

STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS OF COLLEGE READINESS AND PERSISTENCE OF YOUTH
WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED FOSTER CARE

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Abstract

Students with a history of foster care attain high school diplomas at lower rates than their peers and are considerably underrepresented in postsecondary education. This convergent mixed methods study, grounded in social capital theory, explores the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, determines differences in risk factors for college attrition between first-year students and persisters, and explores the factors related to postsecondary degree persistence of bachelor's degree students and graduates who have experienced foster care and participated in a college readiness program. Ten caregivers and 12 college readiness program personnel completed College-Going Culture Surveys and five program administrators completed graduation factors semistructured interviews. Additionally, 558 program alumni enrolled in or graduated from college completed Risk Factors for Retention Surveys and 12 completed postsecondary persistence semistructured interviews. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the surveys and thematic analysis were used for the interviews. Supports for postsecondary graduation include resources, supportive adults, and a sense of belonging. Barriers to postsecondary graduation include manifestations of childhood trauma, academic challenges, and placement changes. Regarding risk factors for college attrition, statistically significant differences exist between (a) first-year students and persisters' and (b) first-year and second-year students' perceptions of their ability and goals. Factors empowering alumni persistence were college-going culture, supportive adults, peer connectedness, access to resources, and individual characteristics. Factors hindering alumni persistence were discouraging messages from adults and not knowing how to navigate postsecondary institutions. Implications for future research include conducting follow-up investigations and interventions related to program alumni's beliefs about their abilities and goals, studying program alumni who did not persist in

postsecondary education, and using snowball sampling. Implications for practice include providing mentors and adding college readiness program components related to confidence and goal-setting, study skills, navigating institutions and accessing resources, and mathematics instruction.

Keywords: foster youth, bachelor's degree persistence, college readiness programs, social capital framework, empowerment

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Dedication

I dedicate this project to the children who have been part of my family over the years, the youth living in the group home that I met as a first-time social worker, my fellow caregivers, and the memory of my friend.

To the children who have shaped me as a person and become family—they taught me how to open my heart and be vulnerable, as well as how to be flexible and persistent. Amongst these children, I especially want to acknowledge Dulce and Kassandra, who through humor and trial and error, taught me valuable lessons about the ins and outs of being a mother. I know life has been tough for all these youth and is not always how we would like it to be, but I have no doubt that all these amazing youth will live successful and fabulous lives.

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Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my friend Joey, who helped me as a teenager and was a cheerleader for me when I needed it the most. His life was taken too soon, but I hope he would be proud of the life I am living.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Nationally, the number of youth in foster care has grown annually (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2019). In 2018, the most recent federal data available, there were 437,283 youth in foster care (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2019). This number has increased by approximately 23,000 since 2014 (Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System, 2019). The definition of foster care is when a person, usually under the age of 21, lives in a temporary home, overseen by each state, when the state determines that it is unsafe for the child to live with their biological parents or legal guardians (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). These homes include facilities, kinship homes, nonrelative homes, shelters, and independent living placements (Font, Berger, Cancian, & Noyes, 2018; Havlicek, 2010). Although many states end foster care at the age of 18, some states, such as New York and California, allow individuals to remain in foster care until they are 21 years old (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.). Approximately 25 states extend foster care until the age of 21 through the Fostering Connections Act; however, most states provide subsidized housing or a monthly stipend for education to individuals beyond the age of 18 with a history of foster care (National Conference, 2017).

This study focuses on students who have experienced foster care in the United States, regardless of how long they were in the foster care system or how they eventually transitioned out of the system. Transitioning out, also known as “aging out” of foster care can be difficult for youth (Mitchell, Jones, & Renema, 2014). Individuals typically transition out of the system when they turn 18 or 21, are adopted, or are reunified with family. Some transition out of foster care if they become involved in a different system such as probation, because the probation system can

take lead in case management over the foster care system (Wylie, 2014). Individuals who leave foster care due to age can have many outcomes, ranging from reunification with biological family, attending college, renting an apartment, or becoming homeless.

Various communities are overrepresented in foster care (Human Rights Campaign, 2021; Puzzanchera & Taylor, 2019). Black and American Indian youth, for example, have disproportionately high placement rates in foster care (Puzzanchera & Taylor, 2019). There is also an overrepresentation of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) in foster care (Human Rights Campaign, 2021). The racial identity “Black” was used in the New York state statistics and was not operationalized further. This study will use the terms “Black” and “African American” synonymously, following the guidelines of National Institutes of Health (NIH). According to these guidelines, “Black” or “African American” would describe any person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (NIH, 2015). The terms “lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer” refer to people who identify outside of mainstream norms for gender and sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign, 2021).

Youth in foster care also experience high rates of trauma, which can impact their education (Cage, 2018; Clemens, Helm, Myers, Thomas, & Tis, 2017a). In fact, the emotional consequences of the youth’s situations and their abuse can impact their ability to manage school and all other areas of their lives (Clemens et al., 2017a). Experiences of trauma can manifest in a survival mentality, where the youth become overly self-reliant and have difficulty asking for help (Morton, 2017). Youth may also internalize their pain, which can have lasting effects on their education (Mitchell, 2018; Sankaran, Church, & Mitchell, 2018).

Trauma, and the occasionally tumultuous home lives of students in foster care, can also increase the risk of a mental health diagnosis (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018; White, O’Brien,

Pecora, & Buher, 2015), which can be connected to behavioral challenges. Youth's behavioral challenges were among the top two reasons for disrupted foster care placements, which directly affects school performance and attendance (Taylor & McQuillan, 2014; Tonheim & Iversen, 2018). For example, online surveys collected by Salazar (2012) highlight the factors correlated with college completion of former foster youth. The participants ($N = 329$) were from 43 states, were recipients of college scholarships, had been in foster care past their 16th birthday, and were under the age of 25. Salazar found that having post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms during college or ever having a mental health diagnosis or considerable trauma were significant factors for leaving school before getting a degree. Lastly—and similar to the findings of Morton (2017)—Salazar noted that students who stated that they did not need support with securing stable housing were likely to drop out, which could indicate a survival mentality and not being able to ask for help when needed.

Considering all these vulnerabilities, there is a disparity in bachelor's degree attainment between students currently or formerly in foster care and their peers who have not been involved in the foster care system (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, 2014). Nationally, 2%–8% of students with foster care experience complete a bachelor's degree by the time they are 25 years old, compared to 30% of the general population in the same age group (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, 2014). Although some students graduate with an associate degree or a technical degree, for this study, college graduation is defined as obtaining a bachelor's degree within six years (Watt, Faulkner, Bustillos, & Madden, 2019).

Problem of Practice

Individuals transitioning out of foster care have higher incidences of poverty, substance

abuse, teen pregnancy, and dependency on welfare than their peers (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012). Additionally, 20% of individuals who transition out of foster care become incarcerated within 2 years (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012) and 50% of students with foster care experience complete high school (National Foster Youth Initiative, 2022); the national high school graduation rate is 86% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Students who have experienced foster care aspire to go to college at the same levels as their peers; however, they persist to earn a degree at much lower rates than their peers (Franco & Durdella, 2018). Only 3% of youth with a history of foster care graduate from postsecondary education (National Foster Youth Initiative, 2022; Think of Us, n.d.). When individuals currently or formerly in foster care do enroll in college, they are often not fully prepared for college-level academic work (Piel, 2018). There are little data regarding how many youth in foster care participate in college preparation programs (Day, Reibschleger, & Wen, 2018). Additionally, nonprofit organizations that provide foster youth with college preparation while in high school often do not track students after they transition out of the system, and, therefore, have not evaluated their programs for postsecondary outcomes.

Statement of Purpose

The purposes of this convergent mixed methods study were to explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, determine differences in risk factors for college attrition between first-year students and persisters, and explore the factors related to postsecondary degree persistence of bachelor's degree students and graduates who have experienced foster care and participated in a college readiness program.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What do program administrators perceive as supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation for youth who have participated in a college readiness program and experienced foster care?
2. How do program personnel and caregivers describe the college-going culture of their college readiness programs?
3. What differences exist between the risk factors of first-year postsecondary students and persisters who have participated in a college readiness program and experienced foster care?
4. How do individuals who have experienced foster care describe factors that enabled or hindered their empowerment to persist in a postsecondary degree program?

Overview of Methodology

This study, which uses a convergent mixed methods design, was implemented in two phases. In a convergent mixed methods study, data are collected at the same time to allow comparison of different data sources and consider viewpoints not otherwise considered (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Phase 1 data were collected regionally and focused on college readiness factors. Phase 2 data were collected nationally and focused on college persistence factors. For this study, the pseudonyms “Hope Manifested” and “Dreams Unlimited” replaced the names of the nonprofit organizations. Phase 2 of the study focused on alumni of the Hope Manifested college readiness program from all the academies, as well as alumni of a different nonprofit college readiness program, located in southern California, and administrators from Dreams Unlimited.

Four instruments were used in this study. The program personnel and caregivers completed the College-Going Culture Survey by Murray (2011) in Phase 1. Program

administrators in Phases 1 and 2 completed the graduation factors semistructured interview, developed using guidelines by Gugiu and Rodriguez (2007). Alumni completed the Risk Factors for Retention Survey, by Pratt, Harwood, Cavazos, and Ditzfeld (2019), and the postsecondary persistence semistructured interview, adapted from Capik and Shupp (2021), in Phase 2.

I collected all the data over the Internet and stored the data in a password protected laptop. I analyzed the data using several methods, as two instruments were quantitative and two instruments were qualitative. For the College-Going Culture Survey, I calculated the mean rating for each item to determine the college-going culture for Hope Manifested; and noted the outliers. I analyzed the graduation factors semistructured interviews using thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009). I used inferential statistics to analyze The Risk Factors for Retention Survey to determine how the number of risk factors that program alumni perceived differed based on if they were first-year students, or had persisted past their first year. I used a theoretical thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyze the postsecondary semistructured interviews. A theoretical thematic analysis includes coding within the context of literature and a theoretical framework and then expands beyond the theoretical framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Significance of the Study

Students with foster care experience complete a bachelor's degree at much lower rates than students of the general population in the same age group (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, 2014). Although there is substantial research on first-generation college students (i.e., the first generation of people in their families to attend college), little research exists specific to college readiness and degree persistence of those who experienced foster care. Education is one of the few reliable ways that youth can avoid negative outcomes faced by their peers (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012). The findings from the study can

inform future college readiness interventions for students involved in the foster care system. The findings may also specifically help the college readiness programs Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited improve or expand their current programming.

College readiness programs are important because completing a college education can have many potential positive outcomes. For example, having a bachelors' degree increases earning potential over a lifetime and helps build skills for successful adulthood (Okpych, 2012). A college education also increases social capital that can help people advance into leadership roles (Brand & Xie, 2010). Although some argue that college is not for everyone, Brand and Xie (2010) assert that those who benefit the most from a college education, both financially and socially, are least likely to pursue a college education due to negative selection. Negative selection refers to the idea that high-income families expect their kids to go to college, and these kids usually graduate with their degrees (Brand & Xie, 2010). People who can benefit most from college by increasing their earning potential are those from low-income families—who are also at higher risk of becoming involved in the child welfare system —due to a potential increase in earnings once they are eligible for jobs requiring bachelor's degrees (Brand & Xie, 2010). This study aims to demonstrate the many factors that contribute to the level of educational attainment for those who have experienced foster care.

Definition of Key Terms

1. **Academic background** – Academic skill level and study habits while in high school, such as whether students felt academically challenged, had regular attendance, studied outside of class, and completed their homework (Pratt et al., 2019).
2. **College adjustment** – Whether a student transitions to college while staying in contact with important people and fits into college life academically and socially (e.g. feeling

comfortable in classes, being able to balance responsibilities, making new friends; Pratt et al., 2019); related to sense of belonging.

3. **College readiness program** – A program for high school students that prepares them for college through classes, activities, and exposure to college life (Day et al., 2018). These programs are also called college preparation programs. The college readiness programs in this study are at least 2 years long, with individual and group sessions that are attended throughout the year.
4. **Empowerment** – “the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations” (Gutierrez, 1995, p. 229).
5. **Foster care** – When a person, usually under the age of 21, lives in a temporary home overseen by each state when the state determines that it is unsafe for the person to live with their biological parents or legal guardians (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).
6. **Involvement in college life** – Student’s involvement in university services and college affiliated activities such as fraternities, sororities, campus activities, volunteering, a student job, or study groups (Capik & Shupp, 2021).
7. **Institutional agents** – Individuals who occupy at least one “hierarchical positions of high status within society or an organization,” maintain the system of social stratification and inequality (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1067).
8. **Institutional supports** – Tangible, formal, and informal support that students receive from an institution. These supports include funds of knowledge, advocacy, individual interventions, accessing role models, emotional and moral support, and regular

feedback and guidance (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

9. **Social capital** – “key resources and support provided by institutional agents”, such as “high-status, non-kin, agents who . . . are well positioned to provide key forms of social and institutional support (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1066). For example, a student may seek advice and mentorship from faculty who are considered high-status, non-kin, agents who can provide social and institutional support (Capik & Shupp, 2021).
10. **Support system** – People that encourage the student to persist in education by assisting the youth with what they may need, whether financial, emotional, advice giving, or something else (Capik & Shupp, 2021).

Chapter 2

Synthesis of the Research Literature

This literature review focuses on the college persistence of students with a history of foster care and focuses on the factors such as societal beliefs, school and placement changes, college-going culture, college readiness, belonging, supportive nonfamily adults, collaboration, availability of resources, and mental health. These concepts are explained using a social capital framework (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) and the research literature is synthesized to better understand factors related to the college persistence of students with a history of foster care.

Theoretical Framework

The social capital framework by Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) provides a theoretical underpinning for this literature synthesis. Stanton-Salazar's 1997 social capital framework focuses on how social capital, institutional agents, and institutional supports are more difficult to access for students who identify as being part of underrepresented groups and from economically disenfranchised urban communities. Part of the reason that students from underrepresented groups have difficulty navigating institutions is related to institutional racism, which is a preference for Whiteness that is infused in institutions and society (Phillips, 2010). These racially biased institutions and systems can perpetuate disparate outcomes for racially marginalized groups in education, criminal justice, and healthcare (Toldson, 2020). This literature synthesis also includes the component of empowerment, which Stanton-Salazar introduced to the framework in 2011.

Social Capital

Social capital is defined as the support, such as resources and connections, that people's interpersonal networks provide them (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). According to the social

capital framework by Stanton-Salazar (1997), there are five reasons why it is difficult for youth with marginalized identities to accumulate social capital: (1) youth are assigned a different value by society dependent on their social class, ethnicity, and gender; (2) participating in mainstream settings can be uncomfortable for youth with marginalized identities due to barriers and entrapments; (3) the evaluation and recruitment processes that institutional agents use to select students who they want to sponsor is often based on their perceptions of the student's ability and willingness to adopt the cultural norms of the dominant group; (4) institutions often create conditions and assign roles to these youth that hinder the development of social capital; and (5) there are often ideas and norms in the institution that discourage the exchange of helping behavior within schools (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Institutional Agents

Institutional agents, defined as individuals who occupy at least one hierarchical position of high status within society or an organization, maintain the system of social stratification and inequality (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). These agents can be middle-class family members, teachers, counselors, clergy, community leaders, or other high-status people. The social capital framework makes it clear that institutional agents are crucial in students with marginalized identities accessing social capital and institutional support.

Supportive relationships with institutional agents and access to institutional support are complex and difficult for students with marginalized identities for three reasons (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). One reason is that forms of class and racial segregation that exist in society also frequently exist in institutions, which makes it more difficult for students with marginalized identities to access institutional agents and support (Lareau, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). A second reason is that institutions often have an embedded stratification system with rigid

hierarchical relationships, which makes it difficult for these students to connect with institutional agents when the connection goes against the expected way that people form relationships within the institution (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Lastly, institutional agents in the upper levels of an organization's hierarchy often have many competing demands, such as supervisory duties and budgeting, that take precedence over embedding students with marginalized identities into systems of institutional and social support (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Institutional agents must do more than solely understand the importance of institutional support and social capital for students from marginalized communities. Although members of dominant groups frequently rely on their social connections for access to mainstream institutions, the lack of connections to institutional agents can prevent members of nondominant groups from having access to those same institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Access or lack of access to an institutional agent can impact a student's ability to succeed in educational institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Institutional Supports

Institutional supports are tangible, formal, and informal supports that students receive from an institution, which includes knowledge, advocacy, individual interventions, accessing role models, emotional and moral support, and regular feedback and guidance (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Institutional support is important for the social integration and success of students in the school system and other institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Access that youth have to institutional support is largely dependent on their networks, and the networks of the institutional agents that support these youth, which differs for youth with marginalized identities versus youth who identify with dominant groups (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Institutional support can come in many forms. One form of institutional support is funds

of knowledge, which helps students rise through the educational system by exposing them to the way that people speak within educational institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Often, youth who are economically marginalized are not afforded lessons in this discourse in the same way as their middle-class peers (Lareau, 2003). The reason these students are not afforded this opportunity to develop funds of knowledge may be because they do not have access to “bridging,” which is the process of when people act as connectors to gatekeepers, social networks, and opportunities to practice discourse needed at mainstream institutions (Lareau, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Institutional support also includes advocacy and individual interventions, as well as accessing role models and emotional and moral support (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Finally, the last form of institutional support is the regular provision of evaluative feedback and guidance (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Empowerment

In 2011, Stanton-Salazar expanded the social capital framework to include the concept of empowerment and relied on the definition of Gutierrez (1995), which was frequently used in the field of social work: “the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations” (p. 229). The four tenets of an empowerment framework are that (a) everyone has strengths, (b) people know their needs better than anyone else and should be permitted to identify and make decisions regarding these needs, (c) empowerment is a journey that can last a lifetime, and (d) everyone’s ideas and experiences are valid and these ideas and experiences can be used when faced with adversity (Joseph, 2020). The concept of empowerment, therefore, includes the transformation of people as they gather resources and become more confident in their abilities, which can move them from being more passive to more active in their lives and destinations.

This expanded framework calls on the work of institutional agents to not only provide resources but to empower the students to access those resources and change their ways of interacting within institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The updated framework highlights that the institutional agents become empowerment agents by not only providing resources, but also assisting youth to empower and transform themselves, their communities, and society (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The concept of empowerment is an important addition because the institutional agents mobilize the students to navigate and have a sense of control over their environment—even when the environments are oppressive—while growing as people who can interact with individuals with different social standing throughout the institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Synthesis of Literature

This synthesis of literature begins with an examination of the characteristics of youth in foster care. This synthesis organizes factors related to bachelor's degree attainment using the social capital framework and four of its main components; (a) social capital, (b) institutional supports, (c) institutional agents, and (d) empowerment. These factors combine and influence whether students from marginalized communities ultimately succeed in completing higher education (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Social Capital

Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011) wrote that social capital, which is the instrumental or supportive relationships formed by students with institutional agents, is difficult to access and accumulate for youth with marginalized identities for several reasons. Youth are assigned a different value by society based on their intersecting identities. These assigned values and the barriers associated with them make it difficult for marginalized youth to participate in mainstream settings. Institutions often create conditions that hinder these youth from developing

social capital and discourage students from seeking help and adults from giving help within schools (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Intersecting marginalized identities, such as race, socio-economic status, gender expression, and sexual orientation, described within social capital theory, are also representative of students who have experienced foster care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Crenshaw (1991) identifies intersectionality as the concept of how people's experiences differ greatly within racial or gender identities, due to their multiple identities. For example, the experiences of a woman of color are often connected to both racism and sexism, and not adequately described by feminism or antiracism discourses alone. Due to institutional racism, families in the child welfare system are disproportionately economically marginalized; disproportionately Black, Hispanic, and Native American; and often face multiple stressors such as housing instability, social isolation, and mental health challenges (Spinak, 2018). The intersectional identities of youth in foster care can, therefore, be connected to societal beliefs, school and placement changes, how they experience a college-going culture, college readiness, and their sense of belonging.

Societal beliefs. Beliefs about a person and their worth and abilities ultimately contribute to the access that person has to social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Sometimes people in society form beliefs about youth in foster care based on negative images they see in the media (Alvarez, 2017). These beliefs can intersect with the beliefs they have about the other marginalized identities that the youth might hold, such as their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, or sexual orientation (Spencer, 2008). Even without other marginalized identities, being in foster care can be stigmatizing (Horn, 2019). This section highlights how the various identities of youth in foster care, such as foster care status, race and ethnicity,

socioeconomic status, and gender and sexual orientation, can ultimately impact their ability to access social capital, which can impact their success in higher educational institutions.

The stigma associated with foster care status is well documented (Alvarez, 2017; Johnson, Strayhorn, & Parler, 2020; Meese, 2012). Johnson et al. (2020) conducted a secondary analysis of data from four focus groups with a total of nearly 50 high school students in foster care who participated in a day-long outreach event at a large midwestern college. The researchers found that students often feel stigma for being in foster care. Some common stereotypes the students hear are that they are, “criminals,” “problem kids,” and “unstable.” These stereotypes often make them not want to share that they are in foster care, causing them to feel disconnected from others (Johnson et al., 2020).

To add to this stigma, the media does not always portray foster care in an accurate way, which can have an impact on how members of society view students with foster care involvement (Meese, 2012). Alvarez (2017) completed a systematic review of movies involving youth in foster care and found that films show mostly negative images of youth in foster care and overrepresent abuse that the youth face when in foster homes, painting a troubling picture of the foster care system as a whole and emphasizing how neglectful the system is. Similarly, some popular stories and movies featuring youth in foster care portray the children as “troubled” individuals who are more likely to have emotional or behavioral problems, or run away (Alvarez, 2017; Meese, 2012). In addition to facing the stigma of being in foster care, youth in foster care are often youth of color, which may lead to them confronting other stereotypes (Puzzanchera & Taylor, 2019; Spinak, 2018).

There is a clear connection between having a strong ethnic and racial identity and positive youth development; however, for youth who have experienced foster care, ethnic and

racial identity can be disrupted (Tyrell, Marcelo, Trang, & Yates, 2019). Tyrell et al. (2019) conducted a longitudinal study with 144 Black, Latinx, and multiracial individuals who had transitioned out of foster care. Participants reported that they did not receive guidance or information about race or ethnicity while in foster care, and when they did it often involved negative stereotypes. This is concerning as strong ethnic racial identity can buffer the negative effects of adversity (Tyrell et al., 2019).

Students with a history of foster care who are part of a marginalized racial group and have other intersecting marginalized identities or have other risk factors tend to have worse educational outcomes (Baams, Wilson, & Russell, 2019). For instance, adults aging out of foster care who report more severe abuse and more placement changes are less likely to endorse positive feelings about their ethnic group, which can have socioemotional consequences (Tyrell et al., 2019). Additionally, youth who identify as African American and are part of the LGBTQ community change placements more often and ultimately have worse mental health and educational outcomes than other foster youth who are part of the LGBTQ community and identify as White (Baams et al., 2019). Being part of a racially marginalized community is often paired with being economically marginalized (Zilberstein, 2016).

Families who are economically marginalized are overrepresented in the foster care system (Cenat, McIntee, Mukunzi, & Noorishad, 2021; Zilberstein, 2016). Many parents who are economically marginalized distrust institutions and can be misunderstood and feel unable to advocate for their needs when interacting with authorities, leading them to have less access to social capital (Lareau, 2003). Their distrust is with reason, because when social workers assess a parent's capacity to care for their child and the child's well-being, they often use models of optimal middle-class outcomes, versus ones that are socioeconomically diverse, which increases

the risk of unconscious bias (Zilberstein, 2016). Since families are often not given a voice or a chance to advocate for themselves within the child welfare system, these youth are disproportionately placed in out-of-home, non-relative foster care homes rather than receiving support so that they can stay together as a family or live with relatives (Spinak, 2018). Cheng and Lo (2018) similarly found that social workers showed more empathy and had more collaborative and goal-oriented relationships with economically advantaged families and less with those who were economically marginalized.

These families who are economically marginalized in the child welfare system often face multiple stressors such as housing instability, social isolation, and mental health challenges (Spinak, 2018). At times, social workers assess the neighborhood, the state of the house, or the resources available when deciding about placing a child into foster care, rather than the parents' ability to care for their children (Zilberstein, 2016). The factors connected with poverty, such as lack of resources and low-income neighborhoods are associated with increased referrals to the child welfare system (Janczewski, 2015). For example, a messy home has been a basis to place children into foster care, even when there is no evidence of child endangerment, which can represent a class bias (Pelton, 2015). In addition to socioeconomic status, youth who identify as LGBTQ are also overrepresented in foster care (Baams et al., 2019; Child Welfare Information Gateway, n.d.).

Even though 30% of youth in foster care identify as part of the LGBTQ community, compared to 11% of youth who are not part of the foster care system, only 13 states had laws or policies “to protect foster youth from harassment and discrimination based on both sexual orientation and gender identity” (Baams et al., 2019, p. 7) in 2019. Youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ can be exposed to increased rejection, unsafe living situations, and worse

outcomes than their non-LGBTQ peers in foster care (Baams et al., 2019). As of 2022, however, there are 22 states with protections for youth in foster care based on both sexual orientation and gender (MAP, 2022). Youth who identify as transgender (i.e., when one's gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth) or gender-expansive (i.e., when one's gender identity is not within the traditional male-female binary) fare even worse than the rest of the youth in foster care who identify as LGBTQ, in terms of mental health, placement stability, and education (Mountz, Capous-Desyllas, & Pourciau, 2018). Mountz et al. (2018) completed a study with seven former foster youth who identified as transgender and found that all seven of them had engaged in physical self-harm at some point, and that they reported living in double the number of placements as the average amount of placements of their peers in the LGBTQ community who identified as cisgender (i.e., when one's gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth).

Youth in foster care who identify as part of the LGBTQ community have worse outcomes in several life domains when compared to their peers in foster care who are not part of the LGBTQ community (Baams et al., 2019; Mountz et al., 2018). For example, they are more likely to face victimization and abuse by social workers, foster parents, and their peers, which contributes to a lack of permanency such as finding a long-term home or family (Baams et al., 2019; Mountz et al., 2018). Mountz et al. (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with seven former foster youth who identified as transgender or gender expansive and found that youth in foster care who identify as transgender have additional barriers in terms of accessing gender-affirming medical care, housing, and employment, which may lead to more participation in the underground economy (i.e., participation in illegal activities to make money), and having a higher likelihood of experiencing homelessness (Mountz et al., 2018).

In summary, youth with intersecting marginalized identities who are in foster care struggle more overall than their peers who are not in foster care (Spinak, 2018). Often, they encounter stereotypes for being in foster care that can contribute to them not wanting to disclose their status of being a foster youth. They may also be more likely to have marginalizing experiences such as feeling rejected by peers or teachers, which can contribute to hypersensitivity about their identities (Johnson et al., 2020). Beliefs about a person ultimately contribute to the access that person has to social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). The different values assigned to them based on their identities make it difficult for youth in foster care to access social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011). Although the intersectional identities of youth can make it difficult for them to access social capital, the environment that they live in, including how the adults in their lives talk about and value higher education, can also hinder their access to social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). These difficulties are exacerbated by frequent school and placement changes.

School and placement changes. A change in foster care placement is rarely due to an isolated event, but rather due to a combination of factors related to the child's needs, perceived lack of support from the foster care system, and the impact that the youth is having on the foster family (Brown & Bednar, 2006; Tonheim & Iversen, 2018). Such placement changes are often followed by a change in school (Clemens, Klopfenstein, Tis, & Lalonde, 2017b; Font et al., 2018). Repeated school changes impact educational achievement for youth in foster care; they correlate with lower high school completion and a lower likelihood of pursuing secondary education (Clemens, Lalonde, & Sheesley, 2016). It is essential to look at the patterns and trends of placement changes and how they correlate to school changes, considering these patterns contribute to how youth can engage with their education (Morton, 2015).

Being in foster care for extended periods of time and changing placements frequently can increase the frequency of students changing schools (Clemens et al., 2017a). Frequently changing placements can affect a student's ability to access institutional agents as these agents often have other duties and responsibilities and may not be able to form relationships with highly mobile students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

The more times a youth changes placements, the more likely it is for the youth to change schools multiple times, which indicates that a change in placements is connected to other factors and consequences (Clemens et al., 2017a). For example, school may become less of a priority for children when they change placements (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Morton, 2015). Morton (2015) conducted a qualitative study using a purposive sample of 11 current and former foster youth in Oregon to explore their perceptions regarding barriers to completing high school. The criteria for participation were being a current or former foster youth who were enrolled in or planned to enroll in postsecondary education; a nonprofit that the youth participated in helped with recruitment. Morton found that placement changes contribute to distrust and anger among youth in foster care and impacted their school experiences. The youth in the study also felt disempowered, which contributed to lower school attendance, more referrals for disciplinary actions, and higher placement in special education (Morton, 2015). Similarly, half of the youth in a mixed methods study of 102 youth in foster care in the Northeast by Strolin-Goltzman, Woodhouse, Suter, and Werrbach (2016) shared that changing placements was especially difficult because they knew that every time they changed placements, they had to change schools. In this study, 102 youth completed a survey, and then 10 participants between the ages of 18 and 22 were selected to complete an interview based on their varied experiences with school mobility or school stability. They talked about how this constant worrying and uncertainty

left them little time to focus on school. In contrast, youth who thought they had more structure at home or school could better focus on completing their work.

A placement can represent a youth's basic need for shelter and can connect to the youth's sense of safety and stability. These studies demonstrate how the instability of placements impact youth's academics by negatively affecting their mental health (Morton, 2015; Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). Youth were able to focus more on their education when they had structure in their homes or classrooms and when adults encouraged them to do well academically (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016). Having to change homes can impact youth's ability to focus on higher-order needs such as academics (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). The effects of placement changes on youth's mental health can continue even after youth age out of foster care, resulting in lower levels of attainment of postsecondary education (Strolin-Goltzman et al., 2016).

Changing schools frequently can decrease students' chances of graduating (Clemens et al., 2016; Zetlin, Weinberg, & Shea, 2010). Clemens et al. (2016) conducted a quantitative study of Colorado youth ($N = 3,357$) in foster care and they found that, as the average number of school changes increased, the youth's chances of earning a high school diploma decreased. They also found that youth who switched schools in 11th or 12th grade were more likely to leave school without a diploma or certificate compared to those who switched schools earlier in the education. Zetlin et al. (2010) found similar results and concluded that these changes impact the youth academically as they often lose credits when they change schools and must readjust to a new setting, with a new culture and new expectations. Even though each new placement negatively impacts education, these effects add up over time (Clemens et al., 2017b).

Acknowledging that youth in foster care change schools more often than their peers is essential in recognizing how these changes affect their education. Pears, Kim, Buchanan, and

Fisher (2015) found that changing schools frequently early in the youth's education were associated with worse socioemotional and academic competence as the youth continued their schooling. It is also important to note that youth often miss core curriculum when they change schools, resulting in gaps in their foundational learning later in their school careers (Pears et al., 2015). These gaps can have implications for their college readiness and their experience of college-going culture.

College-going culture. The influences surrounding youth and the messages they receive from institutions impact their choices academically, and ultimately their educational attainment level (Roderick, Coca, & Nagaoka, 2011). This section explores the schools that youth in foster care attend and how their school cultures can influence degree attainment. The synthesis will primarily focus on college-going culture, which is defined as the degree that youth are encouraged and expected to go to college by those in their environments (Roderick et al., 2011). Students who attend schools with a strong college-going culture, including high expectations and support, are more likely to succeed academically (Roderick et al., 2011). College-going culture and school culture are closely related (Knight & Duncheon, 2019).

School culture refers to beliefs, attitudes, relationships, and rules that influence how a school functions (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). The way that institutional agents select students they want to support, however, is often based on their perceptions of the student and whether they think the student is willing to adopt the cultural norms of the dominant group (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Often, those who would like to help these youth know little about the foster care system besides what they see in the media. Clemens et al. (2017a) conducted a study in which 16 former foster youth participated in focus groups designed to explore the factors contributing to how youth in foster care exit the educational system, the disparity in high school

graduation rates, and what the former foster youth recommend to improve educational outcomes for students in foster care. One theme that emerged was that school personnel were more likely to have lower expectations for youth in foster care. For example, participants stated that they were often encouraged to take a high school equivalency exam rather than complete their high school diplomas. They also perceived receiving less praise and recognition for academic achievements, which reinforced negative messaging and ultimately demotivated them (Clemens et al., 2017a).

College-going culture, which is often lacking in the lives of youth with marginalized identities, is vital in mitigating the impact of negative peer interactions and less perceived support from adults (Clemens et al., 2017a; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). There is a connection between college-going culture and youth enrolling in college, as found in a mixed methods study by Schroeter et al. (2015) of 102 youth in foster care between the ages of 15 and 21, who completed youth education surveys measuring teacher–student relationships, peer supports, and goals. College-enrolled youth scored significantly higher on engagement subscales. All of the college-enrolled youth reported that an adult talked to them about college at some point in their school careers (Schroeter et al., 2015). In comparison, only 80% of the youth who dropped out of school reported that adults had spoken to them about college (Schroeter et al., 2015).

These studies demonstrate the need for youth in foster care to experience an encouraging school environment that promotes school engagement and optimism for their academic futures. When students attend schools with college-going cultures, there is a higher likelihood that they will continue their journey in achieving a bachelor’s degree (Benbenishty, Siegel, & Astor, 2018; Edwards & Batlemento, 2016; Schroeter, 2015). The students’ marginalized intersectional identities and societal beliefs about those students may prevent them from accessing an

institutional agent, who could facilitate a college-going culture (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Additionally, educational institutions are set up so that it is more difficult for students to access social capital, and participating in mainstream settings can be uncomfortable for youth with marginalized identities due to barriers (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Some barriers for these students can be a lack of a sense of belonging within educational settings, sociocultural barriers (i.e., when the cultural aspects of a home or community are judged as less important than the cultural aspects of another), socioeconomic barriers (i.e., when the student cannot fully participate in higher education due to monetary reasons), linguistic barriers (i.e., when using one's primary language is deemed problematic and one is not able to participate in both languages fully) and structural barriers (i.e., issues that are part of the environment such as a lack of resources that prevent a student from fully participating in the environment; Salazar, 2012; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Students with a history of foster care may not be as college-ready as their peers (Unrau, Font, & Rawls, 2012), regardless of college-going culture.

College readiness. The academic level of youth in foster care may impact their college graduation rates, as they can be underprepared for college by missing core academic curriculum. The term “college readiness” has evolved over the years. One definition is “the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, without remediation, in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program” (Conley, 2007, p. 5).

Although former foster youth may be less prepared academically for college, they are often just as motivated as their peers who were not in foster care. A study by Unrau et al. (2012) used a convenience sample of youth enrolled in a Michigan University to investigate the readiness of youth who had experienced foster care to engage in college compared to their peers

who had not been in foster care. The results indicated that youth formerly in foster care were more motivated academically, more self-reliant, more receptive to services, had less familial support, and perceived that they were better prepared for college than the general freshman class. At the end of their first semester, however, the youth in foster care had lower grade point averages, had dropped more classes, and had accumulated fewer credits than their peers who had not experienced foster care. These findings indicated that, although youth formerly in foster care had higher aspirations and felt prepared, they still could not complete the semester as successfully as their peers (Unrau et al., 2012). This study is vital because it shows that aspirations do not always align with actions among highly motivated youth in foster care.

Additionally, due to their educational and personal experiences, youth in foster care may still need more support than their peers who had not been in foster care, to succeed in higher education (Unrau et al., 2012). In a study by Mitchell et al. (2014), 10% percent of the youth transitioning out of foster care stated that they would need a tutor to be successful in college. The regular provision of evaluative feedback and guidance, a form of institutional support, would be a way to help them persist and succeed in college (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

One type of institutional support is college readiness programs. For the purpose of this literature synthesis, “residential programs” represent programs where youth live on a college campus or in a college-rich environment for a period of time. For example, residential college readiness summer programs are ways to prepare youth in foster care for higher education rigors in an environment where they can experience campus life (Day et al., 2018). Preparation includes empowering youth to see themselves on campus and think about college as being a place where they belong. These programs are called “college readiness programs.”

College readiness programs that have a residential component can improve college access for youth in foster care through academic preparation, therapeutic supports, and providing information on financial aid, resiliency, and organizational skills (Hope Manifested, 2020). However, a weakness is that no research exists regarding these programs' collective impact on youth's educational outcomes (Day et al., 2018). Some residential college readiness programs include First Star Academies; Fostering Academies, Mentoring Excellence (FAME); and Better Futures. In these programs, the foster youth live on campus for anywhere between three days and three months, depending on the program, and then have a non-residential programming for the rest of the year. Some of the year-long programming includes mentorship, workshops, and college counseling (Day et al., 2018; Geenen et al., 2015; Hope Manifested, 2020). These programs can create a sense of stability and continuation through instability, since the students still attend these programs even as they move among placements.

First Star Academies, FAME, and Better Futures demonstrate successful outcomes for youth who participated (Day et al., 2018; Geenen et al., 2015; Hope Manifested, 2020). Day et al. (2018) investigated the outcomes of 142 high school-aged foster youth enrolled in a residential college readiness summer program between 2008 and 2012. Of those youth, 45% enrolled in a postsecondary education program. Similarly, for the 2019 school year, 98% of foster youth who attended First Star Academy graduated high school, and 89% enrolled in higher education (Hope Manifested, 2020). Better Futures, consisting of a 4-day stay on a university campus and yearlong programming, also shows promising results. Geenen et al. (2015) randomized 67 foster youth with mental health diagnoses into (a) a control group that received their mental health treatment as usual and (b) an intervention group (i.e., the residential college readiness program). Both groups completed assessments for mental health, self-determination,

and quality of life. The two groups varied in their enrollment in postsecondary education, with nearly 73% of the youth who received the intervention enrolling in postsecondary education, compared to 36% of the control group.

A concern related to college-readiness programs is that their intensities (e.g., duration, programming offered, frequency of contact) vary widely based on which agency facilitates the program. The varying intensities make the interventions difficult to evaluate on a large scale due to the variability. Some of these programs include residential stays that last a month, while others only last 3 days (Day et al., 2018). Articles reviewing these programs did not analyze how the length of time that the youth spend on campus connect to the youth's outcomes (Day et al., 2018; Geenen et al., 2015). However, the results of these programs appeared to have internal validity. For example, the study by Geenen et al. (2015) included a control group of foster youth who did not receive the intervention. At the study's conclusion, 65% of the students in the intervention group and 24% of the students in the control group enrolled in higher education, which was a significant difference (Geenen et al., 2015). All three of these programs reported results that were on track to be higher than the 2%-8% national average for youth with a history of foster care who complete a bachelor's degree by the time they were 25 years old (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, 2014).

These studies suggest that college readiness programs can help youth gain the necessary skills and preparation to live independently. While scarce, college readiness programs such as First Star Academies, FAME, and Better Futures serve to prepare and empower youth to live on their own, as well as prepare them for college-level work. These programs help the youth develop needed skills to succeed later in life (Day et al., 2018; Geenen et al., 2015; Hope Manifested, 2020). Even when students are academically prepared, another important aspect for

success is feeling like they belong in college.

Sense of belonging. Once students with a history of foster care start college, having a sense of belonging is just as important, if not more important, as they continue their educational journeys (Salazar, 2012). A sense of belonging is the feeling of personal involvement in an environment, such that someone perceives they are an important part of that environment (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). A sense of belonging can be connected to students having access to funds of knowledge, which is practicing the way that people speak within educational institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Students with foster care involvement often want to make friends but have difficulty showing vulnerability and connecting to their college peers, who they may feel are more privileged (Morton, 2017). These concerns may be justified, as youth in foster care reported feeling judged and perceived more bullying by their peers during school, which can lead to them feeling like they are different than others (Clemens et al., 2017a; Edwards & Batlemento, 2016). Edwards and Batlemento (2016) found that being placed into foster care, which can cause a disrupted attachment, contributed to the struggle to strengthen their sense of selves, especially if their cultural heritage is different from their caregivers' culture.

It would make sense, then, that youth who feel more connected tend to have an increased sense of belonging (Salazar, 2012). Salazar (2012) conducted a national study of former foster youth who graduated from high school, and found that youth who connected to extracurricular activities, and went to college-related events, had a decreased risk of college dropout. Increasing extracurricular involvement could also help youth connect more with their peers who they previously felt were unrelatable (Morton, 2017). When considering that youth in foster care may struggle with a sense of self (Edwards & Batlemento, 2016), college can be when they find

themselves, or it can be a time when they continue to struggle with their academic identities. Access to funds of knowledge and bridging will ultimately determine if the student is able to feel a sense of belonging and success within the institution (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). It is difficult for students in foster care to achieve a sense of belonging in a school setting, as they often change schools and placements frequently (Johnson et al., 2020). Due to changing placements and schools so often, students may not have the opportunity to connect with supportive adults or institutional agents in the same way as students who remain in the same school.

Institutional Agents

According to Stanton-Salazar (2011), institutional agents, who are individuals with at least one high status position in an agency or society, are instrumental in accessing social capital and institutional support. These agents can be teachers, counselors, clergy, leaders, or other high-status people. Youth in foster care, however, may not have access to any consistent supportive adults, including institutional agents (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018).

Supportive adults. For all youth, perhaps even more so for youth in foster care, supportive adults are crucial in shaping and guiding life decisions such as postsecondary education. In a qualitative study of eight youth formerly in foster care, Kilgore and Miller-Ott (2019) analyzed the messages the youth received from adults regarding education. They found that messages from caregivers and school counselors were most important to the youth and whether the youth decided to continue with postsecondary education (Kilgore & Miller-Ott, 2019). Relationships with teachers might also mitigate some adverse effects of placement changes, should those relationships continue (Schroeter et al., 2015). These findings regarding the importance of messages and the relationships with adults in the youth's lives aligns with a study by Morton (2016) that included 11 Oregon youth who experienced foster care, had

graduated high school, and applied for a college grant to help with postsecondary education. Participants were interviewed for 90 minutes about their educational experiences and what helped them decide to pursue secondary education. Each participant identified a single strong supportive relationship that had helped them to overcome barriers and succeed academically (Morton, 2016), which shows the importance of supportive adults explicitly encouraging youth to continue with their education.

Youth in foster care, however, tend to lack unpaid supportive adults to guide them in their decision-making processes, although they state that when they do have supportive adults in their lives, these relationships can help them persist in education (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). In some cases, foster parents can be a source of support and can play important roles in youth's decisions to pursue higher education. Munford and Sanders (2016) conducted a qualitative study involving 21 foster parents of students who were doing well educationally. These foster parents participated in two semistructured interviews over 2 years. The results indicated that the foster parents supported the youth both tangibly and emotionally, which helped youth feel a sense of belonging to a family unit and helped them gain confidence in pursuing their goals (Munford & Sanders, 2016).

The way that foster parents perceive their role within the youth's schooling is a major factor related to how they can academically support the youth in their care (Stein-Steele, 2015). In a qualitative study of 12 California foster parents by Stein-Steele (2015) using in-depth interviews and a post-interview focus group, the foster parents emphasized that they did not see their role in raising youth in foster care as any different from their role in parenting their biological children. The foster parents identified their primary role as stabilizing the youth through structure, addressing basic needs, and developing healthy relationships. Once the youth

appeared to be more stable in terms of behavior and emotions, the foster parents explained that their roles shifted to increasing the youth's self-esteem through school progress (Stein-Steele, 2015). Some challenges to the youth succeeding academically included having misdiagnosed learning disabilities, lower expectations from teachers, multiple placements, and behavioral difficulties that prevented them from achieving in the classroom (Stein-Steele, 2015). Another challenge identified for older youth pursuing higher education was that the youth grew tired of the system and being told what to do, which prevented them from listening to advice and guidance (Stein-Steele, 2015).

Considering that youth in foster care tend to have difficulties identifying supportive adults, it is likely that they do not have adults in their lives in high status positions (i.e., institutional agents). By the time these students get to college, they also face an embedded stratification system with rigid hierarchal relationships, making it even more difficult for them to connect with institutional agents at the institution (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Supportive adults are essential for the youth's wellbeing and ability to form healthy relationships, and they also serve the vital role of advocating for the students (Stein-Steele, 2015). Youth in foster care are part of many systems, and sometimes the systems do not communicate with each other. One crucial area for advocacy is education, especially considering that these youth often do not have consistent people in their lives. They can lose academic progress due to information not being shared between schools and placements (Zetlin et al., 2010).

School-home-community collaboration. The interactions between the youth's home environments, school environments, and social service agencies are crucial leading up to college. Zetlin et al. (2010) conducted a study in California and facilitated focus groups with caregivers, school liaisons, and agency advocates to determine what they thought youth in foster care needed

to succeed educationally. All three groups acknowledged that youth in foster care had severe behavioral, academic, and social challenges in school. Additionally, all three groups acknowledged little to no cooperation or collaboration among the school, the home, and the social workers. Each group tried to work on these issues independently. Across the different stakeholders, they all had the same goal of helping youth in foster care succeed academically, and they all felt that the other groups needed to be more active in solving the issue. The participants in this study recognized that the youth's educational achievement is not the responsibility of one group, and that there should be collaboration and support from the school, their homes, and their social service agencies to increase success (Zetlin et al., 2010).

Youth in foster care need a person to advocate for their educational needs (Zetlin et al., 2010). If the youth qualify for special education services, they might also need an advocate to identify and communicate needs across systems (Geenen & Powers, 2006). The lack of communication between the youth's former and current schools, and child welfare system can be a barrier to educational success (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012). The lack of communication could also result in lost credits if the youth are placed in classes they already completed, or if transcripts from former schools were not received (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012). Lack of communication between these systems can result in the youth falling behind and ultimately failing to pursue postsecondary education (Hahnel & Van Zile, 2012; Zetlin et al., 2010).

One barrier to communication between the school, the caregivers, and the foster care agencies could be that schools have a traditional way of framing the family (Morton, 2016). Considering youth change placements and interact with different systems, the people in their support network often shift (Zetlin et al., 2010). It could be helpful if the schools asked the

guardians to add caseworkers and other supportive adults to the list of who can communicate with the school, so that there is more overall collaboration (Morton, 2016).

Even though students with no history of foster care may have access to institutional agents who can advocate for them and help guide them through the educational system prior to and while in college, students in foster care who frequently change placements, may not have access to a stable person who can guide and advocate for them (Zetlin et al., 2010). With an institutional agent to help guide and coach them, these students may also have difficulty accessing institutional supports (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).

Institutional Supports

Institutional supports, which are important for the success of students in a school system, are not evenly accessible to all students (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). These supports can include knowledge, individual resources, moral support, feedback, and guidance (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Youth transitioning out of foster care report having difficulty finding and navigating resources available to them as well as finding adults who can help them access these resources (Tobolowsky, Scannapieco, Aguiniga, & Madden, 2019).

Availability of resources. A need for resources is especially evident as youth in foster care prepare to transition to adulthood (Courtney, Lee, & Perez, 2011; Pecora, 2012). Several studies found that youth in foster care lacked independent living skills such as knowing how to maintain a budget, which hindered their independence, and contributed to them feeling unprepared to live on their own (Courtney et al., 2011; Hiles, Moss, Thorne, Wright, & Dallos, 2014). Courtney et al. (2011) explored independent living skills services available to 732 youth in three Midwestern states by interviewing them every two years while they were between the ages of 17 and 24. Youth who participated were not receiving all the services they were eligible

for under federal law. Specifically, there were 47 independent living services (e.g., study skills trainings, internships, classes about maintaining an apartment) available for the youth and, on average, youth received 14 services at ages 17 and 18, nine at age 19, and six at age 21.

Additionally, the youth indicated that they would like more support than they were receiving but did not specify what support they could benefit from (Courtney et al., 2011), which could mean they were not familiar enough with available supports to be able to name them.

A need for resources and social connections was also a theme in a meta-analysis of the Casey National Alumni Study, the Northwest Alumni Study, and the Salazar Study of College Completers (Pecora, 2012). Across all three studies, a common predictor of educational success was academic support (e.g., tutoring) and tangible support (e.g., a consistent adult) for youth with foster care experience. Finding both academic and tangible support is especially difficult, considering that moving between placements and schools can disrupt support networks (Pecora, 2012).

A lack of financial resources, specifically, was a barrier to educational attainment, especially when the aid available was insufficient to cover the students' financial needs (Schroeter et al., 2015). When students with foster care history enter college and look for assistance, they often cannot find staff who are familiar with the housing and financial aid options available to them (Tobolowsky et al., 2019). They often ask many people and spend time independently researching, which results in them not receiving all available resources (Tobolowsky et al., 2019). Students can become frustrated with learning how to navigate the system, which increases the likelihood that they will not complete their degree (Tobolowsky et al., 2019). Students with a history of foster care indicated that although some financial aid was available to attend college, this aid was insufficient to cover their financial needs (Schroeter et

al., 2015). Challenges navigating resources and systems can be especially difficult when youth are transitioning out of the foster care system.

Transition out of foster care. The transition out of foster care is when youth stop being under the children's court system jurisdiction, which includes losing the oversight of their social workers. This transition can be life-changing for youth, as they may not have any other support network in place. This transition is also when they may decide whether they will be pursuing a college degree (Hiles et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2014).

Although the transition out of foster care is a new beginning, the uncertainty of living situations and lack of available financial resources can be barriers to a successful transition into independence (Hiles et al., 2014; Schelbe, 2018). Often youth in foster care indicate that they do not feel well prepared to live independently once leaving foster care (Courtney et al., 2011). Furthermore, they often lacked the safety net of having family support if they made mistakes (Pecora, 2012). These feelings of uncertainty align with a study by Schelbe (2018), who found that youth transitioning out of foster care felt unprepared to live on their own in terms of financial management and independent living skills.

Although most of the youth who participated in the studies had goals such as graduating high school, going to college, and working, the uncertainty about the transition and their futures created a gap between the youth having these goals and having the tools to achieve them (Hiles et al., 2014; Mitchell et al., 2014; Schelbe, 2018). The themes of uncertainty and doubt regarding resources and the youth's ability to thrive in adulthood were also prevalent in a study by Mitchell et al. (2014). The students stated that good grades, motivation, finances, transportation, and social networks were crucial to them achieving their educational goals. The need to work during college was also correlated with premature school dropout (Salazar, 2012). Even though there is

an expectation that all youth develop a transition plan when leaving foster care, 60% of the youth in the study did not know if they had a transition plan (Mitchell et al., 2014).

The previously described studies reflect the thoughts of youth and staff regarding the barriers and needs of individuals transitioning out of foster care; however, a large ($N = 1,459$) multi-state longitudinal study of youth in foster care by Okpych and Courtney (2019) identified predictors of success as youth transition out of foster care and found higher postsecondary education completion rates in states where youth can stay in foster care past their 18th birthday. They found that higher reading levels and finishing the 11th grade increased the probability of completing high school. Youth who enrolled in four-year colleges were more likely to graduate than those who enrolled in two-year colleges (Okpych & Courtney, 2019). The authors attributed this outcome to selective admission criteria and more resources once the students began college. Their study highlights how the factors that affect youth in foster care are not all unique to students in foster care, and many of these factors are similar to those found among students in general who drop out of institutions of higher education, such as first-generation students (Capik & Shupp, 2021; Pratt et al., 2019).

Considering that the access youth have to institutional support depends on their networks and the networks of the institutional agents connected to them, it makes sense that such support differs for students with marginalized identities versus youth who identify with dominant groups (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Youth transitioning out of foster care may have even less access to such supports than youth with marginalized identities not transitioning out of foster care, connected to feelings of uncertainty related to transitioning out of foster care (Schelbe, 2018). Additionally, support, defined as a trusting relationship, was often difficult to obtain during the transition out of care, due to high child welfare staff turnover and the varying levels of knowledge by each

child welfare staff member (Hiles et al., 2014; Tonheim & Iversen, 2018). For this reason, it is important to empower these youth to interact with the system differently (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Empowerment

Stanton-Salazar (2011) added the concept of empowerment to the social capital theory in 2011; empowerment is when individuals transition from passive participants to active participants in their lives. There is evidence that participating in empowerment activities can help youth aging out of foster care perceive higher levels of control, have more motivation to influence others, and participate more in activities (Batista, Johnson, & Friedmann, 2018). Empowerment activities are when an individual participates in shared decision-making, development of a group identity, development of skills, or participates in important tasks, which cultivates feelings of empowerment (Batista et al., 2018). The concept of empowerment is important in mental health, as empowering someone can help them heal as they move from a mindset of something happening to them, to them having some control over the outcome (Greene, Lee, Mentzer, Pinnell, & Niles, 1998).

One way to empower students with mental health concerns is with customized interventions (Williams, Baker, & Williams-DeVane, 2018). Williams et al. (2018) studied the effectiveness of customized interventions, which allowed students to choose their own interventions and found that participants showed improvement in at least one category of the Career and College Readiness Self-Efficacy Inventory after completing the intervention, which lasted eight weeks. The study was a single case research design with three participants. All participants indicated that they felt their customized interventions had value (Williams et al., 2018). Additionally, using the customized intervention approach, the therapist adjusted treatment goals based on Career and College Readiness Self-Efficacy Inventory life domains on which the

youth scored the lowest. Having three participants makes the findings difficult to generalize (Williams et al., 2018). The findings do, however, support the notion that students are intrinsically motivated in the face of adversity and have the potential to benefit from being empowered to help themselves (Jackson, Colvin, & Bullock, 2019). There can also be a correlation between trauma and a person's mental health (American Psychiatric Association, 2015; Huinan, Tsz Wai, Liang, & Kong, 2021).

With the increased mental health concerns and self-reliance in the foster youth population, there should be a focus on empowerment. The updated framework emphasizes that institutional agents should be empowerment agents by assisting youth to empower and transform themselves, their communities, and society rather than just providing resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). This then motivates students to navigate and have a sense of control over their environment while growing in their abilities to navigate institutions (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Sometimes interventions that are grounded in empowerment, such as photovoice or dance/movement therapy, can help youth heal from trauma and certain mental health diagnoses (Bernstein, 2019; Gupta, Simms, & Dougherty, 2019). These two models of treatment, similar to other treatments that include empowerment, focus on increasing self-esteem and skills for those who participate, and allowing them to take an active and guiding role in their healing (Bernstein, 2019; Gupta et al., 2019).

Summary

In summary, social capital, institutional agents, institutional supports, and empowerment all contribute to the success of former foster youth in college (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Access to social capital may be limited for former foster youth due to their intersectional identities, school and placement changes, college readiness, sense of belonging, and college-going culture. Access

to institutional agents may be limited due to changing supportive adults and the challenges of collaborating among their schools, homes, and the community. Access to institutional supports may be limited due to their marginalized identities (Stanton-Salazar, 2011), which is compounded by availability of resources, challenges with transitioning out of foster care, and availability of resources. It is also important to empower these students to transform their relationships with institutions.

Some college readiness programs are specifically designed to assist current and former foster youth (Day et al., 2018). These programs can provide skills and tangible resources that can help students as they prepare to transition out of the system such as financial resources and supportive adults who can give advice. College readiness programs can empower youth to actively participate in their educational journey and how they choose to engage in it, and students who participate in college readiness programs have a higher likelihood of completing college (Day et al., 2018). Considering risk factors and the rate of students with a history of foster care graduating with college degrees, I aim to use a social capital framework with an empowerment component to study the perceptions of students, caregivers, and program personnel about college readiness programs and explore what helps students with a history of foster care involvement complete postsecondary education.

Chapter 3

Method

This convergent mixed methods study attempted to expand the current literature on college readiness programs and completion of postsecondary education to include perceptions of individuals who identify as program personnel, alumni, and caregivers, through an empowerment and social capital lens. This chapter describes the study method and includes the context, role of the researcher, research design, participants, instrumentation, and procedure.

The purposes of the study were to explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, determine differences in risk factors for college attrition between first-year students and persisters, and explore the factors related to postsecondary degree persistence of bachelor's degree students and graduates who have experienced foster care and participated in a college readiness program. The following research questions guide the study:

1. What do program administrators perceive as supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation for youth who have participated in a college readiness program and experienced foster care?
2. How do program personnel and caregivers describe the college-going culture of their college readiness programs?
3. What differences exist between the risk factors of first-year postsecondary students and persisters who have participated in a college readiness program and experienced foster care?
4. How do individuals who have experienced foster care describe factors that enabled or hindered their empowerment to persist in a postsecondary degree program?

Context of the Study

This study focuses on college-aged students who have experienced foster care, which was approximately 56,000 youth in 2020 (AEC Foundation, 2022). The study was conducted in partnership with a national nonprofit organization (Hope Manifested) and a California-based nonprofit organization (Dreams Unlimited).

Hope Manifested

Hope Manifested, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1999, includes 14 academies designed to improve the lives of foster youth (Hope Manifested, 2021). The mission of Hope Manifested is to “[improve] the lives of foster youth by partnering with child welfare agencies, universities, and school districts to ensure foster youth have the academic, life skills, and adult supports needed to transition to higher education and adulthood successfully. [They] pursue [their] mission through innovative, university-based college-preparatory programs, providing technical assistance to stakeholders, and advocating for policy change” (Hope Manifested, 2021, para. 1). Students enrolled in Hope Manifested are expected to remain in the program throughout their time in high school.

There are four objectives for the Hope Manifested program. The first objective is to keep youth on track for high school graduation. The second objective of the Hope Manifested program is to provide participants with the resources and supports needed to successfully transition to higher education. The third objective is to ensure that participants have life skills and access to the resources needed to prepare them for independence and adulthood. The fourth and final objective is to engage caregivers and other adults who can provide support to students as they transition to higher education and independence.

Hope Manifested has an executive director and a board of directors, making the executive director, the chief operating officer, and the academy directors the primary fulltime

employees of the organization. Hope Manifested and its academies predominantly rely on volunteers and part-time employees to function. The organization hires temporary summer staff such as case managers, youth coaches, and assistant directors to staff the summer programs (Hope Manifested, 2021). The youth coaches are often alumni of the foster care system or are first-generation college students. Even though first-generation students do not have all the same experiences as youth in foster care, they still face unique challenges that can help them relate to students in foster care (Batsche et al., 2014). Hope Manifested also utilizes staff from county social welfare agencies, the agencies responsible for protecting children living in those counties, to provide transportation to and from events, and college interns to help with administrative tasks.

The Hope Manifested model is such that youth in foster care can join the program in eighth or ninth grade and remain together as a cohort throughout high school. These youth convene one Saturday a month to participate in various workshops on college campuses or in the community. They also spend a month on a college campus each summer during their high school years, where they experience college culture and college readiness programming designed by Hope Manifested. Programming includes Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) preparation, field trips, and academics, as well as other topics (Hope Manifested, 2021).

Hope Manifested has an alumni program that keeps youth connected to the Hope Manifested program through social media, celebrating successes and birthdays, and tracking the alumni's journeys (Hope Manifested, 2021). This model supports the youth to confront challenges of early adulthood (Hope Manifested, 2021). This alumni program was created in 2019 and is working on expanding participation by academy alumni (J. Gallo, personal communication, October 5, 2021). Hope Manifested differs from Dreams Unlimited in some

ways, but there are also similarities between the two programs.

Dreams Unlimited

For more than 100 years the California-based nonprofit organization, Dreams Unlimited, has provided support services to families and individuals experiencing trauma. The mission of Dreams Unlimited is “to transform the lives of children exposed to adversity and poverty” (Dreams Unlimited, 2020, p. 1).

Dreams Unlimited has over 1,100 staff members that work in 29 locations across the county (Dreams Unlimited, 2020). The staff includes parent partners, teachers, therapists, psychologists, development staff, volunteer coordinators, and employment and recreational specialists. Their levels of education range from high school equivalencies to doctorates. The organization also has a board of directors and an executive team that guide project implementation to support their strategic plan (Dreams Unlimited, 2021).

One of the programs at Dreams Unlimited is the individualized transition skills program that serves students aged 16 to 20 who are or have been in foster care. Students enrolled in Dreams Unlimited can participate in the program for up to two years or until their 21st birthday, whichever comes first. The individualized transition skills program was created in 2014 after the Department of Children and Family Services added self-sufficiency as a child welfare outcome goal (Los Angeles County, 2014). The individualized transition skills program prepares students to transition out of the foster care system using mentorship and by encouraging graduation and preparation for college (Los Angeles County, 2014). The staff teach life skills classes with a focus on job training and financial management as a way of preparing students for the transition. The program staff also connect students to outside community programs to ensure that they can continue with needed services after transitioning

from the individualized transition skills program.

The individualized transition skills program is a voluntary 2-year program where each student is matched with a transition development specialist. At the start of the program, the transition development specialist administers a life skills assessment, which is also used to measure progress throughout the program. Students work collaboratively with the transition development specialist to create goals related to independence that they want to focus on. The students and transition development specialist meet at least twice per month to work on these goals. The transition development specialist might also host group activities so that the student can work on the individualized transition skills program goal while socializing with other students in the program. The students can earn up to four monetary incentives of \$75 each, for a total of \$300 as an incentive for completing individualized transition skills program goals (Los Angeles County, 2014).

The individualized transition skills program does not have a formal alumni program. The program alumni, however, are invited to an annual high school graduation celebration that honors the students' accomplishments and includes celebrities and donations (e.g., laptops, housing supplies) as they transition out of the program.

Role of Researcher

I planned and designed this study as well as collected the interview and survey data. I conducted data analysis with the guidance of my dissertation chair and committee. I have no current or past affiliation with Hope Manifested. I was a previous employee—a senior clinical supervisor—at Dreams Unlimited and worked in a different department than the department that is part of this study. There are no apparent ethical considerations related to my role in the context of this study.

Research Design

I used a convergent mixed methods design. A mixed methods design compares quantitative and qualitative data to get a more complete understanding of the findings and problems, validate each set of findings, and investigate if participants respond similarly to scales as they would to open-ended questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Additionally, a mixed methods study provides opportunities for comparisons amongst different data sources and for the researcher to learn from the participants' perspectives, which could provide information and viewpoints not previously considered (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Data in mixed methods studies can provide confirmation by verifying the data from one data source compared to another (Small, 2011). I chose a convergent mixed method design specifically because the quantitative survey data and the qualitative interview data were analyzed and combined to answer different aspects of the research questions to provide a more robust understanding of the experiences of students with a history of foster care who engage in college readiness programs.

This study had two phases; each included surveys and interviews. During Phase 1, preliminary data were collected to establish the breadth and depth of the problem of practice and focused on one of Hope Manifested's academies. I collected quantitative data using College-Going Culture Surveys and qualitative data using graduation factors semistructured interviews. During Phase 2, data collection expanded nationally to include Dreams Unlimited as well as all Hope Manifested academies. Quantitative data were collected using the Risk Factors for Retention Survey and qualitative data were collected using the graduation factors semistructured interview and postsecondary persistence semistructured interview.

A summary matrix shows alignment among the research questions, constructs and variables, instruments, data collection, and data analysis (see Appendix A).

Participants

The program administrators, program personnel, caregivers, and alumni who participated in this study were selected using various sampling methods. All Phase 1 participants (i.e., program administrators, program personnel, caregivers) were selected using criterion sampling based on their roles. Criterion sampling is when the researcher selects a sample based on a set of predetermined criteria (Patton, 1990). The administrators were chosen as they were uniquely able to speak about the perceived challenges and factors related to their programs as well as program attendees' college readiness. The staff and caregivers were selected due to their involvement in the program and ability to discuss and share insights regarding the perceived college-going culture.

The Phase 2 survey participants were also selected using criterion sampling (Patton, 1990). The criteria were having (a) graduated from the Hope Manifested or Dreams Unlimited program, (b) graduated from or being currently enrolled in a postsecondary degree program, and (c) a history of foster care. To be considered a graduate of Hope Manifested or Dreams Unlimited, the individual would have needed consistent attendance in the program, which is a requirement for participation in either program. If the students met these criteria, they could have been any age.

The Phase 2 interview participants were selected using extreme case sampling (Patton, 1990). Extreme case sampling is when a researcher selects participants based on them being unusual in some way, such as experiencing extraordinary successes or failures (Patton, 1990). This method of sampling is appropriate for this study, as college students with a history of foster care are considered to be extraordinary since their college attendance and graduation rates are so low (National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, 2014).

Phase 1. Phase 1 included three groups of participants from Hope Manifested: administrators, program personnel, and caregivers.

The first group of participants consisted of two administrators at Hope Manifested. The director of Hope Manifested had been the director since her academy opened in 2016. The chief executive officer of Hope Manifested oversees all 14 academies.

The second group of participants were 12 program personnel whose roles were case managers, assistant directors, mentors, coaches, or chaperones. Most of these program personnel worked with the academy for 2 years. Their social services experience ranged from 1 to 15 years, with the average years of experience being 4.7 years.

The third group consisted of 15 caregivers selected by the directors as having been consistently involved in the Hope Manifested programming. *Consistently involved* described a caregiver with whom the youth had lived for six months or more. The caregiver participants included foster, adoptive, and biological parents. The caregivers had a mean of 11.5 years of experience, with two caregivers having 4 or 5 years of experience, and the other eight having 10 or more years of experience, including one with 23 years of experience. The youth had lived with these caregivers for an average of 7 years, with the most amount of time being 17 years and the least amount of time being 7 months.

Phase 2. Phase 2 had two groups of participants: administrators of Dreams Unlimited and program alumni of Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited.

Three participants were administrators of Dreams Unlimited. These participants included a program supervisor, a senior clinical supervisor, and a clinical program manager. These administrators work with the programs for youth in foster care at Dreams Unlimited. They worked in the field of social services for on average 20 years, with the most being 26 years and

the least being 10 years. Two of the administrators identified as female and one identified as male. Two identified as Hispanic and one identified as Caucasian.

There were 558 program alumni who completed surveys. Of these alumni, 368 were currently enrolled in college and 190 had graduated. The racial and gender demographics of the alumni survey participants are similar to the demographics of those in foster care nationally. For gender identity, slightly less than half identified as female and slightly less than half identified as male, 7% identified as gender nonconforming or nonbinary, and less than 1% identified as other or left this question blank. For racial and ethnic identity 4% identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, 4% identified as Asian, a little less than a third identified as Black or African American, a little less than a third identified as Hispanic or Latino, and a little less than a third identified as White or Caucasian, 1% identified as other, and one person left the question blank. For school standing, 11% identified as freshmen, 22% identified as sophomores, 12% identified as juniors, 22% identified as seniors, and approximately a third had graduated. The demographics of the students who answered the survey are in Table 3.1.

There were 12 program alumni who participated in interviews. Eight identified as female, two identified as male, and two identified as gender nonconforming. For racial and ethnic identity, two identified as Black or African American, six identified as Hispanic or Latino, two identified as White or Caucasian, and two identified as other. For school standing, three alumni identified as freshmen and nine had graduated. The demographics of the alumni who participated in the interviews are in Table 3.2.

Table 3.1

Program Alumni Survey Participants

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	263	47
Gender nonconforming/transgender/other	39	7
Male	252	45
Other or blank	4	>1
Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaskan Native	20	4
Asian	21	4
Black or African American	173	31
Hispanic or Latino	156	28
Other or blank	7	1
White or Caucasian	181	32
Standing		
Freshmen	60	11
Sophomore	120	22
Junior	68	12
Senior	120	22
Graduated	190	33

Note. *N* = 558

Table 3.2

Program Alumni Interview Participants

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	8	66
Gender nonconforming/transgender/other	2	17
Male	2	17
Ethnicity		
Black or African American	2	17
Hispanic or Latino	6	49
Other	2	17
White or Caucasian	2	17
Standing		
Freshmen	3	25
Graduated	9	75

Note. *N* = 12

Instrumentation

Four instruments were used in this study. The College-Going Culture Survey by Murray (2011) was only used in Phase 1. The graduation factors semistructured interview, developed using guidelines by Gugiu and Rodriguez (2007), was used in Phases 1 and 2. The Risk Factors for Retention Survey by Pratt et al. (2019) and the postsecondary persistence semistructured interview, adapted from Capik and Shupp (2021), were used in Phase 2.

College-Going Culture Survey. I used two versions of the College-Going Culture Survey, one for caregivers and one for program personnel, to help answer Research Question 2, which focused on the perceived college-going culture of the program (see Appendices B and C).

The survey was modified from *Diploma Matters: A Field Guide for College and Career Readiness* (Murray, 2011) and solicited opinions and perspectives on the college-going culture of Hope Manifested. The 20-item survey was answered using a five-point Likert scale (*strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree*), in addition to a *not applicable* option.

For caregivers, the words “my student’s school” were changed to “Hope Manifested” in most items. An example of an item in the caregiver survey is, “I am well-informed about college requirements, the application process, and financial aid.” Responses indicate a robust college-going culture if the caregivers answer *strongly agree* or *agree* to statements about the program and the schools’ support of the youth going to college. Question 5 is reverse coded as the item indicates that the caregivers were not knowledgeable about the college process before their students entered high school, which is inconsistent with a college-going culture.

Similarly, for program personnel, the words “our counseling department” were changed to “Hope Manifested,” and “teachers” was changed to “caregivers.” A sample item is: “I believe that all the students at Hope Manifested are capable of going to college after high school.”

Graduation factors semistructured interview. The graduation factors semistructured interview aimed to answer Research Questions 1 and 2, which are about the perceived supports and barriers to college graduation for youth in foster care and the perceived college-going culture of college readiness programs that are designed to help them persist in postsecondary education (see Appendix D). Questions came from the interview protocol for constructing logic models, which are used to obtain relevant information prior to creating a program, best practices, or an intervention (Gugiu & Rodriguez-Campos, 2007). Semistructured interviews are used by novice researchers who want to “generate comprehensive logic models like seasoned professional evaluators” (Gugiu & Rodriguez-Campos, 2007).

The graduation factors semistructured interview contains six open-ended main questions with sub-questions for each, totaling 12 questions. The interview included demographic, placement, support, and college-going culture questions. One sample question is: “What new or existing activities related to college readiness does the program provide to program students or their placements?” with a sub-question of: “Are students referred for any services?”

Risk Factors for Retention Survey. The Risk Factors for Retention Survey was developed by Pratt et al. (2019) and has 50 items within five subscales to measure students’ perceived financial security, support systems, college adjustment concerns, academic background, and abilities and goals (see Appendix E). This instrument was adapted from a 2014 study using first-time, full-time college students in a large Midwestern state university. The perceived financial security subscale has five questions and the support systems subscale has four questions. The college adjustment concerns subscale has nine questions, the academic background subscale has 14 questions, and the perceived ability and goals subscale has 18 questions. Most of the items required either *yes* or *no* answers.

Demographic and program specific questions were added to this instrument to assess whether the participants were eligible for the semistructured interview and to gather information about the variables of number of placements, number of school changes, age when entering foster care, and length of time in foster care. A sample item for perceived financial security is, “I need to work to afford to go to school.” A sample item for support systems is, “I have friends I can talk to if I feel discouraged.” A sample item for college adjustment concerns is, “Balancing all my responsibilities,” and a sample item for perceived abilities and goals is, “I can improve my intelligence level.”

Postsecondary persistence semistructured interview. The postsecondary persistence semistructured interview prompts aimed to help answer Research Questions 3 and 4, which solicit college and program factors that the students and graduates attribute to their college persistence, as well as challenges and risk factors (see Appendix F). Each interview included 16 questions that ask about the participants' perceptions of their college persistence. The semistructured interview protocol was adapted with permission from Capik and Shupp (2021), who used the protocol in a narrative inquiry design study that included 10 first-generation college students enrolled in a bachelor's degree program in the Northeast. This interview is designed to collect information on (1) support systems, (2) involvement in college life, (3) perceived ability and goals, and (4) social capital. One sample question related to support systems is: "Who were the individuals (e.g., parents, family, friends, mentors) that supported and encouraged you to continue working toward your degree, particularly when you felt discouraged, if any?" One sample question related to involvement in college life is: "Describe the university services that helped you complete your degree/continue to work towards your degree." One sample question related to perceived ability and goals is: "Tell me about some of your personal characteristics that keep/have kept you in college and continuing on the path to graduation." A sample question related to social capital is: "Can you tell me about any faculty or staff (if any) who have assisted you with schoolwork while you have been in college?"

Procedure

The procedure section describes how survey and interview data were collected and analyzed.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited for this study with assistance from the administrators of both college readiness programs.

Phase 1. For Phase 1, the director of Hope Manifested called each potential caregiver participant to let them know about the study and provided me with a list of the caregivers' contacts. I then called each caregiver, introduced myself, and explained the study. I obtained verbal consent (see Appendix G).

For the College-Going Culture Survey, the director of Hope Manifested emailed each potential program personnel or volunteer a description of the study which included a consent for participation (see Appendix H). The participants read and agreed to the consent form before being permitted to answer the questions.

For the graduation factors semistructured interview, I emailed the two administrators of Hope Manifested and read a recruitment script that included a description of the study. The script asked if they would be willing to participate in a graduation factors semistructured interview (see Appendix I). I obtained verbal consent (see Appendix J).

Phase 2. For Phase 2, which included administration and program alumni, recruitment was completed through email.

For the administrator interviews, I emailed a description of the study to the research team at Dreams Unlimited, who forwarded the email to the administrators of Dreams Unlimited and asked if they would be willing to participate in a graduation factors semistructured interview. The recruitment script was the same as the one used for Hope Manifested administration in Phase 1. If they indicated they were interested, I asked that they return the consent form via email (see Appendix K).

For the Risk Factors for Retention Survey, the Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited program staff emailed program alumni the information about the study that included a flyer with contact information and a link to click to participate (see Appendix L). The flyer noted that

participating alumni would receive a \$10 Amazon gift card after completing the survey portion of the study. The link then took them to the survey where they read and electronically agreed to participate in the study prior to proceeding to the questions.

For the alumni interviews, participants met eligibility criteria based on their survey responses and their expressed willingness to participate in the interview portion of the study. Alumni who noted more perceived risk factors and more advanced standing in college were given priority for interviews, to align with extreme case sampling. I contacted each qualifying potential interview participant within 48 hours of them completing the survey by email or text message. When I contacted the participant, I explained the second portion of the study and asked if the participant was interested in participating. I also explained that they would receive a \$25 Amazon gift card after completing the interview portion of the study. Interview participants were emailed a consent form prior to the interview for them to return via email prior to the scheduled Zoom session (see Appendix M).

Data Collection

For Phase 1, survey and interview data were collected over two weeks. All Phase 1 data were collected over the phone or on an online survey website and stored on a password-protected laptop. For Phase 2, data were collected over 2 months. All Phase 2 data were collected using an online survey website and web conferencing software, downloaded, and stored on a password-protected laptop.

College-Going Culture Survey. For the College-Going Culture Survey, data were collected differently from the caregivers versus the program personnel. To collect data from the caregivers, I called each caregiver whose contact information was provided and introduced myself, obtained verbal consent, and read each of the items of the scale including the Likert scale

responses, so that they were able to choose their answers. I filled out their answers electronically on the computer while they spoke. I repeated any items if the caregivers asked but did not add any clarification or additional description of the items to introduce bias or compromise the instrument's validity. The surveys were completed in a mean of 16.8 minutes and a range of 8 to 45.9 minutes.

For the program personnel, the director of Hope Manifested emailed each potential participant the link to the survey that I emailed to her, which was available through an online survey website for Hope Manifested program personnel and volunteers. The survey started with an introduction and then consent for participation. The participants read and agreed to the consent form before being permitted to answer the surveys. The surveys were completed in a mean of 6.8 minutes and a range of 1.5 to 20.8 minutes.

Graduation factors semistructured interview. The graduation factors semistructured interviews were conducted in both Phase 1 and Phase 2. Zoom videoconferencing software was utilized to interview program alumni at a time and day convenient for them. The interviews were video or audio-recorded for accurate transcription and analysis after the program alumni consented to being recorded. The recordings were labeled with a pseudonym for each participant. The recordings were stored on a password protected laptop. The interviews were transcribed using a software called Otter.ai. The interviews were completed in a mean of 42.5 minutes and a range of 31.6 to 48.2 minutes.

Risk Factors for Retention Survey. The Risk Factors for Retention Survey was administered during Phase 2 using an online survey website called Qualtrics. Once the participant clicked on the link they were directed to the Qualtrics survey where they answered the questions after they read the consent statement at the beginning of the survey. The program

alumni had 30 days to complete the survey from the time the initial email was sent. Qualtrics sent periodic reminder emails if they started the survey but did not finish it. The surveys were completed in a mean of 16.2 minutes with a range of 6.3 to 46.1 minutes.

Postsecondary persistence semistructured interview. The postsecondary persistence semistructured interviews were collected during Phase 2. The interviews were completed in a mean of 39.2 minutes and a range of 22.5 to 56.4 minutes. The outline of the interview script is based on an outline of setting the stage for an interview (McNamara, 2009). The guidelines are: (1) choose a setting with little distraction, (2) explain the purpose of the conversation, (3) explain confidentiality, (4) explain the interview format, (5) indicate how long the interview generally takes, (6) provide researcher's contact information should the participants need to reach you after the interview, (7) ask participant if they have any questions before the interview starts, and (8) record the answers. The interviews were recorded using Zoom videoconferencing software. The recordings were labeled with a pseudonym for each participant. The recordings were stored on a password protected laptop. The interviews were transcribed using a software called Otter.ai.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using several methods, as two instruments were quantitative and two instruments were qualitative.

College-Going Culture Survey. For the College-Going Culture Survey, the mean rating was calculated for each item, as well as noting outliers, to determine the college-going culture for Hope Manifested. Prior to calculating means, the items were grouped into categories based on themes of those items. The mean ratings for the caregiver survey were calculated separately from the program personnel survey.

Graduation factors semistructured interview. The graduation factors semistructured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009). The transcripts were read several times, and the data were placed into categories and coded. The codes were organized using a table that sorted them by research questions and themes.

Risk Factors for Retention Survey. I calculated the frequency of *yes* and *no* responses in The Risk Factors for Retention Survey to determine the number of risk factors perceived by program alumni. The risk factor scores were compared using Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance tests between first-year students and those who persisted beyond their first year, as well as between first-year students and second-year students to identify if there were any differences in perceived risk between the two groups. After observing a significant difference, I used descriptive statistics to determine the mean risk scores of each group to determine the direction of the significance (i.e., which group had more risk factors). Prior to conducting the Kruskal-Wallis analysis, I reverse-coded the items that were not risk factors. The data were also analyzed to ensure that the data met the assumptions of the Kruskal-Wallis. A *Q-Q* plot was created to view the shape and distribution of the data, to check that they were similar, which is an assumption of the Kruskal-Wallis analysis. Prior to analyzing the data, I removed surveys that were all blank, incomplete, or if questions about year in college or about their time in foster care were completely blank. This reduced the number of responses from 671 to 558.

Postsecondary persistence semistructured interview. The postsecondary semistructured interviews were analyzed using a theoretical thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach to coding involved six steps: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing the themes, naming and defining the themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clark, 2006). To become familiar with the data,

the transcripts were read at least twice. The initial codes were generated by looking at words and phrases that repeated or were part of a pattern. These words and phrases helped generate themes, which were the meanings of the words and phrases. The initial themes were: (a) supportive adults, (b) ability and goals, (c) personal habits, (d) using resources, (e) stable housing, (f) faith, (g) role models, (h) connection to internship and jobs, (i) peer connections, (j) peer culture, (k) campus involvement, (l) sense of belonging, (m) college preparation, and (n) hinderances to persistence. The themes were then reviewed to ensure they were inclusive of the data, and combined if they were similar. Definitions were added to clarify which words and phrases were included in each theme, and then the results were written up.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that trustworthiness is when data are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. Credibility is the extent that the researcher measures what he or she intends to measure. Transferability is the extent that a person can apply the findings of a study to a different study context. Dependability is the extent that the results could be replicated if the study were repeated in the same context with the same methods and participants. Confirmability is the extent that the results are believed to be based on the ideas and experiences of the participants rather than the researcher's characteristics and biases.

The trustworthiness of the study was enhanced by researcher reflexivity and by using peer debriefing, an audit trail, thick detailed description (Brantlinger, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005), and a researcher's journal (Slotnick & Janesick, 2011). Researcher reflexivity is when the researcher attempts to understand and disclose her assumptions, values, beliefs, and biases and be forthright about her position, to increase credibility, as the research continues (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell & Miller, 2000). This is done because in qualitative research

the researcher is so involved in the research process that she is the instrument herself (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

Peer debriefing is when the researcher has a colleague or someone familiar with the topic of study review and provide feedback on the study's descriptions, results, or interpretations, to increase credibility (Brantlinger et al., 2005). This was done in this study as the researcher collaborated with and received feedback from an advisor and a committee that were familiar with foster care, education, and research methods.

An audit trail is created when a researcher keeps track of when and how data are collected, including specific dates and times, and anything out of the ordinary that occurred. This is done to demonstrate that sufficient time was spent on the study to claim dependable and confirmable results (Brantlinger et al., 2005). There was an audit trail from the beginning of the study, including how the initial idea for the study was shared with Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited, how program interest in participating was gauged, and notes from conversations with the organizations, the advisor, the committee, and the participants.

Thick, rich descriptions are created when a researcher includes "sufficient quotes and field note descriptions to provide evidence for her interpretations and conclusions" (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p. 201). This was done in this study as the researcher created codes and searched for themes in the interviews, while still including original quotes and sentences in the documentation of the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Finally, a researcher's journal was used during the study to reflect on observations and research, as well as how any potential biases might have affected the data. Writing in this journal throughout the course of the study assisted me in refining and interpreting my role as a

researcher and understanding more clearly the participant responses. Lastly, it helped me to consider my thought patterns and create a coherent analysis (Slotnick & Janesick, 2011).

Researcher Positionality

I was a foster parent for approximately 6 years and learned of Hope Manifested because one of the youths in my home attended the program as an eighth grader. Through parenting 14 preteenagers and teenagers during my time as a foster parent, I witnessed their struggles in school and their educational outcomes. This motivated me to pursue my doctoral degree to search for ways to improve the academic and non-academic outcomes of youth who have experienced foster care. During my study I reflected on how my positionality as a foster parent might have influenced how I interact with program alumni and program personnel at Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited.

One assumption that I have is that students in foster care could complete their bachelor's degrees if they had more resources and stability in their lives. I believe that the professionals in the foster care system and the educational system do not collaborate enough. I also believe that foster care in general is traumatizing for youth, and—even with all the interventions and best intentions—students in foster care still end up working harder in school than students not in foster care.

I believe that students in foster care will be more motivated to pursue their education when they feel heard and think that people care for them. I think that students in foster care are intuitive and can sense if a person is working with them as part of their job or because they genuinely care, and this affects how much the student is willing to participate. Lastly, I believe in the motto, “Nothing for us, without us,” meaning that people need to be involved in creating their own solutions to their concerns. This applies to bachelor's degree attainment for youth in

foster care, because as the experts of their own lives, they know what will work for them, better than anyone who has not been in foster care would know. As such, I think that any solution or intervention must center the voices of students with foster care experience and what they think will help them to persist academically.

Chapter 4

Findings and Discussion

The purposes of this study were to explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, determine differences in risk factors for college attrition between first-year students and persisters, and explore the factors related to postsecondary degree persistence of bachelor's degree students and graduates who have experienced foster care and participated in a college readiness program. This chapter provides the findings, a conclusion, a discussion, limitations and delimitations, and implications for future research. Findings from the interviews are displayed using direct quotes from the participants, who are alumni or program administrators. To maintain confidentiality, all the participant names are pseudonyms. This chapter begins with the findings, organized by research question.

Program Supports and Barriers

Through Research Question 1, I sought to explore program administrators' perceptions of supports and barriers available for youth with a history of foster care involvement who participated in college readiness programs, as they were pursuing bachelor's degree attainment. To answer this question, I interviewed two administrators of Hope Manifested and three administrators of Dreams Unlimited. The administrators from Hope Manifested were the executive director and an academy director. The administrators from Dreams Unlimited were a clinical program manager, a clinical supervisor, and a program manager. The administrators from both programs identified similar supports and barriers to bachelor's degree attainment.

Supports

The supports that emerged through analysis of the interview data were professional training, resources, supportive adults, belonging, and students' mindset.

Professional training. Teachers, mental health professionals, and other individuals working with students in foster care need specific training related to education and trauma. As Tanya, a program director, pointed out, “the child welfare agency, their specialty is child protection. It’s not necessarily education.” and “Sometimes you do see that folks [personnel at child welfare agencies] have a hard time navigating different settings.” Shawn, the executive director talked about training teachers to work with students as “they’re [students in foster care are] more apt to being suspended, or being put into in-school suspension, or removed from the classroom.” Shawn talked about the need for teachers to learn to work better with students in foster care, rather than relying predominantly on suspensions or calling the child welfare system by describing, “And so I would say that community-wise, it’s the way that we handle behaviors in school, especially when we’re thinking about foster youth.”

Olivia, a clinical program manager, talked about professional training as a needed support for teachers, mental health professionals, and other people working with the youth. Referencing trauma, she stated, the “teacher doesn’t understand, no fault of their own” how to interpret or react in a trauma informed way to the student who is exhibiting challenging behaviors. She also mentioned the importance of training on learning differences [e.g., ADHD] that “nobody realizes because of whatever else is going on.” She referenced herself when she was a clinician who had recently graduated from school and stated, “I don’t think that I would have understood the importance of putting all of the people together that are working with a child.” She continued by saying, “looking at all aspects of not just mental health or behavior, but also what is education, what’s going on at home?” She alluded to the importance of training the teachers and mental health professionals to be able to serve the child in a collaborative and trauma-informed way.

Learning how to help students and caregivers access resources is another important area of professional training.

Resources. Students transitioning out of foster care need to know how to access resources. Crystal, a senior clinical supervisor, referenced caregivers not knowing the options and resources available to them, whether it be legal or different types of services. Olivia talked about the resources more specifically, stating, “things like, even tutoring, we all know, really isn’t [accessible] for kiddos who are in foster care. They might miss out on some things that might be helpful to them.” Zaid, a program supervisor, listed resources that are needed for youth transitioning to college, including transportation, groceries, finances, and dormitory supplies. Zaid talked about the importance of “informing people [caregivers] that there are other programs and services, to tailor to different populations [such as college readiness for foster youth], not just mental health [services].” He also emphasized that students do not only need to know the resources exist, but also may need prompting or help navigating the resources. He referenced how program staff can help students access resources by stating, “January is here. Financial aid. It’s coming. The deadline. Let’s get it.”

Tanya talked about NYC specifically and how there is a need for more college funding for the youth: “In order for our young people to not go into debt, they have to go to a CUNY [public city college] or a SUNY [public state college].” She then questioned, “What if a CUNY and SUNY is not appropriate for that young person? What if an HBCU is more appropriate for that young person? So, then we [society] send them to college, [and] they accrue a whole bunch of debt.”

Two of the directors talked about how helpful—but scarce—resources are. One resource mentioned for the caregivers was transportation to help them bring the students to school. Shawn

stated, “If we’re talking about transportation, if a young person can’t depend on their parents to get to school, that’s a barrier that keeps them from accessing education.” She also talked about laptops, stating, “They receive a laptop so that they have access to being able to complete work” about the laptops provided by Hope Manifested. Shawn mentioned wanting to partner with larger organizations to increase access to resources. She explained that “it would be really nice to have some support from these larger Fortune 500—or even Fortune 1000s [companies]—to support our kids.” In addition to having access to resources, the administrators also talked about the importance of supportive adults who can help students navigate these resources.

Supportive adults. Supportive adults are important for mentoring and advocating for youth in foster care. Crystal talked about the importance of foster youth experiencing “stability as far as mentorship.” She talked about mentorship twice in her interview and highlighted the importance of “being able to hook them [foster youth] up to people that have done it and have been where they are.” Olivia discussed further the importance of an adult who “encourages them and helps them feel successful in their education.” She emphasized the importance of, “connect[ing] with people who are invested in their education.” Zaid focused on the longevity of the relationships with supportive adults, stating they need, “a mentor to stay with them for longer time rather than just two years.” Crystal referenced a sense of rejection and lack of stable supportive adults that youth might feel when they switch placements, stating, “They [foster parents] don’t want them. Move them somewhere else.”

Olivia talked about the importance of supportive adults advocating to help youth in foster care persist in their education. She stated advocacy looks like, “thinking through what a kiddo might need [educationally] and advocating for whatever that looks like.” She referred to the important roles that these adults have in helping students with undiagnosed learning differences

and who have experienced trauma receive trauma-informed educational services. At a later point in the interview, Olivia specified that students also need adults who might notice a need for additional services: “Hey, it seems like there should be an IEP [individualized education plan] here. How can we advocate for that?” She mentioned that sometimes educational liaisons can help advocate for educational services for a child, but explained that in her experience, “depending on the caseload of what that person has, we could or could not have gotten super far [in successfully advocating for the needs of a student].” In addition to supportive adults, administrators also talked about the importance of youth feeling a sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging. Students in foster care need to feel a sense of belonging, which can be accomplished by connecting them with positive and successful people who have similar cultural backgrounds and experiences. Shawn talked about peer mentors within the college-readiness program. She shared that the mentors have “had similar experiences,” which “is an opportunity for our kids to say, ‘this is possible’.” Similarly, Tanya discussed the importance of having youth in foster care see professionals and leaders who look like them to be able to see themselves as potential leaders and professionals. For example, she took her students on a tour of historically Black colleges and universities to see successful adults who have similar backgrounds. She stated, “If I say, let’s do STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math], let’s do tech[nology], and I don’t see Black STEM professionals and Black tech[nology] professionals, then I’m like, well, what am I doing this for? So that’s why we took them on the HBCU tour.”

These administrators talked about belonging within peer groups and within communities. Olivia focused on the sense of belonging a student might gain by pursuing postsecondary education. She referred to college as a way “to find your people.” She elaborated to say,

“[college] is where you can find connections and people that ... may be lifelong friends.” Olivia suggested that when talking to students about postsecondary education, supportive adults should also emphasize the opportunities to develop social connections as opposed to solely focusing on academics. Zaid also emphasized the importance of creating a sense of belonging in the community. He stated, “These youth are from [the community], but they move around a lot.” Zaid continued, “How do we collectively support them [in] being proud of being [community members].” He stated that one way that the program attempts to increase a student’s sense of belonging is by creating “social skills and leadership skills groups,” where the youth “can be a part of their peers and learning social and leadership skills along the way.” Students’ mindsets are also connected to whether these skills are utilized.

Students’ mindset. Even with unlimited resources, students’ mindsets are also a factor. As Tanya described, when youth with foster care experience enter college, “You’re a full-fledged adult, you’re no longer a minor. You can make decisions on your own. You can decide whether or not you’re going to engage with the child welfare professional, how you’re going to engage with them.” She explained that the youth’s mindset could be a barrier, for example, if they isolate and reject others when they need help. Tanya suggested that the youth might think, “If I’m not doing well—and I’d rather not talk about it—[then] I’m going to hide.” Both participants connected this concept of reaching out for help with how the youth perceive failure and whether they see the setback as a final thing or a confirmation of some of the stereotypes and messages they may have internalized.

Tanya described a student that missed her first class and immediately reported, “I’m a failure. I failed, and I dropped out the first day of college.” Tanya described what a student might be thinking when she said, “I’m lost. I don’t understand what the professor is talking about. I

don't know how to read the syllabus. I don't know how to do any of these things, this is foreign to me." She then connected these thoughts to conclusions the students might make, such as, "I feel stupid. I feel dumb. How come everybody else seems to understand and seems to get what's going on? But I don't." As Shawn highlighted, "Kids are not always amped and excited to do an educational program." A student's mindset is just one barrier students with a history of foster care might encounter when they transition to college.

Barriers

The barriers identified through analysis of the interview data were the manifestation of childhood trauma, institutional racism and stereotype bias, academic challenges, and postsecondary challenges related to placement changes.

Unresolved childhood trauma can be a barrier to bachelor's degree attainment. Shawn specifically talked about the outcome of trauma and how youth may exhibit challenging behavior while dealing with their traumas, stating, "we have to be there to support them through this hard time without blaming it on them and saying they're a bad kid." Tanya also highlighted unresolved childhood trauma as a challenge to obtaining a bachelor's degree. She specifically talked about how childhood trauma contributed to the youth being "very raw" and "triggered."

Both Olivia and Crystal discussed the impact of the unresolved childhood trauma on behavior in the classroom. Olivia stated that a barrier to students in foster care educationally is "classrooms that are not trauma-informed." She stated, "the child is behaving, or daydreaming, or looking like [they have] ADHD [attention deficit hyperactive disorder], because they have trauma." Crystal referenced those same behaviors and how adults who are supposed to be supportive, misunderstand the behavior and think, "Oh, he's doing it on purpose." In addition to

unresolved trauma, administrators also discussed themes of institutional racism and stereotype biases.

Institutional racism and stereotype bias can hinder the persistence of students in education. Shawn spoke about the stereotypes that people can hold about youth in foster care. She discussed the community perceptions of youth in foster care and the community's reception to the non-profit's work and mentioned hearing adults talk about students in the program and saying, "Well, you know, your kids are kind of unruly, or I don't know if I trust foster youth being on campus." Tanya also referenced how stereotype bias can prevent students from accessing needed resources that are specifically for students with a history of foster care, stating "because of the stigma of being in foster care, they tend not to disclose that status." In contrast, when asked specifically about their perceptions of how their programs are viewed by the local community, both Zaid and Crystal stated that they had only encountered positive attitudes and messages about youth in foster care from the community.

The leaders identified academic preparation, which can be attributed to opportunity gaps, as another barrier to obtaining a bachelor's degree. Opportunity gaps are uncontrollable aspects of a student's identity or situation that can contribute to having less academic success in the classroom (TFA, 2018). For example, Tanya stated that a lot of these students, "are not adequately prepared for the rigors of higher education." Both leaders from Hope Manifested alluded to how difficult early experiences in the classroom can contribute to opportunity gaps that lead to not understanding classes at a college level or increased frustration when they experience challenging classwork. Olivia talked about variances in academic preparation that can occur for a student in foster care by stating, "assignments don't always match where a child might be [academically] because of missed school, or trauma, or multiple things." Zaid talked

about how a lack of academic preparation over many years can result in students not being prepared for the academic rigor of college. He talked about providing the message to those students, “You’re not there [at the level to start a four-year college] right now... so let’s go into this community college. And you are still going to get to where you want to go [a four-year college].”

These variances in the academic preparation of foster youth can be at least partially attributed to frequent placement changes. Olivia stated, “When they were hopping from placement to placement, that means they were missing out on the continuity of an educational year, even if they were going.” Tanya talked about how each time a youth changes placements, they often change schools. She acknowledged the correlation between placement stability and school stability. She explained, “there’s been laws in place that if a young person’s placement disrupts, then you have to maintain that educational setting” and described one barrier: “If I’m [the student] in Staten Island and my school is in the Bronx, I’m not going to travel back and forth. So, the more we see placement instability, the more we see educational instability, which leads to lower graduation rates.” Tanya also explained that school instability can contribute to missing crucial information that the youth need later when they navigate higher education when she said, “If I’ve had placement [lived in foster care]...with placement instability, educational instability, perhaps my [educational] services have not been implemented with fidelity, by the time I get to a college campus and I’m sitting in a classroom, I’m lost [not understanding the class material].”

Placement changes can impact students’ behavior, ability to build relationships, and motivation. Crystal highlighted the role of school changes and stated bluntly; “The kids move around too much.” She added that when the students change placements, it means that they

cannot “stay at one school and build relationships with teachers.” Crystal discussed that changing placements may be related to the development of behavioral issues. Olivia talked about it being “hard [for the youth] to keep up that motivation” in school when they have other aspects of their life that they are worried about. Olivia described the impact of these changes by stating the students are, “often in crisis,” meaning “school kind of took the backseat [became less of a priority].”

Sometimes alumni did not know how to navigate postsecondary institutions due, in part, to not experiencing college-going culture or not having access to institutional agents—a theme that also arose in the alumni interviews. As Tanya stated, “We cannot take for granted that our young people know the process.... How many times does the bursar’s office send you back to the financial aid office, send you back to the registrar....So it’s this maze of services.”

In summary, administrators from both programs mentioned similar themes in their interviews related to the supports and barriers for youth in foster care as they persist in their education and pursue graduation. At least one administrator from each context referenced the supports of professional trainings, resources, supportive adults, a sense of belonging, or the barriers of trauma, institutional racism and stereotype bias, opportunity gaps, and placements. All five of the administrators referred to the importance of resources for the youth, supportive adults, and having a sense of belonging for a student’s persistence in education. Both administrators from Hope Manifested acknowledged the sometimes negative perceptions of foster youth by the community while only one of the three Dreams Unlimited administrators did. Both administrators at Hope Manifested talked about the impact that students’ individual characteristics have on education, while the administrators at Dreams Unlimited talked more

about the structure and system that the students live in and how that system can affect their education.

Program College-Going Culture

Through Research Question 2, I sought to understand how program personnel and caregivers described the college-going culture of the Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited college readiness programs. Information was gathered from caregivers and program personnel at Hope Manifested and program administrators from both Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited.

Hope Manifested Caregivers

Youth enrolled in Hope Manifested likely experienced a college-going culture in their schools, homes, and the academy. At least 50% of the caregivers marked that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with all the items associated with college-going culture. Additionally, 10 caregivers marked that they *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with 70% of the items or more in all three categories (see Table 4.1). Caregivers indicated that they most *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with items related to programming to involve caregivers (88%), followed by items related to staff support (85%) and items related to caregiver involvement (71%).

Table 4.1

Caregiver College-Going Culture Survey: Agree and Strongly Agree Responses (N = 10)

	Items	Frequency Agree	Frequency Strongly Agree	Percent Agree or Strongly Agree
Staff Support	7	18	50	88%
Programming to Involve Caregivers	5	21	30	85%
Caregiver Involvement	8	25	43	71%

Items in this survey were used to measure the caregivers' perceptions of whether youth in their care would continue and be ready to succeed in college and their perception of their own

and the program personnel's knowledge about the college application process. For Item 1, "My student is planning to attend college after graduation," 80% of the caregivers *agreed* or *strongly agreed*, with 20% marking *disagree*. Items 2 and 3 aimed to measure the caregivers' perceptions of whether the youth would be ready or successful in college. Although 70% of the caregivers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with these statements, 30% indicated that they *disagreed* or were *neutral*. Only 50% of caregivers *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with Item 4 designed to measure caregivers' involvement in the youth's college application process. Eighty percent of the caregivers *agreed* with the statement that they knew about the college application process, requirements, and financial aid. The caregivers largely *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with the program staff's support of them, knowledge of college, and support of the students.

The open-ended comments of the caregivers indicated that Hope Manifested was a supportive program for the youth. The caregivers overwhelmingly responded positively about Hope Manifested, and eight of the 10 added additional comments with the message of, "It's an excellent program." Six of the caregivers, for example, wrote that the program was "excellent." Eight caregivers *agreed* that their student will attend or be successful in college. Approximately half *agreed* that they played a significant role in youth researching and applying to college.

Hope Manifested Staff

Similar to the caregivers, the 12 current and former program personnel who answered the survey indicated that they *agreed* that the program has a college-going culture (see Table 4.2). All the respondents *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that all students could go to college and be successful. They all *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that Hope Manifested promoted a culture of success and collaboration and supported the students through their journeys to apply for college. Aligning with the caregivers' responses, only 83% of the program personnel *agreed* or *strongly*

agreed with the statement, “Hope Manifested provides professional development for caregivers about the college application process.”

The survey items were grouped into four categories: student’s college readiness, programming to involve caregivers, programming to support college readiness, and staff beliefs. Ninety percent of program personnel *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with items related to students’ college readiness and staff beliefs, 83% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with items related to programming to involve caregivers, and 73% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with items related to programming to support college readiness.

The program personnel rated the program positively, which was evident in their open-ended comments. Over half of the employees (58%) wrote statements such as “best program ever” and “excellent program.” Others included that the program supported the youth through the transition to high school, helped them put education first, and prepared them for college. All program personnel answered each survey with *strongly agree*, *agree*, or *neutral*; none responded *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. These answers and the additional comments highlight the passion that the program personnel have for the program and how they align with the program mission.

Table 4.2

Program Personnel College-Going Culture Survey: Agree and Strongly Agree Responses (N = 12)

	Items	Frequency Agree	Frequency Strongly Agree	% Agree or Strongly Agree
Students’ College Readiness	4	9	34	90%
Staff Beliefs	5	11	43	90%
Programming to Involve Caregivers	4	12	28	83%
Programming to Support College Readiness	7	19	47	79%

Program Administrators

The program involved caregivers so that students could experience a college-going culture consistently in both program and home settings. Shawn highlighted the importance of the caregivers focusing on the student's grades and absences, stating, "we are a college prep[aratory] program, which means, caregivers, we need you guys to care about A through G [state college admissions requirements], we need you to care about grades, we need you to care about absences." She explained that, at Hope Manifested, staff encourage a college-going culture and highlight the importance of the students receiving consistent messaging when they return home, stating, "We really try to affirm the Hope Manifested mission with our caregivers so that when our students go home, they're not hearing a totally different message once they get back into their home environment."

Talking about college with the students and caregivers is one way the programs promoted a college-going culture. Both Oliva and Zaid discussed the importance of supporting the youth whether they continue to college or not. Crystal likened a college-going culture as when others "introduce [foster youth] to that world [college]," and "encourage them to do what they need to do to go on to college." Crystal stated that a college-going culture is "having the knowledge that [going to college] is doable." She discussed her own journey to college. She shared that since her parents had not graduated high school and she did not know any college graduates, she did not know that college was an option for her until she was exposed to other college students later in life. She shared that the message given to her growing up was, "You graduate and you get a job." Olivia defined college-going culture as, "Is education important? And how is the message presented?" Similar to Crystal, she spoke about the importance of adults speaking to youth in

foster care about college. She stated, “No one...talks to them about college, or talks to them about why it would be important or what it would do for them.”

Increasing college-going culture within the placements (i.e., foster homes) is just as important as promoting a college-going culture within the programs. Shawn talked about the youth’s home environment and how adults’ educational achievement in the environment inspires the youth to attain a college degree or be satisfied without completing college. She stated, “If you are thinking about educational attainment, sometimes you can only dream as big as the environment around you.” Olivia discussed different families having different views on education and stated, “If a child is placed in a home that maybe [education] is not as important to them, then they might miss opportunities [tutoring, scholarships, educational enrichment programs].” She also highlighted the challenges of group homes being able to support educational attainment. She stated, “The focus is not ‘how can I help this child with their school?’ The focus is, how, behaviorally, can we keep everyone calm and get everyone through their structured schedule?”

Program personnel attempted to create a college-going culture for youth in foster care. Zaid stated that the staff at Dreams Unlimited “Do [their] own college tours with them [the youth.]” He also shared that the program brings in “guest speakers from college related organizations, programs, or actual colleges,” so that the participants can get exposure to higher education. Zaid emphasized that it is important to “always talk about this education, higher education.” He mentioned that the program holds Dream Big graduations, where they celebrate the participants in the program who graduate high school and are going to college. Finally, he talked about a tradition that was started a few years ago, where employees have “college days” and “bring [their] sweaters from [their colleges] to create a college-going culture. Shawn also

talked about the college-going culture at the college-readiness program, since the program is part of the university and the students get to experience college life, professors, and interact with college students. She explained, “So, because we’re working within these comprehensive mini[ature] cities, which are universities, our students get to get acquainted with university life, so it’s not daunting, it’s not scary. It’s just another environment.”

College attendance, however, should not be the only option for measuring success after high school. Tanya, for example, expressed some concern with using the term “college-going culture.” She clarified, “So I think the culture has to be like a ‘success-going culture’.” She explained the culture as, “That young person’s plan once they finish high school.” She added, “If a young person decides I’m going to go get a trade [certificate in a technical career], or I’m going to become an electrician, or I’m going to become a carpenter, we should celebrate that just as much [as if they were going to college].” Tanya discussed success-going culture by saying, “The messaging and the encouraging, and helping them see the pathway. Lay that path bare before them [guide them to recognize the steps needed]. Where they see, this is how I get there.” She further elaborated that preparation should be comprehensive and flexible by stating, “They can say, this is what I need to get there, this is the mentality I need to get there.” Zaid and Oliva also referenced broadening college-going culture to identify alternatives to college as successful outcomes. Olivia identified that some students may be better at “a trade school or community college.” Similarly, Zaid talked about alternatives to a four-year college and stated, “There’s people in general, that college is not for them... so there’s also a lot of vocational trainings and certifications and programs. Pretty good careers come out of that.” Regardless, the programs still prepare the youth for college and support them whether they choose a traditional 4-year college, a trade school, or the career route.

Summary

In summary, the program personnel created a college-going culture within their college readiness program and the students' homes, particularly by talking to the students about college. The participants indicated that their college readiness programs had college-going cultures. All participants acknowledged the importance of students experiencing a college-going culture for them to pursue higher education. The administrators discussed the importance of students experiencing a college-going culture, not just within the program, but also at their placements and in school, as well as the need to expand college-going culture to include careers and nontraditional postsecondary education.

Differences in Risk Factors

Through Research Question 3, I sought to understand the differences in risk factors present between first-year students with a history of foster care, and those students with a history of foster care who persisted past their first year, and analyzed the Risk Factors for Retention Surveys to answer this question.

A total of 558 program alumni were included in the Risk Factors for Retention Survey, and they answered *yes* or *no* to risk factors in five subcategories: perceived financial security, support systems, college adjustment, high school academic background, and ability and goals. The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance determined the difference in the risk factor scores between first-year students and second-year students as well as first-year students and persisters.

Prior to using the Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis, the data were assessed to determine the most appropriate test to use. The two groups (i.e., first-year students and persisters and first-year students and second-year students) had different sample sizes, which warranted additional

testing to determine normality and distribution shape. The Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis is a nonparametric test that can be used to determine differences between independent samples. The Kruskal-Wallis analysis has four assumptions, which are: (1) a dependent variable that is either continuous or ordinal; (2) an independent variable that is categorical; (3) independence of observations; (4) distributions of scores for each group of the independent variable have the same shape (Kruskal & Wallis, 1952; Vargha & Delaney, 1998).

In this study, the alumni's ranking in school is ordinal, as there is a clear order to the options, and the risk factors score is a sum of all the factors to which the respondent answered *yes*. Each response is independent as each response was from a unique individual and no one answered more than once. The distribution of the scores for each group also had similar shapes, which was determined by using a *Q-Q* plot for the school standings of the alumni. A *Q-Q* plot displays the shape of a data set by plotting it on a graph in comparison to a line that represents a normal distribution (Statology, 2021).

The data met all four assumptions, and the results demonstrated that the only significant result was for ability and goals. The test showed a statistically significant result for perceived ability and goals of first-year students and second-year students, $H(1) = 12.10, p = .001$. The means showed that second-year students had more perceived risk factors for abilities and goals compared to first-year students. There were no significant results for perceived financial security, support systems, college adjustment, or high school academic background. Complete results are presented in Table 4.3.

There was also a significant difference in perceived risk factors between first-year students and those who persisted past their first year for ability and goals, $H(1) = 13.33, p < .001$. The means showed that persisters had more perceived risk factors for abilities and goals

compared to first-year students. There were no significant differences in the results for perceived financial security, support systems, high school academic backgrounds, or college adjustment.

These results are also presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.3

Risk Factors for Retention Survey: First-Year and Second-Year Student Responses

Construct	<i>n</i>	<i>H</i>	First-Year Mean	Second- Year Mean	<i>p</i>
Ability and Goals	178	12.10	5.88	7.85	.001*
College Adjustment	158	0.01	7.42	7.33	.915
HS Academic Background	180	.064	6.08	6.42	.800
Perceived Financial Security	179	1.10	2.00	1.90	.295
Support Systems	178	0.32	1.28	1.33	.571

Note. *N* = 558. HS = high school. *df* = 1. Cases have no missing values in any independent variable.

**p* < 0.05

Table 4.4

Risk Factors for Retention Survey: First-Year and Persister Responses

Construct	<i>n</i>	<i>H</i>	First-Year Mean	Persisters Mean	<i>p</i>
Ability and Goals	551	13.33	5.88	7.61	<.001*
College Adjustment	446	1.62	7.42	6.93	.203
HS Academic Background	556	1.25	6.08	6.70	.263
Perceived Financial Security	557	2.33	2.00	2.17	.127
Support Systems	555	0.42	1.28	1.34	.515

Note. *N* = 558. HS = high school. *df* = 1. Cases have no missing values in any independent variable.

**p* < 0.05

Summary

In summary, the third research question focused on the differences in perceived risk factors between first-year students and persisters with a history of foster care. A nonparametric test determined difference in sample sizes between the groups. The significant difference for perceived ability and goals was present whether first-year students were compared to second-year students or to all those who persisted past their first year. There were no significant differences between first-year students and second-year students for the risk factor categories of college adjustment, high school academic background, perceived financial security, or support systems. There were also no significant differences between first-year students and persisters for the risk factor categories of college adjustment, high school academic background, perceived financial security, or support systems.

Persistence

Through Research Question 4, I sought to understand how alumni of college readiness programs described factors that empowered or hindered their empowerment to persist in a postsecondary degree program. To answer this question, I interviewed 12 alumni of Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited. Alumni from both programs discussed similar factors that supported or hindered their empowerment to persist in a postsecondary degree program.

Empowering Factors

The alumni described supportive adults, peer connectedness, resources, and individual characteristics as factors that enabled their empowerment.

Supportive adults. All alumni, with the exception of one, talked about adults that supported them and empowered them to persist in their postsecondary degree programs. Supportive adults mentioned in the interviews included teachers, professors, older siblings, foster

parents, school counselors, social workers, and program personnel. Some of the adults provided encouragement and support, others acted as role models, and others helped the alumni connect to networks and jobs.

The alumni described adults who empowered them by providing encouragement and support. Three alumni talked about their foster parents encouraging them to pursue higher education. When talking about her foster mother, Sierra stated, “She was always pushing me towards higher education because she saw the [academic] discipline I had.” When describing the support that personnel in a campus program provided, Ashton stated, “They’re very well equipped in their counseling degrees to handle any situation.” Nevaeh, talked about how her social worker empowered her and “really motivated [her] and kept [her] on the right track [focused on her academics].”

Supportive adults also acted as role models, especially when they shared some personal or demographic characteristics as the alumni. Sierra described a professor who she felt empowered by, who is the same ethnicity as her:

He was very inspirational for me and my educational journey. A Black doctor. He was the first person of color that I encountered directly that had a PhD [doctor of philosophy]. And he had this vocabulary where you knew he knew how to communicate. But he also cussed. He also was funny. So, he was all of these things that I did not think that people of color could be. So that made me want to pursue psychology.

Other alumni had similar stories. Sage shared about a professor who was approximately 10 years older than them and stated, “He was kind of, like, the ideal of who I wanted to be in 10 years, as far as his career trajectory...he had sort of a turbulent home life as well. And he was able to understand [the impact of that turbulence on education].”

Some alumni talked about how supportive adults helped connect them to networks and jobs. Mike, for example, shared about how his professors helped connect him to jobs and stated:

Let's say you are trying to go to a career. Some professors that I have talked to have connections with other outside companies, or people and friends and stuff like that, where they can be like, 'Oh, yes, you can talk to one of my friends who's in this field, and they can help you out [connect you to a job]', which has happened to me quite a lot.

Valentina mentioned that her professors were helpful and "offered [her] jobs. Like, if something comes along, you know, they tell you, like, 'Look, this is an opportunity'." Tamara, however, talked about the helpfulness of her college readiness program personnel who "navigated [her] towards the resources to obtain an internship at [a local nonprofit organization]."

Peer connectedness. Alumni also described how peer connectedness was an empowering support, such as relationships formed in college. Jo shared that one of his peers in college is "like [a] brother [to him]." Similarly, Monica stated that her peers "supported and encouraged [her] and helped [her]." Sage talked about how their peers helped them understand the music industry, as they aspired to be a musician. For example, their friends explained to them that "we do not do internships, we do summer music festivals."

Some alumni described how peer culture empowered them to persist in their degrees. Dayanara, for example, who joined the military prior to enrolling in school, talked about her peers using military benefits to sign up for college courses. She stated, "Just kind of, the peer pressure, everybody [taking college courses]. And so, I just signed up for [college] when I was still active duty." Similarly, Monica shared about her peers in high school and stated, "It was just, like, what kids were doing [going to college] and sort of what was almost, like, a guaranteed success [pathway to successful employment]."

Some alumni intentionally sought ways to connect with peers by becoming involved in campus activities. Both Ashton and Monica shared how involved they were with campus activities and groups. Ashton emphasized, “I had friends, but they were all in those groups, so that was like my social time.” Similarly, Monica shared that being on the rowing team (i.e., crew) and in other activities helped her stay disciplined. She shared, “It sort of forced me to get up on time and then make sure I got breakfast, and then my work-study job, and then I went to my classes, and then the library, and do my homework.” There were also resources available on and off campus that the alumni described.

Resources. Several alumni talked about available resources that empowered them as they prepared to go to college and while they were in college. The alumni described various resources that were useful to them, and multiple alumni emphasized the importance of being able to have stable housing as a factor that empowered them to persist in college.

Other resources that empowered them to do well academically included having access to school supplies, having the necessary information, tutoring, and being introduced to college life by a peer or adult. Nevaeh shared, “When you fill out your [college] application they ask you if you have been a former foster youth and automatically [you] get connected to all these services.” Mike, for example, talked about the text messages his campus program personnel would send him to ask if he needed resources that read, “Hi, [a] new year is coming. Do you need a new backpack, books, items?” Ashton shared that the program personnel from her college readiness program would “hand me a million pamphlets with information, even though they were not going to hold my hand while I did everything.” Sierra talked about how tutoring from a professor empowered her to pass the only class she had left to graduate. She shared, “He said, ‘You got to show up, show me some effort, and I’ll work with you,’ and essentially that is what I did to pass

my last math class.” Tamara referred to the college readiness classes she took where she stayed on a college campus as “like, a beginner to [a] college course...getting to know scholars, and campus resources.”

Several alumni specifically talked about the importance of having access to stable housing. Evelyn stated that she went to college because she considered the on-campus dormitories as “the best way to maintain housing.” Nevaeh shared the importance of her maintaining her housing using university resources by stating, “If I want to execute my educational goals, if I want to achieve those things, I need a place that is stable for me. So, I have always been able to maintain that.” Sage, on the contrary, talked about losing their housing and becoming homeless for six months during their junior year, which made it more difficult for them to focus on academics. They stated, “I was living on campus. Sleeping a few hours every couple of hours, wherever I could.” The alumni also discussed their own characteristics that helped them persist, even when they were struggling.

Individual characteristics. All alumni talked about their individual characteristics that helped them persist in college. These characteristics includes beliefs about their abilities, habits, and faith. Each alumni referenced the importance of believing in their ability to persist in college and to rely on themselves. Both Dayanara and Ashton talked about not liking to hear negative statistics about foster youth, but also how hearing these statistics motivated them to do better. Dayanara stated, “You have a lot of statistics against you. And you are trying to prove them wrong. But you also have a lot of self-doubt.” Several alumni referred to the ability to use positive self-talk. Ashton, for example, talked about what she told herself when she was struggling in her last year of college:

I was very competitive with myself in the sense that, the semester prior, I had gone through really bad mental health [problems]. I was in the hospital for [mental health].

And I was like, “Well, what is your excuse [to not graduate], minus the pandemic?” And so that is the one thing that kept me in the last year of college without having to take any breaks... is just telling myself: “You are not her from last semester, so you have no excuses.”

Mallory also shared that she encourages herself through self-talk, saying “one step at a time [to persist in college].”

Several alumni talked about how their personal habits empower them to persist. Jo listed habits that helped him succeed: “Organization is one. Knowing your responsibilities is another. And your mindset. Like you always have to [improve] your mindset. Work hard.” Sierra shared, “Typically, I am meeting my deadlines. I am doing my homework.” Nevaeh added that she focuses on “how to start [my] day....take showers in the morning, maybe 5 minutes of cold water will help....keep calm....protect [my] energy.”

Two alumni noted their faith as a characteristic that empowered them to persist. Valentina shared, “I’m a religious person, or not so much religious, but believing in God. [Faith] does help you to move forward, like you trust in the higher power.” Similarly, Monica described her persistence and challenges by saying, “I think it was just destined, really.” The youth also discussed factors that hindered their empowerment to persist in a postsecondary degree program.

Hindering Factors

The alumni described struggles with mathematics, adults discouraging them from going to college or making postsecondary education sound harder than it was, and difficulties

navigating postsecondary education as factors that hindered their empowerment to persist in a postsecondary degree program.

Four alumni discussed challenges with mathematics as a factor that made it difficult for them to persist in college. Sierra shared, “I’m not good at math. So, I remember I failed math three times before I could pass it.” Dayanara elaborated on why she struggled in mathematics and stated, “Between the ages of 7 and 12, I moved a lot, and those were, like, the core math fundamental years. So, I missed out on a lot of [instruction]. So, I struggled really in college with basic math concepts.” Monica shared that she did not major in the topic she wanted to major in because, “to get into the business school, you needed to take some math prerequisites. So, even though it was something I was interested in, that [mathematics] sort of hindered me from even [pursuing it].” Mallory expressed being worried about passing a mathematics class and stated, “I do not like math. It is difficult. Why do I need it.” The alumni also voiced that the messages they heard from adults hindered their empowerment to consider college as an option.

Several alumni shared that the messages they received from adults in their lives hindered them from even wanting to enroll in college. Tamara stated, “There [were] a lot of [high school] teachers, emphasizing, like, they are not going to go easy on you in college.” Similarly, Sierra shared, “People scared me with college, growing up. You hear, ‘Oh my God, college. You are on your own’...and I had the opposite experience...I was, like, okay, this is not as hard as I thought it was going to be.” Despite attending a college readiness program, several alumni still felt unprepared to navigate the postsecondary education system.

Alumni discussed their challenges with navigating the postsecondary education system. Ashton explained, “I do not know what the h*ll I am doing. I do not know if I am making the right decisions in college to prepare me for what comes after.” Monica shared two examples

where not knowing how to navigate postsecondary education hindered her. The semester that she did the worst was when she “took four finals in one day. And I come to find out that there was a school policy that says if you have more than two finals in a day, you can move [the rest]... and I did not know.” She also disclosed how she got in trouble for not knowing how the system worked:

I did not know that if [you] write a paper for one class that you took two semesters ago, and then you are writing a paper that sounds kind of similar, because obviously major stuff repeats, and then you submit it, that is plagiarism, even though you are the one who wrote it. So, I think that can cause a lot of harm.

In summary, the alumni who participated in the interviews identified multiple factors that both empowered their persistence in postsecondary education, as well as factors that hindered their empowerment to persist in postsecondary education. They highlighted supportive adults, peer connectedness, resources, and individual characteristics as factors that helped the alumni persist. Mathematics, discouraging messages, and navigating postsecondary education were mentioned as factors that hindered their empowerment to persist in postsecondary education.

Discussion

The research questions were used to frame my exploration of the supports and barriers to graduation for youth who have completed a college readiness program and experienced foster care, the college-going culture of the college readiness programs, differences between risk factors of first-year students and persisters, and factors that empowered or hindered the empowerment of alumni to persist in their postsecondary education programs. Some supports and barriers to graduation identified by administrators, such as availability of resources and access to supportive adults, were also identified by alumni as factors that empowered or hindered

them to persist in their postsecondary education programs. Administrators and alumni indicated that resources were available but also talked about the difficulty accessing or navigating these resources, similar to research by Courtney et al. (2011), Pecora (2012), and Schroeter et al. (2015). Supportive adults were mentioned by both alumni and administrators as important for persistence in postsecondary education. Alumni also discussed messages from adults that were not supportive of them pursuing postsecondary education, which discouraged them. This finding is similar to other studies that concluded that messages of support from adults are important for persistence in education (Kilgore & Miller-Ott, 2019; Morton, 2016).

Three other themes that appeared in the alumni and the administrator interviews were the mindsets of students, academic challenges, and placement changes. Both administrators and alumni shared how a student's mindset could empower or hinder their persistence. Mindset is an important component of empowerment, which is a shift of mindset from something happening to a person to a person perceiving that they have some control of the outcome (Greene et al., 1998). Administrators also discussed academic challenges, amplified by placement and school changes resulting in the students missing academic material. This finding is consistent with literature that highlights that youth in foster care often miss core curriculum when they change schools, which can result in gaps in their foundational learning (Pears et al., 2015). The administrators and caregivers also highlighted the college-going culture that empowered students.

The Hope Manifested caregivers and staff indicated that they considered the college-going culture of the program to be strong, and the administrators and alumni from both programs described the college-going culture within the college readiness programs. The administrators shared that their programs included college tours, college campus immersion, informing caregivers about the college process, and days where program personnel wore clothing from

colleges they attended. Some alumni also highlighted the experience of attending programming on the college campuses as important for their persistence in postsecondary education. These findings align with literature that indicates that students who attend college readiness programs that include campus visits increase their access to social capital and college readiness (Cates & Schaeffe, 2011).

Perceived ability and goals, which includes what students believe about themselves and tell themselves, was a statistically significant risk factor and was mentioned in all 12 alumni interviews. Perceived ability and goals were significant for first year students compared to second-year students and all students who persisted past their first year. Additionally, seven of the alumni shared that they felt the person they could rely on the most was themselves. This is supported by research that indicates that in the face of adversity, students are often intrinsically motivated and can benefit from being empowered to help themselves (Jackson et al., 2019). This finding could also be attributed to a survival mentality that can emerge when youth experience trauma, become overly self-reliant, and have difficulty asking for help (Morton, 2017).

The findings make sense when considering Stanton-Salazar's (2011) social capital framework, which highlighted social capital, institutional agents, institutional supports, and empowerment, as important for the persistence of students from underrepresented groups in postsecondary education. The resources and supportive adults that the alumni and administrators talked about, for example, are a form of social capital that the youth were able to access. Additionally, throughout the interviews it was evident that the students were active participants in their own journeys, which empowered them to persist, even when faced with challenges.

Some themes that appeared in the administrator and alumni interviews, however, did not appear in the literature. Challenges with high school academics, and mathematics specifically, as

well as not knowing the rules and policies of postsecondary institutions were identified as challenges to the educational journeys of the alumni. Fear of failure and not being successful also appeared in the alumni interviews as both motivating and hindering factors.

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study are limitations in the control of the researcher, which are set to achieve study goals (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). One delimitation of this study is that participants were constrained to those who participated in Hope Manifested or Dreams Unlimited programming. These programs were chosen because I have a connection with both of those programs, which made recruitment more feasible. Another delimitation is that I did not analyze the data collected on number of placements, age at first placement, or number of high schools attended. Finally, a delimitation is that program alumni who dropped out of postsecondary education were excluded from recruitment, as this study focused on those who were persisting. Those alumni who did not persist might have also provided implications for research regarding factors that hindered or empowered their persistence in postsecondary education.

Limitations

This study also has limitations, which are factors within a study that the researcher cannot control and may impact the generalization of results (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Limitations for this study include data being collected at two different points in time, differences between Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited program structures, and potential alumni having limited time and technology. One limitation is that the data from administrators were collected during two different phases, as reflected in the research design section. The effect of time between the two different data collection points might affect the answers. For example, Phase 1 data were collected in the middle of summer 2020, which was a summer of significant

civil unrest and racial tension; these themes showed up in the interview data. Phase 2 data were collected a year and a half later, when these same world events were also competing for attention with a pandemic entering its third year, and issues regarding women's rights. The data being collected during a pandemic is also a limitation, as the regular challenges of students who have experienced foster care were compounded with the challenges of students experiencing a pandemic. The results of this study, therefore, may be unique due to the historical conditions taking place during the study (Campbell & Stanley, 1963).

The different programming and structure of Hope Manifested and Dreams Unlimited is also a limitation, as the program alumni may have developed different skills and had access to different resources from those programs. Hope Manifested, a national organization, is for students between the ages of 14 and 21; students are expected to remain in the program throughout their time in high school. Dreams Unlimited, located in California, is for students between the ages of 16 and 20; program participation is capped at 2 years.

Additional limitations are that access to technology or time constraints may have prevented some potential program alumni from participating in the study. This limitation, therefore, may have influenced the breadth and depth of themes related to technology and time constraints as barriers to graduation, as program alumni with those barriers may have self-selected out of the study. To address the limitation of time, an incentive was offered for student or graduate participation in the study to hopefully make participation worth the student or graduate's time.

Implications for Research and Practice

Based on the findings of this study, there are several implications for future research and practice.

Implications for Research

Implications for future research include (a) using snowball sampling when conducting research with current and foster youth; (b) expanding research to additional college readiness programs for students in foster care; (c) Involving program alumni who did not persist in postsecondary education and expanding the analysis of the data to include the variables of number of placements, age at first placement, and number of high schools attended; and (d) investigating the beliefs of program alumni about their abilities and goals.

Snowball sampling was important for the recruitment of alumni for this study. During the first few weeks of recruitment there were a few alumni who participated in the survey. Several alumni reported during their interviews that they would encourage their peers to participate in the study, which caused a snowball effect where many alumni filled out the surveys in a short period of time. Although snowball sampling was not the intended method of recruitment for this study, future researchers should consider it when conducting research with students with a history of foster care.

Future research should be done with former foster youth who participated in other college readiness programs in the United States. This study focused on two college readiness programs; however, there are little data on how many youth in foster care participate in college readiness programs (Day et al., 2018). It would be helpful to learn about other college readiness programs and how their outcomes are similar or different from those of Hope Manifested or Dreams Unlimited. Areas of future research could include how different aspects of college readiness programming can impact postsecondary persistence and attrition, as well as if there are correlations between programs with different program structures and outcomes.

This study did not include program alumni who paused or dropped out of postsecondary education. Future studies should include those who did not persist, to determine whether their risk factors differed from those in the present study. Similar to the study conducted by Capik and Shupp (2021) the students who drop out might provide crucial information regarding their risk factors and what led to their decision to discontinue their postsecondary education. Analyses of variables such as the number of placement changes, the ages of students during their first placements, and the number of high schools attended might also be useful to support understanding of their relationship to risk factors.

Lastly, follow-up investigations would be warranted on perceptions of abilities and goals, considering there were significant differences in this construct between first-year students and those who persisted past their first year. Future qualitative studies could further explore the mindsets of students with histories of foster care involvement. Future quantitative studies could utilize existing self-efficacy scales, similar to the study on customized mental health interventions with college students (Williams et al., 2018). It would be helpful for future research, especially, to investigate interventions that focus on increasing students' perceptions of their abilities and goals.

Implications for Practice

Implications for practice include (a) monitoring the K-12 academic progression of students in foster care; (b) creating a workshop or class about navigating postsecondary institutions, including how to access resources; (c) providing students in foster care with a mentor at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels, especially one with similar demographics or lived experiences; and (d) adding college readiness program components related to confidence,

goal-setting, study skills, navigating institutions and accessing resources, and mathematics instruction.

Opportunity gaps were mentioned in the review of the literature and alluded to throughout the administrator and alumni interviews. Knowing that youth in foster care often miss core academic concepts (Pears et al., 2015), K-12 school leaders should institute formal checkpoints and academic interventions particular to this group of students. These checkpoints could help with early detection of missing academic concepts prior to enrollment in postsecondary education, which could reduce some of the frustration with coursework at the college level, especially regarding mathematics.

Several alumni discussed feeling like they did not know how to navigate college life, policies, and norms. Stanton-Salazar (2011) highlights that institutional agents can empower students to navigate postsecondary institutions, but students with marginalized identities (e.g., students with a history of foster care) have difficulty connecting to institutional agents. College counselors could provide workshops or classes to students with a history of foster care to explain and enculturate them to the institutional procedures and expectations. Some alumni described programs available to them on the college campus, however, not all alumni were able to connect to resources on the college campus. College resources should be centralized and easily accessible so that students with a history of foster care know how to access them (Day et al., 2018). These centers, which were praised by alumni during the interviews, are available on some college campuses, but should be expanded and publicized on all college campuses.

Supportive adults, or institutional agents, can be instrumental in postsecondary success, however it is difficult for students with marginalized identities to access these adults (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The majority of alumni identified supportive adults who helped them persist in

postsecondary education or inspired them to pursue postsecondary education. The administrators, however, acknowledged that when students change placements, it can be more difficult for them to form relationships with supportive adults, which is also supported by the literature (Rutman & Hubberstey, 2018). Long-term mentors for youth in foster care, especially those with similar demographics or lived experiences, are crucial so students can establish important relationships that support their persistence in postsecondary education.

Lastly, themes related to confidence and goal-setting, improving study skills, navigating institutions and accessing resources, and mathematics instruction were prominent in the interview and survey data. Hope Manifested, Dreams Unlimited, and other college readiness programs have different structures and may differ regarding the amount of focus on these topics. It would be important for these topics to be added as program components that receive significant focus.

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Appendix A

Summary Matrix

Research Question(s)	Constructs or Variables	Instruments	Data Collection	Data Analysis
1) What do program administrators perceive as supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation for youth who have participated in a college readiness program and experienced foster care?	Supports: college-going culture, professional training, resources, and individual characteristics Barriers: trauma, institutional racism, opportunity gaps, and placements	Graduation factors semistructured interview	Zoom (Once, post-survey analysis)	Thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009)
2) How do program personnel and caregivers describe the college-going culture of their college readiness programs?	College-going culture	College-Going Culture Survey Graduation factors semistructured interview	Qualtrics (once) Zoom (Once, post-survey analysis)	Descriptive analysis Thematic analysis (Saldaña, 2009)
3) What differences exist between the risk factors of first-year students and persisters who have participated in a college readiness program and experienced foster care?	Risk factors: perceived financial security, support systems, college adjustment concerns, academic background, perceived ability and goals	Risk Factors for Retention Survey (Pratt et al., 2019) Postsecondary persistence semistructured interview (Capik & Shupp, 2021)	Qualtrics (once) Zoom (Once, post survey analysis)	Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis Theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)
4) How do individuals who have experienced foster care describe factors that enabled or hindered their empowerment to persist in a postsecondary degree program?	Program factors: Partnerships with community agencies and schools (e.g., field trips), career readiness assessments, workshops, test preparation, mental health services, mentorship, financial assistance Non-program factors: Support systems, involvement in college life, perceived ability and goals, social capital	Postsecondary persistence semistructured interview (Capik & Shupp, 2021)	Zoom (Once, post-survey analysis)	Theoretical thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Appendix B

College-Going Culture Survey for Caregivers

Adapted with permission from Murray (2011).

Student Information

Grade Level: _____ Ethnicity: _____ Gender: _____ Enrollment in Special Program (ex: Special Ed, English Language Learner, Gifted and Talented Education): _____

Caregiver Information

Amount of time you have been a caregiver: _____

Amount of time this student has lived with you: _____

Please rate your agreement with the following statements. Space is provided at the end of the survey for any specific comments, concerns, etc., you would like to provide in addition.

Response options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree, N/A

Caregiver Involvement

- My student is planning to attend college after graduation
- I believe my student will be successful in college
- My student will be ready for college by the time she/he graduates
- My student has taken or will take the PSAT, SAT/ACT
- I have been involved with my student's college search and application process
- Before my student entered high school, I was not very well- informed about college
- I am well-informed about college requirements, the application process, and financial aid
- At my student's school, all students can enroll in AP and Honors classes if they choose

Staff Support

- The staff at Hope Manifested help all parents understand the college search and application process, providing information in other languages
- The staff at Hope Manifested are well-informed about college requirements, the application process, and financial aid
- The staff at Hope Manifested is supportive in college application efforts
- I feel that there is at least one staff member at Hope Manifested who is available to help my student with college applications

- I know at least one staff member at Hope Manifested who wants to see my student go to college and be successful
- The entire staff at Hope Manifested are dedicated to making sure that ALL students go to college
- The staff at Hope Manifested believe that all students can go to college

Programming to Involve Caregivers

- Hope Manifested has helped me to become more involved in the college search and application process
- Hope Manifested is preparing my student for college-level work
- Hope Manifested gives me and my student information about the college application process
- Hope Manifested gives my student the opportunity to research colleges online, visit college campuses, and/or speak with college representatives about admission
- My student's peers at Hope Manifested have the same opportunities that they do to explore colleges and understand the application process

Comments _____

Appendix C

College-Going Culture Survey for Staff

Adapted with permission from Murray (2011).

In completing this survey or questionnaire, you are consenting to be in this research study about youth in foster care and college readiness. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop at any time.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements. Space is provided at the end of the survey for any specific comments, concerns, etc., you would like to provide in addition.

Role at Hope Manifested _____

Amount of time in role _____

Amount of time working in the field of social services _____

Response options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree, N/A

Students' College Readiness

- I believe that all the students at Hope Manifested are capable of going to college after high school
- The students at Hope Manifested are well-informed about college requirements, the application process, and financial aid
- Our students plan to take or have already taken the PSAT, SAT/ACT
- Our students believe that they can be successful in college

Programming to Involve Caregivers

- Hope Manifested provides professional development for caregivers about the college application process
- Hope Manifested collaborates with caregivers to make presentations about college preparation
- Hope Manifested works to ensure a positive and productive relationship with parents to achieve success for all students
- Hope Manifested holds regular informational sessions for students and parents about the college application process (including college prep courses, and financial aid)

Programming to Support College Readiness

- Hope Manifested’s program has a curriculum with grade-level college preparation activities
- Hope Manifested works to ensure all students take the PSAT, ACT/SAT, obtaining waivers for needy students and providing test preparation strategies/resources
- Hope Manifested has an efficient system for monitoring seniors’ application progress
- Hope Manifested staff meet students regularly, keeping track of the college preparatory progress
- Hope Manifested has effective “early warning” system(s) to identify struggling students
- Hope Manifested has instruments in place to help all students plan for college
- Hope Manifested has established relationships with local colleges/universities to help facilitate campus visits, tours, information sessions, and other services for our students

Staff Beliefs

- Hope Manifested staff share the belief that all students can go to college
- Hope Manifested is focused on all students attending college after graduation
- I believe Hope Manifested promotes a culture of success for all students, regardless of their background
- I believe that our students are being adequately prepared in this program for the academic challenges of college
- Hope Manifested’s curriculum is rigorous and is preparing all students for college success

Comments

Appendix D

Graduation Factors Semistructured Interview Protocol

1. What is your position at Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited?
2. How long have you worked in the field of social services?
3. Please identify any social factors, such as placements, family support, outside support, or the experience of being in foster care that you believe may affect the level of educational attainment by youth in foster care.
 - a. What organizational or community factors do you think affect the program from achieving its goals regarding youths' educational attainment?
 - b. What do you think are the biggest barriers and supportive factors to youth in foster care achieving a college degree?
 - c. Are social attitudes in the community supportive of Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited and other similar programs?
 - d. How do Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited services differ (if at all) depending on the type of placement the student is in?
4. How do you think Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited and other similar programs affect students regarding their college readiness, behavior, attitudes, and academic performance?
 - a. In what ways do the adults in the students' placements participate in the program?
5. What new or existing activities related to college readiness does the program provide to program students or their placements?
 - a. Are students referred for any services?
6. What do you think contributes to a college-going culture for youth in foster care?

Appendix E

Risk Factors for Retention Survey

Adapted with permission from Pratt et al. (2019). For the main part of the survey, the response options are “yes” or “no” other than two items that request a number be typed in.

By completing this, you are consenting to be in this portion of this research study.

The following Finance items ask you about your time in college, whether you are currently enrolled or have already graduated:

Perceived Financial Security (RQ3)

- I work(ed) ____ hours per week in college
- I need(ed) to work to afford to go to school
- I have the financial resources to complete this year of college (or I had the financial resources to complete college)
- I am/was concerned about having enough money while in college
- I filed for financial aid

The following support system items ask about your support system while in college.

Support Systems (RQ3)

- I know an adult who graduated from college
- I participate(d) in study groups
- I have friends I can talk to if I feel discouraged

The following College Adjustment items ask you to think about concerns you may have had when you were a **freshman** in college.

College Adjustment Concerns (RQ3)

- Getting involved in campus activities
- Staying in contact with my high school support system
- Being in large classes
- Balancing a job with my studies
- Staying connected to household members and friends
- Fitting into the campus environment
- Making new friends
- Balancing all my responsibilities
- Doing well academically

The following items ask you to think about your time in high school.

Academic Background (High School) (RQ3)

- I was challenged to do my best academic work
- I feel like I worked harder than most students while in high school
- I rarely studied outside of class
- I studied with other students outside of class in high school

- I went to class without doing homework or assignments
- I skipped class
- I spent ___ hours or week studying outside of class in high school
- I went to class without doing assigned reading
- I went to class late
- I felt bored in class
- I waited until the last minute to do my assignments
- Reading materials was all I had to do to be successful
- I waited until the last minute to study for exams
- I initiated discussions with teachers about assignments, tests, or grades
- I felt overwhelmed by all that I had to do

The following Ability and Goal items are about how you currently feel, unless you already graduated. If you already graduated, please fill these out by thinking about your time in college.

Perceived Ability and Goals (RQ3)

- I have/had the self-discipline needed to keep up with my class work
- Challenges motivate me
- When I encounter a setback, I do not get discouraged
- I am able to work effectively toward long-term goals
- Going to college is/was the most satisfying experience right now/at that time
- I spend/spent ___ hours per week studying outside of class.
- I am/was confident in my ability to succeed at college
- I can improve my intelligence level
- I have had doubts about my ability to succeed in life
- I have overcome difficulties to conquer an important challenge
- I learn best by memory rehearsal
- I feel confused and undecided about my educational goals
- I have accomplished a goal that took years to achieve
- I am responsible for what and how well I learn
- It is/was important to graduate at this university instead of another one
- Pleasure and fun sometimes keep/kept me from getting work finished
- I have confidence in my academic abilities
- I remain calm when facing difficult academic challenges

The following items ask you to think about the helpfulness of the college preparation program you attended (ex. Hope Manifested or Dreams Unlimited)

Please rank the helpfulness of the components of your college preparatory program, with 1 being the most helpful and 6 being the least helpful (mark N/A if your program did not have this option) **(RQ4)**

- College readiness workshops
- SAT/ACT test preparation
- Field trips to community spaces such as, but not limited to, museums and the beach
- Mental health services
- Mentoring
- Financial resources to help pay for school

- N/A

Please rank the following non-program factors in order of helpfulness to you, with 1 being the most helpful and 4 being the least helpful. **(RQ4)**

- Support systems (e.g., family or friends)
- Involvement in college life (e.g., athletics, student government, multicultural events)
- Perceived ability and goals (e.g., having confidence even when things are challenging)
- Social capital (e.g., connecting to mentors, establishing relationships with faculty and staff)

Based on credits you have earned, what is your standing in college:

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior
- Graduated

Race/Ethnicity:

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- White or Caucasian
- other

Gender:

- female
- gender nonconforming or nonbinary
- male
- other

Age when you first had a foster care placement: _____

Total length of time in foster care: Year(s) _____ Month(s) _____

Number of placements in foster care (excluding hospital stays):

- 1–5
- 6–10
- 11–15
- 16 +

Number of high schools attended: _____

Please provide your email or phone number if you would like to be sent a \$10 gift card for completing this survey:

Email: _____

Phone number: _____

Name: _____

Can we contact you for an interview, if you qualify? (You will receive a \$25 gift card for completing an interview). Yes/No

Appendix F

Postsecondary Persistence Semistructured Interview

Adapted with permission from Capik and Shupp (2021).

Establish Rapport: Hello. Thank you for taking the time to complete an interview about your experiences in high school and college. I am working on my doctoral degree and am hoping to learn how to support more students with a history of foster care. Today I would like to discuss your experiences in high school, Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited, and college. Do you have any questions so far?

Expectations: Let's discuss our shared expectations.

Confidentiality: Everything you tell me today will be kept completely confidential. I will summarize our interview and combine it with the feedback of others and none of your identifying information will be shared.

Interview Speed: This interview should take approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

Compensation: At the end I will obtain your contact information to send you a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Recording: I will be recording this interview so I can go back, record a transcript, and listen to it later. Is that ok with you?

Do you have any questions? Okay, let us begin.

Support Systems (RQ3 and 4)

First, I'm going to ask you some questions about your support systems, as related to your degree completion/working toward your degree completion.

1. Who were the individuals (e.g., parents, family, friends, mentors) that supported and encouraged you to continue working toward your degree, particularly when you felt discouraged, if any?
2. Who were the individuals at the university that supported and encouraged you to continue working toward your degree, particularly when you felt discouraged, if any?
3. Who were the individuals from your college preparation program that supported and encouraged you to continue working toward your degree, particularly when you felt discouraged, if any?

Perceived Ability and Goals (RQ3 and 4)

Part of the reason that some students continue in college while others drop out may be related to their personal characteristics, perceived abilities, and goals.

4. Tell me about some of your personal characteristics that kept you in college and continuing on the path to graduation, if applicable.
 - a. Which of your personal characteristics hindered your progress, if at all, and how did you overcome them?
5. Tell me about some of your beliefs about your abilities that kept you in college and continuing on the path to graduation, if applicable.

- a. Which of your beliefs about your abilities hindered your progress, if at all, and how did you overcome them?
6. Tell me how your educational goals kept you in college and continuing on the path to graduation, if applicable.
 - a. How did your educational goals hinder your progress, if at all, and how did you overcome that?

Involvement in College Life (RQ 4)

Now I am going to ask you some questions about how involved you are or were regarding college life and university services.

7. Describe the university's services that helped you complete your degree/continue to work on towards your degree.
8. Tell me about your involvement in college life, outside of attending classes.
 - a. What experiences did you have related to campus activities (e.g., sports, performances)?
 - b. What experiences did you have related to volunteer work?
 - c. What experiences did you have related to using campus facilities (e.g., student union, writing center)?
 - d. What experiences did you have related to student organizations or groups (e.g., first-generation college student programs, cultural centers, religious groups)?

Social Capital (RQ4)

Social capital can be described as when someone outside of your family who is in a position of power helps you gain access to resources that you might not otherwise have had access to. Now I am going to ask you about your social capital while in college.

9. Tell me about any faculty or staff who supported your academic success while you were in college, if applicable.
10. Tell me about any adults who assisted you in finding a job, internship, or volunteering opportunity while you were in college, if applicable.

Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited Program Factors (RQ4)

Thank you for everything you have shared so far. Now I am going to ask you some questions specific to Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited.

11. Tell me about your experience at Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited.
12. Tell me about your experience in the summer programming of Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited.
13. What were some aspects of Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited that were especially helpful in preparing you for college?
14. What could Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited have done differently to better prepare you for college?

- prompt, if needed (based on survey responses): help getting involved in campus activities, fitting into the campus environment, making new friends, balancing responsibilities, doing well academically, keeping in touch with family and high school friends, finding study groups, accessing campus resources
15. Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give to students with a history of foster care who are beginning their college experience?
 16. In closing, is there anything you would like to add that I have not asked about in relation to Hope Manifested/Dreams Unlimited, your experiences in college and persisting in your degree, or anything else?
 17. Which program did you attend?

*Choices removed to provide anonymity

Appendix G

Phase 1: Informed Consent for Caregivers

ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT:

Johns Hopkins University
Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB)

Informed Consent Form

Title: *Bachelor's Degree Attainment and Foster Care*
Principal Investigator: *Dr. Carey Borkoski, Johns Hopkins University*
Date: *April 29, 2020*

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

The purpose of this research is to (a) explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, (b) explore the prevalence of risk factors for college attrition for foster youth who completed a college readiness program, and (c) determine the aspects of college readiness programs that contribute to postsecondary education persistence for those who have experienced foster care. We anticipate that approximately 50 people will participate in this study.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Confirm that you have listened to this informed consent document
- Complete an online survey about your perception of the college-going culture at Hope Manifested. The survey is expected to take less than 15 minutes.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life, or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. Some questions may be sensitive, and it is your choice whether you want to answer them or not. You can stop the interview at any time.

You may get tired or bored when you are completing the survey. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer.

BENEFITS:

Benefits to participants that may be reasonably expected from the research include gaining insights about persistence in college amongst former foster youth. This study may benefit society if the results lead to a better understanding of factors that better prepare students with a history of foster care to persist in college.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary: You choose whether to participate. If you

decide not to participate, there are no penalties, and you will not lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop your participation at any time, without any penalty or loss of benefits. If you want to withdraw from the study, please email, text, or call the researcher, Vicky Garafola, at vgarafo1@jhu.edu or (858) 722-0423.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board and officials from government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Office for Human Research Protections. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

COMPENSATION:

There is no monetary compensation for this study.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:

You can ask questions about this research study now or at any time during the study, by talking to the researcher working with you, Vicky Garafola or by calling (858) 722-0423 or emailing vgarafo1@jhu.edu, or contacting the principal investigator, Dr. Carey Borkoski via email at cborkoski@jhu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, please call the Homewood Institutional Review Board at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

WHAT YOUR VERBAL CONSENT MEANS:

Your signature below means that you understand the information in this consent form.

Your signature also means that you agree to participate in the study.

By signing this consent form, you have not waived any legal rights you otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

Appendix H

Phase 1: Informed Consent for Staff

Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB)

Informed Consent Form

Title: *Bachelor's Degree Attainment and Foster Care*
Principal Investigator: *Dr. Carey Borkoski, Johns Hopkins University*
Date: *April 29, 2020*

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

The purpose of this research is to (a) explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, (b) explore the prevalence of risk factors for college attrition for foster youth who completed a college readiness program, and (c) determine the aspects of college readiness programs that contribute to postsecondary education persistence for those who have experienced foster care.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Confirm that you have read this informed consent document
- Complete an online survey about your perception of the college-going culture at Hope Manifested. The survey is expected to take no more than 15 minutes.

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life, or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. Some questions may be sensitive, and it is your choice whether you want to answer them or not. You can stop the interview at any time.

You may get tired or bored when you are completing the survey. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer.

BENEFITS:

Benefits to participants that may be reasonably expected from the research include gaining insights about persistence in college amongst former foster youth.

This study may benefit society if the results lead to a better understanding of factors that better prepare students with a history of foster care to persist in college.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary: You choose whether to participate. If you decide not to participate, there are no penalties, and you will not lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop your participation at any time, without any penalty or loss of benefits. If you want to withdraw from the study, please email, text, or call the researcher, Vicky Garafola, at vgarafol1@jhu.edu or (858) 722-0423.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board and officials from government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Office for Human Research Protections. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

COMPENSATION:

There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this study.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:

You can ask questions about this research study now or at any time during the study, by talking to the researcher working with you, Vicky Garafola or by calling (858) 722-0423 or emailing vgarafol1@jhu.edu, or contacting the principal investigator, Dr. Carey Borkoski via email at cborkoski@jhu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, please call the Homewood Institutional Review Board at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

SIGNATURES

WHAT YOUR SIGNATURE MEANS:

Your signature below means that you understand the information in this consent form.

Your signature also means that you agree to participate in the study.

By signing this consent form, you have not waived any legal rights you otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

Participant's Signature

Date

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
(Investigator or HIRB Approved Designee)**

Date

Appendix I

Recruitment Email for Administrators

Dear prospective study participant,

My name is Vicky Garafola, and I am a doctoral candidate at Johns Hopkins University. I am writing this email to invite you to participate in a research study regarding your experiences serving students who have a history of foster care. The purposes of the study are to (a) explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, (b) explore the prevalence of risk factors for college attrition for foster youth who completed a college readiness program, and (c) determine the aspects of college-readiness programs that contribute to postsecondary education persistence for those who have experienced foster care.

The study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through Johns Hopkins Institutional Review Board.

This study will be conducted during Spring of 2022. During that time, I will collect and analyze data related to your experiences working with students who have a history of foster care. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview using Zoom. Your interview responses will be anonymous. The interview is expected to take 60-minutes.

As part of this research, we are requesting your permission to create and use audio and video recordings that just the investigator will hear and see. Any audio or video recordings will not be published or used for advertising or non-study related purposes.

You should know that:

- You may request that the audio and video recording be stopped at any time.
- If you agree to allow the recording and then change your mind, you may ask us to destroy that recording. If the recording has had all identifiers removed, we may not be able to do this.
- We will only use these recordings for the purposes of this research.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop your participation at any time. Participation or non-participation will have no bearing on your employment. Furthermore, any information you provide during the study will not be shared with your employer.

This study may benefit society if the results lead to a better understanding of factors that better prepare students with a history of foster care to persist in college.

If you are interested in participating, please contact me by phone or email.

Thank you very much for your consideration. If you have any questions regarding this study or the consent document, please contact me via email at vgarafo1@jhu.edu or phone at (858) 722-0423.

Sincerely,
Vicky Garafola
Doctoral Candidate
Johns Hopkins University

Name and address of the faculty advisor:
Dr. Sherri Prosser
Senior Advisor, Doctor of Education Program
Johns Hopkins University, School of Education
2800 N. Charles St. Baltimore, MD 21218

Appendix J

Phase 1: Informed Consent for Administrators

ORAL CONSENT SCRIPT:

Johns Hopkins University
Homewood Institutional Review Board (HIRB)

Informed Consent Form

Title:	<i>Bachelor's Degree Attainment and Foster Care</i>
Principal Investigator:	<i>Dr. Carey Borkoski, Johns Hopkins University</i>
Date:	<i>April 29, 2020</i>

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH STUDY:

The purpose of this research is to (a) explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, (b) explore the prevalence of risk factors for college attrition for foster youth who completed a college readiness program, and (c) determine the aspects of college readiness programs that contribute to postsecondary education persistence for those who have experienced foster care. We anticipate that approximately 50 people will participate in this study.

PROCEDURES:

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

- Confirm that you have listened to this informed consent document
- Participate in a 60 minute interview through Zoom

RISKS/DISCOMFORTS:

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life, or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. Some questions may be sensitive, and it is your choice whether you want to answer them or not. You can stop the interview at any time.

You may get tired or bored when you are completing the survey. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer.

BENEFITS:

Benefits to participants that may be reasonably expected from the research include gaining insights about persistence in college amongst former foster youth.

This study may benefit society if the results lead to a better understanding of factors that better prepare students with a history of foster care to persist in college.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary: You choose whether to participate. If you decide not to participate, there are no penalties, and you will not lose any benefits to which you

would otherwise be entitled.

If you choose to participate in the study, you can stop your participation at any time, without any penalty or loss of benefits. If you want to withdraw from the study, please email, text, or call the researcher, Vicky Garafola, at vgarafo1@jhu.edu or (858) 722-0423.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board and officials from government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Office for Human Research Protections. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

COMPENSATION:

There is no monetary compensation for this study.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS:

You can ask questions about this research study now or at any time during the study, by talking to the researcher working with you, Vicky Garafola or by calling (858) 722-0423 or emailing vgarafo1@jhu.edu, or contacting the principal investigator, Dr. Carey Borkoski via email at cborkoski@jhu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, please call the Homewood Institutional Review Board at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

WHAT YOUR VERBAL CONSENT MEANS:

Your signature below means that you understand the information in this consent form. Your signature also means that you agree to participate in the study.

By signing this consent form, you have not waived any legal rights you otherwise would have as a participant in a research study.

Appendix K

Phase 2: Informed Consent for Administrators

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY HOMEWOOD INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (HIRB)

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title: *Factors Contributing to Bachelor's Degree Persistence of Students Who Have Experienced Foster Care*

Application No.: **HIRB00014528**

Funded By: *Victoria Garafola (Student Investigator funded)*

Principal Investigator: *Dr. Sherri Prosser, Senior Educational Advisor, 2800 N. Charles St. Baltimore, MD 21218, sprossel@jhu.edu, (386) 314-3015*

You are being asked to join a research study. Participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to join now, you can change your mind later.

1. Research Summary (Key Information):

The information in this section is intended to be an introduction to the study only. Complete details of the study are listed in the sections below. If you are considering participation in the study, the entire document should be discussed with you before you make your final decision. You can ask questions about the study now and at any time in the future.

The purpose of this research is to (a) explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, (b) explore the prevalence of risk factors for college attrition for foster youth who completed a college readiness program, and (c) determine the aspects of college readiness programs that contribute to postsecondary education persistence for those who have experienced foster care. There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this research study. There are no significant risks or costs associated with your participation in this research study.

This portion of the research study is an interview conducted via Zoom videoconferencing software. The interview is expected to take 60 minutes. Some questions may be sensitive, and it is your choice whether you want to answer them or not. You can stop the interview at any time. You will be in this study from the time you express interest until the conclusion of the interview, which could range from one day to two months.

2. Why is this research being done?

This research is being done to lead to a better understanding of factors related to bachelor's degree completion of former foster youth. The study can contribute to the body of research for interventions aiming to assist these individuals, particularly given the limited number of former foster youth with bachelor's degrees and the limited research focused on this problem.

Administrators who have worked with foster youth in the context of a college readiness program may join.

3. What will happen if you join this study?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following:

- Confirm that you have read this informed consent document by emailing a signed copy to the student investigator.
- Communicate with the student investigator to set up a Zoom appointment.
- Participate in an interview via Zoom about your experience working with students in foster care at Dreams Unlimited and your perceptions of the supports and barriers they experience related to college readiness. The interview is expected to last 60 minutes.

Administrators who have worked with foster youth in the context of a college readiness program may join.

Photographs/Video recordings:

As part of this research, we are requesting your permission to create and use video recordings from Zoom. Any recordings will not be used for advertising or non-study related purposes.

You should know that:

- You may request that the video recording be stopped at any time.
- If you agree to allow the video recording and then change your mind, you may ask us to destroy that imaging/recording. If the imaging/recording has had all identifiers removed, we may not be able to do this.
- We will only use these video recordings for the purposes of this research.

How long will you be in the study?

You will be in this study from the time you express interest until the conclusion of the interview, which could range from one day to two months.

4. What are the risks or discomforts of the study?

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

You may get tired or bored when I am asking you questions. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. There is the risk that information about you may become known to people outside this study.

5. Are there benefits to being in the study?

There is no direct benefit to you from being in the study. This study may benefit society if the results lead to (a) a better understanding of factors related to bachelor's degree completion of former foster youth and (b) improved college readiness programming for current and former foster youth.

6. What are your options if you do not want to be in the study?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary: You choose whether to participate.

If you decide not to participate, there are no penalties, and you will not lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

7. Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

No.

8. Will you be paid if you join this study?

There is no compensation for participation in this study.

9. Can you leave the study early?

- You can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later, without any penalty or loss of benefits.
- If you wish to stop, please tell us right away.
- If you want to withdraw from the study, please email, text, or call the student investigator, Vicky Garafola, at vgarafol1@jhu.edu or (858) 722-0423.

10. How will the confidentiality of your biospecimens and/or data be protected?

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board and officials from government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Office for Human Research Protections. Records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

11. What other things should you know about this research study?

What is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and how does it protect you?

This study has been reviewed by an Institutional Review Board (IRB), a group of people that reviews human research studies. The IRB can help you if you have questions about your rights as a research participant or if you have other questions, concerns or complaints about this research study. You may contact the IRB at 410-516-6580 or hirb@jhu.edu.

What should you do if you have questions about the study?

Call the principal investigator, Dr. Sherri Prosser, at 386-314-3015. If you wish, you may contact the principal investigator by letter. The address is on page one of this consent form. If you cannot reach the principal investigator or wish to talk to someone else, call the IRB office at 410-516-5680.

You can ask questions about this research study now or at any time during the study, by talking to the researcher(s) working with you or by calling the student investigator, Victoria Garafola, at 858-722-0423.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or feel that you have not been treated fairly, please call the Homewood Institutional Review Board at Johns Hopkins University at (410) 516-6580.

12. What does your signature on this consent form mean?

Your signature on this form means that: You understand the information given to you in this form, you accept the provisions in the form, and you agree to join the study. You will not give up any legal rights by signing this consent form.

WE WILL GIVE YOU A COPY OF THIS SIGNED AND DATED CONSENT FORM

Signature of Participant
Date/Time

(Print Name)

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
Date/Time

(Print Name)

NOTE: A COPY OF THE SIGNED, DATED CONSENT FORM MUST BE KEPT BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR; A COPY MUST BE GIVEN TO THE PARTICIPANT.

Appendix L

Recruitment Flyer for Alumni

Calling Hope Manifested & Dreams Unlimited Alumni Enrolled in or Graduated from College for a Research Study!!

We want to hear about your experiences in Hope Manifested or Dreams Unlimited and in college!
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO BACHELOR'S DEGREE PERSISTENCE OF STUDENTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED
FOSTER CARE

Participate in ⌚ 15 minute survey, earn \$10 gift card

Participate in ⌚ 45-60 minute interview, earn \$25 gift
card

Click on link to survey [here](#)

Or

Contact Vicky Garafola:
vgarafo1@jhu.edu

(858) 722-0423 (call or text)

Appendix M

Phase 2: Informed Consent for Alumni (Interview)

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY HOMEWOOD INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (HIRB)

RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study Title: *Factors Contributing to Bachelor's Degree Persistence of Students Who Have Experienced Foster Care*

Application No.: HIRB00014528

Funded By: *Victoria Garafola (Student Investigator funded)*

Principal Investigator: *Dr. Sherri Prosser, Senior Educational Advisor, 2800 N. Charles St. Baltimore, MD 21218, sprosse1@jhu.edu, (386) 314-3015*

You are being asked to join a research study. Participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to join now, you can change your mind later.

1. Research Summary (Key Information):

The information in this section is intended to be an introduction to the study only. Complete details of the study are listed in the sections below. If you are considering participation in the study, the entire document should be discussed with you before you make your final decision. You can ask questions about the study now and at any time in the future.

The purpose of this research is to (a) explore the perceived supports and barriers to postsecondary graduation, (b) explore the prevalence of risk factors for college attrition for foster youth who completed a college readiness program, and (c) determine the aspects of college readiness programs that contribute to postsecondary education persistence for those who have experienced foster care. There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this research study. There are no significant risks or costs associated with your participation in this research study.

This portion of the research study is an interview conducted via Zoom videoconferencing software. The interview is expected to take 45 to 60 minutes. Some questions may be sensitive, and it is your choice whether you want to answer them or not. You can stop the interview at any time. You will be in this study from the time you express interest until the conclusion of the interview, which could range from one day to two months.

2. Why is this research being done?

This research is being done to lead to a better understanding of factors related to bachelor's degree completion of former foster youth. The study can contribute to the body of research

for interventions aiming to assist these individuals, particularly given the limited number of former foster youth with bachelor's degrees and the limited research focused on this problem.

People who have completed a college readiness program, have been in foster care, and are currently enrolled in or have graduated from a postsecondary education program may join.

3. What will happen if you join this study?

If you agree to be in this study, we will ask you to do the following:

- Confirm that you have read this informed consent document by emailing a signed copy to the student investigator.
- Communicate with the student investigator to set up a Zoom appointment.
- Participate in a follow-up interview via Zoom about your experience at Hope Manifested or Dreams Unlimited, your support system, and your college experience. The interview is expected to last 45 to 60 minutes.

People who have completed a college readiness program, have been in foster care, and are currently enrolled in or have graduated from a postsecondary education program may qualify to be part of this study.

Photographs/Video recordings:

As part of this research, we are requesting your permission to create and use video recordings from Zoom. Any recordings will not be used for advertising or non-study related purposes.

You should know that:

- You may request that the video recording be stopped at any time.
- If you agree to allow the video recording and then change your mind, you may ask us to destroy that imaging/recording. If the imaging/recording has had all identifiers removed, we may not be able to do this.
- We will only use these video recordings for the purposes of this research.

How long will you be in the study?

You will be in this study from the time you express interest until the conclusion of the interview, which could range from one day to two months.

12. What are the risks or discomforts of the study?

The risks associated with participation in this study are no greater than those encountered in daily life.

You may get tired or bored when I am asking you questions. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. There is the risk that information about you may become known to people outside this study.

13. Are there benefits to being in the study?

There is no direct benefit to you from being in the study. This study may benefit society if the results lead to (a) a better understanding of factors related to bachelor's degree

completion of former foster youth and (b) improved college readiness programming for current and former foster youth.

14. What are your options if you do not want to be in the study?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary: You choose whether to participate.

If you decide not to participate, there are no penalties, and you will not lose any benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled.

15. Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

No.

16. Will you be paid if you join this study?

If you satisfactorily complete the interview, you will receive a \$25.00 Amazon gift card to compensate you for your participation. If you end your participation before completing the study, you will not be paid for your participation. Payments will be made by email at the end of your participation in this portion of the study.

You may be required to provide your social security number to be paid for taking part in this study. Federal tax law requires that you report your research payments when you file your taxes. If your total payments from Johns Hopkins exceed \$600 per year, Johns Hopkins will report these payments to the Internal Revenue Service and you will receive a 1099-MISC form from us.

17. Can you leave the study early?

- You can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later, without any penalty or loss of benefits.
- If you wish to stop, please tell us right away.
- If you want to withdraw from the study, please email, text, or call the student investigator, Vicky Garafola, at vgarafol1@jhu.edu or (858) 722-0423.

18. How will the confidentiality of your biospecimens and/or data be protected?

Any study records that identify you will be kept confidential to the extent possible by law. The records from your participation may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including members of the Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board and officials from government agencies such as the National Institutes of Health and the Office for Human Research Protections. Relevant contact information will be given to the Johns Hopkins School of Education so that they can provide the gift card at the conclusion of your participation in this portion of the study. (All of these people are required to keep your identity confidential.) Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

19. What other things should you know about this research study?

What is the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and how does it protect you?

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**WE WILL GIVE YOU A COPY OF THIS SIGNED AND DATED
CONSENT FORM**

Signature of Participant
Date/Time

(Print Name)

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent
Date/Time

(Print Name)

NOTE: A COPY OF THE SIGNED, DATED CONSENT FORM MUST BE KEPT BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR; A COPY MUST BE GIVEN TO THE PARTICIPANT.