrives with homework that is not neat, complete, accurate, and turned in on time. It is my responsibility to provide transportation home for my child.
- We understand that our child may also be required to remain after school if he/she has chosen to disrespect the YES Prep team. If this situation occurs, we commit to picking up our child from school on time.
- We will always make ourselves available to our child and to the school and we will address any concern(s) that arise.
- We will read all papers sent home carefully, sign them, and return them within two (2) days. If we fail to return papers on time, we understand that our child will have to stay for Wall Street or detention.
- We will attend all required parent meetings, exhibitions, and conferences.
- We will allow our child to go on YES Prep field lessons, including out-of-town field lessons.
- We will make sure our child adheres to the YES Prep dress code.
- We understand that our child must follow all YES Prep rules in the handbook in order to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom.
- We, not the school, are responsible for the behavior and actions of our child.
- **For the whole time my child is a student at YES, I will do *Whatever It Takes* to support the work required of me and my child in order for him or her to be accepted and graduate from a 4 year college or university.**

* Failure to adhere to these commitments can cause my child to lose various YES Prep privileges and can lead to his or her removal from the YES Prep team.

I have read the above, and by signing, I agree to abide by this contract.

Parent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Teachers' Commitments: *We fully commit to YES Prep in the following ways:*

- We will arrive at YES Prep on time and will remain for the entirety of the school day.
- We will arrive at YES Prep on appropriate Saturdays.
- We will attend and participate in all staff meetings and professional development.
- We will teach YES Prep students in the best way we know how and we will do *Whatever It Takes* for our students to learn including providing students with our cell phone numbers for questions about homework after school.
- We will always make ourselves available to work with students and parents, and we will address any concern(s) they might have.
- We will be the first to both correct AND congratulate our students.
- We will provide tutorials for our students to support their learning.
- We will respond to communication from students, parents, and fellow staff members within 24 hours.
- We will always protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom.
- **We will provide a rigorous college prep curriculum along with necessary support in order to prepare our YES Prep students to be accepted and graduate from a 4 year college or university.**

* Failure to adhere to these commitments can lead to my removal from the YES Prep team.

I have read the above, and by signing, I agree to abide by this contract.

Teacher/Staff Member's Signature: _____

Date: _____

Congratulations, and welcome to YES!



Whatever It Takes



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APPENDIX C: SCHOOL-BASED DOCUMENTS

APPENDIX C1: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM



YES Prep Full Observation Evaluation Form

Teacher: _____ Date: _____ Time In: _____ Time Out: _____
 Observer: _____ Class and topic: _____

**Observation notes and lesson plans attached*

DOMAIN I: Classroom Management and Culture Classroom Culture and the Learning Environment	
Indicator at the <i>Proficient</i> and <i>Mastery</i> Levels on the Teacher Summative Rubric	Rating
<u>Motivation/Sense of Urgency</u> -Effectively creates a positive sense of urgency for classroom performance -Effectively motivates students to work hard including the use of verbal and/or written praise to reward students for their efforts -Students demonstrate intrinsic motivation and have internalized the value of hard work, demonstrating pride in their accomplishments	NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery
<u>Respect and Equity</u> -Demonstrates respect for all students and treats all students fairly. -Interactions among students are free from sarcasm, conflict, and insensitivity. -Classroom culture encourages respect between all individuals in the room; interactions demonstrate genuine warmth and caring toward individuals.	NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery
<u>High Expectations</u> -Drives all students to achieve at high levels. -Drives students to hold themselves accountable for success every day. -Students occasionally take risks such as volunteering or making mistakes. -Students consistently take academic risks such as volunteering or making mistakes in order to better their learning.	NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery



APPENDIX C1: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM



YES Prep
Full Observation Evaluation Form

<p><u>Valuing Hard Work and Persistence</u> -75% - 90% of students display hard work and demonstrate persistence through difficult material. -90-100% of students display hard work and demonstrate persistence through difficult material.</p>	<p>NA 1 2 3 Mastery</p>
<p><u>Teamwork</u> -Students demonstrate positive interactions with each other and teacher during group activities. -Students value contributions of other team members. -Students demonstrate cooperation rather than competition in group and whole-class activities.</p>	<p>NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery</p>
<p><u>Stimulating Environment</u> -Classroom contains positive messages (including all YES materials) and relevant content materials. -The space is clean and visually stimulating. -Engaging and promotes student achievement; examples of recent student work displayed and celebrated.</p>	<p>NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery</p>
<p><u>Classroom Arrangement</u> -Classroom is arranged to allow varied interactions between students and teacher and among students. -Space is rearranged as necessary to meet curricular goals. -Teacher uses recent data to make decisions about student seating (including hetero- and homogeneous grouping).</p>	<p>NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery</p>



APPENDIX C1: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM



YES Prep
Full Observation Evaluation Form

DOMAIN I: Classroom Management and Culture	
Student Management	
Indicator at the Proficient and Mastery Levels on the Teacher Summative Rubric	Rating
<p><u>Assertive Authority</u> -Uses a firm tone to clearly articulate behavioral expectations of students as appropriate during class. -Monitors student behavior and attends to all areas of the classroom in order to prevent misbehavior. -Students display appropriate behavior the majority of the time -Teacher uses a variety of strategies to manage student behavior in a proactive manner; teachers' monitoring of behavior is subtle and students display appropriate behavior <u>95% - 100%</u> of the time.</p>	NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery
<p><u>Handling Misbehavior</u> -Quickly, effectively, and consistently handles student misbehavior. -Handles student misbehavior in a respectful and appropriate way. -Misbehaving students respond quickly and appropriately. -Quickly and effectively handles student misbehavior in a respectful and appropriate way that maximizes instructional time and promotes positive expectations for behavior. -Teacher's response is firm yet responsive to individual student needs.</p>	NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery Mastery
<p><u>Using School Systems Effectively</u> -Effectively and appropriately uses school systems such as agendas, Wall St., RISE, "three marks" and detentions to manage student misbehavior. -Blends use of school systems with own methods effectively so as to not over-depend on school systems.</p>	NA 1 2 3 Mastery
<p><u>Classroom Routines and Procedures</u> -Creates and implements effective classroom procedures that maximize instructional time and allow for effective record keeping. -85 - 90% of students follow procedures without prompting by teacher. -Over 90% of students follow procedures w/o prompting by teacher; uses student helpers to accomplish tasks and streamline classroom operations.</p>	NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery



APPENDIX C1: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM



YES Prep
Full Observation Evaluation Form

DOMAIN II: Instructional Planning and Delivery	
Classroom Instruction	
Indicator at the Proficient and Mastery Levels on the Teacher Summative Rubric	Rating
<p>Objective-Driven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lesson is centered around concrete, measurable objective(s) for student achievement. -Expectations for student learning are clearly stated. -Objective is posted prominently in room. -Consistently invests students in the daily objective. 	<p>NA 1 2 3</p> <p>NA 1 2 3</p> <p>NA 1 2 3</p> <p>Mastery</p>
<p>Effective Instructional Planning-Focus on Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Lesson delivery shows thoughtful and reflective planning and contains all elements of the lesson cycle as appropriate to ensure student understanding and mastery of objective(s). -Direct instruction is clear and error-free, and designed to avoid and/or clarify anticipated misunderstandings. -Teacher designs lesson plans regularly (weekly) using recent student data in order to meet student needs. 	<p>NA 1 2 3</p> <p>NA 1 2 3</p> <p>Mastery</p>
<p>Effective Instructional Planning-Focus on Student (Engagement and Interest)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Uses a variety of student-centered strategies (instructional and behavioral) to ensure that students are engaged in lesson. -Effectively addresses students' different learning styles with some differentiation (formal or informal) so that students are appropriately challenged. -Lessons are differentiated (formally and informally) so that students at various levels are engaged and appropriately challenged. 	<p>NA 1 2 3</p> <p>NA 1 2 3</p> <p>Mastery</p>



APPENDIX C1: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION FORM



**YES Prep
Full Observation Evaluation Form**

<p>Checking for Understanding -Lesson contains appropriate activities for students to <i>demonstrate</i> understanding. -Modifies and/or adjusts lesson as appropriate in order to ensure mastery of objective. -Assesses each student's level of mastery of daily objectives.</p>	<p>NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery</p>
<p>Pacing -The pacing of lesson activities consistently balances instructional time with opportunities for student processing. -Teacher adjusts presentation style and strategies as appropriate to meet needs of all students; students may be working at different pace depending on progress on daily objective.</p>	<p>NA 1 2 3 Mastery</p>
<p>Questioning Strategies -Structures questions to assess student mastery of material and encourage higher level thinking. -Encourages student questioning and productive discussion. -Effective use of wait time to encourage processing. -Questions are consistently open-ended; students display ownership of the inquiry process without prompting by teacher; uses wait time effectively both after posing a question and before responding to student answers.</p>	<p>NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery</p>
<p>Content Knowledge -Displays extensive content knowledge to students. -Effectively explains relevancy of material to students and/or makes connections to other disciplines or the world. -Consistently strives to increase content knowledge and bring new learning into classroom.</p>	<p>NA 1 2 3 NA 1 2 3 Mastery</p>

Signature of Observer _____ Date _____

Signature of Instructor _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C2: POST-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE FORM



Post Observation Conference Plan
YES Prep



Staff Member:	
Agenda	
Transition	
... so now that you have the agenda...	
Strengths in school and then in the classroom observation	
*Think about a variety of sources-PowerSchool, observations, GLC or DH feedback, Director feedback, benchmark/district tests, etc.	
Transition	
Here are some things I noticed...	
Since I noticed that, I would like to talk about...	
Points of Concern	
Focus on agenda over empathy.	
How do I prepare the instructor to receive feedback?	
What I hear you saying is _____ so let's focus back on _____	
It's ok to interrupt teachers to stay on agenda.	
Difficult conversations/action steps from previous observations or meetings	
Commitment/desired action steps from the meeting	

APPENDIX C3: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ROUNDS

Professional Development: Rounds

Rounds Overview:

If you walk into any hospital, you will most likely see a group of doctors traveling together to a group of patients. The doctors observe each patient and then debrief as a group to determine next steps. This best practice in the medical profession can be applied to the teaching profession in a similar way. This year at _____, we will be implementing a professional development program called "Rounds" based on peer observation, sharing of feedback, self-directed professional development, and working towards a common goal through a scientific inquiry process.

Groups of _____ teachers will form Rounds groups. Through observations and close analysis of data, teachers in each Rounds group will determine a common goal related to student achievement. They will then devise a scientific inquiry process through which they will gather data, experiment with instructional practices, and ultimately increase student achievement. Rounds groups will then observe one teacher in the group per week throughout the year. Observations will be focused on the group's main inquiry or goal. Rounds groups will meet the majority of early dismissal Wednesdays during professional development time to debrief, discuss, encourage, inquire, and move forward with next steps. By implementing Rounds, we will revolutionize _____ professional development.

Rounds will provide teachers with:

- Completely differentiated professional development
- Opportunities to be observed by colleagues and receive feedback for continual improvement
- Opportunities to observe colleagues and see best practices in action on a regular basis
- Mutual accountability and support from colleagues on group goals
- Space to conduct an instructional experiment using scientific inquiry
- Time to discuss instructional practices with a group of like-minded colleagues

Rounds Groups:

- **Middle School:** In grades 6 - 8, Rounds groups will be grade-level based. For example, all sixth grade teachers will be members of the same Rounds group. This will allow the grade level to work towards a common goal connecting to student achievement. Group membership will remain constant throughout the year.
- **High School:** In grades 9 - 12, Rounds groups will be content based. For example, all high school math teachers will be members of the same Rounds group. This will allow content teams to work towards vertical alignment and articulation of best practices for college readiness. Group membership will remain constant throughout the year.
- **Electives/Spanish:** Spanish teachers that normally attend a middle school grade level meeting will participate in Rounds with that group. High school electives and Spanish teachers will attend the following Rounds groups:
 - **Electives Round:**
 - **High School English Round:** AP and pre-AP Spanish teachers

Rounds Roles:

- **Rounds Facilitators:** One teacher in each Rounds group will serve as the "Rounds Facilitator". This facilitator will help lead Rounds meetings. The Rounds facilitator will be the main liaison between the instructional team and Rounds groups.
- **Rounds Members:** All teachers in a Rounds group will be Rounds members. Members will be engaged in observations and discussions of best practices. Members will be open-minded and flexible as they give and receive feedback. All Rounds members will be invested in the group's chosen inquiry and goal.
- **Administrators:** The YES _____ instructional team will facilitate Rounds as a whole. _____ will meet with Rounds facilitators on a regular basis to facilitate communication, deliverables, and logistics. All school administrators will fully participate in a Rounds group.

APPENDIX C3: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ROUNDS

Year Long Overview:

1st six weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building trust in Rounds groups • General observations: looking for trends and trouble
2nd six weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designing an experimental plan using the scientific method • Continue general observations or begin focused observations
3rd six weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused observations and debriefs • Self-selected professional development • Analysis of student work • Discussion of progress in scientific inquiry
4th six weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused observations and debriefs • Self-selected professional development • Analysis of student work • Discussion of progress in scientific inquiry
5th six weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focused observations and debriefs • Self-selected professional development • Analysis of student work • Discussion of progress in scientific inquiry
6th six weeks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesis of discoveries • Presentations to staff

Repeating Six Week Structure:

Meeting 1: Week 1	All-Staff PD Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logistical meeting • Focus for the six week session • Debriefing / Sharing / Q&A around Rounds issues Short Rounds Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-observation discussion
Meeting 2: Week 3	Rounds Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation debriefing • Analysis of student work and other data • Scientific investigation progress and next steps • Pre-observation discussion
Meeting 3: Week 4	Rounds Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation debriefing • Analysis of student work and other data • Scientific investigation progress and next steps • Pre-observation discussion
Meeting 4: Week 6 or Week 7	Rounds Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation debriefing • Analysis of student work and other data • Scientific investigation progress and next steps • Pre-observation discussion

Rounds Meetings:

All Rounds meetings will take place during early dismissal Wednesday professional development time. Teachers will be expected to meet with their Rounds groups from 2:30 – 4:30 on these afternoons. Rounds meetings will follow a common meeting protocol. The protocol will ensure effective use of time, equity of voice among group members, and ease in sharing feedback. All meetings will be facilitated by the Rounds Facilitator. The general meeting structure will include observation debriefing from the previous week(s), analysis of student work, a discussion of the scientific investigation progress, and next steps including information on who will be observed next.

YES Prep RISE Respect Log

Student Name: _____ HR: _____ Level: _____ Start Date: _____ Parent Ltr: _____ HR Ltr: _____

Just Beginning (1)	Approaching (2)	Meets (3)	Exceeds (4)
The student failed to meet the behavioral expectations of a student on RISE. The student failed to contribute to the learning environment of the classroom.	The student was on task for a majority of class, but did not follow all directions. The student made little effort to participate in classroom activities.	The student was on task and followed the instructor's directions. The student made an effort to participate in classroom activities.	The student was a model YES Prep student in class. The on task behavior and active participation enhanced the learning environment.

Day 1	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 2	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 3	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 4	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____



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YES Prep RISE Respect Log



- 1. Good Class Participation/Buena Participación en Clase
- 2. Positive Attitude/Actitud Positiva
- 3. Has Shown Improvement/Ha Mejorado

Day 5	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

- 4. Capable of Doing Better/Capaz de Hacer Mejor
- 5. Talking Disturbs Others/Habla, Interrumpe a los Demas
- 6. Needs to Participate More/Tiene Que Participar Mas

Day 6	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 7	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 8	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

APPENDIX C4: RESPECT RISE INFORMATION

APPENDIX C4: RESPECT RISE INFORMATION



YES Prep RISE Respect Log



Day 9	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____

Parent _____

Day 10	Behavior	Signature	Comment
1	1 2 3 4		
2	1 2 3 4		
3	1 2 3 4		
4	1 2 3 4		
5	1 2 3 4		
6	1 2 3 4		
7	1 2 3 4		
8	1 2 3 4		

Thinks & Acts _____

Parent _____

APPENDIX C5: RESPONSIBILITY RISE INFORMATION

1ES PREP RISE Responsibility Log

Student Name: _____ HR: _____ Level: _____ Start Date: _____ Parent Ltr: _____ HR Ltr: _____

Responsibility RISE Expectations (Circle Yes or No for each period)	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Homework is written neatly, completely, and accurately in agenda. 2. BOSS binder only has necessary materials for class (check specific class). 3. The student is prepared for class with all necessary supplies. 4. The student completed all homework assignments from the previous day. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. The student has an organized backpack without loose papers. 6. The student has an independent reading book. 7. The student has all necessary parent signatures (when applicable). 8. The student had all items ready for the teacher to check.

Day 1	Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No	
2	Yes	No	
3	Yes	No	
4	Yes	No	
5	Yes	No	
6	Yes	No	
7	Yes	No	
8	Yes	No	

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 2	Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No	
2	Yes	No	
3	Yes	No	
4	Yes	No	
5	Yes	No	
6	Yes	No	
7	Yes	No	
8	Yes	No	

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 3	Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No	
2	Yes	No	
3	Yes	No	
4	Yes	No	
5	Yes	No	
6	Yes	No	
7	Yes	No	
8	Yes	No	

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 4	Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No	
2	Yes	No	
3	Yes	No	
4	Yes	No	
5	Yes	No	
6	Yes	No	
7	Yes	No	
8	Yes	No	

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____



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APPENDIX C5: RESPONSIBILITY RISE INFORMATION



YES Prep RISE Responsibility Log



1. Student is prepared to learn / Estudiante está preparado para aprender
2. Positive attitude/Actitud positiva
3. Has shown improvement/Ha mejorado

4. Capable of doing better/Capaz de hacer mejor
5. Has not shown improvement / No ha mejorado
6. Needs to come to school prepared / Necesita venir preparado a las clases

Day 5	Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No	
2	Yes	No	
3	Yes	No	
4	Yes	No	
5	Yes	No	
6	Yes	No	
7	Yes	No	
8	Yes	No	

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 6	Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No	
2	Yes	No	
3	Yes	No	
4	Yes	No	
5	Yes	No	
6	Yes	No	
7	Yes	No	
8	Yes	No	

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 7	Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No	
2	Yes	No	
3	Yes	No	
4	Yes	No	
5	Yes	No	
6	Yes	No	
7	Yes	No	
8	Yes	No	

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 8	Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No	
2	Yes	No	
3	Yes	No	
4	Yes	No	
5	Yes	No	
6	Yes	No	
7	Yes	No	
8	Yes	No	

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

APPENDIX C5: RESPONSIBILITY RISE INFORMATION



YES Prep RISE Responsibility Log



Day 9		Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No		
2	Yes	No		
3	Yes	No		
4	Yes	No		
5	Yes	No		
6	Yes	No		
7	Yes	No		
8	Yes	No		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

Day 10		Expectations Met	Signature	Comment
1	Yes	No		
2	Yes	No		
3	Yes	No		
4	Yes	No		
5	Yes	No		
6	Yes	No		
7	Yes	No		
8	Yes	No		

Thinks & Acts _____ Parent _____

APPENDIX C6: GUARDRAILS



YES Prep Public Schools

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Proposed Guardrails of College Counseling and Alumni Programs

OVERVIEW

Recruit, select, train and develop a comprehensive College Counseling Team

- **Guardrails:** Must have a college counseling department that meets the needs of students, families and the entire school community. Positions that are non-negotiable are Director of College Counseling, two counselors and a student opportunities coordinator.
- **Flexibility:** Staggering the hiring of the four positions noted above based on student enrollment. Actual structure and specific responsibilities of four positions can be interchangeable. Lastly, hiring of administrative assistant is strongly recommended but is not essential as long as this role is being done by others.

Specific Programs/Responsibilities that fall within College Counseling Program

- Faculty Advising (high school)

- **Guardrails:** Must have an advisory program in place that covers the outlined scope and sequence provided by Director of College Initiatives (DCI).
- **Flexibility:** When advisory sessions will occur (specific periods, on certain days, etc.). Additions to scope and sequence beyond ones given by DCI, as well as teaching/instructional materials and plans can be made.

- Junior Seminar class/test prep (planning and teaching)

- **Guardrails:** Must have a Junior Seminar class that has designated test prep instruction, along with introduction to the college counseling application/search process.
- **Flexibility:** When Junior Seminar will occur (during specific periods, on certain days, etc.). Additions to scope and sequence beyond ones given by DCI, as well as teaching/instructional materials and plans can be made.

- Senior Seminar class (planning and teaching)

- **Guardrails:** Must have a daily Senior Seminar class that adheres to the outlined scope and sequence provided by the DCI.
- **Flexibility:** When Senior Seminar will occur (during specific periods). Additions to scope and sequence beyond ones given by DCI, as well as teaching/instructional materials and plans can be made.

- Spring Trips (planning and implementation – all grade levels but emphasis on 8th-11th)

- **Guardrails:** Must have annual spring trips. College focus in 8th-11th grade trips (college visits, tours, info sessions, guest lectures, student panels, etc.). Must stay within outlined budgets determined by both school leadership and designated home office staff (head of schools, chief financial officer, board, etc.). Will work with designated home office staff to maximize leverage with specific vendors (e.g. bus requests-Coach USA, airline tickets-Continental, etc.)
- **Flexibility:** The location of spring trips, dates and length of trips. Collaborating with other YES Prep campuses to hold joint spring trips (e.g. mixing 11th graders among YES schools and locations).

- Senior College Visit Program – Fall/Spring

- **Guardrails:** Must have a program/protocol in place to support seniors (mainly staffing) visiting college campuses through fly-in programs sponsored by colleges and/or using school-provided (YES provided) funds.

- High School Visits by colleges and outside organizations to YES Prep schools

- **Guardrails:** YES Prep campuses will host all colleges and outside organizations that wish to visit their respective campuses throughout the fall and spring.
- **Flexibility:** Visits can occur at specified times and under certain conditions established by respective schools (e.g. all college visits will happen at lunch, at academic elective and club time, etc.).

APPENDIX C6: GUARDRAILS

- Senior Signing Day (SSD) Program

- **Guardrails:** YES Prep campuses will plan and successfully implement annual Senior Signing Day celebration of their respective campuses that will occur no more than 2-3 days prior to May 1st, the national reply date. Other YES Prep campuses that currently do not have their own senior classes will be invited to attend those celebrations that do. The number of available spaces and accommodations will be determined by host school and available space.
- **Flexibility:** Location/time of event can either be on campus or off-campus, depending on space and logistics.

- Commencement Exercises/Weekend (school-based and possible district-wide celebration)

- **Guardrails:** Working with both designated home office staff and school-based staff, all members in the CC dept. will assist with the planning and successful implementation of all Commencement Exercises/Weekend events/celebration of their respective campuses. Commencement Weekend will occur the last week/weekend of the school year.
- **Flexibility:** Location and time of event can either be on campus or off-campus, depending on space and logistical needs. Specific times/events of weekend celebrations will be determined by schools and home office staff at the beginning of each school year to allow for sufficient planning time.

- Student Opportunities (High School & possible Middle School Support)

- **Guardrails:** YES Prep campuses will have a comprehensive high school student opportunities program in place for rising juniors and seniors. YES Prep campuses will designate a specified allotment of funds for scholarship/programmatic costs for a high school student opportunities program. Regarding middle school support, it will be required that all YES Prep schools participate in the DUKE Talent Identification Program (TIPs).
- **Flexibility:** Summer opportunities program have option to serve rising sophomores and freshmen at the school's discretion (based on factors as summer school/credit recovery, staffing/personnel, available scholarship funds, etc.). Overall budget allotment for summer opportunities will be determined by schools. Campuses are highly encouraged to participate in other pre-identified programs like Uncommon Schools/Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship Program, Mini-Meds Program at the Houston Museum of Medicine, etc.

- Additional Areas of Responsibilities for College Counselors

- **Special Education Needs (ARDs, 504, Exit Strategies, College Accommodations)**
- **NCAA Athletics/Clearinghouse**
- **Performing and Visual Arts**
- **Testing (PSAT/SAT, PLAN/ACT, AP, CLEP, TOEFL)**
 - **Guardrails:** Must have program in place that ensures that the noted areas above are being supported by the college counselors and all other departments on the campus where needed. Must ensure all college counselors are knowledgeable in all of these areas.
 - **Flexibility:** Have specific college counselors serve as designated/primary contacts within the CC department to oversee the specifics of areas.

- Ongoing professional development opportunities

- **Guardrails:** School leadership will help create and allow college counseling department members to actively participate in ongoing professional development opportunities that not only benefit themselves but the overall department, YES school and YES district as a whole.
- **Flexibility:** Designate when professional development will occur (specific times of the year, summer, etc.).

- Member of school-based and district-wide leadership teams and committees

- **Guardrails:** College Counseling Department members are expected to actively participate and serve on both school-based and district-wide leadership teams as needed.
- **Flexibility:** Designate what level of participation/commitment, along with number of commitments CC members can do and when.

Files/Research/Evaluation/Database Support

- Counseling folders

- **Guardrails:** College Counseling Department members are expected to maintain a comprehensive folder of pertinent information for both the student opportunities and the college admissions process. All counseling folders must contain outlined items pre-determined by the DCI with significant input from all CCs on all campuses.
- **Flexibility:** Additional materials can be added as deemed necessary by respective CC school-based teams.

APPENDIX C6: GUARDRAILS

- Naviance – College Counseling tracking database

- **Guardrails:** College Counseling Department members are expected to maintain an updated overall database (primary responsibility of maintenance and updated information is that of the DCC), as well as pre-determined information designated by both the DCI and DCC (e.g. journal notes, prospective/active college applications, surveys, etc.). CC Dept members will be expected to attend all ongoing professional development trainings on Naviance held throughout the year.
- **Flexibility:** Additional aspects of the Naviance can be added/purchased as deemed necessary by respective CC school-based teams.

- Power School support

- **Guardrails:** College Counseling Department members are expected to assist with and maintain an updated overall school-based database, as well as pre-determined information designated by both the respective school and/or the home office. CC Dept members will be expected to attend all ongoing professional development trainings on Power School held throughout the year.
- **Flexibility:** These specific responsibilities can be placed onto the registrar, operations manager and/or other staff members as deemed necessary.

District Assistance/Support of overall YES Prep College Counseling Program

- District College Fair

- **Guardrails:** College Counseling Department members are expected to assist with the planning and successful implementation of a District College Fair. Schools/CC depts. will be expected to have their seniors and juniors in attendance. Schools/CC depts. will cover their own respective costs of transporting students, meals for students and other costs as necessary.
- **Flexibility:** Ideally, each of the YES schools that have high school programs would host the district fair for a 2-year (possible 3-year) rotation based on available space and equity among the host schools. Possibility of sophomores in attendance based on space availability.

- IMPACT Partnership Scholars Program

- **Guardrails:** College Counseling Department members of each high school campus with seniors are expected to identify, nominate, support and assist with all aspects of district-wide IMPACT Partnership Scholars Program.

- Boarding/day schools support and assistance

- **Guardrails:** College Counseling Department members are expected to assist with 8th and 9th grade students (working with respective grade level chairs and deans of students/principals) who have expressed an interest in pursuing boarding/day school options (primary responsibility of DCC).

- Other external community partnerships

- **Guardrails:** College Counseling Department members are expected to assist with the planning, successful implementation and ongoing support of community partnerships that YES Prep Schools establishes. Specific examples of external community partnerships such as The Princeton Review and Skills 4 Living program.

Optional Programs that could fall within College Counseling Program

- YES Ambassadors Program

- **Flexibility:** The YES Student Ambassador Program is one this is not required to be done at the school level, but is strongly recommended by the DCI and home office to have pre-identified and trained students who can be utilized to represent said school both internally and externally.

Alumni Support Program

- **Guardrails:** Need to have a comprehensive alumni support program established that assists with ensuring that all graduating YES students successfully matriculate to and graduate from college (ideally a 4-year college). This will also entail maintaining an up-to-date alumni database, as well as other aspects of the alumni program.
- **Flexibility:** Specific support programs can vary as needed. Creation of an advisory alumni board/council.

APPENDIX C7: WALKTHROUGH OBSERVATION FORM



YES Prep Walk-Through Observation Notes



Teacher: _____ Date: _____ Time In: _____ Time Out: _____
 Observer: _____ Class and topic: _____

While in your classroom I observed the following:

DOMAIN I: Classroom Management and Culture	
CMC Teacher Behaviors/Actions	CMC Student Behaviors/Actions
<input type="checkbox"/> Sense of urgency <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful, supportive tone <input type="checkbox"/> Assertive tone when appropriate <input type="checkbox"/> High expectations <input type="checkbox"/> Stimulating classroom environment <input type="checkbox"/> Positive reinforcement <input type="checkbox"/> Redirecting inappropriate/off task behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Strong procedures/routines/transitions	<input type="checkbox"/> On task and actively participating <input type="checkbox"/> Following directions/expectations <input type="checkbox"/> Respectful/Courteous <input type="checkbox"/> Sense of responsibility/initiative for learning <input type="checkbox"/> Productive risk-taking <input type="checkbox"/> Off task/Disengaged <input type="checkbox"/> Disruptive/Disrespectful
CMC Strengths	CMC Areas of Improvement

APPENDIX C7: WALKTHROUGH OBSERVATION FORM

KEY TAKE-AWAYS		
Keep Doing	Start Doing	Think About Not Doing

ACTION STEPS (if applicable)
1.
2.
3.

Instructor's signature

Observer's signature

Date of Conference



APPENDIX D: 7 PERSONALITY TRAITS

REBOUND TIME

The amount of time we require to recover from a crisis or setback. This is similar to the property of a coiled spring to bounce back to its original shape after being pressed.

Ideal YES Teachers tend to recover quickly from disappointment or situations of intense stress encountered during a teaching day and are able to resume normal activity or move into problem solving without missing a beat.

ENERGY MODE

The degree to which we prefer staying active and on the move versus stationary at work.

Ideal YES Teachers tend to stay "on the move." They are comfortable standing up, walking around and/or being physically active for extended periods of time. They transmit this energy to students and colleagues alike. In class, they are dynamic instructors, never sitting at their desk, constantly motivating students and checking on their work.

TAKING CHARGE

The extent to which we want to take responsibility for directing, controlling, coaching, delegating, and otherwise orchestrating the tasks of others.

Ideal YES Teachers enjoy the responsibility of leading others and actively seek opportunities to give directions to others.

AGREEMENT

How we react in the presence of conflict, whether we are in conflict with someone else, or whether we are a third party or bystander. Conflict exists when two or more parties lay claim to the same outcome or differ over the best strategy to use in pursuing a common goal. Either case represents the clash of two different sets of agendas. The key is in the stance we take toward the other's needs—yield vs. confront.

Ideal YES Teachers may show great interest in the other's needs and may be excellent listeners, but, at the end of the day, will likely only agree to the other's needs if it is conducive to success (teacher's, student's, team's, or school's success). They enjoy being persuasive in a sensitive and considerate, even though unyielding manner. Also, they are more likely to deal with conflict rather than avoid it.

PERFECTIONISM

The degree to which we strive for perfection, reflective of the tug between production and quality requirements.

Ideal YES Teachers throw in extra time, resources, and effort in order to produce a highly refined and polished product. They epitomize the continual improvement philosophy, always looking for ways to set a higher standard.

RESERVE

Reserve is essentially a one-person opinion poll. The degree to which we share our opinions with others.

Ideal YES Teachers tend to provide opinion outputs on a regular basis, whether asked for or not. You do not have to read their minds to find out what they think or how they feel about certain issues.

DRIVE

How pushed we feel to continually set and achieve goals. Drive is not so much about our commitment to goals, but rather about whether we have goals and/or crave achievement.

Ideal YES Teachers typically have clear goals that are associated in some sense with becoming "number one" in a given context: becoming School Leader, obtaining "exemplary" rating in TAKS, promoting high student achievement, establishing a new record, winning an award, or the like.



APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview with Charlie Scott

Q: Can you speak a bit about the type of school culture one finds at YES schools? What are some of the core values, beliefs and norms that are upheld by YES leadership?

CS: At the end of the day, is what we are doing leading to student achievement, student gains, and in the best interest of the students? And if it's not, then why are we doing it? One of our major downfalls in education is, we are worrying way too much about adults and not enough about students. A perfect example is that we have professional development every Wednesday, which is a great thing for us. Kids go home at 2:30. It's great for the students. Some people say it's detrimental because the students go home early. Well, the students go home two hours early, but we need that time because it's in the best interest of kids that we actually have that time to sit and reflect, plan and move forward.

I think the culture and the beliefs, what drives us, you know, we have that set of Core Values. It's actually what we call our Thinks and Acts document.

Q: Thinks and Acts document?

CS: These are sort of the Thinks and Acts for students. And we also have the same thing for staff. This is what drives students, but then we have the shared belief as well. This is the core purpose, or our vision. These are the Core Principles and the values and beliefs. These five things are something we, we always are just thinking about, like, when we have discussions, it's always about, you know, continuous improvement - How do you get the best results? Continuous improvement. So everything we're driving - data, data analysis, assessments. Like, everything from an exit ticket on a lesson plan is right at the heart of that. Like, achieving excellent results through continuous improvement.

Q: Can you talk about the type of curriculum offered at YES Prep?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

CS: [unintelligible]... attract and develop high caliber people. What are we doing? That's the, so where all of our resources. My, we, my support are instructional support. We well know that the single greatest factor that will change the trajectory of a child's life, and especially in low-income communities is, is an effective teacher. That is the one, you could, you could, you know, you could, you could do all you want to change, sort of, community and sort of, um, financial pieces or like, culture, I know, but at the end of the day, those things are hit or miss in what you might have. But what you have the complete control over is effective teachers in the classroom, and 3 years of effective teaching will change the trajectory of a child's, you know, academic growth.

You, know, and then building, and then, this is the one thing, that building positive relationships. If you ask any of our students, whether they're in sixth grade all the way or our kids who have graduated from college, the one thing that they value most about YES. Unequivocally, almost all of them will say the relationships they've built. The positive relationships because if you think, if you think our own lives and we think about people, when someone says, hey tell, how did you get an education, what did you do, or what drove you to be where you, the kind of person you are? You know, someone will say it was a teacher or mentor. It was somebody a coach, and it's like, that positive relationship. And it's not like building friendships. It doesn't say building, like liking friendships... Nowhere in my job description does it ever say, "I'm your friend." [unintelligible] We're constantly thinking about, like, what can we do more? Like creating opportunities that otherwise not exist. So things from like... [unintelligible] We're always constantly thinking about what we can do to create opportunities for our students, you know, from the summer opps to going to college to, um, just everything that we do, what conversations... [unintelligible] But at the end of the day, we really believe that the way that you effect change in a community is you

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

have to change that community. This has become sort of the buzzword now, you know, education is the civil rights of our generation. And it really is...

Q: Can you explain what you mean by “effective teaching?”

CS: Teachers who look, who truly, you know, um, look for ways to increase student achievement in the classroom by using different modalities. I mean, you know, kinesthetic, hands-on, that do incredible pacing in that class, that keep kids engaged. That don't expect less from kids, um, that, you know, direct instruction is a part of the lesson. It doesn't drive the lesson. And, I mean, it is not the main focal point. Um, I just think at the end of the day, like the most effective teachers I've ever seen, um, in the classroom are, and it has a variety of subject areas is, are teachers who really think about, “How am I going to make sure those kids are engaged from the moment they step in to the moment they leave my classroom and that they learn... We've worked with some of the most brilliant people in the world who know their content well but cannot connect with the kids at all... People ask me all the time, you know, “What do you look for in college counseling?” And there are some of my colleagues out there who truly believe at the end of the day that they must have college admissions experience, and, I don't, I disagree because I, I will tell people hands down, I, we actually have a standardized behavior interview that we do, as you know, every single person. Um, and that is more important to me. Like, can they work at YES Prep? 'Cause I can teach you how to be a good college counselor. I can give you all the resources to build your knowledge base, but I can't teach you how to build positive relationships. I can coach you and work with you. But there's something about you that has to be that, that essence. Like, you have to truly believe that at the end the day that you are thinking, like, how can I build that relationship with the colleges that's gonna create those opportunities for my kids. How can I, you know, push myself to ensure that I'm not...[unintelligible]

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

If someone comes in and says to me, like, those are the kids that are in the second quadrant, in the second quartile. They should just be going to X, Y & Z college. Heck no! You need to be pushing them up to go to X, Y & Z schools. Like, if you fundamentally, like I love and value your opinion, but that's your opinion. Like at the end of the day, we're about creating choices. If a child decides at the end of the day, they've applied to six or seven schools, and they've made a choice to stay locally, great. That is their choice. That is not your decision.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about the "positive relationships" you mentioned earlier?

CS: Positive relationships is being willing to engage kids and work with students in a way that it really shows that you care but doesn't expect anything less... [unintelligible] I will be the first one to take, if things aren't going well at home and family situations, like, I will be there in a heartbeat. However, that doesn't excuse the fact, like, just because you have a rough family life at home doesn't mean, okay, all of a student, you know, um, everything is dropped. It's like, no, well let's work through this. And I think being able to work with the students and their families. So we have a lot of families that will come in and say, you know, students will say, I want to go away, but my parents won't let me. Ok, great, let's brainstorm ways that we can really help your parents understand, and that's things like, you know, going to a parent's house and reassuring them, like calling a meeting up there. It's that type of thing...[unintelligible] I tell my kids all the time that I will treat the valedictorian of the class the same way that I treat the person who is second-to-last in the class...[unintelligible] My students, I think, realize I'm harsh, but, like, know I'm fair. And positive relationships I think is about the respect...[unintelligible] In my mind, it's about the respect, like the mutual respect. In my mind it's like I respect you too much to expect anything less of you, and you expect me to be an effective instructional leader for you in every capacity.

Q: Can you talk about the college counseling program at YES Prep?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

CS: I think ultimately what drives us, Erica, is... despite their challenges, despite their background, despite their difficulties, you have the same opportunities as every other kid... I just found out that one of our students was the first student ever admitted to Dartmouth... It's the whole idea of leveling the playing field... [unintelligible, describes the positions found in the college counseling department at YES campuses] It's that whole idea of moving from traditional guidance to developmental guidance. It's this whole idea of, you know, traditional guidance was, you had a high school counselor that was certified in counseling and did schedules and did some college things and was sort of that whole list of things... when I was hired on board, it was with a clear understanding that, of course, in our work, that do I do, you know, some counseling with students? Absolutely, you know, things are going on at home where I feel homesick, you know, I mean that's counseling. But there's a certain level that, like if a student comes in, and says or shows signs of depression, like, that's where I stop. And that's where I refer it over to the student support counselor who oftentimes... the student support counselor, there are two stages of the student support counselor. There is one, and the lead counselor has to be LMSW, so licensed social worker or has to be, um, an LPC. Like, you have to have some credentialing. And then there's someone else who could have taken counseling, like, you can have a second person who might have taken enough psychology courses whatever, in that aspect. But even among them there's certain things that this person can do and there's certain things that this counselor cannot do. And it's a sort of realm of, like even if, like I found one student who revealed depression in his personal statement. You know, really, that was his way of sort of sharing that...

Q: There is a clear division of responsibility among counseling roles?

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

CS: There's definitely overlap, but I think it's really clear, like, this is what you handle, this is what you handle, this is what you handle... It sort of has to be on that level with some flexibility because for instance if a kid comes to me as opposed to some other person, there's a reason. It's that trust factor. Um, and maybe it's the 3 of us sitting together and maybe it's me being very quiet because there are a lot of things I can't say legally whereas an LMSW can... It's that sort of collaborative piece...

[Portion of the interview omitted to ensure confidentiality.]

What transformed the way we do college counseling was that student opportunities piece. And it was really, the long and short of it... we really did it because we have rising juniors and seniors that we're like, we don't want to keep taking them through our summer school. They'd be better served doing a three... week internship, getting the real world experience, than sitting with us for three weeks. They'd be better off going to Stanford for a philosophy program than sitting with us, sort of, hey, let's talk about English... And that's why... 2/3 of our kids are not in the Houston area. They're in regional parts of Texas or outside the state... in college. But part of that is because they've seen, you know, we do these spring trips, they're going to all parts of the country... when they're doing outward bound, they're doing it in Colorado... We call it, "they've gotta get out of the Houston bubble..." And it's even further than that, getting out of the community bubble because you and I both know there are kids that, lots of kids, your kids, my kids, who will say they've never stepped foot on Rice's campus until we take them there...And so, when we talk about the letting go process and whether a kid's gonna go down the street and go to U of H and live in the dorms there all the way to, they're gonna go to, you know, Washington state to go to the University of Washington. That letting go process has begun, you know, years ahead because that same kid also did a summer program out in Portland or did, um, Outward Bound in

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Colorado or did U Penn's engineering program. And, as tough as it was for the family, they saw that child go away for three weeks and as touch as it was, the child, they saw the growth and maturity of that child... And it really has transformed the way we do college admissions... It changed everything we did because... it was about true opportunities, about true awareness. Again, ensuring that kids make informed... When they're meeting with their college counselors in the 11th and 12th grade, they're saying that, like, I really loved going to Vanderbilt, but that's just too far... Okay, what did you like about Vanderbilt? Well, let's try to find a school closer to home for you, like, or, you know, like going to Chicago was really amazing, but it's just too cold, or... I never thought I would want to go away, but I want to go away, but it's my family..."

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Interview with Scott Johnson

EL: Okay, thank you so much for participating in this interview. I will be as brief as I can.

Umm. I just have a few questions regarding, um... as you know, this study is looking at the college-going culture of the YES Prep system...Um, looking for those, kind of, identifiable elements that make up the college-going culture in the YES system, focusing specifically on [Campus A] and [Campus B] campuses. Um, just two premises of the study, one, one that, um, culture is defined as the beliefs, the values, attitudes, norms, and patterns of behavior that you see within an institution that kind of makes up the identity of that institution and, kind of “how we do business here.” Okay, um, so that’s the definition that I’m operating on. And, also another premise is that adults are the “culture bearers,” the, those who... Adults in the institution are, um, those who, um, kind of translate the culture to the students, as students attempt to kind of navigate through the environment. Ok, not to get too deep into that. I just had to lay that out up front, just to, kinda, so we can kinda go from there.

SJ: Sure.

EL: Ok, so with that in mind, can you tell me just a little bit about what you do here in the YES system?

SJ: Yes, so I am the [college counselor] at the [Campus A] campus, soon to become the [college counselor plus additional role]. As we graduate our first group of students, we’ll actually have alumni, which is exciting.

EL: Okay, yeah.

SJ: So that’s my role on campus. So basically overseeing, um, the college counseling program, which includes junior/senior seminar class periods that the students come to as well as just traditional college counseling roles that the college counselors would serve in other, in other schools. So that’s, in a nutshell, I guess, my role.

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EL: Okay, how would you, I guess, describe a day in your, in the life of the [college counselor]...

SJ: Uh...

EL: ... and alumni support?

SJ: Yeah. It's, it's, like so many people on this campus, it's probably tough to describe a day-to-day schedule. But, um, generally, some of that time will be spent in class. Um, for me, I have two class periods a day, one junior seminar, one senior seminar. Um, various meetings throughout the day, whether they be check-ins with our other college counselor or a check-in meeting with our summer programs, our summer opps coordinator. Um, as a member of the administrative team, check-ins there as well. Um, direct check-ins with the school director. I'm also, um, the twelfth grade level chair this year. And, so, grade level chair meetings and check-ins with the high school principal, so lots of time meeting.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: It definitely takes up a large portion of my day. Obviously trying to check in with students as much as possible. During lunch periods, during their elective periods, whenever I can, sort of, get my hands on them or, you know, the flip side is when they can get their hands on me.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: Which makes it... which is also challenging. And then, um, you know obviously various other responsibilities, but just a lot of communication...

EL: Okay.

SJ: ... on a daily basis. Um, communication with my team, communication with the administrative team, communication with outside vendors, whether they be, ah, Princeton Review, whether they be Hearsh Jones, who we do all of our commencement stuff, as you

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can see all of the boxes piled up. Ah, communication with colleges, um, scholarship committees. Things like that, so, um, a large portion of what I am doing is communicating.

EL: Okay. Alright, just trying to recapture some of that... Um, um, tell me about the team that you work on, the college counseling team here. And, I guess what I am looking for here is, how does it, how is it different... How is the college counseling program at YES Prep different from what I might find at a, at a traditional, mainstream public school?

SJ: I don't, you know the easiest way to define it is that our college counseling program was built on a private school model, but we operate within the public schools, so the idea is, um, small case loads, as much one-on-one attention as we can give students, um, lots of professional development, in terms of trying to get out and visit colleges, bringing colleges to campus, um, really trying... knowing that we are really that intermediary between the students and the colleges, so we do as much as we possibly can to bring those two closer together.

EL: Okay.

SJ: So I guess the easiest way to define it, you know, would be if you think about the private school model. If you were to see schools in the area, John Cooper School or Kinkaid School or, um, Episcopal School, we try and grow... We grew from that model.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: Obviously it's different. It's a public school, and, you know we teach more classes throughout the day, but I think that's the distinguishing factor between what separates us from your traditional HISD or Aldine ISD school, with much larger numbers and fewer counselors per student, things like that.

EL: Okay, and, I guess the final piece of this question is, tell me about your team – the team that you work with. Do you supervise anyone, and how does that... How do you guys...

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SJ: Yeah, um. Right now our team is small. We are growing. There, in addition to me, we have another college counselor on campus as well as, um, our student opps coordinator, which also, so the three of us comprise the college counseling team. Next year we are growing, so we will add another college counselor, so we will have a director, two counselors, and a summer opps coordinator.

EL: Okay.

SJ: So that's really the team that I directly manage.

EL: Okay. Okay. Alright, um, and then, finally, I said that before, but I really mean it this time. The last piece of this question is, um, I've interviewed [college counselor] at, um, [Campus B].

SJ: Uh-huh.

EL: How would you characterize your, the, your position here, or your role here at [Campus A], kind of in comparison to his at [Campus B]? Are there some similarities and some differences? I know you all have the exact same title.

SJ: Right.

EL: But because there are different schools, you know, um, are there different types of, can you see a difference or any similarities?

SJ: Yeah, I definitely can see a difference. You know, up until this point, we've been considered an emerging campus, where [college counselor's] campus has been considered established. And so, um, you know, one of the major differences is, you know, as I mentioned in the alumni programs title, is that [college counselor] spends a significant chunk of his time, you know, working with, with alumni.

EL: I just want to make sure it's still recording. Ok, I'm sorry.

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SJ: Yeah, working with alumni, which is something I don't do this year. Which, um, and I will. Um, as well as our role as an emerging campus, we're really still trying to build that college counseling culture. Um, at [Campus B], I feel like students are coming into, at this point coming into junior and senior seminar knowing what to expect, and, having talked with friends and knowing what to expect with the college admissions process. But our students, especially our current seniors, they are used to playing the guinea pig role as the first class going through our school. And so, and again, I'm just sort of making assumptions about... I mean, some things I know, like the alumni program I know. But one sense that I get for us is that we're trying to establish, um, a certain level of high expectations right now that may already exist at [Campus B] because, um, one thing that I wish our seniors had is to get to see a group go ahead of them so that they, they know what to expect. And so, we're working on building that. So when students are coming to us, they've had enough exposure and they've known enough people who have gone through the process to know, sort of, what to expect versus, our first group shows up in junior and senior seminar class, and they're like, ok, what are we going to do at this point?

EL: Mm-hmm. (repeats) What are we going to do... yeah.

SJ: And so, I think that's a a major difference between our two programs.

EL: So this school is... how old?

SJ: Seven years old.

EL: Seven years old, and they are, [Campus B] is...

SJ: They've gotta be...

EL: They were in the 90's. It started in the 90's. Yeah.

SJ: I think maybe 1998.

EL: Mokay.

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SJ: So they're a good twelve...

EL: Yeah, twelve or thirteen years old.

SJ: Twelve years old.

EL: Ok, alright, um, question two... Can, alright, we just, we talked about the definition of culture. Can you tell me a little bit about what, how you would describe the culture here at [Campus A]. And when I say culture, like I said, the attitudes, beliefs, norms, patterns of behavior, um..

SJ: Right

EL: I mean, you know, we use the term college-going culture, but,

SJ: Right

EL: What does that actually...

SJ: Right, um, I guess I can talk about how we sort of fit with other YES schools, and I think there's some norms across the district, I mean, just obviously the conversations and the language that's being used and the, like I said, the conversations that are being had, starting at sixth grade.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: I think is what makes it unique, that kids have homeroom classes named after their teachers' alma maters and, just from the beginning, when you talk about norms and when you talk about attitudes, it really, the kids are hit as soon as they come in with this idea of "You will go to college," and there really isn't any compromise with that, and so I think that is definitely a powerful thing, and that is something that I know bridges all YES campuses. To speak specifically to, to, um, YES Prep [Campus A]...

EL: Mm-hmm.

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SJ: There's a lot of school spirit here. And a, and a lot of it is driven by the students, but also a significant amount of it is driven by the staff.

EL: Mmm- hmm.

SJ: Umm, there are so many staff members here who, who just love this place, and really live for this place, and, and it shows, and I think that rubs off on the students as well. Um, in talking with some of the seniors, you know, until you really sit down and have one-on-ones with them, you don't realize just how much they're gonna miss this place, how much they love this place, which is nice to hear, um, and I think that really starts with, with the staff. And, um, and, but, but as well as the students. The students do a great job of carrying that on. We have some, you know, always in each grade I think there's a core group of students that really drive that. And identifying those students, and making sure that we're giving them the opportunities to develop that within themselves as well as then to try and cultivate that in their, in their grade levels.

EL: Well, ok. Um, if you could identify any core values, for, and I know, I mean, I've kind of identified the core values of the YES system, but just, you know, if there are maybe some core values that kind of fall underneath the umbrella of YES core values here at [Campus A]... Can you think of anything?

SJ: Yeah, the first thing that jumps into my mind is the idea of "we are a family-oriented school."

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: And I know that, you know, and we talk a lot about a college-going culture, but I think that is, that is something that I know our administration works really hard to, to develop, is this idea of, um, us being a family, and ...

EL: When you say family-oriented meaning, you as a campus community are a family?

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SJ: Exactly, exactly.

EL: Ok, I got it. Ok.

SJ: And wanting to make sure that we aren't just taking care of ourselves but that we're making sure that everyone is successful.

EL: Ok.

SJ: And that, as a graduating class, you know, unless we all finish together, then, then we're not taking care of everything we need to take care of. You know, things like, um, things like lying, things like cheating, things like stealing are, are taken extremely seriously around here.

EL: Umm, hmmm.

SJ: Um, with, and I think that's the driving force behind it. You know, and we had an incident the other day of a laptop that came up missing, and the first thing that we did is, the entire school was pulled into the gym at the end of the day for a discussion with the principal. I don't know if that happens everywhere else or what that looks like everywhere else, and the rationale was, and Bryan Reed as our principal, basically said what I am saying to you. He said, "This is a family-oriented place. I should, the same way I would leave my laptop in front of my brother and my mother and not worry about it being stolen is the same way it should be around here."

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: And he even said, he said, "I leave my stuff everywhere, and it never crosses my mind that it will ever be stolen," so, even though things do happen, things go missing. You know, students do cheat. Students do lie. The fact that that message is always constant, I think, is powerful. It's powerful, and, you know, obviously we tend to focus on when students do something wrong, and we lose sight of how many students are truly living their lives here

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and taking advantage of this environment and, and thinking of it as a family outside of school. And so that's a really positive message that I feel like permeates...

EL: ... the entire school...

SJ: A lot of the school, yeah.

EL: One thing I've noticed since I've been here, and I haven't been at this campus very long is just how outgoing, intelligent, and ar-, and well-spoken the students are. Just, you know, walking the halls, you know, I'm approached by the students, "Hi, how are you, my name is such and such," you know, um, "can I help you find anything?" And, that to me, just is very startling 'cause I've taught, I've been in, I've been in education most of my adult life. I've taught in schools in New York, and, and in Houston, and I've just never seen students to, you know, I've never seen them do that before. What do you think it is that makes your students, um, have those kind of qualities and those kind of characteristics?

SJ: You know, I think it's just the the amount of time we spend just trying to develop those in students and encourage students. I'm a firm believer that all students, not all students, but the vast majority of students across the country have that in them...

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: ... they just need the opportunity, and they need the encouragement to develop that, so, you know, from the very beginning we tell students that if you see a visitor on campus, welcome them, talk to them. Umm, we encourage visitors, when they come to campus, to engage students, you know. We never say, "Hey, don't talk to kids when they're in class." But instead, if you're observing a class, go a-, go talk to kids. Go ask what they're doing. See what they're thinking. See where they're going to college.

EL: Mm-hmm.

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SJ: Um, so on both ends, trying to encourage that dialogue, just knowing that, just how important it is for a student just to be able to engage someone in conversation and have the confidence to do something like that, and to, um...

EL: Uh- huh.

SJ: ... I mean, we see it really as a life skill, and, and also a cultural thing. We feel like students that are, that are happy and proud of their school are much more likely to, to want to engage a, a visitor, and help them and, and share with them, and so... I think it really is just from the very beginning again, just encouraging that type of activity.

EL: Okay.

SJ: And rewarding that for students.

EL: Okay. I'm gonna move a little quickly 'cause I don't too much more, and I know you don't have a whole lot of time. But, um, the last couple of questions are... Let me see, I can skip curriculum, I can ask a teacher about that. Um, let's see... Skip this one about teachers. Alright. I just have two more. And the first one is, um, one of the, you know, my, my program is educational policy and planning, and so we kind of look at how, you know, policies influence an organization, both by enhancing and, and enabling the goals of the institution to take place and by creating barriers. So, with that in mind, can you think of any, you know, YES Prep is its own policy-maker. I mean, of course you have TEA, you know, you have the state, you have the federal, um, laws and regulations governing schools that kind of limit or, you know, enable you guys to do the things that you are doing. But then, YES kind of has the freedom to determine, you know, their own policies and procedures. Can you think of any policies, and when I say policies, I mean either school-based, system-wide, state, federal, that make the biggest impact on what you do each and every day, whether negative or positive. Ok, let me just narrow that down, 'cause that's a

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big question. And, what I mean by that is, you know, if you can think of two policies, or two things - One, a, a, the, the policy that has the, the biggest impact on you in a positive way, and then one that creates the biggest barrier for you in terms of, uh, your work here.

SJ: Okay, I can start with, I think, for me in thinking specifically about college counseling. It's the, you know, as you mentioned, as a charter school, we have a little more flexibility in how we, um establish things like graduation requirements.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: And I think one thing that's really valuable to me as a college counselor is that all of our students, in order to graduate from high school, have to have completed at least one AP course or dual enrollment course...

EL: Okay.

SJ: ... with, with a local community college, and that is specifically based on making sure that students have taken college-level coursework before they go to college, um, all in the name of college preparation and college readiness.

EL: So they all have to, uh, take at least one...

SJ: And successfully complete, so pass at least one AP course...

EL: Okay.

SJ: ... while they're on campus, or dual enrollment in the course. Now, we don't offer dual enrollment here. Um, we've had some trouble getting it set, but I believe [Campus B] has. I don't know if they still do, um, and again, that is just specifically to make sure students are taking college- level coursework before they go off to school...

EL: Okay.

SJ: ... as well as making sure that, and I know that, you know, now I think the state four-by-four has caught up with us in that respect, but making sure that all students are at least

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finishing pre-calculus before they go off to college... making sure that students are, you know, really maxing out the curriculum. You, know, our seniors aren't here taking half-days and then leaving.

EL: Laughs.

SJ: They're taking the full load. They're getting four years of math. They're getting four years of science in addition to their English and their econ and their government.

EL: Which, to me is just... you know, the half-day concept, I've never really understood it. You know, I was, I had my last period off as a senior, and I think about it now. What did I really do? Actually, I had a job, which was helpful...

SJ: Right, and I know that's really, I think, what drives it. I think the students can go out, and they can work, and hopefully that's what they're doing with their time...

EL: Oh no, not, my, most of my friends, they would just go home.

SJ: ...just go home.

EL: Yeah, laughs.

SJ: And so, I'm thinking again about college preparation. It's nice that when our students are applying and, um working with colleges, that I can just go across the board. I can just say that this is, all of our kids are leaving here with pre-cal, you know, all of our students who graduate, go on to new schools having taken at least one AP course, you know, they've been exposed to that because I know that's one of the concerns that, that colleges have when they're recruiting minority students is that they're always worried about the level of preparation that students are getting.

EL: Yeah, with a forty percent remediation rate in the state.

SJ: Right. And so our remediation rate, as you may know, is more like five percent.

EL: Mm- hmm.

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SJ: Which is obviously a huge difference.

EL: A huge difference.

SJ: And so, I think it's really helpful. That, that alone, when it comes to working with colleges because they come through here and they know, ok, I, these kids are taking rigorous curriculum. They can look at GPA's and they can make a value judgment as to the quality of education they received. So that, I think that's one that's really helpful.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: In terms of a policy that, how did you word that?

EL: Just, you know, presents barriers to, or limitations to what you're doing and your goals, you know, as a, as director of college counseling. You know, anything... if you could change one policy, modify it, or, um, and it doesn't have to be a school-based policy. It could be something that the state has, you know...

SJ: Sure. Sure. Um, [long pause]

EL: And I know it's probably hard to find something because you guys do have so much freedom to, you know...

SJ: Right. We don't. I don't feel like we feel the constraints, uh, in a negative way, that some principals may.

EL: If I ask..., which I did, he said, I mean, facilities funding [laughs]. But it just depends, I mean, that's his role, you know.

SJ: Right, right, right.

EL: So, I mean, if you can't think of anything, we'll just move on to the next.

SJ: Yeah, you know, honestly one thing, and as I think about this... As the [college counselor], we are, as a college counseling team we are sort of that stop-gap for students.

EL: Mm-hmm.

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SJ: Um, and I feel like that same policy that I love is also one of the more challenging ones.

EL: Hmmm.

SJ: Because if we have a student who does not complete a course throughout the course of their four years, then that student can't walk with their classmates.

EL: Umm-hmm.

SJ: And so, again, we may have students that, as far as the state is concerned, have completed everything that they need to complete in order to get a high school diploma.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: But because they're here and because we've got that guideline in place, so it's, so, I guess I think of that as sort of a double-edged sword. Much more positive than negative, but I can think of students, you know, even students this year, who may be in danger of not passing an AP course and then the ramifications of that, and then, thinking, okay, if that student isn't finishing here, um, are they gonna come back for a fifth semester? Realistically? Are they going to go somewhere else and finish, and so that, I guess there's a lot of fear there for me when it comes to students that, knowing that, you know, ninety-nine percent of the students or ninety-five percent of the students will meet all of these requirements. For that small percentage that doesn't...

EL: Then, that's the, that's the, um, the barrier.

SJ: The barrier, yeah. So, I guess if I can say that that same policy is one that I love but at the same time...

EL: It presents kind of a challenge.

SJ: Presents, presents a challenge, yeah.

EL: Okay, um, alright. Ah, do you have time for one last question?

SJ: Yes.

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EL: Okay. Um, if you had a perfect world and you could just change anything about the circumstances at [Campus A], what would that be? If, if, okay, I'll give you an example.

SJ: Um-hmm.

EL: Um, not to lead you into thinking any certain way, but, um, speaking with people at, sort, at [Campus B], one of the common threads was, ah, teacher turnover, and, ah, student retention. Um, if I had a perfect world, I'd be able to keep all the teachers here. You know, and then we kind of talked about why, you know, some of the reasons why that happens. And then if I had a perfect world, students would stay from sixth grade all the way through twelfth grade.

SJ: Right.

EL: And I, I understand the factors contributing to that, I mean I'm one of YES Prep's biggest fans, you know, but I do understand that it's a very rigorous program, and unless a parent is completely sold, they may give up after a while because they, you know, parents are motivated by grades, and if "my child isn't making an A, then why, why are they here?"

SJ: Right.

EL: Well, the child is not making an A because the level of instruction is, is raised. Well you can send them back to, you know, whatever their home school is, but they won't get the same, you know... So anyway, that in a nutshell.

SJ: I think in a perfect world, you know, for me, and you sort of, you started getting at this. The initial thing that I thought of was parental involvement.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: Um, [pause] I feel like oftentimes the perception is when you've got a high performing school that all the parents are, are super involved. And, I think in any grade level here there is a small contingent of parents that might represent ten percent of the students that really

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drives most of the, the parental involvement and the parental activity. And I know, I understand there are obviously variables in place where, you know, I know some parents are working multiple jobs and just don't have the time, um. But I also think there are parents that are just intimidated by the educational process. I think there are parents, sometimes parents can feel like, hey, my kid's in a good school, like I'm doing a good thing. Um...

EL: "Why do I need to be there?"

SJ: "Why do I need to be there," or, "They're the experts on this. They should handle it." Um, so that's one thing you know, I think I would change, you know with some of the students, and oftentimes the parents, you know, that come to me here are the parents that I don't need to see. And, I would love, and I, we track down parents, and we set up meetings, and parents for the most part are good about coming in, but they don't often seek us out. And, that is something that I feel like I would, you know, I'm not lobbying for, you know, helicopter parents or, you know...

EL: Right.

SJ: ... anything like that.

EL: Yeah, I understand.

SJ: But definitely, um, you know, a balance there where parents are very active and, you know, want to stop by or place a phone call just to check in. And obviously, again, you know, language barriers there for me, there are issues. And so I don't blame parents for this. But at the same time, I just wish...

EL: What do you think, um, would, would change that for the, for the school? Think out the box. We're still in a perfect world.

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SJ: Right. Um, and you know, it's something we've talked about in our grade level meetings, just how to improve our outreach practices, how to we do... I know there are schools like us that do a much better job. Learning from those schools. Um, and a lot of it I know, you know comes, is on the teacher's side. Um, when you are really, really busy in your day-to-day, it's hard to prioritize parent phone calls. Parent phone calls can be intimidating. I know for, you know, with certain teachers, or you know, with certain parents I know, they can be an issue. And so, just thinking outside the box and just reevaluating how we work with parents, how we communicate with parents because, while it's positive for I think ten or fifteen percent of parents, there's a, a significant number of parents that we're not communicating with. With simple parent notes, with, you know, I try to send e-mails home, but I don't know what percentage of my parents receive e-mail.

EL: Mm-hmm.

SJ: You know, so on and so forth. So really looking at the way we've done it for years, and I think recognizing that, you know, and if overall the schools are okay with ten or fifteen percent, then we're okay with ten or fifteen percent. I guess that's more of an administrative decision. But, you know, within my team, we try to get all the parents up here each semester for a meeting, um, especially with seniors, it's, they make their admissions choices and financial aid packages, but, I guess in a perfect world, I would love it if parents would approach us about, hey I'd love to sit down with you and talk about these financial aid packages...

EL: Yeah.

SJ: ... instead of us having to contact them and getting students to bring them in.

EL: I, I see that. I'm gonna stop. Thank you.

SJ: Yeah!

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Interview with Troy Carter

EL: Alright, okay. It may not last. Let's see. I'm having some technology problems there. Okay, if you can tell me a little bit about your role within the YES College Prep system? I know you're the director here at [Campus B].

TC: Yeah, so, I'm the [Administrator] here at [Campus B]. Um, just a little background, this is my sixth year at YES Prep. I taught four years in [School District] at [X] Middle School, um, came to this campus, taught for a year, then moved to our [X] campus when it was in its third year. I moved up after a year and a half there to become an assistant principal and held that role for two and a half years, uh, before coming this year to be the [administrator] of this campus. Um, as the [administrator] of [Campus B], I obviously oversee all operations at, um, [Campus B].

EL: Okay, um, instructional leadership and all that. Okay, well...

TC: You have instructional leadership, okay, basically, at the end of the day, anything that involves this campus, it's on, it's on me. Obviously, a lot of that's delegated. I don't know if you want to hear admin structure.

EL: Sure. That would be helpful.

TC: So, admin structure, it's myself, um, [co-leader, name], uh...

EL: Who's also the [additional title], right?

TC: Right.

EL: Of YES System?

TC: He is.

EL: Okay.

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TC: Um. So he's here three days a week. Um, operations manager, the two co-directors, we have three deans of instruction, which are split by content. But then, we also have our director of college counseling.

EL: Okay. So, tell me, three deans.

TC: Three deans of instruction.

EL: Director of college counseling, and operations director. Okay. I just said it, and I forgot that quickly, three deans...

TC: Director of college counseling.

EL: ... of college counseling. Okay. Okay. Um, yes, okay, let's move it on. [papers rustling] The next question is, if you can tell me a little bit about the type of school culture a person would find here at YES [Campus B]. And what I mean by that – the premise of this study is that culture is, culture, the definition of culture is the values, the beliefs, the norms, the kind of practices that kind of make up a day in the life of the school or the kind of, you know, how we do things here. You know, and that adults are the carriers and translators of culture, of the school culture. So, um, if you can think of some of the core values, beliefs, and norms that one would find here in [Campus B], um, yeah.

TC: I mean, obviously from the moment we hire anyone to work at a YES school and specifically [Campus B], they have to be bought into the idea that all students, you know, are capable and deserve the opportunity to go to a college or university. Not just to go and attend, but to take on the responsibility that it's up to us to prepare them to be successful and to actually graduate once they're there. Um, so that begins, obviously, in the sixth grade. And I think in terms of what you see on a day-to-day is that everyone, by becoming a part of the [Campus B] team, um, agrees with that and is driven by that. That we have to prepare students for college success. Not just college, but like I said college success and

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graduation. Um, and we own that. I think the way you would see that every single day is that holding each other accountable, um, really messaging, you know, that college piece through our instruction, through how we expect students to interact with each other, so not just academically, but, you know, how [pause] peer interactions and the expectations they have when they talk to each other, even our expectations for how adults model that behavior, um, with students. Obviously, what that looks like in a sixth grade classroom versus the twelfth grade classroom is very different. I think that's, um, challenging for us, but also one of the things that, when done well, is what, um, strengthens our culture. You know when a person knows here's how I talk to a sixth grader about why it's important that you do your homework, and then, here's how I address an eleventh grader and say why it's important to tuck in your shirt. You know, so just being accountable for the "why" behind why we do everything and how it's all focused on one thing, and that is, not just because we say so but because we want you to have many opportunities, and our belief is that by doing these things that when you go off to college and beyond, knowing how to interact in this way is going to, ah, set you up for success. Um, [long pause]

EL: Okay [writing]. Okay, um, thinking it through.

TC: Did I answer your question?

EL: You did, and I'm thinking is that, if there is anything in regards to that I want to kind of expand on, um [pause]. I may come back to it. I may revisit it later as we go along.

TC: Sure, sure.

EL: Um, can you tell me a little bit about the, the type of curriculum offered at YES [Campus B], I guess, as a part of the larger system? You know, anything that you is relevant to college readiness, you know, the level of rigor that they, you know, that they have, um, the types of curricular opportunities that you all provide...

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TC: Now that a lot of our curriculum is centrally focused, um, [pause] I don't know if we are doing anything unique to the other YES schools, but in terms of what YES as a whole is doing, you know, for every single subject in every grade level we have a course leader which is a teacher, and they collaborate every six weeks to create, um, you know, vertically aligned... not vertical alignment, but horizontally align the scope and sequence for each grade level. Some of them have already been created as a matter of making units together, and then also preparing students for a common assessment, which is created by the teachers of that class, which is great, obviously because they, their, it's not an outside person saying, "Here's what your kids need to know." It's them who created it based on the TEKS and then also the YES standards, which are a bit more rigorous. Um, and in terms of college-bound and college readiness, I think we push our instructors in the planning to really think about, ah, you know, critical thinking skills and putting themselves in the classroom as students, so, what, you know, how would you, you know, what kind of things need to be done to, what type of instructional delivery strategies would need to be used to engage yourself if you are a student in your classroom, and kind of asking yourself – we ask our teachers to ask that question as they are delivering so it's not too content-heavy or too much teacher talk... and making sure that students, cause, you know, we talk about a culture, you know, we believe obviously a strong culture is a result of strong instruction, so, um, making sure that students have the opportunity to, to talk to...

EL: Sorry, just wanted to make sure it's still recording, yeah.

TC: Making sure that students have the opportunity to talk to each other in an organized fashion in the classroom, not just the working groups, but, okay, turn to your partner and teach them how to interact with each other, how to have academic conversations. I think that's a focus, and that's going to continue to need to get better, but I think that's how we try

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to promote that college piece is that different, you know – using different strategies in how we introduce the material. So, even though we plan centrally, but we tell our teachers, “You gotta put your stamp on it,” whether it may be lecture occasionally, group work occasionally, a combination of student engagement and, you know, discovery. Not just saying that every single day it’s gonna be, I teach and give you all the information you need, and you just memorize it and regurgitate it, but really thinking about how we’re building college students from sixth grade on, so...

EL: So, would you say independence is something that you all really try to foster in terms of, well... The reason why I say that is, it was a theme that kind of kept reoccurring in my observations, that, you know, they are pushing students towards more independence and taking ownership over, over what they’re learning. Not just in the sense, you know, you hear that all the time in education. It’s kind of a buzzword, you know, taking ownership, but it’s more of, okay, how do I intrinsically, how do I get that intrinsic motivation? You know, um, so, would you say that is something that you all explicitly kind of dialogue about at meetings, or is it just something that you think, in the hiring process, you look for in people?

TC: No, I think definitely in feedback sessions, um, we definitely ask our teachers to really think about how they’re going about engaging students so that it is meaningful.

EL: Mm-hmm.

TC: We, you know, recognize that if you just say, this is going to help you out to go to college, you know, that isn’t enough. Um, so the classes with the stronger instruction and that have the, you know, stronger classroom cultures, are those classes that you can tell that teachers have, in their planning, really thought through, you know, what, what’s the big, what’s the why here that I need to get through to students so that they understand the big picture. So,

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in terms of, we presented that as a, um, you know a PD focus generally early on in the year,
but I think a lot of the... [end of recording]

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