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TALKING ACADEMICS, PRACTICING CARE

A Student-Centered Analysis of Caring
in Academically-Promising, Low-Income High Schools

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TALKING ACADEMICS, PRACTICING CARE
A Student-Centered Analysis of Caring
in Academically Promising, Low-Income High Schools

by

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Dissertation

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In memory of my grandmother, Kathryn Bair Howry,
with appreciation for her love and care.

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TALKING ACADEMICS, PRACTICING CARE
A Student-Centered Analysis of Caring
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This student-centered analysis of caring in three academically promising, low-income public high schools in Texas used an instrumental case study design (Stake, 1998) to investigate students' perceptions and experiences of receiving care in high school. The analysis also examined the teacher and administrator practices that contributed to students' experience of receiving care, and considered the resources that supported the adults' caring practice at the three schools. Archival data consisting of open-ended interviews with students, teachers, administrators, and school staff were analyzed qualitatively. Results suggest that caring should be evaluated in context. In the high school context students experience care through having their teachers' and administrators' help and support with academics. Results also suggest that students experience caring through teacher and administrator behaviors and attitudes that respond to their developmental needs. That is, they experience care when adults at school establish a style and pattern of interaction similar to "authoritative parenting" (Baumrind, 1987). Recognition from adults in the school is very important for high school students, and especially salient for low-income and minority adolescents who often receive negative and discriminatory feedback from the community.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Before I got here, I'd dropped out so many times I didn't want to go to school anymore. I've dropped out here, too, but the difference is that here, they keep calling you and asking you to come back. The teachers talk to you here, they remember your name and what you said. And when they care, you care.

Lisa, a 21 year-old female high school student
NY Times 7/3/03

Lisa's words suggest that "caring" and the lack of caring have potent consequences for student engagement in high school. Many high school students feel that "no one really cares," and far fewer are able to report, as Lisa did, the experience of being cared about by the adults in the high schools they attend (Altenbaugh, Engel & Martin, 1995; Blythe & Leffert, 1995; Chase, 1981; Marsh & Coddling, 1999; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Research suggests that the majority of high school students, including students of color in inner-city schools as well as white middle- and working-class students in the mid-western heartlands, do not experience their high schools as caring and supportive (Blythe & Leffert, 1995; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). Rather, students believe that teachers are not interested in them (Chase, 1981; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), and they experience their relationships with school personnel as distant, impersonal (Altenbaugh et al.; Marsh & Coddling, 1999), and of little significance (Galbo, 1984).

Drop-out statistics underline the extent of student disengagement from high school. In 1998, for example, 25% of the adult population in the United States aged 18 to 24 had not obtained their high school diploma (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics [FIFCFS], 2000). The situation for minority students was even more problematic: almost one half (48%) of the young Hispanic adults in the US, and more than one quarter (28%) of African-American young adults had not graduated from high school (FIFCFS, 2000). Focusing our lens even more sharply, we note that along the US-

Mexico border only about 50% of the adult population has completed 9th grade (Ward, 1999); and that dropout rates as high as 40 to 70 percent have been reported at inner-city high schools (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Fine, 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986).

Educational theory, research, and reform efforts focused on caring have most typically been targeted at the elementary school level (Baker, Terry, Bridger & Winsor, 1997; Battistich, Solomon, Watson & Schaps, 1997; Comer, 1993; Henderson, 1996; Lyman, 2000; Noblit & Rogers, 1995; Noddings, 1984, 1992, 1995). However, the importance of “caring” in the high school context has slowly been recognized by school reformers and researchers over the past few years (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Beck & Newman, 1996; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Coddling & Tucker, 1999; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Deiro, 1996; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996; Newmann, 1992; Riley, 2000; Wasley et al., 1997). Caring is seen as an important ingredient of high school reform; key to increasing student engagement (Newmann, 1992) and improving student performance outcomes (Wasley et al., 1997). Most significantly, recent empirical research has demonstrated that teacher interest in and support of students has a significant impact on high school completion, especially for those students most at risk of dropout related to behavioral and academic and/or demographic factors (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Croninger & Lee, 2001).

Although there is mounting evidence about the importance of caring in the high school setting, very little is known about the quality of teacher-student relationships at the high school level and how and why these relationships confer such benefits for high school students in general and at-risk adolescents in particular (Call & Mortimer, 2001; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Darling et al., 1994). In fact, psychological research has been slow to focus on adolescents’ relationships with adults other than parents (Darling et al., 1994; Galbo, 1984). Aside from what we can piece together from a variety of anecdotal accounts (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Beck & Newman, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Van Galen, 1996), we lack an understanding of high school students’ perceptions of these

beneficial relationships. What does it mean when students say that their high school teachers and administrators care?

Contemporary theorists of caring (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993) would suggest that this question is of critical importance; for it is only when caring as been received and experienced as such that one can accurately say that caring has occurred. Thus, any attempt to understand caring relationships needs to highlight, if not foreground, the felt experience of the recipients of care. The answer to the question is also important, having the potential to enrich our understanding of adolescent needs; experiencing care indicates that a need or needs of the recipient have been met (Tronto, 1993). Thus through understanding high school students' experience of receiving care in the high school setting we will gain insight into the pressing needs and concerns that adolescents have in that context.

This research uses an instrumental case study design (Stake, 1998) to address these issues; analyzing qualitative archival data from three academically promising, Texas high schools that students themselves have described as caring. Instrumental case design consists of selection and analysis of cases where the phenomenon of interest is present (Stake, 1998). Through my participation in the Charles A. Dana Center field study (2000) for which this data was originally collected, I was struck by the high levels of caring reported by students interviewed at these three schools. In fact, I left my field trip to Mountain View High School, located in a colonia near the US-Mexico border, amazed and heartened by students' descriptions of how much they felt cared about, and how much they in turn cared about their school. This was so different from what I had heard in many previous conversations with high school students, and so different from the portraits of uncaring high schools prominent in the literature (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Continuing my field work at two other, very different high schools --Brazosport High School on the Texas gulf coast and Martin High School in Laredo-- my colleagues and I heard similar student accounts of caring. Following Stake

(1998), I saw these three schools as exemplars of the phenomenon of caring. The extensive archive of interview data from the schools provided me an excellent opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of caring in the high school setting.

The qualitative analysis uses the theoretical perspective of caring practice as outlined by Tronto (1993) to understand and describe the phenomenon of caring at each of the three schools. Tronto conceptualizes caring as a “practice” which involves both “thought and action” rather than an emotion (p. 108), and which has both universal and culturally specific dimensions. Staying true to the theoretical notion that the presence of caring can only be reliably identified by its recipients (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1993), my analysis is student-centered; focusing first on analyzing and interpreting student accounts of caring and then moving to an analysis of adult accounts to describe the practices and resources that contributed to students’ perceptions and experiences of receiving care.

Greater clarity about caring practice in the high school context has important practical implications, including the potential to increase student engagement (Newmann, 1992), school graduation rates (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Croninger & Lee, 2001), and to support a variety of positive developmental outcomes (Connell, Halpern-Felscher, Clifford, Crichlow & Usinger, 1995; Garmezy, 1993; Kasen, Cohen & Brook, 1998; Pittman, 2000; Sipe & Ma, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1982). Through my own experience being in schools and around educators during my work at the Charles A. Dana Center, I recognized that educators were becoming increasingly aware that high school students, like elementary students, benefit from the experience of being known, cared about, and respected (Coddling & Tucker, 1999; National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 1996; Riley, 2000). The overarching recommendation of *Breaking Ranks* (NASSP, 1996), an influential Carnegie report on high school reform, was that high schools must become “much more personalized in programs, support services, and intellectual rigor” (p. iv). And the words, “personalization,” “caring,” and “connection” surfaced frequently at the United States Department of Education [USDE] *Reinventing*

High School Conference held in June 2000 in Washington, DC. However, I also recognized that “caring” in high school seems quite difficult to achieve in practice.

Historical factors which have shaped the mission and structure of high schools (Callahan, 1962; Lesko, 2001), deeply held cultural notions about adolescence and adolescent needs (Lesko, 2001; Steinberg, 2001), and our uncritical, common-sense understanding of caring itself (Benner & Gordon, 1996; Deiro, 1996; Eaker-Rich & Van Galen, 1996; Sarason, 1985; Tronto, 1993), may all serve as barriers to caring practice in high school. The “factory model” approach to high school education, prominent in the early part of the century and influential still, was oriented towards efficiently producing “educated” students, and did not invest in processes to promote individual student development (Callahan, 1962). The notions that the teenage years are times of “storm and stress,” characterized by separation from adults (Blos, 1979; Freud, 1958) and affiliation with peers (Brown, 1990) have contributed to adults’ confusion about their role in adolescents’ lives. These ideas, although now seen as outdated and overly simplistic within psychology (Lerner & Lerner, 1999; Petersen, 1993; Steinberg, 1990), nonetheless continue to exert a powerful influence on adults’ thinking about adolescence (Steinberg, 2001; Lesko, 2001).

However, our “everyday” understanding of caring may be the most significant barrier (Benner & Gordon, 1996; Eaker-Rich & Van Galen, 1996; Sarason, 1985; Tronto, 1993). Within our culture, “caring” is most commonly seen as an emotional attitude or state, or at best as a relational orientation, which is infused with maternal associations (Benner & Gordon, 1996; Sarason, 1985; Tronto, 1993). This deeply ingrained understanding makes caring seem at once too easy, and too difficult, to achieve. I agree with Seymour Sarason who said, “As long as we continue to talk about caring and compassion as attitudes, we make it too easy to ignore the tenuous and complex relationship between attitude and action” (1985; p. 9). We limit our ability to perceive and identify various forms of caring, and limit our ability to provide care. The conceptual blind spot that

results from seeing caring in exclusively or primarily affective terms seems especially important to correct in conducting research on the nature of adolescent and non-familial adult relationships; where instrumental assistance rather than exclusively affective support may be precisely the “caring” that adolescents value and need in certain contexts (Darling et al., 1994). This research will attend to that “tenuous and complex relationship between attitude and action; examining the *practice* of caring in three high schools, in an effort to describe caring from the perspective of high school students, and to identify the actions, behaviors, and resources that contribute to adolescents’ experience of receiving care in the high school context.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LITERATURE

Caring and Its Significance in High Schools

A renewed academic interest in the phenomenon of “caring” emerged in the mid-1980’s and developed through the 1990’s. Carol Gilligan’s (1982) work, which highlighted the important role of caring and connection in girls’ moral development, stimulated much of this new interest. Nel Noddings (1984; 1992; 1995) extended the notion of an “ethic of care” to the field of education, which in turn provided a theoretical base for subsequent research and practical efforts to create “caring communities” in schools (Baker et al., 1997; Battistich et al., 1997). One goal underlying these efforts was to create a school context that would foster moral development and pro-social behaviors, including the quality of “caring” in the students themselves (Battistich et al., 1997; Noddings, 1992; 1995). Others promoted “relationally oriented schools” primarily as a means to improve schools and enhance students’ academic attainment (Baker et al., 1997; Noblit & Rogers, 1995).

This work focused primarily on caring in elementary schools, but it nonetheless provided insights about factors relevant to caring, and pointed to significant benefits associated with caring in schools (Baker et al, 1997; Battistich et al, 1997). Baker and colleagues noted that educational practices in caring elementary schools included: 1) teachers attending to relationships through warmth, listening, and the provision of support, 2) teachers mentoring and assisting students in areas other than academics, 3) teachers using collaborative teaching methods, and 4) teachers approaching discipline with a low “emphasis on extrinsic control strategies.” Noblit and Rogers (1995) listened to students and observed teachers in an elementary school and concluded that caring teachers helped students with their work and talked with them. These researchers defined “talk as the currency of caring” and emphasized the use of classroom rituals to promote and reinforce a caring ethic. They also identified inadequate time as a serious obstacle to caring in the

elementary setting. Battistich and colleagues investigated the relationship between perceptions of school as a “caring community” and teacher and student characteristics in 24 varied and diverse elementary schools throughout the US. They found that the perception of the school as a “caring community” was associated with many positive student attitudes and behaviors, including a “positive orientation toward school and learning, task orientation toward learning, educational aspirations, and trust in and respect for teachers (p 143).” These benefits were present for all students, including the samples of low-income students. More importantly, these researchers found that three interactions between sense of “caring community” and positive student outcomes were *strongest* for students in the highest poverty schools. Specifically, students’ enjoyment of class, students’ task orientation, and students’ educational expectations were highest in the low-income schools that students had rated as high in “caring community.” The authors underlined the intriguing potential that this finding could hold for practice and intervention in high-poverty schools.

Review of the literature reveals that affective and relational aspects of schooling and concern about meeting students’ developmental needs, are emphasized at the elementary school level, and are present to a lesser degree at the middle school and junior high level (Eccles, Midgley, Wigfield, Buchanan, Reuman, Flanagan, and Mac Iver, 1993; Jackson & Davis, 2000), but are almost completely non-existent at the high school level (Baker et al., 1997; Deiro, 1996). Exceptions include Deiro’s (1996) work that promoted caring in high schools and offered teachers advice for establishing “healthy connections with students”; and the work of some educational reformers (Newmann, Wehlage & Lamborn, 1992; Sizer, 1996; Wasley et al., 1997). For example, Newmann and his colleagues conceptualized caring --attending to the unique humanity and worth of each student-- as a key component in the process of building student engagement. They asserted that four factors --clarity of purpose, fairness, personal support, and opportunities for success-- should be “integrated within a more general climate of caring.” (p. 23). Caring also figured prominently in Wasley and colleagues’ (1997) recipe for school reform. Caring,

defined as “a teacher’s sincere concern for the welfare of students” (p. 17), in combination with “high expectations” was one of four “sets of connections” identified as critical to supporting positive outcomes for high school students.

We also note that systemic intervention programs that focus on addressing the needs of the “whole child,” such as Comer’s *School Development Program* (Comer, 1993; Noblit, Malloy & Malloy, 2001) and the Hogg Foundation’s *School of the Future* (Holtzman, 1992)

seem much more likely to be designed for, and initiated in, elementary schools; and only later, if ever, extended to secondary schools (see for example, Malloy & Patterson, 2001).

The reasons for this oversight and delay are complex, but no doubt relate to several factors including, 1) adult misconceptions of adolescent needs, influenced in part by now outdated psychological constructions of adolescence (Lesko, 2001; Steinberg, 2001), 2) historical traditions in high school organization and teaching that emphasized efficiency over student learning and development (Callahan, 1962), and 3) limited common-sense notions of caring (Benner & Gordon, 1996; Deiro, 1996; Eaker-Rich & Van Galen, 1996; Sarason, 1985; Tronto, 1993) and a resulting confusion about what it means to care in a high school setting. Because we commonly and uncritically think of caring as an emotional quality or attitude it seems both too easy and too difficult to achieve. I heard, for example, one principal, a persuasive advocate of “caring” in high schools, say, “Caring works! And caring doesn’t cost a dime!” On the other side, educators doubtful about their abilities to care for high school students, throw up their hands in resistance and say just as assertively, “Caring can’t be mandated!” Both statements reflect the common-sense understanding of caring as an emotional quality or attitude; and in my view, both positions are flawed. Caring does involve resources (Tronto, 1993) and while it can’t be “mandated” it can most likely be fostered and made more systemic by careful policy decisions. Deiro (1996), who wrote a practitioner-oriented book advocating

“caring” in high schools, provides considerable insight into the resistance and barriers teachers might experience when asked to care in a high school setting.

The importance of “caring” within the high school context has emerged more clearly -- albeit indirectly-- through research on the drop-out problem (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986) and related constructs such as student engagement (Newmann, 1992) and school attachment (Mouton & Hawkins, 1986); as well as through qualitative research (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Wasley et al., 1997) and journalistic accounts of high school students’ experience (New York Times, 7/3/03). Caring -or its absence- is repeatedly cited as one of several important factors contributing to students’ level of engagement and commitment to school (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Bryk & Thum, 1989; Croninger & Lee, 2001; Mouton & Hawkins, 1996; Newmann, 1992; Welage & Rutter, 1986). Investigating school-based factors that contribute to high school drop-out, Wehlage and Rutter highlighted the low levels of teacher interest in students perceived by drop-outs as well as non-college bound graduates. Analyzing open-ended interviews with 100 teens who had dropped out of Pittsburgh high schools, Altenbaugh and colleagues reported that teachers were consistently described as “uncaring” while other adults were characterized as distant “shadow figures.” (p. 157) For example, they noted that most of their interview participants did not even know the name of their principal. These former students reported an notable lack of adult support at school. Commenting on this the researchers wrote,

What struck us most vividly through the interview process was that not one informant described an adult advocate, that is an administrator or teacher who defended the students’ interests and needs in school. More than alienation from academic subject matter and other educational and social activities in their schools, students felt estranged from the adults who were supposed to help them (p. 96).

Interestingly, Mouton and Hawkins (1996) who focused on perspectives of high school students who were classified as having “low attachment” to school, found a similar

result; namely, that these students perceived low levels of support and encouragement from school personnel. Altenbaugh and colleagues (1995) concluded their study with the contention that creating a “caring/learning” community would be essential to resolving the drop-out problem.

Bryk and Thum (1989) examined the relationship between structural and normative features of schools on dropout and absenteeism, and found that teachers’ interest in and involvement with students (as rated by both students and principals) predicted higher student attendance and high school completion. Furthermore, the researchers found that teacher interest in students was especially beneficial in increasing attendance and reducing dropout among disadvantaged and high-risk youth. These findings led the researchers to promote “smaller high schools where there are substantial opportunities for informal adult-student interactions, where teachers are committed to and interested in working with students...” (p. 377).

Croninger and Lee (2001) extended the theoretical concept of “social capital” to teacher-student relationships, and found that higher levels of “teacher-based social capital” increased the probability that 10th-12th graders would graduate. They measured students’ perceptions of received social capital using a questionnaire in which students rated the degree to which they felt teachers were interested in them, valued them, cared about them and their success, recognized and praised them for hard work, were good at teaching, and did not put them down. The researchers also measured student behaviors in accessing teacher capital by using teacher ratings of whether students did or did not seek additional help or guidance outside of class. The impact of teacher-based student capital was striking: access to teacher-based social capital reduced the risk of dropout among their sample by nearly 50%. Similar to results reported by Bryk and Thum (1989), Croninger and Lee found teacher-based social capital especially benefited at-risk students. That is, while all groups of students benefited from teacher-based social capital, those students who were both academically and socially at-risk benefited most. Their analysis provided

specific information about what types of teacher-based social capital were most helpful to certain groups of students. Socially at-risk students were most positively affected by student-teacher talks, while academically at-risk students benefited most from informal opportunities to obtain help from teachers. Croninger and Lee pointed out that the measures they used only provided “blunt” measures of teacher-based social capital, and did not provide adequate insight into what students were actually obtaining and experiencing in these valuable encounters. Given their findings suggesting the potent impact of teacher-based social capital on high school graduation, Croninger and Lee stressed the need to learn more about the quality of high school students’ relationships with their teachers. They called for future research to:

...understand more fully the nature of the resources that students can acquire from their social networks, the effect of these resources on adolescent development (negative and positive), incentives for accessing these resources for different populations of students, and the factors that encourage teachers to actually provide support and assistance to students when doing so may require some personal sacrifice. (p. 571)

Indeed, surprisingly little work has focused specifically on what high school themselves perceive as caring in school. However, anecdotal evidence can be found in the work of several researchers who have focused explicitly on student perspectives on high school (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Wasley et al., 1997), as well as in broader high school studies that include student accounts (Beck & Newman, 1996; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Van Galen, 1996). For example, Altenbaugh and colleagues interviewed high school drop-outs in Pittsburgh and developed a sense of what students perceived as caring, mainly by looking at their comments of the reverse. That is, their participants spoke much more frequently of the lack of caring they experienced at school. As the researchers explained,

Most students had only negative comments to make: a poor teacher did not help, did not explain, ignored students when their hands were raised, had favorites, did not care, was ‘mean’ or ‘picked on’ students, ‘tried to rule you’, treated students ‘unequally’, did not understand, and was just ‘talk, talk, talk.’ (p. 86)

In contrast, the researchers learned that good teachers, “ ‘helped’, ‘worked with students’, ‘allowed conversation’, ‘explained’, acted ‘like a big brother’, and ‘keep on you’ ” (p.85). Altenbaugh and colleagues pointed out that students also interpreted both fairness in discipline, and teachers’ and administrators’ visibility and attendance at sports events, as demonstrations of caring. The researchers’ overall conclusion was that two behaviors - sharing time to help and showing patience - were most frequently linked with caring by their participants.

Van Galen (1996) examined the phenomenon of caring in an ethnically and racially diverse Catholic high school in a Mid-western city. Her interest was piqued by the consciously articulated “rhetoric of caring” promoted by adults at the school. She found similar themes in student descriptions of caring. That is, they experienced caring in teachers’ involvement in their extracurricular activities, through teachers’ warmth and humor, and especially through teachers’ willingness to help and their generosity with extra time to help with schoolwork. For example, one of their student participants said, “I like the teachers. They really care. It’s not like they are just teaching you and ‘we don’t care if you fail.’ They do help you work up to your potential” (p. 154).

Students of an inner city Los Angeles high school interviewed by Beck and Newman (1996) highlighted the respect they received from adults at the school, and the benefits of having teachers and administrators who paid attention to them. It mattered to students that their teachers were aware of whether they were present or absent. Romo and Falbo (1996) provided a similar anecdote in their study, *Latino High School Graduation*, sharing the account of a student who dropped out,

Work keeps me there ‘cause it’s like for the money and like, if you don’t go, they call you and tell you. You have a chance of getting fired. School is like, they don’t call you. They don’t care if you are there. At work you are scared of getting fired and that’s what keeps you going to work. School is like, so you miss a day, so what? (p. 27)

Interestingly, this sentiment was echoed by a student interviewed for a recent (7/3/03) article in a New York Times feature series on high school “push outs.” A twenty-one year-old student of the Manhattan Comprehensive Day and Night School, a high school designed to serve the New York City’s most difficult high school students, said of her experience,

Before I got here, I’d dropped out so many times I didn’t want to go to school anymore. I’ve dropped out here too, but the difference is that here, they keep calling you and asking you to come back. The teachers talk to you here and they remember your name and what you said. And when they care, you care. (p.A20)

Taken together, these accounts suggest that students felt cared for when teachers took time to help them, participated with them, were attentive to them, and treated them with fairness and respect.

Although it focuses on middle school students, Wilson and Corbett’s (2001) *Listening to Urban Kids: School Reform and the Teachers They Want*, stands out as a model of student-centered research and is especially relevant here because of its insightful interpretation of caring. In their three-year study which followed a cohort of students from 6th grade to 8th grade in five reforming, inner-city Philadelphia middle schools, Wilson and Corbett (2001) identified six qualities and behaviors that students wanted and valued in their teachers. These were teachers 1) who pushed them and made them “stay on” (p. 73) their work, 2) who maintained an orderly classroom, 3) who were “willing to help” (p. 78) with school work, 4) who worked to make sure that everyone in the class understood the material, 5) who varied classroom activities, and 6) who respected students and tried to understand their experience. They went on to show how students perceived the presence or lack of these qualities in terms of caring. As they explained, these actions conveyed to students that the teachers cared about them and were invested in their academic success. For example, as one of their student research participants said, “One of my teachers really push kids to work. She is the most caring teacher. She really want you to do the work” (p.89). Wilson and Corbett concluded that, “[Students]

interpreted how a teacher taught as an indication of how the teacher felt about them as students. Teachers who taught, cared; teachers who did not teach did not care” (p. 123).

Adolescent Needs: Psychological Literature on Adolescent Development

Erik Erikson established (1950; 1968) the concept that adolescent development primarily consists of the process or “task” of consolidating a stable and clear identity. The assertion that identity formation is the central and defining feature of adolescent development has been very influential, serving as a foundation and touchstone for much subsequent research on this life stage. In Erikson’s words, “an optimal identity” --the desired end result of this process-- would be,

... a sense of psychosocial well-being. Its most obvious concomitants are a feeling of being at home in one’s body, a sense of “knowing where one is going,” and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count.” (1968, p. 164)

Erikson clearly saw the process of identity development as challenging, complex, and multi-faceted. He viewed it as an essentially social process in which the maturing youth becomes increasingly involved in a wider social world. Identity development depended on the interactive, interpersonal process of reflection and recognition between adolescents and others, especially -but not exclusively- significant adults. Adults are important in numerous ways, both as objects of “experimental identification,” but also as providers of “recognition” as the adolescent grows, changes, and develops. As Erikson said,

[When] we speak of the community’s response to the young individual’s need to be “recognized” by those around him, we mean something beyond a mere recognition of achievement; for it is of great relevance to the young individual’s identity formation that he be responded to and be given function and status as a person whose gradual growth and transformation make sense to those who begin to make sense to him. (1968, p. 156)

In his writing, Erikson suggests that adults experience a sense of delight as they respond to the maturing adolescent. As he explains, “The community, often with some initial mistrust, gives such recognition with a display of surprise and pleasure in making the acquaintance of a newly emerging individual.” (1968, p. 159) The end result of this process is a clear sense of direction about one’s future work and role in society.

Much of the earliest psychological research that built on Erikson’s perspective on identity formation did not tend to focus on the interpersonal and social aspects of his conceptualization, but rather emphasized intra-psychic aspects of identity development, operationalizing stages of identity formation, and measuring individuals’ stages of identity achievement (Kroger, 1996; 2002; Marcia, 1966). At the same time, other dominant theoretical influences in psychology also diverted attention from adult participation in adolescent development: psychoanalytic and neo-analytic perspectives (Blos, 1979; Freud, 1958) emphasized the process of separation from parents in adolescent development; and the role of peer interactions was increasingly emphasized (Brown, 1990). Adolescence came to be seen as a time of “storm and stress” --especially between parents and their children-- and the contributing roles of adults in adolescent development were downplayed.

The 1980’s and 1990’s saw significant shifts in psychological research on adolescent development, including greater attention to the processes and contexts, respectively, that contribute to identity development (Tharinger & Lambert, 1999). As Steinberg (2001) pointed out, the view that adolescence was inevitably a time of “storm and stress” characterized by conflict with parents was all but rejected (; Feldman & Elliott, 1990; Lerner & Lerner, 1999; Petersen, 1993; Petersen & Leffert, 1995; Steinberg, 1990) as researchers working with large samples of community adolescents (as opposed patients or clinical samples) discovered that a majority of youth reported ongoing and close relations with parents and family. The important role of parents (and other adults) in

fostering adolescent development, was confirmed by researchers who identified specific parent attributes, parenting styles, and adolescent/parent interactions that were associated with, and/or contributed to, positive developmental outcomes (Barber, 1997; Baumrind, 1987; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Sartor & Youniss, 2002; Steinberg, 1990). Although described in slightly different terms by the different researchers, essentially all of the work in this area shared a common theme, namely, that positive adolescent development was fostered by parents who provided affectionate support along with clear and demanding standards and expectations.

Baumrind's work (1971; 1987) on parenting styles, initially developed in research with younger children, demonstrated the benefits of an authoritative parenting style for adolescents as well. She defines this beneficial style as combining the elements of parental affective responsiveness and demandingness. Baumrind emphasized the cognitive as well as affective aspects of parental responsiveness, noting that authoritative parents are attuned to a child's ever-changing needs for stimulation and challenge. As a result, "Authoritative parents characteristically maintain an appropriate ratio of children's autonomy to parental control at all ages" (1987, p. 112). Baumrind continued, describing specific characteristics of authoritative parenting with adolescents,

However, an appropriate ratio is weighted in the direction of control with young children and in the direction of autonomy in adolescence. Authoritative parents of adolescents focus on issues rather than personalities and roles, they encourage their adolescents to voice their dissent and actively seek to share power as their children mature. (1987, p. 112)

These elements became influential concepts in much following work on beneficial parent/adolescent relationships. For example, Steinberg (1990; 2001) drew on Baumrind's work, emphasizing the developmental benefits of an "authoritative" parenting style in which parents maintained strong affective bonds with their teens, fostered democratic interactions in which disagreements and divergent views were

tolerated, and communicated “demandingness.” Steinberg (2001) and his colleagues continued to develop and refine these ideas, highlighting the importance of parental “warmth,” “firmness,” and “psychological autonomy granting.” In his view, the combination of warmth and firmness facilitates “self-regulation;” while “psychological autonomy granting,” defined as encouraging and permitting adolescents to develop opinions and beliefs, allows for parent and adolescent “verbal give-and-take” that fosters development of social skills. Barber (1997) outlined a model of socialization that incorporated three similar dimensions: “connectedness with significant others”, “demandingness”, and “responsiveness to the adolescent’s need to separate.” Sartor and Youniss (2002), emphasized the importance of parental “behavioral control,” which they defined as reasoning and encouraging adolescents to be aware of the consequences for their behaviors, within a context of a “nurturing” and “connected” relationship.

This body of research affirmed the notion that in adolescence the parent-child relationship is transformed in adolescence (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Petersen, 1995), shifting from a vertical relationship characterized by parental authority and control to relationship that becomes more symmetrical in nature; involving increasing mutual decision-making and adolescent autonomy as the youth matures (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985). This mutually constructed process of change itself contributes to and facilitates positive developmental outcomes (Steinberg, 2001).

Unique Needs of Low-Income and Minority Adolescents

Psychology became increasingly focused on understanding the unique developmental experiences and needs of low-income and minority youth in the 1990’s (Phinney & Landin, 1998). Accepted theories and knowledge about adolescent development had been built primarily on research and clinical work with middle-class, White, often predominantly male, children and youth (McLoyd, 1998; Yoshikawa & Seidman, 2000; Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia & Lopez, 1998). Responses to this problem have varied. Some researchers, primarily those using an ethnographic approach (Burton, Obeidallah &

Allison, 1996; Jarrett, 1997), assert that minority adolescents develop in qualitatively different ways from middle class white youth, and they prioritize understanding the unique experiences of these youth. They question the applicability of categories and concepts derived from the study of white, middle class youth; for example, challenging the appropriateness of the category of adolescence itself for youth whose life circumstances do not include an extended period of “moratorium” between childhood and adulthood (Yoshikawa & Seidman, 2000).

Others see minority adolescent development as essentially similar to that of majority youth, but involving unique and additional challenges, complications, and barriers: the central process of identity formation remains an important theoretical focus, but it is seen as affected by discrimination, poverty, prejudice, stereotyping, and issues of acculturation (Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Castro, Boyer & Balcazar, 2000; Fuligni, 1998; Youngblood & Spencer, 2002).

These factors can affect development in many ways. For example, minority adolescents are necessarily involved in developing a sense of ethnic or racial identity as part of their overall identity development (Castro, Boyer, & Balcazar, 2000; Phinney & Rosenthal, 1992; Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). These researchers have highlighted the increased challenge inherent in developing a dual, or bicultural identity, noting the stresses involved in negotiating contradictory values and allegiances. Immigrant youth face an added challenge as they respond to expectations and norms of their adoptive culture and their culture of origin (Castro et al., 2000; Fuligni, 1998).

The process of evaluating oneself in comparison with others --an inherent part of the identity formation process (Erikson, 1968)-- can be especially problematic and painful for poor and minority adolescents (Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Youngblood & Spencer, 2001). For, as they seek reflections of themselves

in their social world and make outward comparisons with others, they are often faced with negative, hostile, and distorted images of themselves and their reference group (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; McLaughlin, 1993; Youngblood & Spencer, 2002). McLaughlin (1993) described observing this very phenomenon during her fieldwork in inner-city neighborhoods:

The community-level attitudes toward ethnicity and race get expressed in various ways: by the allocation of community resources, the presence or absence of voice in the community's power structure, and access to the local social structure. The priority or lack of priority afforded youth gives off powerful signals to youth about their value, social legitimacy, and future. ... Communities also shape young people's conceptions of self-esteem and presence. The message about self and identity that urban youth get about themselves and their place is disheartening: 'Society gives you the feeling that you aren't worth anything.' (p. 43)

In addition, the process of exploration, --trying out new roles, beliefs, and values-- which is understood to be critical to identity formation is often limited; either blocked directly by lack of opportunities or role models (Yoshikawa & Seidman, 2000), and indirectly through processes of discrimination that lead to disappointment and avoidance (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Again, McLaughlin (1993) astutely captures this process:

The real and perceived boundaries that circumscribe a youth's environment generate young people's perceptions of themselves as human beings and as social participants and also establish perimeters for their understanding of possibilities and futures. (p. 54)

Ogbu's ethnographic studies (1986, 1991, 1992, 1995a, 1995b) point to the ways in which schools in particular can be especially problematic contexts for minority adolescents. His work attends to the unique historical and political experience of distinct minority groups and addresses their relationship minority school engagement and academic performance. Ogbu highlights the fact that many minority youth, most notably those he describes as "involuntary minorities" (1995a), come to school with deeply internalized, and perhaps unconscious, oppositional orientations to school. As he explains this "oppositional cultural frame of reference" (1992, 1995a) towards White institutions

(such as public schools) and practices associated with the White majority (such as school achievement) developed within the minority communities over time as a result of oppression and exploitation and became further entrenched through ongoing discrimination and limitations in economic opportunities. The cultural frame of reference is associated with specific cultural orientations and beliefs about the value of schooling and its relations to success and shapes the set of specific strategies and coping responses that each minority group is most likely to employ when faced with the dilemma of functioning, and succeeding, in a majority institution. From Ogbu's perspective school itself is often perceived as a barrier and even a threat to minority adolescent identity development. Focusing on instructional and relational processes within a Mexican-American high school in Texas, Valenzuela (1999) developed the concept of "subtractive schooling" to describe the way in which schools actually strip minority students of their social and cultural resources through their pervasive and systematic failure to recognize and value that which they bring with them to school.

Spencer and her colleagues emphasize the special role and responsibilities that adults have in helping poor and minority adolescents overcome these extra developmental hurdles (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Youngblood & Spencer, 2002). They call for all adult caretakers in adolescent's lives --parents, teachers, clergy, mentors, and extended family-- to assist them in processing negative community feedback and discriminatory experiences. In their view, adults are critically important for adolescent development; being able to provide teens with positive reflections and critical interpretations about the challenging realities of their socio-political context.

Theoretical Approaches to Caring

Contemporary theoretical approaches to caring can be found in a wide variety of disciplinary traditions including humanist psychology (Mayeroff, 1970), feminist psychology (Gilligan, 1982), education (Noddings, 1984, 1992), and political science (Tronto, 1993). Tronto's theory is uniquely appropriate for the proposed research: it

moves beyond relational and dyadic concepts of caring, and instead conceptualizes caring as a practice that is socially and culturally shaped. Educational researchers (Beck & Newman, 1996; Eaker-Rich & Van Galen, 1996; Gordon et. al., 1996) have more recently brought critical, multi-cultural perspectives to research on caring in schools. Although they do not offer new theoretical perspectives on caring, their observations lead them to conclude that caring is best understood as a practice. In drawing attention to the varied and competing definitions and uses of caring, their work also points to the need to critically examine caring as a socially and culturally embedded practice.

Milton Mayeroff's Humanist Perspective

Mayeroff's (1970) treatise *On Caring* defines caring as a relational process in which one is engaged in "helping the other grow." Mayeroff sees caring as at the very essence of human life. As he says, "In the sense in which man can ever be said to be at home in the world, he is at home not through dominating, explaining, or appreciating, but through caring and being cared for (p. 2)." Caring is what gives human beings their sense of "being in place" in the world, their sense of purpose and meaning in an existential sense.

Mayeroff's discussion of caring focuses on the experience of the individual providing care. The process of caring has a specific characteristics which Mayeroff describes primarily in terms the internal states and psychological capacities of the one engaged in caring. In brief, the process is as follows: the one caring experiences a strong connection with the cared for, but at the same time remains aware of the other's separateness, the one caring is deeply committed to the "cared for's" growth, but does not impose his/her own direction on the other but rather "follows the other's lead" and allows and assists the cared for to develop "to be itself."

Mayeroff explains that certain personal capacities are required for effective caring. Namely, the one caring must be devoted to the one cared for and remain both honest and humble. Honesty and humility serve to keep the one caring focused on the interests and

needs of the person cared for. The one caring must be able to see the one cared for as he is and remain open to him on an ongoing basis. Mayeroff's theory is teleological; although he emphasizes the existential benefits for the one caring, the ultimate goal of caring is that the one being cared for learns to care and become responsible for himself.

Mayeroff mentions that knowledge is critical to caring in that the one caring must "be able to understand the other's needs and be able to respond properly" (p. 13). His comments on knowledge suggest that he sees it as an important resource in caring. Using Mayeroff's theory to hypothesize about barriers to caring, one would see difficulties in caring residing in the inability of the one caring to achieve and maintain the correct internal stance toward the one cared for, or in lacking adequate knowledge of the other or the ability to respond.

Nel Noddings' Feminist Ethic of Care

Until the early 1980's with the appearance of Gilligan's research (1982) on feminine morality, interest in caring as a phenomenon remained relatively sparse. Nel Noddings' work (1984, 1992, 1995) developed within this tradition of early feminist thought. She explored and extended the implications of Gilligan's work to the domain of education, developing an "ethic of care" and proposals for an educational curriculum based upon it.

Noddings conceptualized caring as a relational process that takes place between the one caring and the one cared for. Noddings' work emphasizes the relational orientation or attitude of the one caring. Specifically, she explains that caring involves "engrossment." She uses this term to describe the state of receptivity or attunement to the other necessary in the one caring in order to perceive the other's needs. This engrossment, or receptivity, is followed by a state of "motivational displacement" in which the needs of the other become the central focus of the one caring and he "begins to think" and direct his energies to "what [he] can do to help another."

It is important to note however that Noddings does not dwell on the actions involved in caring. But caring begins with engrossment and comes to a close when the one cared for receives and responds to the caring. Noddings made a significant contribution in her attention to this final step of caring. She asserted that it is only when caring has been received that it can be considered complete. As such, Noddings takes the words, “They don’t care,” as an indicator that something is seriously amiss. The underlying goal of Noddings’ caring is “creating, maintaining, and enhancing relationships (1992, p. 21)” and fostering others’ capacity to care.

Although Noddings does not explicitly theorize the role of resources in caring, she does speculate about organizing a school in such a way as to support caring. As she says, “What I am recommending is that schools and teaching be redesigned so that caring has a chance to be initiated in the one-caring and completed in the cared-for.” (1984, p. 182) She goes on to say, “[A] school can be deliberately designed to support caring and caring individuals...” (p.182). In her earliest work, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), Noddings suggests that smaller schools and teaching arrangements that increase the continuity of teacher-student relationships would tend to support caring. She also questioned the impact of the evaluative role on teachers’ ability to care for students. She suggested an approach to curriculum and subject matter that would allow for students to make more meaningful connections with their own experience. In a later work (1992) Noddings has chosen to emphasize this curricular solution, proposing an overhaul of the liberal arts curriculum and calling instead for a curriculum focused on “centers” of care. Noddings would be most likely to see any breaches in caring as arising from the one caring’s capacity or willingness to attend to the other or become or remain engrossed or attentive to the other.

Multi-Cultural Perspectives

Recent work by Eaker-Rich and Van Galen (1996) brought a multi-cultural perspective to the study of caring in schools. Their research suggested that caring is complicated by the

many differences --class, racial/ethnic, and gender-- which exist in schools today. These researchers used Noddings' theory, citing her notion that "caring is more difficult at a distance" to suggest that the difficulties in caring in schools today may reside in the challenge and limitations of the one caring in "crossing boundaries" or being able to adequately perceive the other and its needs and desires. They (Eaker-Rich, Van Galen & Timothy, 1996) concluded that active "dialogue" is needed to achieve successful caring in diverse settings. They emphasized the way in which those giving care must actively listen to those they seek to care for. "Giving care includes receiving information." (p.234)

It is interesting that although these researchers implicitly move the theory of caring beyond the dyadic and relational theory of Noddings, they do not offer a revised or more comprehensive theory and, paradoxically, they remain focused primarily on actions included in the first phase of caring. Critical of the ways in which "caring" actions and behaviors on the part of school personnel can mask prejudice, unequal treatment, and silence discussion and dissent, these researchers stress the importance of seeing caring as a practice as opposed to a "sentiment" (p. 233).

Joan Tronto's Political Theory of Care

Tronto, a political scientist, offered a well-developed theory of caring as practice in 1993, in her work, *Moral Boundaries*. Tronto sees caring as a "practice," rather than an emotion, which involves both "thought and action" (p. 108). She emphasizes the fact that caring requires resources. As she states, "...care depends on adequate resources: on material goods, on time, on skills" (p. 110). She asserts that caring has both universal and culturally specific dimensions; that is, while all human beings have a need for care, the specifics of those needs and ideas about what is appropriate or adequate care are culturally shaped and variable depending on the group or context. She notes that caring may and often does involve conflict. Further, caring does not take place solely between individuals. For example she explains,

In the United States, we often think of caring about in highly individualistic terms...Nonetheless, we can also describe caring about on a social and political level, and describe society's approach to the homeless, for example, in caring terms.

According to Tronto the process of caring consists of four distinct phases. These are "Caring About," "Taking Care Of," "Caring For", and "Care-Receiving" (p. 106-7). The first phase involves recognizing a need and deciding it should be met. She mentions that this step often includes taking the perspective of another. We can see that this initial phase might include Noddings notion of "engrossment" and "thinking" and Mayeroff's notion of the strongly felt connection with the other. The next phase, "Taking Care Of" involves assuming responsibility for the need and deciding how to respond. Tronto aptly notes that this part of the process "involves agency." The third phase, "Caring For," consists of the actions carried out to meet the identified needs. In her framework this step is the direct provision of care. Finally, in the last phase, "Care-Receiving" the one cared for receives and responds to the caring. Like Nel Noddings (1984), Tronto highlights the importance of this final step and sees it as the only way to know whether the practice of caring has been successfully completed. As she says, "It is important to include care-receiving as an element of the caring process because it provides the only way to know that caring needs have actually been met" (p. 108).

Using this theoretical framework we can see that caring can break down or be frustrated at many different junctures. For example, there can be difficulties in noticing and defining the need. Most of the other theories stop at this point. There may be difficulties related to being equipped to respond to the need or to involve oneself and take responsibility for meeting the need. There can be a host of difficulties in implementing the actions that meet the need. With this framework we can consider what resources are necessary at each step along the way so that care can progress from "Caring About" to "Receiving Care."

Tronto's model also helps us best think about our common-sense observations and the paradoxes of "caring." For example, while someone may "care" --notice a need-- if they don't feel able to respond to it, or if they don't feel it is their responsibility to respond to it, caring would not take place. Or similarly if somebody does notice a need, and takes responsibility for it, but for whatever reason they cannot act to meet the need or do not have the capacity to meet the need, then caring has not taken place. This perspective helps us reconcile the contradictions that we experience in our everyday talk about caring. While we would describe the majority of teachers as "caring" (and they would probably describe themselves that way as well) often their students do not; and thus, in fact, care has not occurred.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

The Data Archive

The archive of qualitative data that is available for this study of caring consists of audio taped and videotaped interview data from three high-poverty high schools in Texas. The data were collected in 1999-2000 as part of a UT Dana Center case-based research study of promising practices in high-performing, low-income high schools in Texas (Charles A. Dana Center, 2000).

Description of Original Site Selection Criteria

Five schools, in districts with more than 5,000 students, and in which more than 40% of the students qualified for free or reduced-priced lunch, were initially selected for the Dana Center project using one of three academic performance criteria. In order for schools to be considered for inclusion in the study they had to meet or exceed at least one of these three criteria. They were 1) Texas Learning Index Scores of 80 or above in both reading and mathematics for economically disadvantaged students, 2) Algebra End-of-Course examination scores higher than the state average, or 3) higher than average enrollment in advanced placement courses. The Dana Center research staff used 1998-1999 performance data to select the schools that were visited in academic year 1999-2000.

The Texas Learning Index Score (TLI) is a scaled score anchored at the exit-level TAAS (administered to students for the first time in the 10th grade). The score describes a student's performance above or below the passing standard. It represents the same level of achievement year to year, and thus can be used to measure and compare students' academic growth from year to year, as well as to predict a student's ability to pass the exit-level TAAS. Relevant to this study, at the exit level, the TLI describes a student's performance above or below the passing standard of the 10th grade TAAS. An average

TLI of 80 represents student performance significantly above the minimum passing level of 70. The Algebra End of Course Examination measures student mastery of mathematical concepts of Algebra I as outlined in the Texas state curriculum guidelines. The Advanced Placement Program allows students to take college-level courses and exams while still in high school. In 2001, the College Board sponsored 33 advanced placement (AP) courses in 19 subject areas. Very few high-poverty Texas high schools had students enrolled in the following AP courses in 1998–99: Biology, Calculus, English Language, English Literature, U.S Government and Politics, and U.S. History. For the Dana Center study, we looked for schools in which students were enrolled in four or more of these six AP courses, and in which the percentage of eleventh- and twelfth-grade students enrolled in at least three of the six courses exceeded the average enrollment for all public high schools in Texas.

Each of these three indicators also had additional criteria to ensure equity in achievement on the indicator. For the TLI criterion researchers excluded any school with a 5 TLI point difference in the TLI scores of economically disadvantaged and advantaged students; for Algebra End of Course they only accepted schools where the achievement gaps in passing rates of these groups was small (below 7 percent) and where the exam participation rates were greater than the state average; for the AP criterion the researchers reviewed the enrollment data to make sure that participation in the courses was representative of the school's overall student population.

It is important to underline the fact that although these are not extremely demanding academic criteria, only a handful of low-income high schools emerged as candidates for the original study.

Sites Selected for Study of Caring in High Schools

The three schools selected for this follow-up study are Brazosport High School in Freeport, TX, which met both the TLI and Algebra End of Course criteria, Martin High School in Laredo, TX which met the Advanced Placement criteria, and Mountain View High School which met the TLI score criteria. Brazosport HS located in the semi-industrial Gulf Coast community of Freeport and serves a diverse group of approximately one thousand students; Martin HS is in the heart of the Mexican-American barrio in downtown Laredo and serves an almost exclusively Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant population totaling approximately 2,000 students; Mountain View, is situated on the edge of a *colonia* in the eastern desert outskirts of El Paso and serves just under one thousand students. Table I below provides detailed enrollment and demographic data for each campus during 1999-2000 data collection year. The demographic data presented in Table I are drawn from the Texas Education Agency's AEIS (Academic Excellence Indicator System) Report and can be found at their website: www.tea.state.tx.us .

TABLE I
Campus Demographics for Academic Year 1999-2000

| | Brazosport | Martin | Mountain View |
|--------------------|------------|--------|---------------|
| Total Enrollment | 1,051 | 1,920 | 910 |
| % Low-Income | 53.4% | 91.8% | 82.3% |
| % African-American | 12.1% | 0% | 0.7% |
| % Latino | 48.8% | 98.5% | 94.2% |
| % White | 38.4% | 1.4% | 4.5% |

I identified these three schools from the original five for the proposed study for two reasons. First, these were the schools in which the students interviewed most clearly identified the school as caring. I was using an instrumental case study design and the ability to understand the phenomenon of interest is dependent on finding and selecting a case where the phenomenon is manifest (Patton, 1990; Stake, 1998). The second reason

is more pragmatic, although it also has implications for the quality of the analysis. These are the three schools, of the original five, which I personally visited as a member of research and video documentary site visit teams. Specifically, I led a three-day research trip to Brazosport HS in January 2000. I visited Mountain View HS for a two-day research visit in November 1999 and returned for one day in May 2000 to lead a video recording visit; and I visited Martin HS for one day as a member of a video team.

A Note on Dropouts and “Pushouts” in the Case Schools

Student dropout data were not used in the selection of schools for the original Dana Center study, nor were they part of my selection process for the present study. Official dropout data are notoriously problematic and are said to greatly under-represent the extent of the dropout problem. At the same time, the issue is pertinent to my interest in the impact of caring in high schools. Therefore, with this caveat about the data in mind, I have included some dropout statistics taken from the Texas Education Agency’s AEIS report. Please note that the annual dropout data reported in AEIS for each campus, are actually based on data for dropout in grades 7-12 in a given year. The figure reported is obtained by calculating the total number of 7th through 12th graders who dropped out in the given year divided by the total number of students who attended 7th through 12th grade at any time in that year. This statistic reported for the Brazosport High School campus in 1999-2000 was 0.7% and it was 1.9% and 1.5% for Mountain View and Martin high schools, respectively. The state average for this statistic was 1.3%. We note that only Brazosport High is performing better than the state average on this indicator.

In addition, AEIS completion rate data for the year of our site visit report some outcomes of students of the senior class. These include percentage of class graduating, percentage of class obtaining GED, percentage of class continuing in high school, and percentage of class dropping out. At Brazosport High School 86.1% of the class of 2000 graduated, with another 4.5% receiving their GED. Only 2.0% of the senior class dropped out, while 7.4% remained in high school. At Mountain View High School 77.5% of the class

of 2000 graduated with none reported as receiving their GED. Over 8% of the Mountain View senior class dropped out while almost 14% continued on in high school. Finally at Martin High School 80.4% of the senior class of 2000 graduated with less than one percent reported as receiving their GED. Of the three schools, Martin had the highest reported percentage of seniors dropping out with 10.5% of the class of 2000 classified as dropping out. Almost nine percent of the Martin class of 2000 continued on in high school. Of the three case schools only Brazosport is above the state average of 80.7% of class 2000 seniors graduating, and under the state average of 7.2% of class of 2000 seniors dropping out.

Contents of Data Archive

The data archive for these three schools consists of audiotapes and typed transcripts of over approximately 75 hours of individual and focus group interviews with 142 individuals. This includes 22 hours of interviews with 52 students, 44 hours of interviews with 67 school-based staff (teachers, administrators, and support staff such as counselors, librarians, security officers), over three hours of interviews with three district personnel, and over four hours of interviews with 20 parents. See Table II below for a more detailed list of those interviewed and length of interviews at each school. In addition to this interview data the archive contains approximately 24 hours of videotape interviews and school footage from the three campuses. The videotaped interviews were not conceived as a data collection tool, but rather were intended to document information collected in interviews during the initial data collection visits. Nonetheless the participants of the videotaped interviews frequently provided new and more elaborate accounts during their videotaping sessions.

TABLE II
Number of Individuals Interviewed and Length of Interviews
at Three Study Schools

| | Brazosport | Martin | Mountain View | All Schools |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| # students (hours) | 17 (7.5) | 20 (5.5) | 15 (9.0) | 52 (22.0) |
| # teachers (hours) | 15 (7.5) | 17 (7.5) | 9 (8.5) | 41 (23.5) |
| # administrators (hours) | 3 (4.5) | 4 (4.5) | 3 (4.0) | 10 (13.0) |
| # support staff (hours) | 3 (3.5) | 11 (2.5) | 2 (2.0) | 16 (8.0) |
| # district staff (hours) | 1 (1.0) | 1 (1.5) | 1 (1.0) | 3 (3.5) |
| # parents (hours) | 12 (2.0) | 6 (1.5) | 2 (1.0) | 20 (4.5) |
| total interviewed | 51 individuals | 59 individuals | 32 individuals | 142 individuals |
| total time | 26 hours | 23 hours | 25.5 hours | 74.5 hours |

Methods of Sampling Used in Original Study

Researchers worked with a school representative -- in most cases this was the school principal-- by phone, and in advance of the field visit, to identify students and staff on campus and in the district in the various categories to be interviewed.

To develop the student sample, researchers asked the school contact person to assemble focus groups of a variety of students. The aim was to meet with students representative of the whole spectrum of the student body. Thus, researchers asked to conduct focus groups interviews with five or six average students from the lower grades (9th and 10th), and with five or six students from the upper grades (11th and 12th). We also asked to meet with focus groups of student leaders, advanced placement students, and students who were receiving special education services. As it turned out, the focus groups usually consisted of fewer students than requested or mixed categories of students in ways the researchers did not request or anticipate. In addition, at certain schools, researchers conducted individual interviews with students.

Similarly, researchers worked in advance with the school representative to develop their sample of adult respondents. Again, researchers requested to meet with specific individuals and groups. Those to be interviewed individually included the principal, one or more of the assistant principals or deans of instruction, one or more school counselors, and teachers representing each area, and the district staff member considered most involved with the campus. The research team asked to meet with both veteran and relatively new teachers. We requested focus group interviews with faculty department chairpersons, members of the school's site based decision-making committee, and parents. In some cases researchers, or the schools themselves, arranged focus groups or individual meetings with other members of the support staff as well.

Data Collection Methods Used in Original Study

Teams of three researchers collected the data for the original study during two-day field visits to each school. The research teams were multi-disciplinary in composition, including former educators and educational administrators as well as a researcher trained in educational research, psychology, and anthropology. Most members of the research team had previous experience and training in qualitative field research in school settings. All members of the team received training on the proper use of the interview protocols.

The researchers used semi-structured, open-ended interviews that had been developed by the research team. I was one of two people co-leading the design of the protocols.

The individual and focus group protocols were tailored to each specific type of respondent (for example: students participating in special education services, department heads, student leaders etc.), but each version followed a similar open-ended format and asked the respondents questions about their experiences at the school, their interactions, their observation of changes and improvements at the school as well as challenges and concerns at the school. The purpose was to ask questions that would help identify those practices and policies --and to a lesser extent the processes-- that had contributed to

school improvement at the selected campus. Samples of two of the ten versions of the protocols –student focus group and teacher interview-- that were used in the data collection are provided in Appendices A and B, respectively. Individual interviews generally lasted about one to one-and-a-half hours while each focus group lasted about one-and-a-half to two hours. The videotapes consist primarily of follow-up interviews with individuals we had spoken with either formally or informally during the research visit. The topics covered during videotaping were similar to those in the original interview protocols.

Limitations of the Archival Data

Although the archival data do provide a source of rich and extensive information, there are limitations and implications for the proposed study that relate to the sample, the type of data, and the content focus of the data. First, regarding sampling and selection, in almost all cases school administrators --in most cases the principals-- selected the participants. In this regard they represented a subset of the schools' populations (adult and student) that were likely to be more favorable and positive about their experiences at the school. In addition, although the researchers requested to speak with a variety of students, we defined this using school-based or academic categories such as "student receiving special education" or "students in 9th and 10th grade," rather than student-defined categories. That is, we did not ask to speak with student athletes, students who spoke only Spanish, student parents, or students experiencing discipline problems. Nonetheless our categories usually always included students who fell into those other categories or had at one time. A qualitative description of these additional characteristics of the student participants is provided in each case presentation in Chapter IV. In short, it is unlikely that we have obtained the entire range of student opinion and thus we must be somewhat cautious about our conclusions regarding the pervasiveness of caring in these schools. The very small number of students interviewed--approximately 1.0% at Martin, and 1.5 % at Brazosport and Mountain View-- is also reason to be cautious in the use of the archival data.

The type of data also poses some limitations for my ability to adequately answer the research question. The data is exclusively interview data consisting of individual accounts, memories, reflections, stories, and self-reports. This data is quite good in building a picture of what students identify as caring, and in developing ideas about how adults in the school identify student needs and how they perceive their role in meeting student needs. It is less helpful in constructing a picture of what actually goes on to meet the needs. I could not assess or describe the quality of student and teacher interactions for example. Observational data would be much more appropriate for that task. Incidentally, the original research did include very limited classroom observations, as well as informal observations in and around the school; however these observations were not systematically documented and hence are not part of the archive.

There are also limitations relating to the content of the data. That is, the original research was designed to collect information that would allow UT Dana Center researchers to construct hypotheses and write a case report about practices and policies that contributed to the relatively high performance at each school. The study did not ask specifically about caring. We did not get information that would allow us to adequately consider the challenges and limitations of caring at each school.

Ethical Issues

The original study went through the internal review process established for non-exempt research at the University of Texas at Austin. I was one of three people who worked to complete the application and documentation necessary for this process. I have completed the NIH on-line training on ethics involving human subjects research.

The researchers followed standard informed-consent procedures in which written informed consent was obtained from adult participants and from all minor participants' parents prior to involvement in the study. As a courtesy and in an effort to be attentive to

developmental issues, all students interviewed also went through a written, informed-consent procedure prior to engaging in any interviews. Their consents stood in addition to parent consent. Students over 18 years of age were allowed to provide their own consent to participate. The researchers conducted a separate, but similar, consent process for the videotaping. All of these consents remain on file at the UT Dana Center.

I received permission from the UT Dana Center to use the archival data to develop the proposed research. I also spoke with each of the current principals of the three high schools about my proposed study and received their written permission to conduct my analysis.

Plan for Data Analysis

My approach to data analysis was primarily informed by a theoretical framework I developed from Joan Tronto's (1993) political ethic of caring. As discussed above in Chapter II, Tronto's theory identifies four distinct phases of caring. They are "Caring About," "Taking Care," "Care-Giving," and "Receiving Care." As she explains, the first phase, "Caring About" involves noticing and recognizing that care is necessary and identifying or defining the need for care. The second step, "Taking Care" involves taking responsibility for the identified need and deciding how to respond. The third phase would be the heart of caring practice, namely carrying out the actions and activities designed to resolve and fulfill the identified needs for care. The fourth and final phase, "Receiving Care," marks the successful culmination of the caring practice as those that have been the objects or recipients of care respond to and acknowledge that their needs have been met.

These phases served as a useful heuristic tool with which to trace and describe caring practice at the three schools. I developed analytical questions related to each phase that I tried to answer as I reviewed the data from the three schools. I inverted the sequence slightly, beginning with the last phase, "Receiving Care" and the students' accounts of

caring and needs met. As I reviewed the data I asked first, “What are the adolescents saying about being cared for and being cared about? Are there explicit references to caring? What do the adolescents tell us about having their needs met at the school, or conversely about needs that are not met at the school? Finally, for all specific references to caring and descriptions of needs met, I further examined the accounts to understand the experiences that led to their perception of being cared for and having needs met. Findings from this first analytical step served to answer the first research question, namely “What constitutes caring from the perspective of adolescent high school students?”

I then analyzed the adult interview data from the schools, using their accounts to compose a portrait of caring practice at each school, sketching the first outlines of how the adults “care about,” “take-care” of and “give care” at each of the three schools. Given my research goals as well as the limitations of the archival data, I did not attempt to provide a complete description of “care-giving” at each school. My purpose was to build hypotheses about the resources that have supported the caring identified by the students themselves. In addition the archival data did not include systematic observational data that would be necessary to provide a complete account of the caring practices occurring at the schools. Thus I concentrated on tracing the process and resources that contributed to the most salient caring practices identified by the students at each school.

In order to investigate the initial phase of “Caring About” I asked the following questions while reviewing and coding the data. First, I sought material that helped me answer the question, “What do adults at the school define or perceive as the students’ needs?” According to the theory caring could break down if the care provider is not able to perceive the care recipients’ needs, or if the care provider defines the needs in a manner that is not congruent or with the recipients’ own perception of needs.

During the process of data analysis I noticed that talk about needs varied at the schools. It seemed that the manner of conceptualizing needs and arriving at an understanding of student needs differed somewhat. In order to better understand these differences I asked an additional question as I reviewed the data, namely, “What do we know about how the adults have developed their understanding of student needs?”

In order to address the second phase of caring, “Taking Care” I reviewed the data with the following question in mind as I coded the interview and video material, “How do the adults perceive their relationship to the student needs which they have identified?” Or, “What is the adults’ perceived role in meeting the identified needs?” As Tronto makes clear, success in this phase depends on several factors - first there must be a perception that the need can indeed be addressed and ameliorated. There are two parts to this as well: first the general question, “Are these needs that can be met? Is this a problem that can be ameliorated?” But also, it seems to me, that it involves individuals making a determination about whether they feel competent to meet these needs. Thus as I reviewed the data for this section I also looked for adult accounts that shed light on their assessment of the nature of the needs and their perceptions about their ability to meet the needs. “Do they take responsibility for meeting the identified needs? How do they define their responsibilities? What do they say about the limits of their responsibilities?”

The last phase of the caring process, “Care-Giving” concerns the actions that are intended to meet the need for care. In analyzing the data I coded any information that shed light on actions the adults were taking to meet student needs. However, as mentioned above, I do not present an exhaustive description of the actions from the care providers’ perspective. The type of interview data that I have did not lend itself to that. My interest was in examining the practices and resources that contributed to the caring identified by the students themselves. Thus, I worked backwards from the student accounts of caring to identify specific practices that may have contributed to their experience of receiving care.

Finally I coded the data for resources that might have helped facilitate the caring practices at each school.

Method of Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involved a sequential and iterative process of reading, and re-reading the interview transcripts, open-ended coding to identify patterns and themes, and re-reading and coding of transcripts again for identified themes. Various strategies of data reduction and data display were utilized during this process to assist with analysis and writing. This approach is similar to that described by Miles and Huberman (1984a; 1984b).

I used this approach for each subgroup of interviews (for example, teachers or students) within each school to analyze and develop results for each individual case school. After writing up each of the three individual cases, I began the process of cross-case analysis. As Huberman and Miles (1984b) point out, cross-case analysis requires careful attention to the uniqueness of individual cases while exploring evidence of phenomena that may be more general or universal across cases.

Miles and Huberman (1984a) have asserted importance of making qualitative data analysis methods explicit. Therefore, a more detailed and in-depth description of the data analysis process and techniques used in this study are provided. The data analysis process relevant to this study actually began prior to my specific work on this study. As one of the leading members of the Dana Center research team for the “high school study,” I participated in collecting, analyzing, and writing up the data for the original study. In my role as lead author of the Mountain View and Brazosport case studies for the original study, I conducted qualitative data analysis on all the transcripts from those schools. This consisted of an open-ended coding process followed by various forms of data reduction (such as summaries of each interview, and thematic outlines of data) in preparation for

writing each case study. The analytic process also included my participation in regular research team meetings with colleagues in which we debriefed about our field visits, discussed the data, and considered emergent themes for the case reports and cross-case summary. This process not only gave me an intimate knowledge of the interview data from the two schools, but it was also the context in which I first noticed the importance of caring at the schools. In fact, we all noted early on that a high degree of caring and respect for students seemed to be present in many of our study schools. Indeed “Fostering and Environment of Respect and Affection for Students” ultimately became a theme in the final study (Charles A. Dana Center, 2000), and seen as one of several important characteristics prominent in these relatively high-performing schools. This initial review process was similar to a grounded theory data analysis approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

When I began the analysis specific to my study I was already extremely familiar with the data and I had already read and re-read the transcripts many times over. As ethnolinguist, Charles Briggs (1986) emphasizes, it is extremely important for the analyst to read and experience the interview as a whole rather than simply searching for isolated statements or references that support a given hypothesis. Once I had determined my research focus on caring, I read and re-read the transcripts again. I began with student interviews from each school because their understanding and accounts of caring were essential to my research. Reading the sets of student interviews from each school separately, I made quick notes and comments on the margins of the transcripts. After completing each interview transcript I made intentionally brief summary comments to capture my global impressions. This all took place before I developed any coding scheme. I then began an open-coding process in attempt to identify all passages relevant to caring to be begin to define and characterize distinct aspects of caring described by students. I used several strategies to reduce and display the data so that I could work with it more effectively. This included making list of important features and relevant quotes from each student interview. This helped me look at the relevant student accounts

as I tried to determine what were the primary and most commonly shared themes regarding caring practice at each school. I had noticed the strong academic and practical nature of the students' accounts of caring and thus as I explored the literature I was drawn to theories which focused on caring as a practice. From that point forward insights from the reading influenced my analysis. I came up with thematic labels or descriptions to capture the emerging themes. In doing this, I initially tried to stay very close to the students' own words as I selected labels and captions for my themes. At this point in the process I had identified many potential themes, some were obviously prominent, but I was unclear about the importance of others. To help clarify this and determine the final themes for the study, I used a simple tallying and counting strategy. I developed a grid, organized with potential themes by student informant. I then re-read the interview transcripts, made tally marks for each occurrence across informants. This way I was more certain about the extent to multiple informants at the school shared a particular idea. Finally, after determining the major themes I then developed a document that I would use in my writing which included data organized by theme. This was another data reduction and display technique. I needed to have all the relevant data on the themes easily accessible to me so I could avoid wading through the entire transcript. Even at this stage in analysis I included some additional thematic categories that were still of interest. In preparing the document I was careful to identify all passages with interview name, speaker, and transcript page so that I would retain awareness of context and have easy reference back to the complete interview. Similarly, I tended to extract large chunks of data, conversations rather than solitary responses, in order to retain a sense of the conversational context. I used this document and referred back to the original transcripts when writing the individual case results. I followed a similar process to analyze the adult (teacher, administrator) data from each school. The only difference was that my sorting of the data was guided by theoretically shaped questions and categories (such as adult perceptions of student needs), but I still used an open-coding process to analyze the material relevant to each category. I also used similar data reduction techniques to make data more manageable and accessible for writing. For the cross-case analysis, I used the

written individual case results as my primary data. I reviewed it and returned to the other earlier data displays to identify both those themes that were present in all schools (i.e. asking what did students across schools see as caring?) as well as relevant findings that were unique to a specific school context.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS - INDIVIDUAL CASES

Results of the analyses of the interview data from the three case schools are presented below. I have elected to begin with the results from Mountain View High School because it was the school where the phenomenon of caring was the strongest. That is, it is the school where students most clearly and consistently described being cared for by the adults at the school. It is also the school with which I am most familiar, having participated in the research visit as well as a second visit to assist with the video taping for the Dana Center product. I then turn to a presentation of results from Brazosport High School, and conclude with results from Martin High School. The same format is used in presenting results for each case. I examine the student accounts and use their words and perspectives as a starting point to identify and describe the care that they received, holding true to the notion that it is only when care is acknowledged by its recipients that caring has truly occurred. I then present the analysis of the adult interviews, showing how teachers, administrators, and support staff “cared about,” “took care of,” and “gave care” to their students.

MOUNTAIN VIEW HIGH SCHOOL

I first visited Mountain View High School in early November 1999. I went to the school as one of a team of three field researchers from the Charles A. Dana Center, to collect data for a project investigating successful and promising practices in Texas high schools serving low-income populations. Mountain View High School was one of only a handful of Texas high schools that had met, and exceeded, the TAAS-based Texas Learning Index standard we had set for inclusion in our study. So, on an early November morning we left our roadside motel, and drove east from downtown El Paso heading to Mountain View eager to explore what made this high school different, what had helped the students reach much higher levels of performance than their peers throughout the state.

After finding ourselves lost in the town of Clint, which is a small, historically Anglo, farming community on the Rio Grande River, and the seat of the district headquarters for Clint Independent School district, of which Mountain View is part, we got directions and headed north to Mountain View. Crossing interstate 10 we thought we must be lost again, there was nothing in sight but desert and mountains in the distance. It was hard to imagine we'd ever find a high school out there. Somewhat skeptical we stayed our course, marveling at the soft colors of the desert grasses. In several minutes we saw a modern-looking building in the distance, and further up the road, some small houses. We were hopeful. This larger building we later learned was a new elementary school that had been built recently to accommodate the expanding population of the area. Just a little further up the road, we passed the middle school and then came to the high school. An attractive one-story stucco-colored building, with a maroon-trimmed central roof rising to two stories at the entrance, sat back from the road behind a campus marquee declaring this the home of "Los Lobos." We were literally at the edge of the desert. The silence was vast, absorbing the footsteps of several latecomers who hurried across the gravel schoolyard.

Over the next two days my two colleagues and I interviewed students, teachers, administrators, and parents. All told we interviewed 32 people formally. We spoke with our participants about their history and experiences at the school, and gathered their impressions and conjectures about what made the school tick and what they perceived as school strengths as well as ongoing challenges. We wandered the halls, sat in on classes, and one of my co-workers even did an investigational bathroom sweep. (She maintains, and rightly I think, that much can be learned by taking a look at high school bathrooms.) The principal insisted we see the area; it was essential, she said, to understand the community that the students came from. She took us on a long drive into the desert, much by dirt road, through the scattered *colonias* that made up a great part of the 300 square mile school district.

Mountain View High School was established in 1989 to serve the children of the Montana area of the Clint Independent School District. The Montana area has developed over the past 20 years and continues to grow as Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants buy and settle on small parcels of unrestricted land. Most of the families who send their children to Mountain View live in *colonias* that are scattered across the desert and connected by a rough network of paved and unpaved roads. Public transportation is virtually non-existent. Signs of local development and the achievements of grass-roots leaders are also obvious. Ample, well-appointed homes with trees and elaborate gardens sit alongside compounds consisting only of trailers, wooden and tin sheds, and water tanks. The area now boasts a police station and several family-owned restaurants and stores. Residents indicated that the most notable accomplishment has been the establishment of local public schools.

Prior to 1985 there were no schools in the Montana area and the children had to ride school buses for as much as one-and-a-half hours to attend school in the town of Clint. Indeed this situation is typical for the majority of children living in border *colonias* (Ward, 1998). The opening of the high school and more recently the establishment of a complete feeder pattern of two elementary schools, one middle school, and the high school were hard-won victories for the community. Residents recalled with almost palpable excitement their celebration of each step in the process of building and opening the new schools, describing the moment ground was broken for the high school and when water service began at the middle school. Several teachers spoke to us about making frequent visits to the high school construction site where they imagined their role in pioneering a new school. Today the building stands out, one of the most modern structures in the area, serving not only as a high school, but as the community center for the residents of the surrounding *colonias*.

In 1997-98, the Montana community had further cause to celebrate, when, under the leadership of a new principal, the teachers and students attained Recognized status in the state accountability system. This achievement marked a major turnaround for the school. Just a couple years earlier the school had been floundering academically. In 1998-99, the year prior to our site visit, Mountain View again achieved Recognized status. Student Texas Learning Index scores were above 80 in reading and mathematics with no significant achievement gap between students who were and were not economically disadvantaged. Mountain View had not reached the Dana Center inclusion criteria set for the other two academic indicators, End of Course Algebra Examination or participation in Advanced Placement classes. Mountain View was well on its way in terms of its initial efforts to raise standards and improve student achievement, but, as staff would acknowledge the school still had much work ahead to truly become an “academically high-performing” high school.

When we conducted our research, in academic year 1999-2000, the school had a total student population of 910. The composition of the student body was quite homogeneous: approximately 95 percent of the students are of Mexican origin, and close to 90% were designated as economically disadvantaged using eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch as a criterion. Many of the students had known each other and gone to the same schools since grade school. One distinguishing difference among the students was the length of time they had been living in the U.S. A significant number of Mountain View students had immigrated from Mexico with their families. 1993 Office of Attorney General figures indicated that an estimated 35% of adults residents over 18 who live in *colonias* lack U. S. citizenship (Ward, 1999). Using Texas Education Agency figures on students designated as having Limited English Proficiency, about one third of Mountain View students were monolingual Spanish speakers the year we visited. There were some demographic differences between students and the teaching and administrative staff. In academic year 1999-2000, 53% of the teachers were White, 43% were Hispanic, and 4% were African-American. (These figures were taken from the Non-TAAS indicator

section of the Texas Education Agency's Academic Excellence Indicator System.) While a sizable number of teachers and administrators are Latino and many are bilingual, they may have different social class background and current class status than the students. The administrators and teaching staff live outside the Montana community, many on the affluent west side of downtown El Paso.

The student results are based on the qualitative analysis of more than nine hours of interviews with 14 students at Mountain View High School. Specifically, researchers conducted one focus group with five students in the upper grades, one focus group with three average students, one group interview with two advanced placement students, one group interview with two students receiving special education services, and one group interview with two student leaders. There were equal numbers of boys and girls. All but one student was Mexican-American or Mexican origin. This is reflective of the population at the school. The overall sample included many more upper level students than lower level students.

In the focus group of five "average" students from upper grades all of the students were Mexican-American, four were male and one was female, three were seniors and two were juniors. Although these students in fact identified themselves as "average students" and "everyday students" at least three of the boys participated in sports teams, and two of the students participated in student council, and at least two participated in AP courses. The female student was a parent. In the focus group of three "average" students from lower grades all the students were Mexican-American, all were female, two were freshman and one was a junior. Each one was in band, cheerleading, sports or a combination. In the group interview with two advanced placement students, one student African-American and the other was Mexican-American. One was male and one was female. One student was a senior and the other was a sophomore. These students both were also participants in several academically oriented clubs as well as student leaders serving as representatives on the schools Campus Improvement Team. The two students who

participated in the focus group designed for students receiving special education services were Mexican-American, male, and seniors. They each were involved in sports, ROTC, and other campus activities such as band and an outdoor adventure club. In the group interview with student leaders, both were Mexican-American, both were female, both were seniors. Each girl was also involved in numerous campus clubs and activities.

Researchers interviewed a total of 17 adults at Mountain View. This included 14 school-based staff, one district staff member, and two parents. Specifically, individual interviews were conducted with each member of the administrative team that consisted of the principal and the two assistant principals. The principal is a Mexican-American woman, originally from the “barrio in Laredo” who was in her fourth year as principal at the time of the study. She had been working in the Clint Independent School District for many years. Prior to coming to Mountain View High school in 1995 as assistant principal on an administrative team sent to “turn-around” the school, she worked as assistant principal at the middle school in the Montana area. One assistant principal is a young Anglo man who had also come from the local feeder middle school. The other assistant principal was a Mexican-American woman who was in her first year at the school. She had worked previously at the middle school. We also interviewed one of the school’s two guidance counselors and the school’s security officer. The counselor is a Mexican-American woman who was in her third year at the school. She had come to the school from another nearby school district. The security officer is a young Mexican-American man who is employed by the local sheriff’s department. The district’s deputy superintendent was also interviewed. He is Mexican-American and had worked at the district for over thirty years. The research team interviewed a total of nine teachers. Specifically, the sample included two mathematics teachers, two science teachers, two social studies teachers, one English teacher, one special education teacher, and one physical education teacher. Of these five were Latino and four were Anglo. Two were male and seven were female. A focus group was conducted with two parents. Both

parents were Mexican-American, one was bilingual and the other was a monolingual Spanish speaker.

STUDENT ACCOUNTS

CARE RECEIVED: Student Perceptions of Needs Met

An analysis of student accounts, focusing on both their explicit accounts of caring, as well as implicit accounts of caring -- those stories about needs being met and significant help received-- serves as the starting point in our study of caring in each of the three high schools.

These student accounts shed light on the most pressing needs of these high school students and provide a clearer understanding of caring practice in this setting. In listening to students' words we learn that the caring that they need is in a sense very pragmatic. They deemed caring those actions that helped them succeed in school; and those actions that prepared them to succeed after high school. Meeting these needs also seems to have touched and begun to fill another, perhaps deeper need; namely, to overcome negative stereotypes and to gain recognition and status in the community at large.

Having Help with School Work

The students indicated that they experienced their teachers' care through their teachers' persistence and dedication to work with them to help them understand and master their schoolwork. In this context the students constantly mentioned the teachers' willingness to give their time to make sure they were successful in their academics. As one student said, "They take time for each student," and another added, "They will stay after hours just to help a student, even if it's just one, they will stay after hours to help him." In their view the teachers were always available to help; at school before classes started, during their breaks and lunch, and after school hours. As one senior said,

Like we say, the teachers, if they notice you need help, they're there before school, they're here after school, during lunch, during the SAT class, after you finish homework you can go and ask, the other teachers give you permission to get out of that class and go for the extra help. There's always help. That's what makes us better, because there's no way you can't pass because there's always help.

One male student, who was relatively new to the school, said,

[T]here's more of a bonding between the teachers and the students. They're willing to help you. I feel that the teachers here are very dedicated to the students. You know they really want you to learn. They believe in you, they help you, and they want to make sure you succeed in life."

Another student, a girl who is a junior said, "They take their time. They really support us and everything and we don't have a problem. We could just go to any teacher and they'll help us out." This student continued, her words indicating the degree of devotion and dedication that she sees in her teachers, "They'll take their time. They would even take after school time, school time, their life. They would even leave their family [...] to be with us."

Students seemed to be aware that this level of help was not usually present at other high schools. They made reference to their experiences or knowledge of other schools through friends or family to underline their pride and gratitude for being in such a school.

Describing recent conversations with a friend, one student said,

Well, when they call me they're like, "Wow! Why haven't you been home?" Like, "I was at school, they were helping me with this." "Oh, I can't do that, 'cause my teacher [says] 'I'm too busy to help you.' They don't take their time.

The finding that students most explicitly defined caring as help with schoolwork should not be all that surprising. Mastering schoolwork is after all their main task in school and helping them succeed the main charge of the teacher. Nonetheless it may seem surprising if one were expecting to hear about more emotionally focused forms of caring. While students did mention that they felt free to go to adults on campus for help with personal concerns this was not emphasized in their spontaneous accounts of why teachers cared.

The students did not speak of emotional qualities, but simply described teachers taking time to do that which is their basic charge; namely, educating students to the agreed upon standards.

Being Pushed and Encouraged to Meet High Expectations

Reviewing the data it became clear that students also experienced caring in their teachers' encouragement and insistence that they meet high expectations in academics and behavior. The notions that adults did not give up on students, but rather reached out and encouraged them and urged them to meet even higher goals were predominant themes in the student transcripts. As one student said,

They encourage you to do better. If we have like low grades or you are doing poorly they encourage you to study hard or to come and ask for help. That makes you feel special because you know somebody else [is there] to help you.

Another student in the same focus group elaborated on this comment, presenting a story from his personal experience, "And they will push and push you, until you, like I didn't use to do my work in pre-cal, but then [my teacher] started pushing and pushing, so I started to like it, everybody started bugging me so I had to do my work."

Again students showed awareness that this level of attention and persistence on the part of teachers was not to be found at every school:

I've heard a lot of teachers don't care at other schools. They're like, "Do your work here, and it's due tomorrow, if you don't turn it in, so what." They don't tell you, "Oh you can make it up. You can get extra credit." They don't care. They just leave it that way.

Another student in the focus group explained that her teacher had helped her stay true to her goal of college and a future career as a doctor despite becoming a parent:

I have a teacher this year and I guess she really cares about me because she knows I have a baby, and she's like... I thought I couldn't go to college because I had a baby. I figured I wouldn't make it, and she's like, 'No, you can make it.' And I have been looking to college ever since because of her. And I noticed...I never thought

teachers cared about us, but I think they do because if they're going to push us to where they're getting us to get A's then they really do care.

Speaking of this encouragement, a student specifically mentioned the principal's role in encouraging students to perform well on the state assessment and in creating a special class that helped students prepare: "She motivates us to do better, like in the TAAS test. Before we were "Recognized" she helped us out." It is important to note here that obtaining Recognized status in the state accountability system had a very particular meaning and a powerful impact on these students lives. The effect went far beyond being a marker of high academic achievement, and rather brought them recognition in the true sense of the word. Many students mentioned with a range of emotions, including hurt, confusion, and indignation, that they had struggled with being unknown and their efforts and accomplishments overlooked. They shared stories about people being confused about what school they had come from when they mentioned the name Mountain View. One boy, when asked about an issue he was concerned with spoke of this experience saying,

I was concerned about it before, about people talking about our school and stuff and how our school was before and how it is today. They used to not, people used to not put attention to our school, probably because it was [missing from transcript] and they wouldn't talk about it or nothing. Since we passed the TAAS and all that, now people are starting to talk about it and saying good things about us. I'm happy they are now talking good about us, but what I don't understand is why didn't they talk about us when we were studying about it and trying to get people involved with us and stuff.

In a different focus group, three girls independently discussed the same issue: "We had never been recognized, the school that nobody knows where it's at." Her friend added, "Now you could tell people that seen the newspaper that ask you, 'Oh, yeah, it's a Recognized school?'" The exchange continued, "We like rubbing that in. We like everybody knowing that. I don't think it's fair for people to think that just because we are isolated from every other high school, that means that we don't have a good education."

As this young woman's comments suggest, the school's accomplishments allowed the students to begin to overcome the negative stereotypes that they knew had been directed at their school and their community:

[P]eople usually think that just because we live all the way out here we're all going to be troublemakers, we're all gangsters, we're all in piles and stuff and that everything's marked up and people think that just because we're all out here we're bad and everything. And I think, that's what they say, and we're all happy, we're all fine. But it does make, it does upset us because we're working as hard as other people and other schools to be recognized and noticed. Until finally, we've been Recognized in our TEA's TAAS scores. Finally we're recognized, but we worked.

Seeing that Others are Supported

The fact that students see teachers helping others, all others, not just them personally seemed to contribute to their perception that teachers care. Not only did they provide examples of times when their teachers helped them personally with school work they also made a point of letting us know that this was a widespread practice throughout the school. It was not just they or their friends that received help. Rather, students explained that what made Mountain View special was that teachers helped *all* students, and in fact were especially diligent in making sure to work with or "push" students who were lagging behind for whatever reason. Students definitely shared the impression that the teachers and administration would not give up on anyone, regardless.

Several students mentioned the school's supportive approach to girls who became pregnant as evidence of how staff at the school care. One student described all the services available prior and after the birth of the child and especially emphasized the active approach the school takes to home schooling:

But what I see is that the teachers help [students who are pregnant] out a lot. I mean, they *leave* like a month before they're due. They don't come back until after six weeks. They don't come back until after six weeks. But during that time the teachers, one way or the other, they try to get that work *to* them. They really help 'em out a lot. They're not like other schools. I don't know how other schools are,

but I would think that if a girl in another school gets pregnant, they would be like, “It’s your fault, we can’t help you. Why did you do that?” They help them here a lot.

This student continued, sharing an example of a time when a teacher’s flexibility with a student parent helped make it possible for the student to graduate. In this case a student had to take an important test in order to graduate and she was distraught because she could not find a babysitter. She asked the teacher if she could bring the baby to class and he agreed.

Speaking about the principal, several seniors conveyed a similar message about the inclusiveness of caring during the following exchange. “[S]he’s so much for us graduating. She cares about everybody.” Another interjected, “She’s always positive, always positive.” To which a third student confirmed, “Yeah, if you are a troublemaker she still cares about you no matter what you do. Whatever you do she is going to be there for you. She is always there.” A peer added, “When she gets mad at you it’s like when your parents yell at you. You know they are mad at you but it’s because they care.”

Receiving Respect and Guidance in all Interactions

Students explained that they were respected by their teachers and in turn treated their teachers with respect. The reciprocity of respect was almost always mentioned when students spoke of the adults’ behavior. They explained that teachers showed politeness and kindness towards them in their day-to-day interactions. As one senior said, “Teachers always say ‘Thank you’ and ‘Please open your books to page 21’ or ‘Would you please pass her the pen?’ or ‘Thank you for answering the question.’ They’re like that.” Another student underlined the way in which this was linked with the students’ own sense of respect for their teachers, “I think we respect our teachers, because if they are nice to you then you are going to be nice to them, and so if they tell you don’t talk we’re not going to talk. So we can be nice, respectful to them.”

Many students spoke positively about the way in which the adults approached discipline, taking time to provide them with information and acknowledging their maturity and ability to reason and grow. As one senior explained, “None of the teachers here treat us like students, they treat us like friends and they are teaching at the same time. They are not forcing us. They are showing us, “Well if you don’t do this, this will happen.”

The students expressed appreciation for the adults’ role in keeping the school a safe and orderly place. Speaking about this one student again highlighted the type of student/teacher interaction that accompanied the disciplinary process. As she said, “They keep order around here. When something is not going all right they get after you. If [students] are in trouble, they’ll tell them, “Don’t get in trouble, it’s not good for you, it’s not going to do anything for you.”

Another student provided an example of such an interaction, describing how the principal talked with a student who was tardy:

I was waiting in line and some guy in the back, some senior, I guess he was tardy or something. And the principal goes, “You’re supposed to get in before school starts so you won’t be late to class.” And she was actually talking to him and explaining to him why and I guess he understood because he actually sounded sorry he missed.

Students clearly felt that the adults’ respectful approach had a positive impact on them. Indeed, another girl, who was a senior, explained how the consistent kindness of teachers had been a contributing factor in helping her make the transition from being an unengaged and argumentative freshman to an active student leader. She described herself as a “troublemaker” during her middle school years, someone who was “rude” and always ready for a fight. She brought these behaviors to high school, but upon arriving at Mountain View she recognized that these behaviors didn’t really work. She found that students were less willing to fight and the teachers would not mirror her negativity. As she explained,

I came over here and nobody wanted to fight with me. I was like, “Oh my God!” I was rude to teachers! I was like, “Why am I being rude to teachers? If they are being

nice to me, why am I being rude to them? That's when I started getting involved, talking with the teachers, and that's how everything just [changed].

The student continued to reflect on the depth of her changes and provided a story of a recent time in which she herself had intervened to stop a fight at school. This was the moment when she realized how much she had changed during her years at Mountain View. She concluded her thoughts saying "They help us grow, they help us grow [along] the right path."

Needing to be Polite and Dressed Right

Students spoke of the adults' high expectations for their behavior as well. One senior girl spoke of the ways in which the teachers model politeness through all of their interactions with students, "They encourage you, like teachers expect politeness from us. When you go somewhere else you expect people to be polite to you too."

It was striking that the students wanted to be remembered for their politeness, their respect, and their active role in creating and maintaining a pretty and clean campus. One girl told me that I would see how polite students were to one another in the halls. She said, "You notice if you bump here with somebody in the hall they're like, 'Excuse me, I'm sorry, I was looking somewhere else.' It's not like you bump into somebody and say, 'Oh what's your problem?'"

Students --boys and girls alike-- mentioned with appreciation and pride the fact that they have a clean campus and a neat looking group of fellow students. Almost everyone spoke in positive terms about the dress code. One young man said,

I think the students like it here because it looks nice. For example, the dress code. We've gone to other schools and we sometimes complain about it, but after we do to other schools and we see the people, we say 'This doesn't look good,' this school doesn't look like ours because here we need to be tucked in.

Girls interviewed felt the same way, “Here you have a dress code you have to follow. Yeah a lot of us complain, ‘Oh I have to wear this, I have to wear that,’ but I go over there [to another school in El Paso] and I realize, it’s better, because over there, you go in and all the guys are in the baggy pants and...” At this point her friend interjected, “Because the way you dress tells a lot about you.”

During the large focus group, one male student said what he most liked about the school was that it was clean. His comment got the students involved in an energetic exchange in which they spoke about teachers coming from other schools who were pleasantly surprised that the bathrooms at Mountain View were clean and still had mirrors.

The students realized here again that they were different from other local high schools and they knew they had a certain positive edge, and they enjoyed the feedback they received. The sense of positive recognition underlay their words of pride. As one boy speaking of the dress code said, “People talk good about you.”

ADULT ACCOUNTS

Explicit Adult Talk of Caring

It was interesting to note that there were very few explicit references to caring in the interviews with adults at Mountain View. To be precise teachers only raised the word “caring” twice. In one instance this was a summary statement at the end of the interview in which one teacher said “We all care about this kids.” Another young teacher in a different interview said she thought the students knew the adults cared and that this started with the principal and “just kind of spread throughout.” In the interviews with the administrative team, the word “care” appeared only once. It was during an interview with the principal: she described a situation in which she was talking with students and had told them, “ We’re here because we care about you.”

This lack of “talk” about caring per se suggests that caring was not a consciously articulated part of the adults’ focus or orientation toward the students. This contrasts then with schools, such as the Catholic High School studied by Van Galen (1996), where there is a noticeable “rhetoric of care” and where conducting affairs in a “caring way,” was a well-accepted cultural norm within the school and perhaps an end goal in and of itself. It is interesting to note that if I had simply read the adults’ accounts, and had not made informal observations nor had spoken with the students themselves, I may never have noticed the phenomenon of care in the school. Rather than talking about care the adults at Mountain View are hard at the work --or practice-- of caring.

“CARING ABOUT”: Adult Perceptions of Student Needs

Tronto’s (1993) framework is helpful in highlighting the many different decision points and actions required in the practice of caring and helping us move away from an view of caring that is more exclusively informed by relational attitudes, capacities, and orientations. The initial phase of caring--Caring About--involved recognizing and defining a need. How did the adults at Mountain View conceptualize their students’ needs? Examination of the adult interviews helps us arrive at an understanding of the dominant perceptions of student needs that were influential in driving practice at the school. As Eaker-Rich and Van Galen (1996; see p. 235) have pointed out, too often studies of caring in schools, as well as those caring in schools have allowed the purposes and goals of caring to remain unexamined. Tronto’s view of caring, which is focused clearly on defining and meeting needs provides the theoretical clarity in addressing this issue. In the case of Mountain View, adults appeared to be identifying and responding to three needs. These students need for academic skills, students’ need overcome negative stereotypes, and students’ need for broad exposure and experience.

“They don’t have academic language”

Examination of the principal’s interviews indicates that she defined the students’ primary need to be attaining academic skills. She did not see students as lacking in ability. As

she said, “I’ve been working with these children for a long time and I know they have the ability. They don’t have academic language.” It is also interesting to note that when she came to the school she did not see a strong need for discipline and indeed faulted a former principal who brought in a strong discipline program as mis-reading students’ needs based on negative stereotypes.

Teachers we spoke with were articulate and passionate about meeting the students’ academic needs. They saw students as ready and willing to learn. As one teacher said, “[T]hese kids are, they’re wanting to learn, they’re ready to learn. So I think they can do it regardless of where they come from.” Teachers, like the principal, acknowledged specific academic needs in the students rather than a limitation in their capacity to learn. For example, one teacher said,

Some of our kids come in maybe lower, at a lower level, and I can’t just say, okay, In Algebra I the book says that we should teach them here. I have to find out where the students are and then go from there, but I still have the same end goal in mind. But I might have to review fractions and some of the other basic skills more often than I would if I were maybe in a more affluent area, but I have to take the kids from where they are and then bring them up to this point.

For the teachers the students’ isolated environment only served to heighten their perception of the students’ needs for a solid education and their role in providing it. There was a strong consensus among staff and students that the school was focused on student academic achievement.

“I want them to act with class”

The principal spoke passionately of another need, namely preparing students so that they could challenge and overcome negative and limiting stereotypes and perceptions of the area. The principal described the dominant Anglo community’s historic disinterest and neglect of the Montana community and its schools, “I have been at a school board meeting where they had a concern about the Lower Valley (the historically Anglo area) and a concern about up here and a school board member said, “Don’t worry about up

there. I saw him do that.” Mountain View, she said, was like a “one-legged step-child of the district.” She acknowledged that fighting this attitude is a major source of her motivation for her work at the school. She made this explicit in motivating teachers and students as well. This perceived need seems to underlie the drive for academic success as well as another major current at the school namely “to act with class,” to “dress for success,” to “be professional.” In fact the principal spoke of her dream to create a “private school atmosphere” at Mountain View. As she said,

[W]hat I am trying to do, that’s why I think [about] this private school [idea]...just an attitude will do a lot. And I tell the kids that the only people that can change the perception of the area is them. And I always expect them to dress nice, to act nice, and to not embarrass us.”

She added,

One thing that I try to stress with my kids is that I want them to act with class. I don’t want them in any way to embarrass the parents, the community, or the school. So I don’t expect any rock throwing, any cussing, or anything.

The staff appears to share these views and speak of the school’s (and district’s) standardized dress code and discipline policies in similar terms. A Mexican-American teacher explained,

We’re teaching our kids to be professional. We have strict guidelines that they have to follow. As much as they don’t like it, eventually they’ll understand that it’s for their own good, then they can express themselves after high school.” “You are kind of like, the kid is forced to respect himself and at the same time he’s learning to realize that it’s something good. ... And I think the reason they’re like that is because they know that we care.

An Anglo assistant principal underlined the extent to which student appearance and behavior were points of school pride and identity:

There seems to be this thinking that the richer the kids the more well-to-do they are they’ll have better discipline. Well, it’s a myth. You look at the rules we have in place in this school, in this district and look at our income levels and you’d be amazed. We have minimal problems on campus compared to other campuses that are a lot better off and have a lot more money and a lot better whatever they need, and our kids are just way above the rest. Our kids have to come to school well dressed.

They have to come to school well behaved. They have to come to school looking professional. We expect the kids to be the best and to be the best behaved.”

“A lot of our kids have never left the area”

A third shared belief about student needs centered on the need for exposure and experience in the larger world beyond the Montana community. This need seemed especially acute given the schools and communities relative isolation in the desert on the outskirts of El Paso. As one teacher said,

I mean this is really the kind of place, [the school’s] the community center of the town out here because there is nothing else. So I think they look forward to it and I think, this is where they’re going to get their knowledge, their friendships. The teachers they meet, I think we bring a lot to the school...different experiences.

Similarly, the school counselor expressed this view, “Being out here, away from everything...because I feel like we’re isolated most of the time, the kids don’t have an opportunity to exchange ideas, to see different cultures, to see what’s out there.”

Examining the adult interview data we see that this perception drives many of the adults’ interventions and extra efforts. For example, one teacher described the principal as really caring about the students and supported her claim by telling a story of how the principal was planning to drive the senior class to Padre Island so they could have a new experience. As she said, “And she’s doing it...I mean driving on the school bus for twelve hours--it’s going to be hot--but she wanted to give the kids an opportunity to see...somewhere else.” Along the same lines, a teacher said that what she was most proud in her work was sponsoring a cheerleading team because this had given the students an opportunity they had never had before. As she said,

I feel really cool about sponsoring the cheerleaders, because that I think meant a lot, although I wish I could do more. [I] got them to compete for city competitions. They got a bid to nationals in Dallas, something that they probably haven’t done, something that they’ve never done before. I’m proud of them.

The school counselor initiated a foreign exchange program so that students would be exposed to different ideas. She also cultivates relationships with local organizations and

colleges to provide students with more experiences in unfamiliar settings. Reflecting upon the impact of the foreign exchange program the counselor said,

It's like we're in a little world out here, and once the foreign exchange students came in and there's another language being spoken and there's different behaviors, then [the students] started to realize that there's a big expansion out there that they have to learn and take advantage.

“TAKING CARE”: Adults’ Perceived Relationship to Student Needs

Shared Beliefs about Student and Teacher Capacity

Staff members appeared to share the belief that the students at Mountain View were capable of meeting the school's and state's academic standards and they also believed in their own capacity to teach. I would maintain that both of these beliefs were essential to their caring practice. For as Tronto's model suggests, in order to take caring practice beyond the first phase of “Caring About,” to “Taking Care Of,” one must believe that something can be done about the need and that it's not a hopeless or lost cause; and secondly, that one personally can do something about it and is responsible for it. As she states, “Rather than simply focusing on the need of the other person, taking care of involves the recognition that one can act to address these unmet needs. (1993, p. 106).” Thus, for example, teacher beliefs that students from a certain background can't learn would stop caring practice at square one.

At Mountain View during the time of our visit, the administrators and teachers we spoke with were unanimous in their belief that their students could learn. One teacher's comments exemplify this view:

I think that we're becoming more student-oriented as far as our kids can accomplish whatever all the students at other schools can accomplish. I felt like...I taught at the middle school that fed this school and so I knew a lot of the students and felt like we were just saying, okay, they're in this poor environment and in four years ago we kind of made more excuses. Today we just accept that these kids can learn and we go in an we may have to approach them differently, but I feel that all of our students can learn what everybody else can learn if we just give them the opportunity and give them the background they need.

As this teacher's words convey, Mountain View faculty had not always viewed students as capable. One teacher spoke of this change,

We didn't [accept], 'We're just one of those schools and we come from a low socio-economic area so we'll just accept what we have now.' We didn't accept that. I'll be honest with you, when I first started I thought, 'These kids aren't going to rise up,' and to see that they are doing it is just...you just see it, wow.'

Because the original research protocols were designed to get at the process of change and events that led to improvement, we did gain some insight into how this resource was cultivated. Although the process was doubtless more complex, we do know that the principal made this one of her primary goals during the first year of her tenure at Mountain View. She engaged in a "positive brain-washing" campaign, sharing and reiterating that the students were capable. She cited her previous knowledge of them at middle school. Comments from teachers also suggest that the principal's identity a Latina who had grown up in a low-income border city may have lent additional authority to her words.

The data also suggested that teachers may have needed to have some positive proof of student achievement before their own beliefs changed. Dramatic improvement on the TAAS provided that kind of confirmation; one year of intensive in-house teacher training and a program of daily extra drill for students culminated in much higher scores.

Teachers reflected that they felt capable of teaching and getting the outcomes they wanted whereas before they had not. One teacher reflected on this change:

[W]e were not prepared. We did not know how to service the kids. We did not know their needs. We really didn't know how to break down the TAAS, and now that they've trained us to do that, it's really made a difference.

In addition to this in-house training, which is an ongoing program at Mountain View, the teachers felt that they administration also supported them in improving their teaching by sending them to outside trainings, and by the close supervision and monitoring in their classrooms.

Adults Take Responsibility to Meet Student Needs

As I examined the adult interview transcripts I was struck by the extent to which any mention of a student need was accompanied by a plan of action or a comment that underlined the speaker's own responsibility for addressing the need. Expressions like, "If we don't, who will?" were peppered throughout the accounts. Examples related to all levels of identified need, including the need for advocacy voiced by the principal, academic needs, and needs for personal guidance and outside activities. The perception of the isolation of the students' community and the relative lack of community resources seemed to heighten their own sense of personal responsibility. Speaking broadly of her work, the principal said, "I just do it. It's the thing to do. It's needed and if I'm not the advocate, if I'm not here then who's going to do it? It *will* be an attitude problem." A teacher spoke similarly about her role in the classroom:

I've worked in a lot of affluent areas, but I feel like I make more of a difference here than I have in a more affluent area. I know that if I don't come in here and do a good job in my classroom the kids aren't going to learn. In some of the schools I was at before, if I did a mediocre job they had some many other resources that they could pull from they're going to be successful anyway, not that I wanted to be a mediocre teachers, but I just feel like out here that's been, something that I feel that I have to do a good job or our kids aren't going to be able to be as successful as they need to be. And it kind of pushes me to try to do a little bit better than I would have ordinarily, maybe. But I feel that's a sense of pride that a lot of us feel.

A colleague on the faculty described her aggressive approach in working to prepare students for college entrance exams in similar terms:

These kids don't, I really don't feel that these students on the whole see the importance of taking their SAT's and searching for scholarships, and so they're just kind of walking around out there, and if we don't do it for them, we don't constantly tell them "You need to take your SAT, here's a scholarship, fill it out, have you sent in the board?" they won't do it. Not that they don't want to; they're scared, they don't know where to start.

Another teacher's words revealed this same sentiment when talking about her commitment to work with the students in extra-curricular activities:

And being that this is such a small school you almost have to be involved in something outside your classroom or those kids aren't going to be taken care of. I mean almost every teacher is a club sponsor or a class sponsor or doing something extra on the side.

Teacher accounts indicate that when teachers noticed a need, they took quick action to resolve the problem. One teacher noted this orientation, "Now we listen to the kids, we have a dance team, the kids wanted a dance class, we got it." For example, when they realized that a scheduling conflict made it necessary to shorten the hours of the after school writing lab, an important resource for students, they responded by taking it to the Campus Improvement Team. This resulted in extended after school hours. A mathematics teacher recounted her efforts to ensure that all her students had access to calculators for the End of Course Algebra Exam. Another teacher spoke about intervening with students' coaches to make sure that they got the most help possible in seeking scholarships.

It is important to note that there was little to no frustration expressed when speaking of student needs or the things that needed to get done to better serve the students. What facilitated Mountain View teachers' responsiveness and active approach to problem solving? I would suggest that the administration's openness to faculty requests and their willingness to provide resources were critical. Teachers and other staff interviewed expressed almost unanimously that they felt free to take suggestions and problems to the principal or to the Campus Improvement Team. They indicated that their requests were thoughtfully considered and that any suggestions were generally embraced and supported. The school counselor, for example, told me about taking her suggestion to initiate a foreign exchange program to the principal. While she said she makes sure to have all her facts well organized before taking a suggestion to the principal her proposal met with a positive response, "All I did was I talked with [the principal], I told her all this good stuff and she agreed. I didn't have to [convince her] she's very open to anything that might help the students out." As one teacher said,

The administration allows us so much flexibility, and if we have an idea, nobody is ever afraid to go to them and ask, and it's always like, "That sounds great, do it and let us know." It's just such a great place to help to achieve, it's just such a great place to *be*."

Thus, we can begin to see that another level of caring practice is operating at Mountain View in that the teachers' professional needs are met by the administration.

"CARE-GIVING": Actions and Resources

We can't assume a one-to-one correspondence between student reports and teacher actions. (See, for example, Van Galen, 1996.) Observational data would help confirm and amplify our understanding of the actions and resources involved in the caring practice we heard about from students at Mountain View. Nonetheless, using our knowledge of the school based on the complete set of interviews we can begin to make some hypotheses about what was going on at Mountain View that led students to feel cared about in the ways they expressed and then speculate about what helped make this possible.

Time to Meet Student Needs

Taking time was mentioned again and again throughout the interviews. As you'll recall from the discussion of student accounts, the students said teachers take time to work with them, and take time to talk about choices and consequences when providing discipline. I wondered how was it that time, which is generally taken to be the scarcest of resources in the school setting (Jackson & Davis, 2000) did not seem to be in short supply at Mountain View. Where did all this time come from? How was it that teachers were apparently so generous with their time? Again, without extensive observational data we cannot be certain how much of their "out of class" time is actually being devoted to helping students. However, I believe their accounts are reliable because students provided specific examples of staying late and coming in early to work on projects or get help. My limited observations also bore this out. The teachers and counselors

provided information about their own schedules and made observations about those of their colleagues. For example, the principal regularly stayed at school until 7:30 or 8:00 pm. As the counselor explained,

No we work...our schedule should be from 7:45 to 4:30, but personally I'm here at 6:30 and usually leave about 5:30, 6:00. That's by preference because I need to do my paperwork, but after the kids have left. Even if it's just SAT, they all need help in filling out the SAT application. Their scholarships, they need help in that. So we need to be available for the students when they're here.

She indicated that she saw other members of the faculty at work with students early in the morning:

I get here at 6:30 and basically because I have a foreign exchange student who is in band, so she has to practice at 6:45. I get here and [Mr. Blank] is already here, and he's already got students in there helping, who he's helping. He teaches Algebra, he teacher the Math for UIL and kids come in and get that help. With me being here early, kids will come in early. I was amazed when I started coming in that early that the kids got here, they'll come in and sit until I come in and just talk about what's going on at home."

Several factors may be at work here. First, teachers at Mountain View do have two planning periods per day. So in terms of the way their daily schedule is organized these teachers may be less pressured and more able to accomplish their work. One teacher said, "They try to give teachers one or two preps so they can really focus in on those two areas instead of having five and just running in every direction." There is some indication that teacher loads are manageable. As one teacher explained, "I feel the administration is a great support. They really work with the staff, they're there for us, especially when it comes to class loads, we have real small class loads which is great." I do not yet have the factual data on this, but, given the size of the school -- approximately 1,000 students when we were visiting-- it is possible that each teacher actually sees and is responsible for a smaller number of students each day than might be the case at other larger schools. We did learn that the administration had created a split lunch period and was using this "extra" 30 minute period to run classes to assist students either with TAAS or college admissions preparation. Some of these classes were very carefully composed and staffed

so that students' specific needs and goals could be met. For example, the principal had designed a number of "same gender" classes geared to working concurrently on academic preparation for testing as well as self-esteem issues. Several teachers noted that these daily classes provided a time to keep up with students. As one said, "Our TAAS classes are obvious because they're small classes and we get to know each of the students and find out their weaknesses, maybe some problems and stuff like that. Just more interested in the kids." Working under these conditions it is fairly safe to assume that a teacher could be more successful in meeting the extra needs of his or her students.

There is some evidence that teachers may also be making effective use of their class-time to work with students' special needs. Van Galen (1996) found that to be one explanation of student perceptions of ample adult time in her field study of a "caring" Catholic school. Indeed, at Mountain View two teachers' comments suggested that their way of structuring classroom instruction helped them keep on top of students' extra needs (both academic and personal). As one explained:

Just the fact that I'm up and I'm walking around and I'm answering questions the whole period, that they know that they can come up to me and ask questions or I will come to them. And that's real important not for them to always feel like they have to walk over to my desk, that I will jump up and run over and answer questions for them. And or at least give them some guidance or direction. So I think my relationship with them is pretty good.

Another teacher explained how her project based teaching style contributed to meeting student needs:

We do a lot of hands-on stuff, a lot of labs. A lot of research. I like to have my classroom like a working classroom rather than they come in and listen to me lecture, they have to dig this stuff out and then talk about it and I go through the group discussing whatever problem in going on. Sometimes they don't want to talk about school, sometimes they have their own personal problems and that gives them time to talk with me. I get to spend more one-on-one time with them than if I was lecturing to them.

Several comments pointed to another influential factor. Students and the counselors indicated that teachers and other staff had the flexibility to allow students to go get help when they needed it. For example one student explained how this worked, “During the SAT class, after you finish the homework you can go and you can ask. The other teachers give you permission to get out of that class and go for the extra help. There’s always help.” And the school counselor spoke of appreciatively of the way teachers allow students to leave class for counseling when needed. As she said:

The teachers are very good, when [the students] say they need to speak to a counselor the teachers will let them come out and speak to us. [] I’m so proud, we’re so lucky. I know in some places the teachers [don’t’ do this]. I’ve told the teachers if the student is upset he’s not going to function. He’s not going to work for you. So just allow him to come in.

This flexibility probably also contributed to the students’ sense that academic and personal help was easy to come by.

All this being said, it is still important to understand how teachers at Mountain were so generous with their outside work time. None of them described this to me or to the other interviewers in a way that implied it was a burden. A school counselor’s comments further underlined our impression, “I never hear the teachers complaining when they’re asked to sell tickets, or when they’re asked to monitor this or that. The teachers are very positive.” Rather it seemed to be an accepted norm of the campus. The principal’s efforts to model commitment and sacrifice through her own work behavior appeared to be critical to establishing this norm. One teacher, who was relatively new on campus explained that she felt strange not being involved in a student extra-curricular activity:

Yeah, the neat thing about it is, one thing I found out about this staff is that if you are not involved, you are rare. Very strange. Everyone is involved in something. Most teachers are involved in something or two or three or four.

I believe the administration’s active practice of recognizing and appreciating the teachers’ hard work and accomplishments supported the teachers’ use of time. A school counselor shed some insight into this dynamic, “They’re doing a lot of extra work, but

then they're also being recognized.” She went on to describe various ways in which the principal acknowledges the teachers’ contributions, “Just when we got Recognized for a second time we got our pin and everybody wears their pin. And she’ll literally recognize the teachers by name and how much they scored on the TAAS and how much they brought the kids up.” Her assertion was consistent with both the principal’s own description of her approach with her staff as well as with teachers’ accounts. Based on her self-report, the principal is very appreciative of her teachers and deliberate in letting her teachers know how much she valued them. She does not hesitate to compliment good work. She actively promotes the teachers’ success at the central office. She takes advantage of opportunities for the teachers to share their expertise beyond the school level, for example in district meetings and state conferences. Moreover she worked hard to show she valued the teachers by listening to their concerns and responding to them.

Receiving and Responding to Care

Discussion of this last step in the process of caring --receiving care-- brings us full circle. The students’ appreciation for their teachers’ extra efforts was also undoubtedly important in maintaining teachers’ commitment and devoted practice. Noddings (1984) had emphasized the teachers’ need for confirmation from students and the powerful impact on teachers when caring is becomes completed as students receive and acknowledge their care. As she states,

Teachers, also, need confirmation in order to nurture their own ethical ideals. We have already discussed the central role played by the cared-for as he responds to the one-caring through both the pursuit of his own goals and attributes of caring motives. The response of students remains at the heart of confirmation for teachers (p. 196).

A teacher’s words suggests this dynamic was indeed at work at Mountain View,

And we’re here, we put in a lot of hours. I mean I know that daylight savings time is coming but there was a time when I would get here and it would be dark and when I left it was day, and so I mean we’re here all the time, all the time. And I would think for us to stay here and to be able to put in all the time, it’s worth it. And I think the students who do come and do all the extra stuff and go through all the school, just like we do, they have a good time.

Student interviews were replete with expressions of appreciation. One account in which students explained that they came into school during break to work on a project because they knew the teacher was taking his time really suggests that student appreciation had stimulated a sense of reciprocity. As student explained,

We had an assignment due, but we could have just said, “Oh well, we’ll do it on Monday.” We took our time because we knew [our teacher] was taking his time to open the lab. So we took our time too.”

Teachers interviewed at Mountain View consistently spoke highly of their students, characterizing them as polite and respectful, and underlining their eagerness and gratitude. It seemed clear that they were well aware of their students’ appreciation. As one teacher said,

And the kids are wonderful. My guess is Mountain View is so far out, away from the city area; they’re grateful for everything. There’s not very much. There’s no parks out here and no malls and no MacDonald’s or anything like that, so we’re all they have, pretty much, and they’re so respectful. ... I’ve never seen kids so excited about things.

BRAZOSPORT HIGH SCHOOL

My second field trip took me to Brazosport High School, in the small gulf coast town of Freeport, Texas. Although located in Freeport, Brazosport High serves students from four of the eight neighboring communities that make up the Brazosport Independent School District. Brazosport High School, built in 1952, was the original and only school in the district until 1970, when a second high school opened to accommodate the growing population in the area.

I was later to learn that the opening of this new high school marked a change and loss of sorts for Brazosport High. The new school, built in a more affluent community, quickly came to be seen as the best high school while Brazosport High lost some of its status and became increasingly stereotyped as the low-income and minority school. At the time of our research visit, Brazosport had regained some prestige through its students' achievement on several academic indicators. Nonetheless, the memories of stereotyping and discrimination were still present in our conversations with both students and adults.

As was the case for Mountain View High School, the Dana Center had selected Brazosport for inclusion in its study of promising practices due to its performance on TAAS and its students' high TLI scores in both reading and mathematics. In fact, Brazosport was one of the few schools that met two of the Dana Center inclusion criteria; its students scored higher than the state average on the Algebra End Of Course examination as well. The Algebra End of Course examination is considered to be a marker of higher academic achievement than the state assessment. Of the three study schools, Brazosport High was probably the one in which students were performing at the highest levels academically. Due to my participation in another Dana Center study of Texas districts that had a preponderance of high-performing, high-poverty schools (Skrla, Scheurich & Johnson, 2000), I was well aware that Brazosport schools, and the district as

a whole, had received much attention for their success raising academic performance of their high-poverty campuses.

Following our excursion in the deserts of El Paso, I soon realized that this would be a decidedly unromantic assignment, as we skirted around Houston on freeways, headed south to the gulf coast and settled in for the night at a motel in Clute which unfortunately overlooked a the stacks and pipes of a nearby chemical plant. With eyes watering and irritated, I was not predisposed to enjoy my visit to the high school the next day.

The next morning we drove down a flat, straight highway toward nearby Freeport, passing by several more large chemical plants, and intersecting streets with names like “Chlorine Drive.” The school was visible from this highway, beyond a stadium and grassy green fields, accessible from the main road that led into the small coastal town. The school building itself made little impression, its low lying profile, simple design, and unadorned brick exterior typical of many schools built in the 1950’s and 60’s. Once inside the school our experience changed. It was immediately clear from the uplifting banners proclaiming the “Explorer’s” academic success, the freshly painted white walls decorated with rather patriotic red and navy-blue trim, and the jovial interactions between adults and students, that Brazosport High was not by any means a dull or lackluster place. “Fun” was the word that bubbled to the top of the interviews. Students and adults alike let us know that this was a place they enjoyed, a place where they felt supported, motivated, and cared about.

At the time of our visit the total student population at Brazosport High School was 1051, just slightly larger than that of Mountain View. It had a diverse student body; in fact, it is the most demographically diverse of the three study schools. Almost half of the students were Latino, almost 40% were white, and 12% were African-American. Slightly more than half of the students participated in the free or reduced-price lunch program. Brazosport High had a staff consisting of many long-term veteran teachers. Although

there was some racial and ethnic diversity among the school's staff, most were white. Some teachers lived in the school's catchment area and sent their children to the school.

The research team interviewed a total of seventeen students at Brazosport High School. Fifteen of these students were interviewed using a focus group format. One focus group was designed to target "average" students in the upper grades, and second focus group aimed at "average" students in the lower grades. The third focus group consisted of students in AP classes. In addition, I conducted two individual interviews. One of these was a scheduled interview with a student leader, the other was a non-scheduled interview with another student who was also very active in the life of the school. A total of eight girls and nine boys were interviewed. Nine of the students interviewed were White, four were Latino, and four were African-American. Unfortunately the ethnic distribution of this sample does not accurately reflect the demographics at the school in which only slightly more than one-third of the students are White. Although no single demographic group held a majority, almost fifty percent of the students were Latino. (Please see Table I for Campus Demographics during the year in which the research was conducted.) Most of the students interviewed were from the upper grades.

In the focus group of "average" students from the upper grades, there were two girls and three boys. Three were seniors, one was a junior, and one was a sophomore. Three of these students were Latino and two were White. Although these adolescents were designated for this group by our school contacts as being "average" students, they were quite active at school. Most of them were involved in one or more school-based activities and sports. Only one student was not involved in extracurricular activities and this was due to after-school employment.

In the focus group with "average" students from lower grades, there were three boys and two girls. Two of the students were freshman, two were sophomores, and one was a junior. Four of the participants in this group were White and one was African-American.

These students tended to be involved in even more extracurricular activities and sports than the seniors and juniors, although one student was not involved in extra school activities due to work. One student in this group held a student leadership position.

The AP Student Focus Group also consisted of five students: three girls and two boys. Four were seniors and one was a junior. Three were White and two were African-American. Students in this group typically had been in taking advanced courses for several years, although one participant was taking AP classes. Most were involved in multiple extra-curricular activities, sports, and academically oriented clubs, three also participated in school government. One student used non-school time to hold a part-time job.

The student leader interviewed was a Mexican-American girl who was also a top student in the school. The other student interviewed individually was an African-American boy who was active in a variety of school and non-school activities.

The school contact person setting up the focus groups for us included the one student who participated in special education services in one of the average focus groups. This was the only school in which we did not hold a distinct focus group with students identified for special education services.

The researchers interviewed a total of 31 adults at Brazosport High School. This included 19 school based staff and 12 parents. Specifically the sample of school-based staff interviewed consisted of 7 administrative and support staff members, as well as 12 teachers. Individual interviews were conducted with the principal, two of the school's three assistant principals, two guidance counselors, an individual who worked as a full-time community liaison, and the district's testing coordinator who was based at the high school. (The person holding this position not only served as testing coordinator at the school but also taught at the high school). We conducted individual interviews with four

teachers as well as two focus groups with teachers. One focus group was made up seven department heads, while the other included five teachers who were members of the school's site-based management team, which was called the Campus Renewal Team. Four teachers participated in two interview sessions with us: two teachers were in both focus groups while two were interviewed individually and also participated in one focus group. The 12 parents were interviewed in one focus group.

The principal is an Anglo man who had been working in the district for many years. His experience in the district included many years as a teacher and coach at the high school prior to administrative positions in other schools in the district. At the time of the study the principal had been at Brazosport High School for five years. In 1995 he had been brought in by the district to lead the high school and was given the assignment to "turn-around" the school's dismal performance (add footnote). It quickly became clear upon talking with and observing the principal that he capitalizes on his experience as a coach. His high energy, enthusiastic spirit, and knack for building a strong sense of team were mentioned often by almost each and every informant. One assistant principal was an African-American man and the other was a Latina woman. They had worked in the district for seven and 12 years, respectively. The African-American assistant principal had come to the high school as part of the principal's team, and had worked with him for two years prior to that. The Latina administrator was originally from South Texas but had been in the area for almost thirty years. Her twelve years with the district had mainly been spent at the high school and the intermediate school located in the same community as the high school. She indicated that her work experience has given her a lot of familiarity with the area and its residents, "I know the make-up of the community and the parents." The two guidance counselors that we interviewed were both Anglo women. One of them was very new to the area and school, having been there only one and a half years while the other had worked in the school for 12 years. The Testing Coordinator is an Anglo woman who had 10 years of experience at the district. She also came to the school as part of the principal's "turn-around" team in 1995. The young woman who

served in the position of Community Liaison is originally from Mexico and is bilingual. Prior to taking on this position this year, she had worked as a substitute teacher in the high school for about three years.

Our sample included three English Language teachers, two mathematics teachers, two Special Education teachers, one social studies teacher, one science teacher, one vocational teacher, and one band teacher. Perhaps most noteworthy, the teachers we interviewed all were very experienced, some were veteran teachers who had spent their teaching career at Brazosport High School. The range of years working at Brazosport High went from a low of eight years to a high of 34 years. Seven teachers we interviewed had worked at Brazosport High for over twenty years.

STUDENT ACCOUNTS

CARE RECEIVED: Student Perceptions of Needs Met

The students we interviewed at Brazosport High School were very enthusiastic about their day-to-day high school experience. They consistently spoke of how much fun it was to attend the school. Indeed, many students directly stated that they liked coming to school. As one student said, “I don't know how you couldn't have a good time here. I really don't.” Throughout the interviews they highlighted the teachers' actions in creating such an appealing academic environment.

Explicit references to caring are infrequent in the transcripts. However there was considerable consensus in their implicit accounts of caring. There was much agreement that teachers were there to help and support all students, even those who were struggling, with their school work; and they especially appreciated their teachers' and administrators' active and enthusiastic involvement in their lives, and their willingness to listen and take time to understand and respond to their concerns. Indeed, one student's

comment suggests that having teachers and administrators who care is taken for granted, something that is the normal and expected state of affairs at Brazosport High. As he said, “When it comes to a teacher who maybe doesn’t care or anything like that, or is hard to understand, there may be only like out of the fifty or so here, only two or three like that.”

Having Help with Schoolwork

Students interviewed at Brazosport High School emphasized with striking unanimity that their teachers were always available and willing to help them with their schoolwork. They provided numerous examples of their teachers’ providing extra attention in class, as well as special assistance outside of school hours so that all students would be able to understand and master the material.

Describing how this worked in one of his classes, a student explained, “Our teacher makes sure that everyone understands it, because if one person doesn’t understand it then we’re going to keep going over it until they do. ... In some places [the students] would be like, “Man, I don’t understand it because she [the teacher] just gave us the notes and didn’t explain anything. In every class I’ve had, as far as AP classes and stuff go...they always make sure that everyone gets it.” Students in the general education classes indicated that they have the same experience in their classes. One such student, who had transferred to the school, described the his teachers’ efforts to help in the classroom and its impact on his performance:

I noticed my grades came up. I used to live in [another school district] and the teachers there, if you did your work or you didn’t do it, that’s your grade. Here they’ll sit, help you more on a one-on-one basis. There’s several kids per class [who have questions], but if you raise your hand they’ll try to get to you as fast as they can to help you.

Furthermore, students indicated that they always could turn to teachers for more help outside of school hours. The described a wide variety of ways in which their teachers

made themselves available to provide more academic tutoring and support, including scheduled study session, and informal tutoring before and after school. Students agreed that their teachers “almost always” came in early or stayed late to provide extra help. They spoke proudly of their teachers’ long daily schedules that routinely included extra hours before and after the school day. This student’s words suggest the impact of the teacher’s presence and dedication:

He’s always there too! That’s the one thing about him. If you were to ask him what time he gets here in the morning and what time he leaves at night...I promise you he is here at 6:15 in the morning. He spends his life up here.

Almost all the students interviewed had taken advantage of this extra help at one time or another. One student for example, attributed his success in a mathematics course to the regular extra study sessions held by the teacher. As he said, “The reason I even passed that class was because that teacher, she understands how difficult it is. She holds all kinds of study sessions before every major test we take. She wants you to come down there, she’ll always mention, like she’ll always have a sign inside of her door saying “Study Session at this time.” Other students similarly underlined their teachers’ eagerness to help. One explained that her teacher had gone so far as to share her home phone number with the class, “My algebra teacher, she says you can call her at home any time you want to if you have a question. She’s happy you want to learn. She’d rather you call her at home and ask her the question than just forget about it.” Indeed, students indicated that their questions were always welcome. Speaking of one teacher a student explained, “He’s a cool teacher. He’s always there for any...no matter what. If it’s something really stupid he doesn’t make you feel stupid about it. He helps you out.” Students at Brazosport High School not only felt free to seek the help, but they also felt assured that they would easily find and receive the help they needed. The students seemed to feel especially lucky in this regard, and were not shy about expressing their pride: “We don’t have to pay people to tutor us. All we have to do is go to our teacher after school. They are always there.”

Seeing that Others are Supported

Students' accounts suggest that one important quality that set their school apart was the perception that their teachers were concerned and committed to helping each and every student. In their view, teachers at Brazosport were especially persistent in efforts to help students who were struggling, whether the problem involved academics, social adjustment, or discipline. Students described the extra efforts that their teachers made to deal with students in difficult situations, noting their flexibility and creativity in working for a positive outcome for the student. For example, one student recalled how the school staff had worked with a student who became pregnant in her senior year to ensure that she could graduate. As she said, "They work around everything to find a way to get somebody to make it through."

Another student appreciated a teacher's persistent manner of working with a student who had discipline problems. As he explained,

He wanted to help everyone. Like this bad student I knew had a problem, but he (the teacher) wasn't going to give up on him though. He wanted him to work out. He gave him a chance like, even though he had disciplinary problems and stuff...he just kept giving him more chances you know, more than most other people would. Because you can't just throw him away like that, just throw him out and say get out or stuff like that. Because there are teachers who are stricter, but he was like a bit more lenient.

The prevailing feeling among students interviewed was, as students said, "Every teacher roots for every kid." and "They don't leave anybody out."

Experiencing Adult Involvement

The students interviewed made it clear that they experienced the adults at the school - including teachers and administrators as engaged with them individually and actively

involved and interested in their activities. Students indicated they were truly known by their teachers. A senior compared her experience at Brazosport High with her previous experience at another school, “There were so many students there, sometimes the teacher didn’t even know your name, and here you can’t walk down the hallway without a teacher saying, “Hi,” to you and starting a conversation with you about your personal life or about different classes or a sporting event or something.” Another student who had gone through a difficult personal period felt she had benefited from the staff’s attentive and watchful involvement. Thinking back on that time, the student said appreciatively, “You don’t realize, people really do see what’s going on...”

Students relished the active and dependable nature of the adults’ involvement in their lives. They described their teachers’ and administrators’ interest in them and emphasized the constancy of their presence. For example, they proudly told us about the principal’s routine -- almost daily -- visits to their classrooms; and happily described his enthusiastic and boisterous presence at pep rallies and almost every extra-curricular school event. As one student said, “He’s not just somebody that sits in his office...he’s always busy and interacting with us.”

The principal’s frequent visits to their classroom seemed to have made a strong impression on many of the students interviewed. They enjoyed his dropping in. Their comments clearly conveyed that they experienced his visits as a sign of his concern about their learning and academic success. As one senior said, “He shows up even in class to see how we’re doing and make sure that everybody’s learning.” Another student shared a similar view, “[The principal] will go to every class and just look at the students, give you a pat on the back to make sure you’re doing the work. He goes to every class because he’s very serious about that.”

Students explained that the staff’s involvement extended beyond the classroom and the school day, to include faithful attendance and support of the students’ extracurricular

activities as well. They had come to expect the principal's presence at all school events and appreciated his energy and enthusiasm. Underlining the ubiquitous nature of his support, one student said, "He's always there if the school is doing something, like basketball games or football games or something. He's always there right on the sidelines with the teams and stuff. Pretty much everywhere you turn he's there." Students indicated that they could depend on this level of involvement from most of their teachers and indeed had come to expect their presence and interest. Indeed, for one senior leader it was precisely this quality that she felt best characterized what was most special and memorable about the high school. In response to my question about what she wanted me to most remember about the school she said,

I guess how united we are, because we are in a way united. There's always people that don't want to anything to do with school, they go home and that's it. They come to school because they have to. But for the most part the majority of our students and our faculty, our faculty is very involved in everything we do. And I know we always ask our teachers, 'Are you going to come watch me do this?', you know, and they always come. They always do, they always come. And the principal and all the office, they people in the office, everybody. Everybody's very, very supportive, and so I guess we all pretty much come together.

Having Adults Listen

Students at Brazosport indicated that they always had a variety of adults at school to whom they could turn to discuss problems and concerns. They stressed that they felt secure and comfortable going to the principal as well as other many other staff members with all kinds of issues, whether they were school-related or personal. As one student commented, "You can actually go and talk with them about something if you need to. ... They make you feel welcome in their classroom." The students described the principal as very approachable, and having "an open mind". One student said that he was "kind of

our counselor and our principal.” Students indicated that they did not hesitate to turn to the principal for help. As one student said,

Take it to the source [the principal]. It doesn't bother him. Anybody can walk into his office, if you have something to talk about, any problem. It doesn't matter, from anything to do with the schools, somebody wrote graffiti, to if your girlfriend just dumped you. He doesn't care. Just go in his office and talk with him. Any way he can help, he's there.

The fact that the principal and teachers are willing to “take time out” to sit and listen and talk seems to have made a powerful impression on the students. Providing several specific examples, the students emphasized the amount of time that the adults spend with them to help them resolve whatever issue is at hand. As one student described help she received from the principal in dealing with a drill team conflict: “He just took time out of his day to come in here to meet with all of us because there was something wrong with our lives. It didn't even affect him, but it helped us a lot.” Another student recalled how the principal had responded to a pivotal school event - the vandalizing of their school bonfire prior to a big school game -

Our bonfire, it got burned down the day before it was supposed to. ... And we came up here the next morning and all got together and walked into his office. He tried to talk to us there, but there were too many of us. He took us to the auditorium, we all sat down, figured out what we wanted to do. He took the time out and he let us have the time out and he was our friend.

Throughout their comments one sees how the students especially appreciate the ways in which these adults are able to slip effortlessly between roles in their interactions with them; seeming to shift flexibly from reliable authority figure to trusted friend.

ADULT ACCOUNTS

Explicit Adult Talk of Caring

There are several explicit references by adults to “caring” in the administrator and teacher interview material. The word appears six times in the administrator interviews and three times in the teacher interviews. Specifically, the notion of “caring about kids” was seen as very important by two administrators both of whom were relatively new on campus. A Latino administrator spoke about love and caring as being critical underpinnings of the educational experience. Raising a rhetorical question during our interview, she asked, “What makes [the school] tick? I think it’s the love and the caring.” Similarly an Anglo counselor spoke about caring five times in her interview. She also seemed to be equating love and caring for the kids as she spoke. She expressed a strong belief that students would not work with teachers and learn from teachers who did not care about them. Indeed, for her being able to “like” and “love” and “care” about the students was a prerequisite for anyone in education. As she said, “I would like to tell schools out there that number one, you have to believe in kids. Number two, you have to love kids. If you don’t love them and if you don’t like kids and you don’t care about them, you shouldn’t be in education because they aren’t going to listen to a word you say.” Both of these staff members seem to be using the word caring primarily to describe the affective quality in relationships between students and adults at the high school. However, they also described some actions that they felt demonstrated caring to the students. For example, the administrator believed the school’s approach to discipline -- which she described as “firm but gentle”-- conveyed caring. And, the counselor mentioned her efforts to learn and remember each student’s name: “I walk through the cafeteria and speak to the kids. One of the little Hispanic kids called out to me and said, “We really like you, you know why?” I said, “Why?” And she said, “You know our names! Just little things like that, just to let them know we care, that I care about them.”

References to “caring” were sparser in the teacher interview data. Only two teachers explicitly used the term. One veteran Anglo teacher, in praising the principal’s contributions to the school’s success, highlighted the fact that “he cares about the kids.” It is interesting to note that another teacher spoke of how the principal took the job at the

Brazosport with a high investment in the school and that she and other teachers recognized that “he was coming back to something he cared about.”

This veteran teacher also spoke of the teachers’ caring for students. Speaking about the teaching staff as a whole, she emphasized the their willingness to come to school early and stay late to work with the students as a key to the school’s success. As she explained,

If you walk down this hall after school, on our hall particularly, you will see math teachers here long after the bell has rung working with kids. If you come in before school in the morning, you’ll see people giving up their time to work with kids. And I think that’s been one of the things that we’ve found success with, is just showing these kids that we care about them and [are] willing to give up our time.

“CARING ABOUT”: Adult Perceptions of Student Needs

The staff at Brazosport often articulated their realization that their students, although high school aged adolescents, were still children, with many of the same academic and emotional needs as other children. Indeed, affectionate expressions such as “the kiddos,” and “my children,” were scattered throughout the interview transcripts. Many adults on the campus seemed to relish engaging with their students’ playful side, while others expressed deep empathy for students who they saw taking on adult responsibilities while completing high school. This perspective influenced the adults’ perception of what students needed in their high school experience. The adults perceptions of their students needs also seemed to be shaped by ideas and beliefs about what the students did not receive from their family and home environment. There was considerable agreement that students needed to be pushed and motivated, needed to receive individualized instruction tailored to their learning needs, as well as positive recognition and broader exposure.

“Nobody’s pushing them”

Adults across the campus, both teachers and administrators, expressed the view that their students needed encouragement to believe in themselves, and motivation to set and strive for their goals. Indeed, this was the most frequently expressed perception of student needs in the interview data. An African-American administrator captured the felt importance of this need and the significance of the school's attention to it:

We feel we're meeting the needs of all the kids and that we're teaching. That's something we've preached from day one, is that we feel like all the kids can learn. It doesn't matter the background that they come from, you give them the time, the resources, and so forth, and I think the motivation, the push to tell them, "You can do this. We're going to be here to help you in any way you can to get to this point." I think that's the first thing: we have faith in them. I think it has really turned some of our kids on, some that probably at one time or another just felt like, "No one really cares," or "No one thought I could do this, and now I've got this person that's really pushing me, that's behind me, trying to motivate me.

The principal was especially adamant about the students' need for positive motivation. Indeed, he felt it was such a pressing need that it had to be addressed on a daily basis. As he explained to us,

I don't know if you all got to see my announcements and my goals, my student goals. That's "You can be anything you want to be." And I tell these kids this. And these kids have to get to hear it nearly everyday. That's why I put it and they hear me and they see me [on the daily school broadcast]. It's visual.

Several teachers also underlined the students' need for motivation, often using similar terms. As one teacher said,

[W]hats the idea throughout this whole district is that you try not to look at your students as far as what kind of family they come from or what kind of house they live in, but you really want to work at just helping them be the very best they can be on their own. The idea is that they can all do it. That they can, instead of them saying, "I can't do this, Miss." That's when you kind of have to pull out the little pump-up speech and try to get them motivated, try to give them some things that they can be successful at, so they will feel like they can.

To a large extent the staff's perception of this student need was tied to their beliefs about students' families. Many adults verbalized a belief that students were not receiving such positive support and motivation from their families for a variety of reasons. As the principal said, "We have good kids that are very intelligent, but nobody's pushing them, [especially with the Hispanic culture.]" Although a misconception (Fuligni, 1998; Romo & Falbo, 1996; Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990), this belief about the families' limitations, seemed to intensify school staff's sense of urgency about providing these motivational messages. Referring again of his daily announcements the principal said, "And I tell them everyday, because they're not told that at home. It's not because mom and dad don't care, sometimes like I said, it's because they may be at work. So the students have to hear it everyday."

"They need more individualized attention"

Staff at Brazosport felt that students at the high school needed the same kind of individualized and intensive instruction that was often found in elementary schools. The principal was an especially strong advocate for teaching the students rather than teaching the content. He developed a colorful and folksy expression of "chicken-feed teaching" to capture the dreaded practice of teaching the content rather than the child. As he said,

Secondary teachers, and I'm one of them, we're going to get through the book come hell or high water. It's like what I call chicken feed teaching, you just throw it out there and they get it if they get it, if they don't they don't. ... They tend to forget that these are little kids. They're little kids in big packages.

And, he promoted in its place the type of student-centered teaching that he saw practiced by successful elementary school teachers. As he said, "So I tell them to watch an

elementary teacher teach. Watch them teach. If we teach the students the content is going to come. They teach those kids first and it really comes across.”

Teachers spoke often of how they were able to identify individual students’ academic needs and tailor instruction based on their use of ongoing student assessments. The staff also made significant changes in the school schedule and required coursework to ensure that students, (especially those who arrived at school with difficulty mastering basic skills) would have a greater opportunity to get sustained, individually tailored, instruction in the classroom. Freshman and sophomore classes were made longer and smaller so that specific teachers had more time with fewer individual students. In addition to this, as a rule, teachers came early and stayed late to work with students. They also utilized standard detention hall settings as forums for individual work with academically needy students. The principal said, “Our kids, we have to work with our kids before and after school and at lunch and whatever.”

“They all still need someone to say, ‘You’re a good kid!’”

The staff at Brazosport also shared a belief that their students needed to receive positive recognition. Teachers and administrators spoke enthusiastically about their varied efforts to make sure the students felt known and appreciated. These ranged from the daily practices of greeting and interacting individually with students, to fun classroom and school wide rituals to celebrate birthdays and recognize important achievements, to devoted attendance at students’ extracurricular activities. As a teacher said, “There are lots and lots of ways to recognize kids.”

For example, one teacher spoke about his daily practice of greeting each and every student individually as they entered the classroom. He explained, “It’s almost little “kiddish”, but I make them, I stand at the door as they leave and they either say goodbye to me or I’m at least patting them each on the back as they go by.” Another teacher

typically stands in the hallways between classes and greets students who pass by. As one teacher said, “Certainly we want our kids to come to school and know that we know they’re here. We don’t want them to be invisible.” This attitude seemed quite pervasive among the staff; the school’s Community Liaison, who helps with truancy and attendance, described her active approach with students:

Sometimes I’ve even walked some students to class to make sure that they get there. I say, “You’re missing school so I’m going to walk with you. Sometimes they just smile at me and say, “Okay, I’m going to class, you don’t have to walk me. “Oh yes I do, because if not you’re going to get lost.” I take them. On the way to class we talk and sometimes they say, “School is boring, school is this and that.” We have a little talk, not that much, but I guess they like the attention.

Teachers tried to ensure that all students had experienced recognition. Following the principal’s suggestion they had regular schedules to call their students’ parents to provide news and positive feedback. Athletic teams are open to all students with no try-outs required. And as we observed ourselves, there were numerous celebrations at the school and in individual classrooms. For example, the principal announces student birthdays everyday on the morning broadcast; teachers and fellow students then follow-up throughout the day with their special greetings. The student council sells balloons specifically for birthdays and it is not uncommon to see one or two students tethered to colorful Mylar balloons or sparkling with glitter sprinkled by one of their teachers. One of the school counselors described an enjoyable interaction she had on a recent birthday,

It was this little 9th grade rebel’s birthday and I saw him in the hallway. I said, “Billy, happy birthday!” “You remembered!” I said, “Yes, I heard it this morning, and you look so nice! “It’s a new shirt, Miss.”

Some teachers were especially sensitive to girls’ need for recognition. As a result, one teacher spearheaded a plan to change the process of homecoming queen and king elections so that greater numbers of girls as well as boys would be recognized. A teacher lauded the results of this change, “It was really nice. A lot more girls got to be

recognized and honored, a lot of girls who maybe would never have had the opportunity before.”

Staff also expressed their recognition of students through regular and devoted attendance to support them at sports matches and other extracurricular events. “If any of my kids have anything that’s at home [on campus] I have them put it on my calendar and if it’s here and I’m not working on that night then I at least make an appearance.” He continued, “They get excited because a lot of their parents work or occasionally there’s a parent who for some reason is not interested and doesn’t show up. It means a lot to them if you’re there. I make sure they see me, I holler and embarrass them.” As one teacher explained, teacher attendance at student events is so consistent that the students have come to expect it, “They know that the teachers are going to be there, and if you’re not there, they’re checking on it.”

While the teachers spoke enthusiastically about their efforts to recognize students, they also seemed slightly apologetic for doing what might be seen “corny,” or “childish”. But one of the assistant principals affirmed confidently, “Many times people think at this age group they’re too old, too mature for kindness and love, but that’s not true. They all still need someone to say, “You’re a good kid. Keep it up!”

“They get behind because they aren’t exposed”

Staff at Brazosport emphasized that their students had a special need for exposure to cultural enrichment opportunities and the world of work and college. They indicated that this need was especially pressing for their students, given the limited opportunities they had in their own neighborhoods and homes.

The principal asserted that it was the school’s responsibility and role to provide the students with some of this needed exposure. As he explained,

If you have a gifted kid here and you have a gifted kid from a highly affluent background, the only difference in brain power with them is that the affluent kid gets to be exposed to all the arts, sciences, and everything else. This kid is here is just as bright, but they get behind because they are not exposed. They don't go to Italy, they don't go to Europe, they don't go to different things, arts, sciences and stuff. So we've got to do that and take care of those kids, so we need to have field trips.

The principal and staff developed a strong series of academic and cultural field trips, taking advantage of local strengths in the chemical industry, as well as nearby Houston's many resources in the arts, sciences, and medicine. Speaking of the results of this effort the principal said,

So now they actually get to see the sculptures that they're talking about, they actually see the picture on the wall. We have our Anatomy and Physiology class go to the Medical Center to watch open heart surgery. It has been phenomenal. We took the whole freshman class to a live production of Romeo and Juliet in Houston. And believe it or not, I have children who have never been to Houston. Imagine a kid open their eyes to a live production they have never seen. So we're increasing that child's exposure. It's helped them tremendously and is opening their eyes and showing there's not just one door.

Similarly, the faculty advocates that students take advantage of a cooperative dual-credit program established by the school district and the local community college. The staff's goal is to expose as many students as possible to the world of college. They believed that in many cases this exposure would give the students a valuable first hand experience of college and increase their likelihood of attending college after high school. As one of the school counselors explained,

[W]e try to encourage as many as we can to go to the community college. Our kids don't have transportation, they don't have money. We have a lot of kids with those problems. If we don't get them out at Brazosport College, then we sometimes lose them. They have to see -- our kids typically don't have parents that went to college. If we can just get them out there and they can be part of the local scene, we have made a big step.

Indeed the principal's commitment to providing this first hand exposure to college was so strong, that he insisted that Brazosport high school students would not be allowed the option of taking the community college courses via a distance learning program that was available. As he said, "I don't want my kids doing distance learning. I want my children, being underprivileged children, I want them to set foot on that campus and experience that atmosphere, know where their advisor is, where the bookstore is."

"TAKING CARE" : Adults' Perceived Relationship to Student Needs

Shared Beliefs about Student and Teacher Capacity

Like the faculty at Mountain View High School, the Brazosport staff shared the belief that all their students could be successful academically. At the focus group with department chairpersons, one teacher attributed much of the school's recent success to this orientation:

The faculty and administration have really focused on helping these kids, recognizing that there is a demographic change and really focusing on teaching those kids with all we can. They're just as capable --they may be different in their upbringing but they're still just as capable, and you just have to approach them in different way.

Another teacher presented a similar view,

The idea throughout this whole district is that you try not to look at your students as far as what kind of family they come from or what kind of house they live in, but you really want to work at just helping them succeed to be the very best they can be on their own. The idea is they all can do it.

It was striking how often this belief was repeated by different adults and students during our two short days of interviewing at the school.

This belief was actively and indeed aggressively promoted by the district as well as within the high school itself. We learned that staff within the school and district had not

always felt that their students were capable of high levels of achievement. The strong emphasis on high achievement for all came after the district was challenged by community members who had reacted in alarm and anger at the low state accountability ratings of certain low-income and minority schools within the district. As a result, the superintendent responded with a district-wide effort to increase performance in all schools and he worked to change beliefs about student capacity district wide, and he provided teachers and students with professional development and support.

At Brazosport High School the principal spreads and reinforces this message everyday in his daily announcements conveying his belief and confidence in both the students and the staff. As one teacher said,

He'll just about drive you crazy sometimes and almost make you sick with it over and over and over, but it works. Everyday encouraging the kids, encouraging the teachers. You go to the best high school in the state of Texas. You've got the best teachers, listen to those teachers, do what they tell you to do. You can do it. You are winners. And that sinks in after a while.

Adults Take Responsibility for Student Needs

The staff's words and actions demonstrated that they felt responsible for their students' success at Brazosport High. Indeed a philosophical correlate of the school and districts' high expectations for students was that these goals could be met only through providing adequate support and resources. Although teachers acknowledged that their students might come to school with different needs than more affluent students, they saw it as their responsibility to meet these needs. Time and again, teachers made comments that they needed to use extra creativity, or provide extra motivation --the little pump up speech--, or especially dedicated persistence with students so that they could master their schoolwork. Another common phrase in the interviews was that teachers wanted to give their students "a taste of success."

An algebra teacher's actions to improve the End of Course Algebra exam scores for ninth grade students provides a powerful example of teacher responsibility for student outcomes. This teacher, perceived informally as a master teacher in the school, had been teaching ninth grade students who were advanced in Algebra. Her students typically did very well on the End of Course Exam. She decided that the less advanced students would do equally well if instructed with the same methods she had been using with her advanced students. She proposed to the administration that she teach several classes of these freshmen herself and train all the other ninth grade math teachers in her instructional strategies for Algebra. Her words clearly reveal her sense of responsibility and initiative as she confronted the challenge of improving student performance in Algebra:

I had some success, if we talk about Algebra, my kids have done very well on the Algebra End of Course exam every time they've taken it. Well, I was convinced that some of the things I was doing, the Algebra Daily kids could do that. They could be successful on the test.

As at Mountain View High School, the staff at Brazosport took responsibility for meeting other student needs as well. For example, making extracurriculars and after school clubs available, being present at after school events, and providing students with information about college.

You have to volunteer a lot of your time to make it successful. Even though you're tired, you don't want to, but you know you have to go to a game because they may not have a family member that's going to their game. Or you're tired and you really don't want to sponsor that club that evening, but you know well, you're going to go ahead and do it.

While the district promoted this ethic of responsibility, the administration at Brazosport High School also cultivated and reinforced this attitude through several practices within the high school; including, strong reliance on teachers, active use and support of the site based decision-making process, and a responsive and earnest open door policy.

When the principal came back to the high school as principal he made a point of leaning heavily on his teachers and using them as instructional leaders. Indeed, he said that he considered himself an “instructional facilitator” rather than an instructional leader. The teachers, particularly the veteran teachers and department chairpersons, responded very positively to this level of trust and responsibility, recognizing that their ideas and suggestions were valued and used. “He just relies on us and our expertise and values our judgment. And he tells us that all the time.” They described how they are always involved in the hiring of new staff, how the principal frequently turned to them for advice and guidance on content issues, and how he had advocated that the district approve campus innovations that teachers had initiated. As one teacher explained,

The principal has given us the freedom to do what we know is best. We know more about what’s best as far as teaching our content and preparing our kids for the state assessment. And he has given us the freedom to do that. He is very open for questions, and suggestions and ideas. This is a good place to work.

Another teacher concurred, “He relies on us because we’re the ones that are responsible for the performance in that classroom at the bottom level. ... He gives us a lot of responsibility in a lot of ways, but it’s a good responsibility.”

The administration had created both formal and informal channels through which teachers and other staff can make their ideas and concern known. There was strong consensus among those interviewed that the school had a functional and active site-based decision-making committee, as well as a principal whose doors were always open and who actively sought teacher and student input. The opportunity to participate and initiate change through these forums has contributed to teachers’ sense of responsibility. As one teacher said, “It’s kind of like being a stockholder. You really have an interest in what you’re doing because you know that what you have to say has an impact.” Another teacher added, “You really do feel, now, like you really can have a say in things, even if you’re not on this committee you should feel that way. He really wants you to utilize that open door policy that he has.”

In addition, a few important changes to teaching assignments seemed to have fostered an attitude of shared responsibility for all students. During the initial period of intense improvement efforts the principal had asked all teachers to assist the English and mathematics teachers in teaching the 20-minute daily TAAS preparation lessons. They still are expected to reinforce the weekly TAAS instructional focus in their own classes. This requirement had the effect of bringing the team together. A teacher explained how this happened:

I think years ago though, we that we not English and not Math sat back and thought it's really not our problem. It's their problem. They have to teach it. Not realizing that those are the same kids that are in my class and so it is my problem because my kids, they've got to graduate. That's our goal and so whatever it takes to get them to graduation is all our problem. And I think when TAAS first started it was like it was sectioned that's their problem; I don't have to worry about it. I'm just going to do my own thing and you can't look at that. You have to look at the child and say we've got to get them out of school. Whatever it takes, we've got to do it. We've got to be supportive of anything that they do. It took us to get to that point and I think that's why our kids are real successful. We reinforce everything they teach.

“CARE-GIVING”: *Actions and Resources*

Time to Meet Student Needs

Brazosport students emphasized the amount of time that teachers and other staff had for them, whether it was to help them with schoolwork, or to listen and respond to a concern or problem, or to attend and provide support during an extracurricular event. We heard again and again that the adults “took time out” to respond to student needs. The adults we spoke with affirmed that they had time and made extra time for students. They

described it as a special characteristic of the school staff and a factor in the school's recent success. As one veteran teacher explained,

And I think that's one thing that our people do. If you walk down the hall after school, on our hall particularly, you will see math teachers here long after the bell has rung working with kids. If you come in before school in the morning you'll see our people giving up their time to work with kids. And I think that's been one of the things that we've found success with, is just showing these kids that we care about them and be[ing] willing to give up our time.

Again, the question is what has made this possible, how is it that Brazosport staff have so much time for their students? Our interviews do suggest that it is a norm for teachers to come in early and stay late, or at the very least have extra after school time on one end of the day. This teacher's statement was typical:

I stay everyday until at least 4:30. Well, I live in Houston so I drive an hour to get to work everyday. I still stay every day until at least 4:30. If the students tell me that they have to give someone a ride, and they can't be back until 4:30 or 5:00, I'll stay and work with them. Anyway after school, even Fridays. I try to give them every opportunity to get help.

On the one hand, there is the expectation for such behavior. The principal was clear that the students needed extra assistance before and after school as well as ample opportunities to participate in after school activities. However, the principal also made a point of noting and rewarding such generous work on the teachers' individual performance review plans. As he said, "I want to know when they are doing tutorials with their kids, because I have a lot of teachers who do it and they never got any praise for it. So this way I can see that they are doing it." He has also used money to provide teachers with stipends for taking on additional roles, such as after school club leadership, after school hours.

The administrators also created policies that appeared to maximize the quantity and quality of time that teachers could spend with students. They insist on minimizing teachers' time doing extraneous activities such as photo-copying and disciplining, and

instead provided them with assistance. For example, the principal avoided calling faculty meetings because he felt they pull teachers away from their direct work with students and their collaborative time with colleagues. Moreover, the teachers at Brazosport explained that they do not “do duty.” That is, they are not responsible for monitoring students in the hallways, in the cafeteria, or outdoors at the bus stop. Rather, the school’s four administrators take responsibility for maintaining and enforcing discipline. Those interviewed agreed that one often than not, the school runs smoothly because the students themselves, who are well versed in the school’s discipline plan and aware of the sequence of consequences for different levels of infractions, monitor their own behavior. An administrator spoke about their approach,

We just try to stay on top of things, keep track of things and just try to free those teachers up so they can teach instruction. That’s the key. Teachers know that they have the support from the office. And we tell them, if a kid is in the classroom misbehaving where he’s not learning and he’s also keeping other kids from learning, he doesn’t need to be there. We’ll remove him so you can teach.

The teachers were enthusiastic about this feature of their experience at Brazosport High and they underlined the positive impact it had for their relationships with students. It seemed clear that in addition to keeping the quality of the teacher-student relationship focused on teaching and guidance, that these policies also freed up considerable time during the school day for teacher-student interactions.

In addition, the school’s policy of capping freshman and sophomore classes to 22 students per class, and requiring daily classes in mathematics and English, resulted in teachers being able to spend more daily time with fewer numbers of individual students. This daily time with the same group of students made it easier for teachers to track and respond to individual student needs.

MARTIN HIGH SCHOOL

My last site visit for the Dana Center “high school study” took me to the Raymond and Tirza Martin High School in downtown Laredo. Martin High School was selected for the Dana Center study due to its high student participation in advanced placement courses. I traveled to this school in the spring of 2000, after the research data had been collected, as part of the team to assist with the interviewing and filming for a video that was to illustrate our findings. I had already heard enthusiastic reports about this school from my research colleagues who had visited the school the previous fall. They were impressed with the school’s effort to “raise the bar” for all its students. For example, at Martin all students were encouraged and expected to graduate with the Recommended High School plan rather than the minimum high school requirements for graduation. My fellow researchers had also been struck by the poised and articulate students they had met, and by the strong sense of pride expressed by all members of the school community. During our research meetings and review of the data I learned that these students, like those at Mountain View and Brazosport, felt they went to the best school in the state. They had spoken passionately with the interviewers about the ways in which the adults at the school had made a difference in their lives. Martin was a place they felt supported, encouraged, and known. It was a place so comfortable and welcoming that many students likened it to home. As one senior said, “This isn’t school, this is just another home for us.”

Needless to say, I was eager to arrive at Martin High and see it for myself. The school, a stately two-story brick building with art deco details, had a decidedly urban feel, set on a corner lot of a bustling downtown neighborhood. Small businesses --a small Mexican import and garden store, a gas station-- occupied the street across from the main school entrance; and a housing project, one of the oldest in the country, filled the blocks just south of campus.

The handsome school building, constructed in the 1930's with Works Progress Administration funds, conveyed my first sense of the long and proud history of the school that I would hear much more about throughout the day. Although now one of three high schools in the city, Martin was the first and only high school in the city from its founding in 1937 until 1965. As we strolled the school's ground with the principal and head coach, in preparation for an early morning video shoot of the football team doing drills, they pointed out original school gym and explained that it had been the community center for the entire city years before. As they continued, sharing details of their long history and experience at the school, I became even more aware of the depth of pride and tradition in the Martin community.

During 1999-2000, the year we conducted the field research, Martin had a total student population of just fewer than 2,000 students. It served an almost exclusively Mexican-origin population, with more than 98% of the students classified as Latino. Over 90% of the students participated in the free or reduced price lunch program. Most of the teachers and staff at Martin are, like the students, Mexican-American; and many are originally from the same community or barrio. A substantial number of the teachers and administrators were themselves former graduates of Martin High School. One teacher for example estimated that approximately 30% of the teachers were Martin alumni.

Martin High School came to the attention of the Dana Center due to the high participation of its students in the core Advanced Placement classes. Although the school has made many efforts to increase student academic performance, I believe it is the weakest of the three schools academically. In terms of objective data, it did not meet either of the Dana Center performance criteria. Secondly, the criteria uses enrollment in the courses, not performance measures from the courses. But in addition, I had another concern; it came to light during our interviews that past administrators had attempted to increase enrollment in Advanced Placement without attending sufficiently to the student outcomes in the classes. This was recognized and being addressed by the present

administration and renewed efforts were being made to increase teacher preparation and student performance in these classes.

At Martin High School a total of 23 students were interviewed. All student interviews at this high school were conducted in a focus group format. Researchers facilitated four different focus groups. One focus group was held with five “average” students from different grades. Another focus group was conducted with six student leaders. The leaders were from all grade levels. A third focus group consisted of three students who had been receiving special education services at the high school. Again there were a variety of grade levels in this group. The fourth focus group examined the perspective of student leaders. Nine students, primarily seniors and juniors participated in the student leader interview.

A total of 47 adults were interviewed at Martin High School. The sample consisted of 16 administrative and support staff, 16 teachers, four parents, and one district staff person who served as a liaison to the high school. Researchers conducted eight individual interviews and five focus group interviews.

All five members of the school’s administrative staff participated in the research. The principal was interviewed individually. The four assistant principals were interviewed in one or more focus groups depending on their role in the school. Researchers facilitated two focus groups attended by the assistant principals. One of these was a general focus group for the assistant principals, and another was focused on their role as curriculum specialists in the school. Two assistant principals also served on the school’s site-based management team, called the Campus Education Improvement Committee, so they attended a focus group held with members of that committee as well.

The principal is a Mexican-American woman who grew up in Laredo. She herself had attended and graduated from Martin High School. She is known and appreciated across campus for her constant enthusiasm and support for the Martin “Tigers.” The researchers couldn’t help but notice this passion as well; it came across loud and clear not only in her words and actions, but in the her liberal use of the school’s colors --red and black-- in her wardrobe and office. At the time of our research visit, she was in her first year as principal at Martin High School. However, she had worked many years in the district, first as a teacher and later as an administrator. Her previous administrative experience included seven years as assistant principal at Martin. The four other members of the school’s administrative team --two men and two women-- were also Hispanic.

The researchers conducted a large focus group with eleven of the school’s support staff. This focus group gathered the perspectives of a wide range of staff within the school, including six members of the counseling staff, the librarian, two diagnosticians, a math facilitator, and an individual working as a parent liaison. All eleven participants were women and all but one were Latino. They varied in terms of how much experience they had and how long they had been working at the high school.

The team interviewed a total of 16 teachers from a wide variety of departments in the school, including mathematics, English, history, social studies, special education, science, and physical education. Five teachers participated in individual interviews; eight took part in a focus group with Master Teachers; and eight in the focus group with the site-based management team. Here again, five individuals participated in more than one session with the researchers. Among the teachers interviewed seven were men and nine were women. Almost all were Latino. Quite a few of the teachers mentioned that they had graduated from Martin High themselves. One faculty member estimated that more than one third of the teaching staff had graduated from Martin. The sample varied in terms of length of experience in teaching and time at Martin High. For example one teacher was new to the school the year of our study, while one had been working at

Martin for 35 years. However, most of the teachers we interviewed had been at Martin many years and were quite experienced. The average tenure at Martin for those interviewed was 15 years. The sample of teachers interviewed may have over represented the veteran teachers at the school.

STUDENT ACCOUNTS

CARE RECEIVED: Student Perceptions of Needs Met

Explicit references to being cared about are not frequent in the Martin interview transcripts. One student did explicitly say that the principal “really cares about students, she really cares about students to succeed.” However, the Martin students we interviewed were quite enthusiastic about their experience at school and described many ways in which their needs were met by adults at Martin. These students, including individuals receiving special education services as well as those pursuing the school’s Distinguished Advanced Placement graduation plan, commented on their teachers’ and administrators’ strong commitment to their schooling and future success. Students highlighted the readily available help they receive from adults at Martin. They described teachers’ and administrators’ support and encouragement to push toward higher academic goals. They especially noted their appreciation for the personal quality of their relationships with adults, and for the adults’ active presence and interest in their lives.

Having Help with Schoolwork

The Martin High School students explained that there was a wide variety of help available with their academics; they noted that they could turn to their peers, to college tutors who came to the campus, and to their teachers. As one student said, “What I think personally, what makes this school successful is that it doesn’t stop at 3:35 when the bell rings. If we have problems, we get tutoring...they are willing to help you out, to get you to learn what you need to learn.”

Students provided many examples of how a teacher's or an administrator's persistence and help had made a difference for them. They spoke about the help they got preparing for the state assessment. One student spoke of a teacher who had kept him from dropping out.

She showed me not to drop out of school because I have to get success from my lack, because my financials aren't good, my parents, so she's helping with how to do my work. Now I get super good grades, like A's and B's. I don't go down from B's.

In another case, a student receiving special education services spoke poignantly about assistance that helped her overcome her struggle with Chemistry:

I love science, but just something about Chemistry was so hard, I could not understand. We had our tutor in there, but he'd go real fast and I cried one time and my teacher came over to me and patted me on the back and said, "Don't cry. Come here, I'll help you." I was like, "I can't, I can't do it." I was crying like a little girl. He goes, "Stop crying. Listen to me." He spent the whole hour with me and ever since then when I'd have a problem I'd go up to him. At the end I passed his class.

Speaking of their teachers' help several students noted the flexibility that their teachers used in handling deadlines for assignments. They appreciated that their teachers took into account the complications of their personal lives --such as work and family responsibilities-- and were willing to bend deadlines slightly so that students could still successfully complete their work. As one senior explained,

They're very understanding. They know what you are going through at home. if they know you have a personal issue at home, they'll give you a little extra time to do your work, to do your things that you need to do in order to graduate. I had to do a research paper in order to graduate. My teacher knew I had a job that required me to be out in the field a lot, so she didn't give me more time, but she was understanding as in if I couldn't turn it in Monday, she knew I would turn it in Tuesday. Of course she would take off points, but she would give me the opportunity to turn it in a little bit later.

Having Help with Personal Issues

Students expressed that the adults at school were there to help them with non-academic school related issues and personal problems and concerns as well. In fact, in each of the four focus groups students without hesitation listed numerous people they could or would turn to at school for help with a personal concern. They felt free to turn to their teachers, administrators, counselors, and coaches. Underlining this point, one student said, “If there’s anything we need, we can go to anybody. They’ll help you as much as they can. If they can’t they’ll refer you to somebody else that can.” Another student expressed a similar view, “What’s good is that here you can go to almost anybody that you feel safe talking to and if they can’t help you with the specific problem, they’ll direct you to somebody we can. Most of them are willing to help.” Another student added, “Even administrators.”

In fact, students interviewed highlighted the accessibility and responsiveness of the administrative staff. Many students mentioned the impact of the principal’s open door policy. They saw her as a person who they could turn to for help with any kind of issue. As one senior explained, “Anything she can help you with, her door is open and you can feel free to ask her for any favor that you might need for school.” Another student concurred, “She’s always there, all the time. Anything you need.” Students also described the school counselors as a valuable resource and complimented them on their focused and individualized attention. One senior, who had struggled with personal issues throughout his schooling described the difference this help has made in his life,

The way the administrators and faculty have helped me get to a point to graduate is by being there emotionally when I’ve been distressed, when I’ve had nowhere to go and I feel boxed in. I don’t think there’s that many principals who take time to do more than what they need to do. They cry with you, they laugh with you, they support you when you do good and they get behind you when you don’t. They treat you like you are part of their life in an important manner.

Being Known and Valued

Martin High School students were very vocal in letting us know that the adults at school were present and interested in their lives. They repeatedly stressed that they felt their teachers and adults at school genuinely wanted to be with them and were articulate about how this led to a reassuring sense of being known, being important, being “somebody.” For many this experience led to a sense that the school was “more like home,” and that it was “a second family.” Speaking of her experience as part of the junior class, one student leader said,

You’re somebody in 600, 700 students. It’s not like, “You’re this class, you’re that class. It’s individuals. It feels good because Laredo is growing, or you have lots of brothers and sisters. It’s really hard to get attention, but it feels good. It feels like they’re there for you.

Students said their teachers and administrators wanted to be with them. They recalled times when their teachers had told them how much they enjoy being with them and helping them learn and grow. Underlining this point, one student said, “It’s not like they just get rid of us.” They saw that their principal was at school, with her door open, always ready and willing to meet with them. One student described the positive impact this had,

At Martin High School, the administration is awesome. It’s an open door policy. you can come in and they are here. It makes you feel important. The school is for you, not you’re for the school.

Students also happily described the quality of their daily experience at school, saying that teachers, even those they did not know personally, greeted them enthusiastically. One senior, while summarizing her feelings about the school said, “I love it. Especially the staff. When you walk in the first thing they tell you is, “Hi, how are you?” That gives you an up for the day. “Wow, she said “hi” or whatever. I love it here.”

The students emphasized the highly attentive and personal manner in which the counselors worked with them. Several noted the undivided attention that they received, stressing that the counselors would block their incoming calls, and put everything else on hold to focus fully on them. They added that although their counselors were responsible for hundreds of students they took time to know each student and manage to keep track of their individual goals and plans. One junior spoke of the counselors' support and the impact it had on her,

The counselors are there for you 100%. They help you out with scholarships and they make you feel like they're there for you. ... It's like I can make a difference, I'm not just a number, you feel more like you are on a one-on-one basis and so you want to push more in your academics and your after school activities.

In addition to these ongoing experiences during the school day, the students also experienced the adults' interest and attention through their avid and enthusiastic participation at their school activities. They described activity sponsors as very dedicated, as "there 24/7," and appreciated their teachers' and administrators' presence at games and extracurricular events. Speaking about the principal one student said,

She supports different clubs and everything. She's always there. She attends the games, or any competition or anything. She's always there backing us up, backing us up. ... She's like a big mother --she'd like to be a mother to all of us. You know, a proud mother that goes around bragging, that's basically the way she is.

Another student expanded on this theme, "It's not just like, "Here's my paperwork. My job ends at 3:45." They wish it ended! The principals are there after that. They do go [to our activities]. We were invited to perform at the Spurs game. They went and they were there. It feels really good."

Enjoying Mutual Relationships with Adults

Throughout the interviews, students spoke with striking consistency about the special quality of their relationships with the teachers and other adults at Martin. In each and every focus group, various students indicated that they felt they had very close, one-to-one relationships with their teachers, relationships that felt, as they said, “more like friends.” They described primarily in terms of feeling less distance and less hierarchical separation between them. As one student said, “What I like about this school is that the fine line between teachers and students is kind of blurred. They’re not really mostly students and teachers, it’s more like friends.” Speaking in similar terms one student said, “That’s one thing here. Teachers are very, very down to earth.” Gesturing to underline his remarks, he continued, “In some places teachers are somewhere else, and the students are over here. Here there’s good communication between both.”

They especially remembered those opportunities that allowed them to experience their teachers and administrators as people in their own right. Some recalled moments when their teachers or counselors had drawn on their personal experience to share advice. Others spoke of the personal interactions they were able to have with teachers at extracurricular events such as UIL competitions.

At the UIL meets, teachers don’t act like teachers...you get to know them personally. - [At UIL] the teachers are totally different. At your competitions you are making friends. You get to talk. You talk about all their experiences, when they were in high school. It’s just so cool.

Their words indicated that these moments were a valuable source of life knowledge and wisdom. One student for example described how she had gained insights into how to pursue her chosen career, “I want to be a math teacher, [they can tell me about how to get

there] since they already accomplished what I want to accomplish.” And a senior boy described the impact a personal encounter with a counselor had for him:

The way that the counselor that I’ve had for four years has helped us is by being more than a counselor to us, by being our friend. ... I don’t think so many counselors or administrators are willing to share detailed personal things about themselves and she did. It made me feel closer. Here’s this lady, she’s just a school administrator, she’s supposed to help me with my classes --and she talks to me in a way where she shares her personal experiences. It really helped me to move on, to go to the next step and succeed.

For some students, this lack of distance and the knowledge of their teachers as real people, with their own history and experience, served as a powerful source of motivation:

It’s not just like when you see a teacher --I know when children are younger you see a teacher and you’re like, “Oh my god! It’s my teacher!” You feel like they’re something else. You kind of grow up with that. Then when I came here it’s like, no, it’s a person. You can talk to them. They can help you out. I think for me that’s been the basic reason I’ve been excelling, because it’s more of a one-to-one basis.

Being Pushed to Meet High Expectations

Many students spoke about the way in which the adults at Martin pushed them to reach higher academic goals. They provided examples of ways in which their teachers and administrators had encouraged and pushed them. A senior remembered how the principal had returned from a trip with college entrance exam preparation materials for him and how she had shared encouraging words about his future,

The principal really cares for students to succeed. She went to Austin for a seminar and she came back and she brought me a book about three or four inches thick on the SAT’s. She goes, “Here, so you can pass it and get accepted to Texas.”

A student receiving special education services recalled his favorite teacher and how she had convinced him of the necessity of sticking with school and graduating. A student

taking Advanced Placement courses explained how one teacher had made the difference in her pursuing her dream to apply to a competitive Northeastern university:

I wasn't going to apply to MIT, I had decided that I wasn't going to apply because I wasn't going to make it. I talked with my teacher and she forced me to apply and I got accepted. If it wouldn't have been for her, I would have stayed here and my dreams wouldn't have come true.

A junior spoke in general terms about the impact of this support and “push” from adults at Martin:

When you don't have the parental background, the “family push” and you have the school, you have the teachers, you have the administration behind you --it makes up for everything else. You feel important. You feel, you know, “I can do it.” If they truly believe in me then maybe I am worth it. Maybe I am what they think I am. It pushes students.

Students also described several school-wide efforts at Martin to increase the rigor of the high school experience for all students and explained how this had affected them. They told us that there was an expectation that every student graduate with the state's “Recommended” graduation plan rather than merely with the minimum graduation requirements. Several students noted the school's support for their participation in the state's Distinguished Achievement Plan (DAP). This plan requires that students meet even more rigorous coursework requirements than the “Recommended” plan. For example, it includes more foreign language coursework requirements, encourages students to take AP and college level classes, and offers an option to conduct an integrated project that is judged by outside examiners. “The teachers push you so much. I'm going to do a DAP project, it's sort of what college students do so that they can get their Masters, their thesis. They push you to the limit.” Indeed, one student explained how an administrator had pushed her beyond the DAP project, encouraging her to present her DAP research findings at a state conference for school administrators. She recalled,

I was like, “Oh god.” ... It was a lot of work. I went over there and it was an experience in itself. It was about 25 to 30 people, but it's an experience in itself, just talking to people that have their PhD's, that

have their careers, and they're learning from you. You're standing there and you're talking to these people, and they're just looking at you like, "Wow." It makes you feel like you've done something. I was like, "Wow." You can do things in high school that make a difference.

ADULT ACCOUNTS

Explicit Adult Talk of Caring

As in the other two schools, there is little explicit talk of caring among either the administrators or the teachers. Caring is not a major feature of the rhetoric of the school. In fact, there was no explicit mention of caring by administrators and only one mention by a faculty member. In that case, a teacher in the special education department said that he felt it very important to have "people that are in place, that care." He asserted that student can pick up on whether or not adults care about them and believed that this has a major impact on their willingness to continue to work with teachers.

Several comments, which did not explicitly use the word "care" or "caring," nonetheless provided insight into how staff perceived this phenomenon at the school. For example, one teacher, who had experience working at other schools, commented on the high degree of "interest" that the Martin faculty demonstrated for their students. Also, a parent who is active on the Campus Education Improvement Committee lauded the school for its efforts to make sure students did not get lost and fall through the cracks. As she said, "Once they step in here they make sure that whatever needs to be taken care of is looked at, and they do have a very supportive staff and teachers. Our kids here are, I think, 100% proof here that they are being taken care of."

“CARING ABOUT”: Adult Perceptions of Student Needs

It is important to note at the outset, that talk about student “needs” was not a salient feature of the interview transcripts. Compared with the other two schools there was comparatively little commentary or speculation about “what students needed.” With the exception of discussion of academic needs, the staff’s talk about needs, as deficits, were very infrequent. So, I began to look for needs defined in terms of developmental goals as well as needs defined in terms of a gap to be filled. Talk about the students’ academic needs and their needs to develop scholastic skills were most prominent in the interviews. Throughout the transcripts a metaphor of opening doors for students was striking. Adults felt that students needed to be exposed to a wide variety of opportunities and encouraged to move beyond the confines of their Laredo community. In addition, teachers and administrators believed that students needed to be pushed and motivated to attain higher goals, and that they needed to develop responsibility and civic pride through community service.

It was also interesting to note that when staff talked about students’ experience or background they joined with students frequently using the pronouns “we” and “our” to describe a shared conditions/context.

“They need to work on some basic skills”

The administrators and teachers at Martin observed that their students had many academic needs. Like their counterparts at Mountain View High School, they viewed their students as “good kids” who had potential. However, they were clear about the fact that their students arrived in high school still needing to master some basic academic skills. Teachers expressed particular concern about the students’ language skills. They noted not only that many 9th graders were coming to high school with inadequate reading skills, but that even the more advanced students in AP needed language enrichment so

that they could better handle the rigorous reading and writing assignments that were standard in these courses. As a result the staff initiated several programs to respond to these needs. The established a Reading Improvement course, taught by trained reading specialists, that focused on the basic reading skills, and they instituted a year-long course for Freshman English. In addition they are in the process of initiating a vocabulary building program school-wide.

In fact, the staff at Martin was very engaged in the process of using a variety of sources of student assessment data (including the TAAS, practice AP and end of course exams, and feedback from the community college instructors) to identify student academic needs. Indeed this was a prominent theme in the interviews. Teachers' descriptions of this process conveyed a sense of their empowerment in having information that helped them notice and identify academic needs. Indeed the staff seemed to be quite aggressive in their approach to identifying student academic needs, displaying an almost bold stance in looking squarely at where their students stand.

“We very much believe in getting the kids out there”

Throughout the administrative and teacher interviews there were many references to their desire to “open doors” for the students and to foster their ability to gain experience beyond their Laredo community. The principal was particularly explicit about this goal and commented several times without further explanation how “uniquely we live in Laredo,” and her belief that students would gain significantly in being able to live, work, or study outside their immediate environment. As she said,

We very much believe in getting the kids out there. We live very uniquely here in Laredo. Very, very uniquely. But it's another world out there. We always tell the kids, “If you can go out there and go to MIT, if you can go to Kingsville, if you can go to UTSA, anywhere, go. Take advantage of that.” In her view a central student need was to be made aware of the host of options and opportunities available to them.

Many staff members interviewed also articulated that they saw it as their responsibility to make students aware of these opportunities and to nurture their curiosity and motivation to pursue them. As the principal said, “We have to be the key that opens that door and says, “Look all of this is available.” Toward this end the school has an “inclusive” admissions policy for their Advanced Placement courses, allowing students who express an interest and are willing work hard to enroll in the courses. The staff also cultivated relationships with two local community colleges and promoted their dual and concurrent enrollment programs.

Teachers spoke about many school programs as vehicles to help students increase their chances to “move beyond”. For example, one teacher highlighted the value of AP for her students because it gives them exposure to the types of courses they would take in college and she asserted that the high school experience of college work would lead them to consider college. Similarly they were very conscious that student participation in extra-curricular activities made them more desirable and competitive candidates for jobs, scholarships, and college admission. Speaking about the school’s emphasis on community service, one teacher said, “We highly encourage it, because you don’t want them --when it comes to university of scholarships-- for them to leave that area blank.”

“Tell them they can do it, and they will do it”

Many of teachers and administrators believed the students needed to be pushed and motivated to reach higher academic goals. Many felt that the students would rise to meet the expectations they set as teachers. “We’re expecting [our students] to do better and they rise to our expectations. We’re not supposed to drop our expectations down to their level, we’re supposed to have them come up to meet ours, and they do.” Indeed, the Martin teachers and administrators we interviewed were quite expressive about their high standards for students. For example, they have established a school norm that students

must complete the recommended high school program in order to graduate rather than simply fulfill the minimum graduation requirements. The principal must personally review and approve any student petition to graduate with the minimum plan only. Students are encouraged to try AP courses and to pursue the goal of graduating with the Distinguished Academic Plan, an even more rigorous set of requirements. As one teacher explained,

There's a great emphasis on them joining the pre-AP and the AP program. Students are aware of that and they strive for that. I think because we are always saying, "Let's join the AP program, let's join the DAP, let's try to do this," students are more motivated to get into these programs."

While the school has focused increased resources on preparing students to pass the TAAS, the end goal envisioned and promoted by staff is to score at a level high enough to be exempted from the exam required to enter community college. In addition, the school has the expectation that most students receiving special education services will take TAAS.

The staff believed that the students needed to be prodded to stretch themselves to take on these new and more difficult challenges. For example, speaking of the students' approach to the sequence of mathematics courses offered at the school, one teacher explained, "Many of the kids just want to take what's required and then they want to quit. Algebra II and that's it." A reading teacher said,

I do a lot of individual work with them because if they're having trouble with reading then they don't want to do the work, and if I just leave them alone they're not going to do it, and they'll end up failing or I'm going to be giving them a lot of make-up. What I do is I have a little group, my reluctant learners I like to call them, and I sit with them .to make sure they're on task, to help them read, to help them with any problems that they're having.

The administration made it difficult for students to take the easier course options or to prematurely choose a vocational track. For example, students were not allowed to enroll in the school's work and study program until they had passed the TAAS, and only the

principal could approve graduation with the minimum plan. Teachers described a wide array of techniques they used to motivate and encourage students, from enthusiastic pep talks to appealing incentives. “Just telling them to be positive and think positive. Tell them that they can do it and they will do it.” They also underlined the importance of recognizing and rewarding their students’ achievement. Echoing the sentiments expressed by staff at Brazosport, one teacher at Martin underlined the importance of rewards for high school aged students, “[W]e tend to think at the high school level, maybe because they’re in larger bodies....we tend to think, that’s elementary level, putting a star on their papers. [T]hey’re looking for their star too.”

“You need to have that sense of pride also to help your community”

The staff at Martin High School believed students needed to develop responsibility for their community and learn how to give back to their community. Toward this end, they actively encouraged all students to participate in some form of community service. The teachers estimated that approximately 90% of their students were involved in some form of community service. “Most all of the students, if not all of them get at least 40 hours of community service. They are encouraged by us and by the teachers, staff, to get involved, and they do.”

To recognize the value of such service they had recently instituted a special graduation honor for any student who had documented more than 100 hours of community service during their high school years. Students who accomplished this received a silver cord at their graduation ceremony. Because some students had exceeded 100 hours of service, the staff had changed the policy for the upcoming graduation so that students would get one silver cord for each 100 hours of community service. When speaking of their approach to community service, teachers did so in a manner that suggested they felt this commitment was something special to the identity of Martin. “We’re the only local school here that does this.”

While the faculty indicated that there were a variety of advantages in doing the community service, including benefits for scholarship and college applications, as well as benefits to the school itself from student assistance as classroom peer tutors, it was clear that the underlying purpose was to instill a sense of “pride” and “responsibility” to their community. As one teacher said, “You need to have that sense of pride also to help your community.” They saw this as an important developmental goal for every student. As one said, “What’s wonderful about this is that it isn’t all academics. These kids don’t have to be the world’s geniuses to give themselves to the community. It’s teaching them responsibility.” A dialogue between teachers in a focus group further highlighted that their underlying purpose was to develop an orientation and attitude of service. They recounted a discussion with a student who wanted to count court ordered community service toward his school community service hours. The teachers informed him that if the service was ordered, it wasn’t community service. She recalled her question to him, “Did you do those community service hours out of your heart or did you do them because you were ordered to?” He said, ‘Well I had to.’ I said, ‘Then that’s not community service.’”

“TAKING CARE”: Adults’ Perceived Relationship to Student Needs

Responsibility to Meet Student Needs

The administration was adamant that it was the school’s responsibility to meet the students at their academic level and pull them up to the high standards of performance set by the school. This was apparent both through their expectations for individual teachers as well as through the many programs and curricular changes that had been conceived to respond to students’ academic needs.

Quality teaching was not simply judged by one’s mastery of the subject matter, but rather by one’s skill and ability in reaching each and every student and providing them with

assistance and instruction so that they could master the grade level work at hand. As the principal explained, “The teachers have to work with the kids. The teacher may be up here [gesturing with hands to show a high level], and the child has the ability to get there, but somebody’s got to put the hand forward and bring them to this pass.” The administrators and curriculum specialists explained that they watched for this very carefully in their teachers and noted several situations in which teachers’ assignments had to be changed because they did not successfully teach to “reach” the children.

Describing a problem she had with a teacher one assistant principal said,

The teacher was under the impression that it [the presentation, the lesson] stays up here and the students have to reach him. So I was saying, “They can get here and maybe even go beyond you to where they can learn in spite of you, not because of you.” And I said, “You need to help us bridge that gap, and bring them up here and fly away. These are my expectations. I don’t want you to lower my expectations, because after all we want college-bound student. That’s where I want you to get them to. Therefore we go back and see what we can do to meet those needs.

Teachers’ comments suggested a more limited sense of responsibility. Several of the teachers we interviewed spoke in similar terms of their responsibility toward their students,

We always have kids that just come to school and don’t do a thing, a single thing. We try to reach them one way or another, and of course many times or sometimes we are not successful. But many times... I guess as long as we try to reach the kids, that is our job. If we don’t succeed every time, I don’t feel too bad about it because at least I tried. I have a lot more kids to worry about than just one. I always try to reach the kid and I always tell him, it’s never too late. I contact the parents if necessary, I contact an administrator.

Beliefs about Teacher and Student Capacity

The data suggests that over the last several years the staff at Martin have very consciously been shifting their beliefs about their capacity and responsibility to make their school and students successful. As one veteran teacher shared,

People would say, ‘I don’t think Martin can do very much’, because at the time we had very low scores, but we started saying, ‘Hey, we can do it. We are just as good as everyone else, we just have to put our effort on this and do something about it.

In comparison with the other two study schools, it seemed that the teachers did not voice the same level of confidence in their capacity to be successful with their students. In fact some of them mentioned feeling less prepared than they would like to be to take on the challenges of a particular course. Others seemed tentative when talking about their ability to be successful with their students. At the same time however, almost each and every teacher interviewed spoke about the extensive professional development and in-house training available. One teacher underlined the administration’s commitment to their learning and growth by explaining how even in a time of budget cuts the administration would not accept a suggestion to cut the teacher travel budget for professional development and conferences. As she recalled being told by an administrator, “No, you can’t cut there. Those teachers need to get out.” So while some of the teachers interviewed conveyed a tone of uncertainty about their capacity they also described steps they were taking to gain more expertise. It was striking that one relatively young teacher who was asked to take on the AP Calculus decided she would not only pursue the AP training required, but also that she would enroll in a college-level Calculus course in order to refresh her knowledge and feel more adequately prepared.

It was also noteworthy that one teacher commented that despite the increasing performance demands they did not seem stressed-out or overwhelmed. This, he suggested, was a tribute to the administration. Indeed, there was a wide consensus among the teachers that the administration was extremely supportive to them in their

work. Most all the teachers interviewed were able to quickly list a number of colleagues and administrators to whom they routinely turned for help. A new teacher described her experience:

I find a lot of support in my department. I find that it's so easy. There's so many people you can go to for help. It's funny, because when I got here I thought, 'It's such a big school, it's not going to be that way.' But it is, people are friendly and helpful.

“CARE-GIVING”: Actions and Resources

Time to Meet Student Needs

As at the other two schools, students at Martin emphasized their teachers' availability and readiness to help them with both academic and personal issues. Here again we are pressed to consider how the adults managed to be so available to their students. Teachers and administrators indicated that they did make themselves available at non-class times such as during lunch or after school. Like the other two schools, teachers said it was the norm that many of them would be in their classrooms after school tutoring students. One Master Teacher characterized her colleagues' willingness to work outside classroom hours this way, "We don't have any trouble getting the teachers. If we need the teachers during lunch, they'll come in. If we need them after school, they'll come in." Indeed, the administration had established formal after-school tutoring programs in addition to offering informal tutoring. One such program was targeted specifically to 9th graders and geared to providing the support they needed to keep them in school.

Administrators at Martin have also developed a strategic way of using local college tutors and student peer tutors to assist in the classroom so that more students have the opportunity to have individual learning needs met. The presence of tutors in the classroom frees the teachers from administrative tasks and allows them to spend more time with their students. Tutors themselves also respond to individual students and provide extra assistance.

It is also likely that the students find teachers and administrators available because of the “open door policy” that has become a widespread practice among adults at the school. The principal has established a policy and practice of being visible and having “an open door.” She took this very seriously when she started, rearranging her office and repositioning her desk so that she is visible and looking out to the waiting area when she is working. The assistant principals underlined that this policy is indeed a reality and that they, other teachers, students and parents are welcome to stop in anytime:

I think the open door policy is very alive here. The principal never closes her door. Never!” They also indicated that this policy is expected from them as well, “The principal expects us to do what she does, and we do it. Our doors are open.

Individual Student Planning and Support

Martin students highlighted the degree to which adults at the school knew them and took an individual interest in them. Several practices appear to be contributing to this individualized attention that seems to be the norm at Martin. First, the curriculum specialists in charge of developing students’ course schedules review each and every student’s program of work individually so that it satisfies requirements and best prepares them for their long-term goals. One staff member described her approach to this with her students, “Tell me what you want to take and tell me what you need to have and I’ll go by that,” and commented about that benefits she saw, “I think our students knew why they were there and what their goals were.”

Several changes and improvements in the student counseling services also likely contribute to students’ perceptions that adults are dedicated to them as individuals. The student counseling offices have recently been given center stage at the school. They moved from their once cramped quarters to an ample and central space in the school’s former cafeteria. Counselors commented that they are now able to meet with students in privacy. Reconfigured work assignments for the counselors also ensure that they will be

able to get to know and work with individual students over time. Counselors at Martin are each assigned students from one grade level and they follow this cohort of students throughout their four years at high school.

CHAPTER FIVE

CROSS CASE ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents results of the cross case analysis. In the initial section of this chapter, findings from the analysis of the student interviews from the three schools are presented and discussed. The second section of the chapter is devoted to a presentation and discussion of the cross case analysis of adult interviews from the schools.

RECEIVING CARE - STUDENT ACCOUNTS OF CARING

Through examining student accounts within the archival data from each of the three schools we have been able to learn about what students themselves experience and perceive as caring within the high school setting. The results of this study suggest that for students good teaching is the most important expression of caring in the high school setting. The findings underscore the usefulness of conceptualizing caring as a practice -- namely identifying and responding to needs-- that takes on very distinct shapes in specific contexts. For our high school students, teachers cared by responding to their academic needs as high school students, responding to their developmental needs as older adolescents, and responding to their unique needs as low-income and minority adolescents.

Theme I: Having Teachers Willing and Available to Help

The consistent finding across all three schools was that students experienced teachers as caring when they took time to help them understand and master schoolwork. In speaking about this they emphasized their teachers' availability and willingness to help. As one student from Brazosport said, "We don't have to pay people to tutor us. All we have to do is go to our teachers after school. They are always there." In speaking about this students repeatedly spoke about the time that teachers gave to work with them.

Especially at Mountain View and Brazosport High Schools students had the impression

that teachers were “always there.” They spoke proudly of the long hours their teachers worked to help them. Examining their words it becomes clear that for these students the hours that teachers spent working with them and helping them signaled their devotion. As one student from Mountain View said, “They’ll take their time. They would even take after school time, their life. They would even leave their family to be with us.”

In addition to highlighting teachers’ willingness and availability to help them, the students also made comments, which provide insight into the qualitative aspects of their teachers’ help. Students appreciated the fact that teachers accepted and responded to their questions without making them feel “stupid” or embarrassed. As a Brazosport student said, “He’s a really cool teacher, if it’s something really stupid, he doesn’t make you feel stupid about it. He helps you out.” Questions were welcomed. No question was unimportant, and no individual student was unworthy of receiving help. As another Brazosport student said, “In every class I had...they make sure that everyone gets it.”

Theme II: Seeing that Peers are Supported

In fact, the perception that help is available to all their peers surfaced as a major theme in two schools - Mountain View and Brazosport. That is, the perception that teachers and administrators were there for everyone, and would not give up on anyone regardless of their status and behavior contributed to the students’ sense of the school being a caring place. It appeared to mean a great deal to students to know that teachers did not leave anyone behind. The prevailing feeling was that “Every teacher roots for every kid.” And “They don’t leave anybody out.” The students experienced their schools as being special in this respect. They shared stories of how teachers and principals worked creatively and persistently to help fellow students who had difficulties. Students at Mountain View and Brazosport proudly described their school’s efforts to help students who are pregnant get through school. They also remembered how teachers worked with students who had behavior problems, or those who had complicated schedules due to work or home

demands. As one Brazosport student explained, “Like this one bad student I knew had a problem, but the teacher wasn’t going to give up on him. He gave him a chance even though he had disciplinary problems and stuff. Because you can’t just throw him away like that, throw him out.” Students frequently noted the quality of flexibility in this context; appreciating their teachers’ willingness to tailor solutions to best address individual needs and support their academic success.

Theme III: Being Pushed

Students experienced their teachers pushing them to succeed and meet higher goals as caring. This was true for students who were struggling and were pushed to keep working as well as for high-performing students who were pushed to go further. In fact, this theme was one of the strongest to emerge from the Mountain View student data and one most clearly linked to the notion of caring. It appeared as a major theme in the Martin student data, and was present in the Brazosport data as well. One Mountain View student’s words made this connection explicit, “I never thought teachers cared about us, but I think they do, because if they’re going to push us to where they’re getting us to get A’s then I think they really do care.” Students provided stories of how had benefited from their teachers’ encouragement and insistence to meet high standards. Several had reached goals they would never have imagined had it not been for their teachers’ encouragement. In contrast, students criticized other schools where teachers allowed students to get away with not doing assignments, or turn in mediocre work, as “not caring.” It is interesting to note that at Mountain View High School students valued not only the adults’ high standards for their school work, but for their conduct as well. For these students, being “polite and dressed right” gave them confidence in their interactions with the wider community, especially as they applied for jobs, and even more importantly it evoked welcome and long overdue positive recognition from the community at large.

In addition to the primary finding that caring practices which those that provided academic support, students at all three schools identified specific aspects of adults' interactions with them that they found especially valuable and that communicated care. Although these themes in slightly different ways in each of the three schools, they nonetheless had much in common across the three schools.

Theme IV: Experiencing Adult Involvement and Attention

Experiencing the adults at the school as engaged and involved in their lives was very important to students. This theme was especially notable in the Brazosport and Martin student accounts, but was definitely present in the Mountain View interviews as well. Students at these schools experienced the adults as actively reaching out and connecting with them as individuals. They spoke about the positive impact of receiving their teachers' daily informal greetings when they arrive to school or to class, and their teachers' and administrators' active and consistent involvement and participation in their extra-curricular activities. They conveyed the sense that they knew that teachers and administrators were observing and watching them because they were invested in their success and well-being. Many students conveyed a sense that their teachers and other adults at the school enjoyed spending time with them and wanted to be with them. As a Brazosport student said, "I think all the faculty wants to be here. I've heard numerous teachers say they wouldn't be anywhere else." "Talking about on our level, that's Ms. K. She is very rarely with other teachers, she would rather be with the kids than with anybody else." Several even recalled things their teachers had told them to that effect. The end result for students was that they felt "known," "cared about", and "special". In fact, as two strikingly similar comments from Martin and Brazosport students indicate, the students felt that their needs and concerns were the main priority of adults at the school. A Martin student said, "You can come in here and they are here. It makes you feel important. The school is for you, not you're for the school." And a Brazosport

student said, “The principal cares about the school and everything, but he cares about us more than the school.”

Related to this, students experienced caring through adults’ availability and willingness to listen to them and help with personal issues. This theme was especially prominent in the Brazosport and Martin interviews. Students’ stories indicated that they especially valued having the adults’ time and undivided attention. They highlighted their school administrators’ open-door policies and indicated they felt free to take advantage of the open doors and seek the help and guidance they needed on a wide range of issues, personal as well as academic. They also felt welcome to stop by their teachers’ classrooms to chat and get help. Here again, as was the case with the perception of availability of help with academics, the students stressed adults’ generosity with time, referring frequently to the time they had taken to listen to them and help them resolve their problems. As one Martin student’s comments suggested, small but courteous gestures such as refusing to take incoming calls when in a counseling appointment made a tremendous and memorable impact.

The student accounts also shed light on aspects and qualities of their interactions with teachers and other adults at the school that they felt especially important to them and their development. The comments had different flavor at each school, but all shared an element of respect for the developing individuality and agency of the adolescent.

Theme V: Experiencing Respect and Mutuality in Relationships

At Martin, the theme that emerged from the interview data was that students really enjoyed and benefited from having the opportunity to experience adults as people in their own right. In speaking about this, students would often point to a loosening of the hierarchical boundaries and role divisions, and describe the adults at school as “also friends”. Students valued non-classroom, structured, activities with teachers in which

they got to know more about the teacher and life experience. Students noted that obtaining deeper knowledge of their teachers' personal experiences was motivating and inspiring. The students commented that this personal information helped them develop their own plans about careers, and helped them persevere through tough personal challenges. As this Brazosport student's comment about their principal indicates, students appreciated adults being able to move flexibly between their adult, authoritative role and a more personal, friendly interactions with students:

He can be on our level at some times. He's on our level, but we respect him. He knows how to talk to us like we talk to each other, but he also knows how to talk above us." Another student added, "When you need him to be principal, he's a principal. Or when you need him to be your best friend, he can be your best friend, just to talk.

Students at Mountain View High School highlighted the consistently respectful and polite manner in which teachers and administrators interacted with them. This in turn engendered their respect. Students described the respectful way the adults approached them about discipline, mentioning how teachers and administrators would talk with them about the consequences of various actions and appeal to their abilities to make good decisions and act in their own best interests. They described this, as did students at the other schools, as teachers treating them more like friends or peers than as students. As at the other schools the adults ability to both communicate with them more as peers as well as to continue to guide and teach them. As one Mountain View student explained, "None of the teachers here treat us like students. They treat us like friends and they are teaching us at the same time. They are not forcing us, they are showing us."

Discussion of Student Cross Case Results

Using students' own accounts to understand what they themselves perceive and experience as caring has been very instructive, providing a great deal of clarity about what students in high school need and want from the adults there. Let there be no mistake, our data shows that adults in schools appear to be very important to students. We see that what it means to care in high the high school context is very specific and

very practical. First and foremost, the students in these three schools were consistent in asserting that they felt cared for through their teachers' efforts to help them be successful with their schoolwork. This finding makes complete sense given that progressing academically and being successful in school is a primary need of students in high school. This finding resonates with anecdotal student accounts of caring found in our review of the literature in which "helping with school work", and "taking time to explain" have been consistently present and linked to caring by students at all grade levels, even elementary school (Altenbaugh et al., 1995; Noblit & Rogers, 1995; Wasley et al, 1997; Wilson & Corbett, 2001; Van Galen, 1996). The findings of the current research are very consistent with those reported by Wilson and Corbett, who listened carefully to middle school students' comments about the teachers they wanted and realized that students interpreted teachers' efforts to teach and make sure they learned as evidence of caring. As Wilson and Corbett asserted, "Teachers who taught, cared; teachers who did not teach did not care" (p.123). The current study confirms their insight and extends the findings to the high school level. Caring in a school setting is conveyed, first and foremost, through good teaching. This main finding reminds us of the importance of thinking about "caring" as a practice not solely in more common-sense affective terms.

The results of this study also underline the importance of conceptualizing caring as a practice that takes on specific shapes and forms in different contexts. As Tronto (1993) pointed out, "Conceptually care is both particular and universal" and "...care is not universal with regard to any specific needs, but all humans have needs that others must help them meet (p.109-110). The high school students we interviewed helped us understand how very specific and important needs were being met by adults at school, as teachers and administrators responded to their academic needs, their developmental needs, and needs related to their unique position as poor, adolescents of color.

In terms of developmental needs, the adolescents in all three schools valued the way in which adults at the schools related to them. Their words painted a picture of these

interactions in terms of what is best described in the psychological literature as authoritative (Baumrind, 1971; 1987; Steinberg, 2001). That is, they valued adults “pushing them” and having “high expectations” for their school performance and behavior, and appreciated adults’ positive regard, and attention. Indeed, this can be seen as an educational variant or manifestation of authoritative parenting, which combines “demandingness” and affective responsiveness (Baumrind, 1987), or “warmth and firmness” (Steinberg, 1990; 2001). Along these same lines, students appreciated adults’ flexibility in shifting between their role as authorities and more hierarchically equivalent and mutual relationships that felt “more like friends.” Indeed their words suggested a sense of comfort and security in knowing that they could rely on adults to know when to be in the teacher or principal role and when to relate to them more as peers. This finding resonates with another key dimension of authoritative parenting, namely that adults must be attuned to changes in their children and constantly adapt to their shifting need for more stimulation, challenge, and responsibility (Baumrind, 1987). As Baumrind explained, “Authoritative parents characteristically maintain an appropriate ratio of children’s autonomy to parental control at all ages.” (1987, p. 112) She goes on to note that for adolescents this generally means allowing increasing levels of autonomy. We learned, from the adolescents interviewed, that many of the adults at school showed demonstrated this responsiveness in their interactions. In addition, students also especially remembered and appreciated adults who would engage them in thoughtful discussion of rule and consequences. As one student said, for example, “None of the teachers here treat us like students, they treat us like friends and they are teaching us at the same time. They are not forcing us; they are showing us, “Well if you don’t do this, this will happen.” This finding reflects another important dimension of authoritative parenting; discussed by Baumrind (1987) as “encouraging adolescents to voice dissent”, and by Steinberg (2001) as fostering “democratic interactions”. It is also reminiscent of the developmentally useful process “parental control” described by Sartor and Youniss (2001), which stresses reasoning about consequences within a nurturing and connected relationship. Steinberg especially has emphasized the ways in which parents who allow

and tolerate such “give and take” between themselves and their adolescent children promote their development of social skills.

Students in all three schools highlighted their experience of being “known”, and feeling “important” to the adults at the schools. In fact, several students interviewed from the three schools commented adult’s behavior led them to feel they were indeed the most important focus of the school. They had come to expect teachers and administrators presence at their games and extracurricular events and experienced this as a sign of interest and support. Several student comments conveyed a happy and delighted sense that they were liked by, and attractive to, the adults at the school. As Erikson (1950; 1968) explained, successful identity development in adolescence depends on the interpersonal process of reflection and recognition by others, especially significant adults. The experience of being known personally, not just being “a number”, as one student in our sample said, is important at any age, but is of special developmental importance in this period of adolescence as the youth experiments with and asserts a more independent self. It’s important to emphasize that students felt known and liked not just by their teachers, but by their principals and assistant principals as well. My own observations during fieldwork in other high schools and the literature (Altenbaugh et al., 1995) suggest that this situation is rare in many high schools. Relationships between students and administrators in these schools contrasted sharply with the distant and shadowy relationships more typically reported (Altenbaugh et al., 1995). It’s possible that for adolescents, having the positive regard and personal rapport with their principals and other administrators is especially valuable developmentally, because these individuals are the most important figures in the school setting. As Erikson (1968) has noted successful identity development is intimately connected with “an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count” (p. 164). As our student participants told us, a morning greeting in the hall, a question about the soccer game last night, noticing a new haircut, following up on an academic question or goal --all these actions,

as small as they may seem-- went a long way in conveying a positive message about their worth and interest as individuals.

Turning to consider another even more “local” context that shaped these students need for and experience of care, we learned that they had special needs owing to their status as low-income and minority youth. Specifically, they had needs relating to experiences of discrimination and prejudice. The students at Mountain View and Brazosport especially were acutely aware of the negative stereotypes held about them by people from the surrounding communities. Their comments and questions to us as we were interviewing were poignant and memorable. They said they weren’t “trash kids” and they didn’t “live in piles.” But yet these were the messages reflected back by the wider community. They were clearly troubled by the fact that they had been misperceived by the wider community prior to their school gaining success on the visible and highly publicized state assessment. Brazosport High School students noted, with confusion and outrage, that the local press would cover any event of the upper-middle class high school, while leaving their achievements unreported and unrecognized. Principals and teachers in these schools actively promoted positive messages about the students worth and accomplishments, both within the campus to the students themselves and to the wider community. The adults often openly acknowledged and did rhetorical battle with the stereotypes, providing students with a strong critique of the notion that they were somehow inferior. At Mountain View for example we noted that the principal worked hard so that the students’ appearance and behavior would challenge any stereotypes they might encounter. Analysis of student comments made clear that for students in these schools the experience of achieving the state status of “Recognized” or “Exemplary” had a more powerful meaning. With this achievement they finally received positive recognition --of the Eriksonian sort-- from the wider community. We observed a process with the dress code and standards for “professional” conduct at Mountain View. Students experienced pride in their appearance and appreciated the positive comments they received from the wider community. Thus we learned students experienced and

“received care” as the adults at school helped them gain recognition in the wider community, buffered the impact of negative stereotypes, and provided them with alternative and more positive ways of seeing themselves. In doing so, these adults were responding appropriately, and as Spencer and her colleagues (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Youngblood & Spencer, 2002) would recommend, to developmental needs that these adolescents faced due to status as low-income and minority youth.

PRACTICING CARE: ADULT ACCOUNTS

Through analyzing the interviews of teachers, administrators, and other staff members at the three schools using Tronto’s (1993) theoretical outline of caring practice we gained insight into how adults perceived student needs, and how they conceptualized their own role in meeting these needs. To a more limited extent, due to the nature and limitations of the data available, we were able to identify some of the important actions taken and resources used to meet student needs. Results of this analysis suggest that adults in all three schools emphasized addressing students’ academic needs and providing them with exposure to experiences and opportunities beyond their immediate communities. They were concerned about the need to motivate and push students. Adults at all three schools had different underlying assumptions –stereotypes perhaps-- about the students and their families, and these appeared to influence their perceptions of student needs. Beliefs of student competency and adult competency to meet student needs were present, especially in two of the three schools. This enabled adults to be quite active and creative in “taking care” of their students. Giving time appeared to be a central component underlying many different practices of care in high schools, for example, helping with homework, listening to a concern, watching an after school game. Teachers and staff at these schools made intentional decisions, in day-to-day practice and policy, to maximize time with students.

Caring About

Although most approaches to caring leave the purposes unexamined, as if assuming that the provision of care is necessarily benign and an end in itself, Tronto's theory highlights the fact that caring has very specific aims and that these aims are related to the care-giver's understanding and definition of the care-recipient's needs. Indeed, becoming aware of a need and deciding it should be met are the central components of the first step in the process of caring, the step that Tronto calls, "Caring About." I examined the data to see how the adults at each of the three schools perceived their students needs. In doing this, I was not attempting to be exhaustive or account for all the adults' perceptions of students' needs; but rather, I looked for recurrent statements about needs and looked for commonly shared perceptions of needs across school staff. It was my thought that these predominant and widely shared perceptions of student needs would be more likely to be driving adults actions and behaviors -caring practice- in the schools.

Theme I: Adults Perceive and Prioritize Basic Academic Needs

Adults at all three schools highlighted students' academic needs. In talking about the student's academic needs they noted the importance of addressing their teaching to the specific learning needs of the student. In other words, they were concerned about meeting the student at his or her academic level. In most cases, this involved a focus on basic skills, such as developing "academic language", enriching vocabulary, and teaching test-taking skills. Principals advocated student-centered teaching and had little tolerance for teachers who were solely focused on teaching their subject matter.

Theme II - Adults Perceive Students' Need for Exposure and Experience

Adults at all three schools emphasized students' needs to be exposed to experiences and opportunities beyond those provided by their immediate community. They devoted

significant time and resources to creating these opportunities; which included, foreign exchange programs, culturally and scientifically oriented field trips, early college exposure through dual-credit arrangements at community colleges or through utilizing college tutors in their classrooms, and innovative community-service programs.

Theme III - Adults Perceive Students' Need for Motivation

At two of the three schools, Brazosport and Martin, adults spoke at length about students' need to be pushed and motivated. And, based on their reports, they appeared to dedicate considerable time, effort, and creativity in their efforts to encourage students to strive to meet higher academic and personal goals.

Unique and Local Perceptions of Student Needs

It was interesting, if not surprising, to find that adults at each of the three schools had developed shared perceptions of student needs that were unique to their school. For example, Mountain View's staff were consistently vocal about the need for students to "be professional" in their appearance and behavior; while Martin High School's staff emphasized students' needs to develop a sense of service and give back to their community. Adults at Brazosport, on the other hand, put a special and notable emphasis on students' need to have fun, and to be "celebrated" and recognized.

Analysis of the interviews suggested that adults the three schools had different underlying assumptions about students and their families as they consciously or unconsciously developed their perceptions of student needs. In addition, I noted differences in the extent to which perceptions of student needs were commonly shared. At Mountain View and Brazosport certain perceptions of needs were widely shared and consistent across staff. This was much less true at Martin where it was rather difficult to discern and identify shared perceptions of student needs among the staff.

At Mountain View, adults generally described student needs as resulting from limitations in their physical environment, not in terms of their intrinsic or native abilities and aptitudes, nor in terms of the attitudes and behaviors of their parents or families. In fact, adults at the school spoke about community parents with considerable respect, and acknowledged their initiative and persistent support for their children's education. The adults at Mountain View were very attentive and attuned to the limitations of the students' social environment. Indeed it would be hard not to be, given the stark visible contrast they undoubtedly observed daily during their commute from suburban or urban residences to the underdeveloped and under-served colonias of the Montana area. The principal herself had a highly developed political consciousness and was acutely aware of the real and potential neglect and damage to her school and students due to negative stereotyping and racial and ethnic power relations. She dedicated significant energy to reversing these negative perceptions of her school and the students.

At Brazosport, in contrast, student needs were generally discussed in terms of deficits associated with students' families. For example, adults believed that students needed to be pushed because they did not get enough encouragement at home, they must be exposed to college because their parents would not have been likely to go to college, and they must have someone attend school events because parents weren't likely to attend. In expressing these views staff would hasten to add that it wasn't due to families not caring, but more due to their lack of opportunities and resources. Although they might speak of family deficits, the staff never seemed to speak of student deficit. Rather, they frequently expressed the belief that their students could learn. It's important to note that Brazosport staff had, for several years prior to the research, been involved in extensive district-wide training in order to improve teaching and student performance in its low-income schools. The widely shared belief --that resurfaced almost like a mantra in the interviews-- was that students could learn and be successful regardless of their family background.

At Martin, as noted above, there was relatively little staff speculation and commentary about students “needs”. Rather, adults were more likely to speak about what “we” need, indicating a closeness and identification with students, instead of a more objective or distanced stance. They were strangely inarticulate --probably reluctant-- when characterizing their students and community to the researchers. There was some indication in the interview data that this close perspective may actually have impaired their ability to identify student academic needs. Teachers indicated that through using performance assessments and focusing on outcome data --an effort that was being pushed by district leadership- that they were beginning to be more aware of where their students stood academically.

Taking Care

To consider the ways in which adults at the school negotiated this step in the process of caring, I examined the interviews to see how they conceived their relationship to the student needs they identified. First, did they feel able to address the perceived needs? This involved their perception of whether or not the need could be met, which in turn related to their perceptions of student competence as well as their own sense of competence and efficacy. Second, I examined the extent to which they assumed responsibility for meeting student needs. As Tronto points out the assumption of responsibility is essence of “taking-care”.

At both Mountain View and Brazosport High Schools, the adult interviews revealed a strongly shared belief that the students were able to learn and could be successful. Teachers and administrators saw students as capable and their potential not limited by their family background or circumstances. At Mountain View this belief came from within the school itself, whereas at Brazosport the belief was initially promoted by the school district and taken up by the school administrators and staff. In both of these schools adults’ perception that student needs could indeed be met was reinforced and consolidated over time by the students’ increasingly positive results on state assessments.

These positive results in turn affirmed teachers' own sense of competence and efficacy in their professional role and seemed to energize them to take on additional challenges. In fact, teachers at the schools were quite aware and articulate about the ways in which their views about the students' and their own capacity had developed over time.

Teachers at Mountain View and Brazosport were very assertive about taking personal responsibility and then jumping into action to address perceived student needs. Indeed, at Mountain View for example, the adults' sense of responsibility seemed to be heightened by their perception of the isolation and relative lack of material resources within the surrounding community. Many of their comments revealed the attitude, "If I don't do it who will?" At Brazosport, it was part of the district philosophy that higher student achievement would take dedication of additional resources and new ways of approaching problems. Interviews with teachers at Brazosport revealed that they had internalized this view. They worked actively to identify needs and then to respond. It's important to note that at both of these schools teachers expressed that they had their principal's and administration's support. They felt welcome and -at Brazosport especially- depended upon, to offer proposals, plans, and solutions to meet students' needs.

At Martin, teachers' comments are slightly different. While administrators strongly affirmed staff and student competence, and clearly saw it as their responsibility to support student achievement, teachers voiced a more limited sense of responsibility. I did not find the same sense of urgency and aggressive problem solving among Martin teachers as I had encountered in interviews with their counterparts at other two schools. Comments indicated that the teachers at the school had only recently begun to make a shift in how they saw themselves and their students:

Even up to a few years ago we were just hoping [the students] passed TAAS. Just so long as they pass TAAS and graduate. Now it's like 'Hey, let's pass the TAAS so that we can be exempt from TAAS.' And the kids are coming up. They're meeting those expectations.

It's important to note that Martin had come close, but had still not yet experienced the level of success that the other schools had on the highly visible and publicly reported measures of student achievement such as the TAAS and the End of Course Algebra examination. They had not yet experienced that confirmation. I believe the nature of Martin High teachers' self- and student appraisals reflected a nascent and emerging sense of capacity.

Despite these variations in the degree to which teachers at the three schools "took care" - the principals and administrative teams at all three schools prioritized their students' academic achievement, actively communicated high expectations for their students, and promoted and supported the development of their teachers' capacity to help their students meet the higher expectations.

Caring Giving

As Tronto (1993) pointed out, this step in the process of caring involves the direct work and actions to meet the needs that have been identified (p. 107). Through our interviews with the students, teachers, and administrators of these three schools, we heard accounts of many different ways in which adults actively responded to meet student needs. For example, the counselor at Mountain View, aware of her student's lack of exposure to other cultures, initiated a student exchange program. Also at Mountain View, staff recognized the students' difficulties with transportation and established an SAT testing site at Mountain View to facilitate their students taking the test. At Brazosport, responding to the academic needs of incoming freshman, the principal reorganized staffing assignments so that the most experienced and veteran teachers were working with the most needy students. And at Martin, a master teacher who had long observed student difficulties with advanced verbal comprehension, advocated for the adoption of a campus-wide vocabulary enrichment program. Indeed, the list of actions that adults took to meet shared and individual student needs is long.

Our data collection did not include any systematic school observations, so I cannot adequately describe the full range of actions nor analyze the ways in which adults at the schools worked to meet student needs. I cannot meaningfully trace or evaluate the ways in which perceptions and intentions translated into practice. Rather, staying true to the theoretical concept that student accounts of caring received indicates that caring has occurred and needs have been met, I focused on the action most consistently noted and appreciated by students across the three schools; namely, that adults “took their time” to help them with schoolwork, to listen and help them with their concerns, and to support and participate with them in their activities.

Although time is generally considered a scarce resource in high schools (Jackson & Davis, 2000), in each of these three high schools students experienced their teachers and administrators as having plenty of time for them. Results suggest that adults at these schools made personal choices and policy decisions that prioritized time with students. For example, staff members described long workdays and routines of coming in early and leaving late. Even more remarkable was the fact that they spoke about this without any resentment. To the contrary, they expressed pride, enthusiasm, and good humor about their decisions to dedicate their time to work with students. This was so noteworthy and different, that several teachers new to the schools commented on the generosity of time they observed in their colleagues. As a Martin teacher noted,

[Staff at] a lot of schools are very apathetic toward doing any extra duties. A lot of times we just kept to ourselves in our department, but here the atmosphere is different. I don't know how to explain it, but the atmosphere is different, just the fact that --you know how if you put people in a room they're not all going to get along, right, but here even though they don't get along, they still work toward one goal, and that goal is to make Martin successful.

Several factors appeared to have fostered and encouraged teachers' generosity with time. At all three schools, principals themselves modeled being generous with time for students. In fact, these principals themselves had the reputations of being ever present

and always available. Furthermore, teachers reported that their principals actively and consistently recognized them and appreciated their extra efforts on students' behalf. As this comment by a teacher at Martin indicates, receiving recognition for their hard work went a long way in promoting and motivating faculty to make extra efforts and give freely of their time:

The administration is very good. We always get a little poem or something and a piece of gum or whatever in our box. If you do something extra for [the students] next day you'll have a little note with a candy or something on it, which is appreciated. At least somebody's appreciating you. A very simple thank you from administration helps a lot.

In addition to findings that suggest that adults were actually giving extra time to students, at each of these schools there is evidence that administrators and teachers made important policy decisions and structural changes in order to create more opportunities for teachers to work and interact closely with students during the course of the regular school day. For example, at Mountain View a recently instituted extra "split-lunch" period allowed teachers to spend a short period each day with the same small group of students. Two daily planning periods at Mountain View also made it possible for teachers to accomplish all the work they needed without cutting into their direct time with students. Teachers also indicated that their active teaching styles allowed them to interact much more closely with students. At Brazosport, the administrations decisions to cut down on faculty meetings, to eliminate teacher "duty," and their active involvement in enforcing discipline, were all very consciously aimed at freeing teachers to teach.

Discussion - Adult Accounts

It is important to note that in none of the three schools was there an obvious rhetoric of neither caring nor a well-articulated focus on caring. That is, adults did not prioritize and structure their actions around notions students' need for caring as such. In fact, if we had not learned from student interviews about their experience of being cared for and cared

about by their teachers and administrators, we would not have noticed the importance of caring at the schools. (This may have appeared different after more extensive observation in the schools.) Rather, the adults structured their activities around meeting their students' basic academic needs, motivating them to set and reach higher academic goals, and providing opportunities for exposure and enrichment. We did note a strong achievement and motivational rhetoric at the schools. This was prominent in daily announcements, posters and banners throughout the schools, as well as in the interviews. And as the students themselves let us know, help with academics was what more than anything else communicated and constituted care. While the adults at these schools were "talking academics" they were "practicing care."

These findings challenge the tendency reflected in most previous educational research to see caring as something separate and apart from teaching. For example, caring is often described as a necessary condition for learning. It is, but only in the sense that good teaching is a necessary condition for learning. The use of a theory that focuses on the "practice of care" helps us see that having "high expectations" is part of practicing caring. It's interesting to note that even when previous anecdotal student accounts have provided clear information, or at least hinted, that very concrete practices in schools constituted caring, the tendency in thinking and writing about caring in high schools is to drift back to the more general, common-sense, affective notion of caring. In the high school context, good teaching *is* caring.

Researchers (Eaker-Rich, Van Galen & Timothy, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999) interested in the phenomenon of caring in complex heterogeneous settings have raised our attention to the potential difficulty of "caring across boundaries." In their view, it is more difficult to care when the one caring is socially and culturally distant from the recipients of care. This is the case because caring depends on "apprehending the reality of the other" and the process of "engrossment." In developing this argument these scholars draw on Noddings (1984) theoretical notions of caring. The assumption is that if people are

members of the same community they will, due to similar experiences and perspectives, be better able to accurately perceive and identify needs. The current findings contribute to this debate. The three schools examined in this research clearly differ in terms of the social and cultural distance between the students and adult staff. They represent a continuum from extremely close in the case of Martin High School where many staff members were Martin alumni who had grown up in the urban barrio surrounding Martin; to somewhat culturally close, but socially and geographically distant in the case of Mountain View High; to quite distant in the case of Brazosport High. It's important to underline the fact that despite these rather significant variations, high levels of caring were reported by students at all three schools. Our analysis did show that adults at the three schools tended to develop their perceptions of student needs in very different ways. But there were significant similarities and overlap in the needs they identified and apparently acted upon. It seems clear that what mattered most to students was having teachers and administrators who responded to their need to learn and be successful in high school. The students let us know that as long as teachers really teach, they have gone a long way in providing care. These findings challenge the assumption that "caring" in diverse settings such as the contemporary urban high school is necessarily blocked by social and cultural differences.

CONCLUSION

This student-centered qualitative study of caring practice at three, academically promising, low-income high schools has provided a deeper understanding of what high school students experience as caring in the school context. It has provided insight into various ways that teachers and school administrators successfully met students' academic and developmental needs. Most literature on adolescents' experience in high school has tended to focus on the lack of caring they receive from teachers and administrators. The present study stands out in examining students' positive experience of receiving care. It contributes some preliminary findings about successful caring in the high school context and offers ideas for educators interested in creating more caring high schools.

While caring is clearly multi-faceted and complex, the adolescents in our study emphasized that caring at school was tied to academics. They told us loud and clear that caring meant having help with academics, and being pushed and encouraged to succeed. They also helped us understand other important facets of caring. That is, they reminded us of their need for adults' involvement and attention, and they showed us how they delight in being noticed and receiving adults' positive regard. They described how they thrive when treated with respect, and how they grow and accept responsibility when they have a chance to experience mutuality and autonomy in relationships with adults. Listening to their words, and analyzing their accounts, we begin to "understand more fully the nature of the resources students can acquire from their social networks" at school and "the effect of these resources on [their] development"(Croninger & Lee, 2001, p 571).

The student accounts suggest that adults at the school were responding to their developmental needs through a set of behaviors, actions, and attitudes that had much in common with those described in the parenting literature as "authoritative" (Baumrind, 1987). In their academic and informal interactions with students, the adults were

demanding, and expressed high expectations, while remaining connected and very engaged. These adults seemed keenly responsive to the students' developing maturity and their need for increased responsibility.

We also learned that recognition, as Erikson (1968) suggested, is very important for older adolescents; and especially so for low-income and minority youth who more typically face negative reflections when they look out to the community. In the three study schools we not only heard students talk about the benefits and satisfactions of receiving recognition in daily interactions with teachers, but we heard poignant stories of ways in which their personal successes and their schools' academic achievements were bringing them recognition in the wider community.

Obgu (1991, 1992, 1995a, 1995b) and Valenzuela (1999) would predict that school is more likely to be a source of negative reflections—in devaluing and ignoring the realities of students' cultural and socio-economic experience-- than a context that fosters positive development among minority youth. Although the archival data analyzed for this study does not allow us to fully assess this, it does seem from our interview data that this was not necessarily the case in the three study schools. Students described many ways in which teachers and administrators had made the school's academic improvement and success a matter of local and community identity and pride, incorporating an implicit and sometimes explicit political critique in their persistent motivational talks and celebratory remarks. We can see that these efforts have the potential to reconfigure the relationship between a school and its low-income community, and to reshape the minority adolescent's perceived relationship with the notion of academic success. Much as a sports team functions to project community identity, school academic success has the potential to do so through the public and shared language of accountability systems. (Despite debate about the benefits and disadvantages of state accountability systems, they nonetheless do provide a common language to discuss academic achievement.) There was evidence in the interviews that the principals at these schools were aware of and

made use of this potential. The preliminary findings in this area underline school staff's important role in helping low-income and minority students to critically and openly assess their full range of experience as low-income and minority adolescents. "Political clarity", as Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2002) has recently noted, is indeed an essential component of caring in schools.

The results of this study have important practical implications for improving high schools and adolescent academic and developmental outcomes. It is critical that teachers, educational administrators, and school staff have extensive training on the developmental needs of older adolescents and especially on the unique developmental needs and experiences of low-income and minority youth. Time emerged as a key resource in supporting caring in the study schools. Thus, it is recommended that high school staffing and scheduling be structured in such a way as to ensure consistent daily interaction between a set of individual teachers and individual students. Class size should also be taken into account to maximize teachers' ability to provide adequate one-to-one attention and monitoring of students' progress. Teachers' daily schedules should include ample blocks of time set aside to meet informally with students seeking one-to-one help with school work. Administrators should generously acknowledge and reward teachers who give extra time to tutor and work with students outside their daily schedule. Teacher training and professional development is essential in preparing teachers who feel competent to prepare their students to meet higher academic expectations. It appears especially important that instructional training promote teachers' skills in providing individual students with attention and instruction during the course of daily classroom lessons.

In addition to structuring and supporting teacher time for one-to-one and small group academic support, high schools should offer numerous and varied ways for their students to interact more informally with their teachers and administrators. As our student participants explained, these informal exchanges provided a host of benefits including

opportunities to speak with adults about their own career decisions, valuable practical knowledge about what is involved in preparing for a chosen career, and a context in which to practice and gain confidence in developing mutual relationships with adults.

Furthermore, this study has highlighted the critical role of high school administrators in creating a caring school. Principals should be as directly involved and active with students as much as possible. The administrators' involvement not only directly benefits students, but also models and inspires the desired behaviors and attitudes in teachers and staff. Administrators also have an important role in setting school policy and practice in the area of discipline. School discipline methods should take into account the older adolescents' developmental needs to engage, evaluate, and grow. Toward that end disciplinary efforts should emphasize guidance over punishment.

In terms of theory, the results of this research also help demystify --or de-sentimentalize-- the notion of what it means to care for adolescents in high school. It has also underlined the value of examining caring in context. As the student accounts suggest, many different kinds of teachers in the three different schools were able to "care" well for them. As Deiro (1996) has also noted, caring does not require a particularly nurturing personality. It only seems that way when we forget that caring is a "practice", a practice that meets needs. Teachers can express their caring through doing their job of teaching well.

In previous work on caring most attention has been given to the act of "attunement", or "engrossment", of the one caring for the one cared for as critical in correctly or adequately perceiving the other's need for care (Noddings, 1984). And, more recently, researchers (Eaker-Rich, Van Galen & Timothy, 1996) have extended these concepts to caring in multi-cultural, heterogeneous settings, raising the problems that would arise there as individuals from very different backgrounds are required to be "attuned to" and "apprehend the reality of the other" in order to care (Noddings, 1984, p. 14). Thus, it was

fascinating to observe that there did not seem to be a perfect overlap or fit between the ways the adults perceived student needs and the needs that students actually noted had been met. That is, adults at each school spoke about, and consciously and no doubt unconsciously, geared their actions around a set of needs they observed or believed the students to have. But it did not seem that there was a complete correspondence between needs perceived by adults and needs met from the students' point of view. However there was certainly an important overlap in the area of academic needs perceived and academic needs met. I raise this to reduce the perception of that caring in today's high schools is a necessarily impossible task. In listening to the students I was struck, really, with how easy it is to care. As we focus more and more on excellent teaching I suspect we will achieve "good-enough" caring.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The most serious limitation of the current research is the fact that it was based on interviews with a very small set of students from each of the three study schools and the fact that these students were selected for the most part by their principals. Therefore, despite our interest in speaking with a range of students at each school, the sample was very limited and probably composed of students who had an especially positive relationship and regard for their school. The sample did not include students who may have had more negative views of the school such as students who had dropped out or students who were in disciplinary settings. The data available could not provide an adequate understanding of the limits of caring at each school, or a clear sense of any ongoing struggles over how to best meet student needs. Furthermore, the interviewing did not allow for in-depth probing on the experience of caring as this was not the focus of the original study. An additional limitation is that the original study did not include observational data to evaluate and use in conjunction with the rich interview data. Future research on caring can build on the approach taken in the current study --focusing on schools that students report as high in caring- but include a wider range of student

participants and extensive participant observation in order to more fully capture the complexities of this important dimension of schooling.

EPILOGUE

I am curious and hopeful that all three high schools—Mountain View, Brazosport, and Martin—have continued to be places where students feel that adults truly care, and where academic performance has continued to improve. A recent review of each school’s campus website revealed that both Brazosport and Martin have been under stable leadership, having the same principals who were present during our site visits. Mountain View, in contrast, has gone through two changes of principals since our site visit. I cannot comment on the ongoing presence of caring at these schools since I have not visited them nor spoken to students there since my fieldwork in 1999-2000. However, academic performance data publicly available on the Texas Education Agency (TEA) website suggest that each school has at least maintained, and in some cases improved upon, the achievements evident in 1999-2000. In 2000-’01, Brazosport High School received the highest rating—“Exemplary”—in the Texas Education Agency’s overall rating system for campuses. They also received a special acknowledgement from TEA for improvement in mathematics. Mountain View maintained their impressive “Recognized” rating and received special TEA acknowledgement for their improvement in reading. Martin held steady at its “Acceptable” rating but received special acknowledgement for the high numbers of its graduates having completed the more challenging coursework designated in the Recommended High School Program. At the time of this writing, the latest TEA accountability ranking data available is for academic year 2001-’02 and all three schools have maintained their respective ratings.

APPENDIX A

1999-2000 Study of Texas High Schools

STUDENT FOCUS GROUP

SCHOOL:

NAME:

DATE:

INTERVIEWER:

INTRODUCTIONS

Introduce ourselves.

Gain written consent.

Hand-out Name Tags

Explain that our intended audience is education professionals.

WARM-UP QUESTIONS

- To start off, let's go around the group and have each participant tell us: 1) your first name; 2) what grade you are in? And 3) how long you have attended this school?

- What sorts of activities are you involved with here at school?

MAIN / GENERAL QUESTIONS

Attempt to get the respondent's perception of the school's history and changes. Use the probes in the box below to determine how the strategy, change or practice was initiated, received, and supported.

- What is it like to be a student at this school?
- How did you decide what courses to take? Is this typical? Where can students turn to with questions?
- Thinking about last week:

– How did you spend your time after school? Is this typical for you?

– About how much time did you spend on homework? Is this typical for you?

SCENARIOS

Use the following questions to obtain specific accounts of the respondent's perceptions of the school, community, and his or her role. PROBE actively after each scenario to find exactly how strategies were implemented and changes came about. Look for concrete examples — especially where questions are posed as hypothetical — and pay attention to what the school is doing.

- Tell me about a time when you or one of your friends had an idea or suggestion about how to improve or change something here at the school. What did you do? Where did you turn to?
- Tell me about your most recent accomplishment here at school (something you feel particularly good about). What happened?
- Tell me about a time when you or one of your friends needed help with a class or an assignment. What happened?
- Tell me about an issue that you are concerned about right now. How are you addressing it?
- If you or one of your friends were experiencing a personal problem, where would you turn? Are there any adults at the school that you would talk with?
- In 4 years, where do think you'll be? What do you think you will you be doing? (How has the school shaped this vision (classes, teachers, counselors)? In what ways is the school helping prepare you for this?)

OVERARCHING QUESTION & THEMES

- *What did the high school do to reach its present level of performance?*

THEMES - Ask about the current status of the general thematic areas below **ONLY** if they have **NOT** already been discussed in the interview. (The questions beneath each area are **NOT** for use in the interview.)

- Vision, Standards and Expectations
How did they formulate their vision/goals, who was involved, what barriers did they have to confront and how did they do this? What are the school's expectations for student achievement and what has the staff, student body, or community done to help establish these standards?
- Focus
Where does the school focus its energies and resources? Each of the schools was selected because of its performance on particular academic indicator(s) (EOC, TLI, AP, etc.). Is the school targeting particular academic areas or are they looking towards a systemic approach? How are they using their financial resources?
- Assessment & Use of Data
How do they know they are achieving their goals? What are they doing to self-assess/reflect on their work? How are they measuring progress and how are they aligning/adjusting their strategies and resources based on this data? How has access to data? How are they using it? How has this changed?
- Students & Student Culture
Describe the quality of the relationships between school staff and students? How have they cultivated these relationships? Are the academic, social, and emotional needs of students being met? If so, how? How have students been involved in decision-making and changes at the school? What are the priorities of students? What are the competing demands on students' time and what is the school's response to these demands? What are they doing when not in school? Do most students do homework? What is the purpose of homework?
- Instruction and Instructional Support
What instructional approaches are being used (lecture, school-within-a school, cooperative learning, service learning, etc.)? How does the school organize extra instructional support for students? How has the school implemented teacher training and other kinds of professional development? How is instructional staff supported in its work (by central office, the principal, departments, other teachers, etc.)? How is collaboration organized, fostered and encouraged?
- Parent, Family & Community Involvement
How is the school helping families establish a home environment that supports student learning and learning at home? How has the school promoted effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and students' progress? (For

example, has the school supported family participation in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or work? How has the school included parents in school decisions?) Describe ways the school has identified and integrated community resources and services to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development.

APPENDIX B

1999-2000 Study of Texas High Schools

TEACHER INTERVIEW

SCHOOL:

NAME:

DATE:

INTERVIEWER:

INTRODUCTIONS

Introduce ourselves.

Gain written consent.

Explain that our intended audience is education professionals.

WARM-UP QUESTIONS

- How long have you been working at this school? How did you come to work here?

MAIN / GENERAL QUESTIONS

Attempt to get the respondent's perception of the school's history and changes. Use the probes in the box below to determine how the strategy, change or practice was initiated, received, and supported.

- Tell me about what the school was like when you started working here.

- How would you describe the school now?

- What do you consider to be the most important changes that have happened here?

SCENARIOS

Use the following questions to obtain specific accounts of the respondent's perceptions of the school, community, and his or her role. PROBE actively after each scenario to find exactly how strategies were implemented and changes came about. Look for concrete examples — especially where questions are posed as hypothetical — and pay attention to what the school is doing.

- Tell me about a student who has made dramatic progress here at this school. What kinds of problems did the student have? How did you learn about the problems? What happened? Who was involved?
- Tell me about a student who is falling behind at the moment. What is being done for that student? Is it helping? How do you know?
- Tell me about a time when you had questions about curriculum and instruction, or other issues relating to your teaching. What did you do? Where did you turn?
- Tell me about a time recently when you had an idea or suggestion? What did you do? Where did you turn?
- Tell me about the last two or three times you had contact with parents? What happened?
- Of all the experiences that you have had, what has had the greatest impact on how you teach?

OVERARCHING QUESTION & THEMES

- *What did the high school do to reach its present level of performance?*

THEMES -Ask about the current status of the general thematic areas below **ONLY** if they have **NOT** already been discussed in the interview. (The questions beneath each area are **NOT** for use in the interview.)

- Vision, Standards and Expectations
How did they formulate their vision/goals, who was involved, what barriers did they have to confront and how did they do this? What are the school's expectations for student achievement and what has the staff, student body, or community done to help establish these standards?
- Focus
Where does the school focus its energies and resources? Each of the schools was selected because of its performance on particular academic indicator(s) (EOC, TLI, AP, etc.). Is the school targeting particular academic areas or are they looking towards a systemic approach? How are they using their financial resources?
- Assessment & Use of Data
How do they know they are achieving their goals? What are they doing to self-assess/reflect on their work? How are they measuring progress and how are they aligning/adjusting their strategies and resources based on this data? How has access to data? How are they using it? How has this changed?
- Students & Student Culture
Describe the quality of the relationships between school staff and students? How have they cultivated these relationships? Are the academic, social, and emotional needs of students being met? If so, how? How have students been involved in decision-making and changes at the school? What are the priorities of students? What are the competing demands on students' time and what is the school's response to these demands? What are they doing when not in school? Do most students do homework? What is the purpose of homework?
- Instruction and Instructional Support
What instructional approaches are being used (lecture, school-within-a school, cooperative learning, service learning, etc.)? How does the school organize extra instructional support for students? How has the school implemented teacher training and other kinds of professional development? How is instructional staff supported in its work (by central office, the principal, departments, other teachers, etc.)? How is collaboration organized, fostered and encouraged?
- Parent, Family & Community Involvement
How is the school helping families establish a home environment that supports student learning and learning at home? How has the school promoted effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and students' progress? (For example, has the school supported family participation in setting student goals each year and

in planning for college or work? How has the school included parents in school decisions?) Describe ways the school has identified and integrated community resources and services to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development.

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