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DEVELOPING COLLEGE READINESS EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TRANSITIONS (CREST):
A COLLEGE AND CAREER TRANSITION PROGRAM

By
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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

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Abstract

After spending nearly all of their adolescent lives in primary education, young adults depart the high school setting expecting to be adequately prepared to effectively transition to adulthood. Young adults should possess the necessary employability skills to enter the work force without significant setbacks. The skills and knowledge of education are crucial in the quality of service and retention of quality employees. Although high schools are designed to prepare young adults for their future, this study investigates whether students develop the necessary confidence and preparation to successfully transition to higher education or the work force.

This action-research study began as an examination of secondary education, employability skills, and career readiness at the high school level. The study used qualitative research and personal reports to develop CREST—College Readiness and Employability Skills Transitions—a public charter high school program. The study consisted of qualitative interviews and surveys with high school graduates, parents, staff, and employers in relation to skills and coursework that are beneficial for higher education or the work force.
Dedication

This study is dedicated to my late sister, Mataa Siluafaga Paoakalani Gago, and my late
grandmother, Moana Lou Kekaikuihala Hiram Hannemann, who inspired me to start this
program and successfully complete it. Their legacies motivate me to be a positive change
in a world that needs more commendable leaders. I am privileged to have spent the first
25 years of my life with their guidance, love, and support.
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Background of the Problem

Secondary schools in America consist of four years or eight semesters of academia that focus on core areas—English, math, science, and history—as well as elective courses that expose students to alternative areas of interest. Throughout these four years, students are expected to pass each course successfully. In addition to these requirements, some states mandate that students pass a course-based competency exam aligned with state and college admissions. Currently, 47 of 50 states have adopted similar graduation requirements; however, the Education Commission of the States reported that allowing high schools to use course-seat-time requirements for graduation is not a true indicator whether students are ready for college. Instead, many states offer competency-based assessments for students to show their content mastery, with some districts now requiring students to provide a portfolio of their work to reflect learning accurately (Education Week, 2015). This theory supports the claim that 60 percent of incoming college students fail placement exams because high school and college standards are not aligned (Adams, 2015).

Outside of the academic preparation that schools are designed to provide, American education is supplemented with career- and workplace-readiness skills. In 1991, the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) was charged with examining the demands of the workplace and whether young people were capable of meeting those demands (What Work Requires of Schools, 2000). At the time, the Commission was asked to define the skills needed for employment; propose acceptable levels of proficiency; suggest effective ways to assess proficiency; and develop a
dissemination strategy for the nation’s schools, businesses, and homes. In the report, implications are outlined of focusing on secondary education as preparation for transitioning into adulthood. Three major conclusions have been drawn from this report: (a) all American high school students must develop a new set of competencies and foundational skills if they are to enjoy a productive, full, and satisfying life; (b) the qualities of high performance that characterize today’s most competitive companies must become the standard for the vast majority of all companies, large and small, local and global; and (c) the nation’s schools must be transformed into high-performance organizations in their own right (What Work Requires of Schools, 2000). These three ideas were developed after the Commission spent nearly 12 months conversing with desk workers, public employees, union officials, managers, and business owners. The Commission recommended that educators implement the SCANS skills into their pedagogy to meet the identified demands.

**Introduction and Statement of the Problem**

Although charter schools are a relatively new concept in mainstream American education, the charter school movement is slowly developing students who are college- and career-ready. Charter schools began in the early 1990s as an alternative to traditional public schools that educate students tuition-free and without special entrance requirements (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). These schools were designed to meet student needs by developing and adjusting curricula, allowing parents to be more involved, and allowing teachers to be more innovative in the classroom. Because charter school students have a high success rate, the number of charter schools across the country continues to increase and the model has been adopted in nearly 80 percent of the
United States. Charter schools have the flexibility to allow more classroom time than public schools. Nobel-winning economist Milton Friedman surmised that charter schools were a step forward toward educational experimentation in response to former President Ronald Regan’s 1983 report, A Nation at Risk (Levine & Levine, 2014). The report’s hypothesis was that traditional public schools were failing to meet the national need for a competitive work force, beginning the debate for educational reform; hence, the charter school movement.

Upon high school departure through graduation or incompletion, young adults are left to decide the route that best fits the lifestyle they will pursue. With a high school diploma, some may choose to pursue higher education and work toward a degree; others may choose to enter the work force with the skills learned through their adolescent years. According to Krahn, Lowe, and Lehman (2002), employability skills are an enduring policy concept resting on two assumptions that have yet to be analyzed: (a) many young people are deficient in employability skills because they are not sufficiently emphasized in schools, and (b) schools lack awareness relating to skills needed in the work force. Are traditional public high schools and resources designed to minimize the transition between secondary education and either college or the work force? Are the skills and knowledge gained in secondary education a sufficient foundation to a young person’s life? Would public charter schools be able to offer more resources and individualized learning programs that could adequately instill life skills and experiences into high school–aged students?
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action-research project is to develop a program called Career Readiness and Employability Skills Transitions (CREST) for public charter high schools as a means of preparing future leaders by assisting in the post-secondary placement process. The program allows students to take courses toward graduation as well as courses aligned with employability skills and college-readiness, based on personal goals and expectations.

Research Questions

CREST is designed to better prepare students for college and the work force using a guided research question that contributes to the overall effectiveness and preparation of high school students for post-secondary opportunities. The study contributes to the research on college and work force readiness and addresses the following question:

Are high school students receiving effective guidance and educational programs to prepare them for adulthood?

Significance of the Study

High school students are continuing to drop out of high school because of issues like the ninth-grade problem (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010), which identifies the transition from middle- to high-school as the critical point for high school completion. Students lack resources to make a crucial realignment at this stage; therefore, it is no surprise that two in five recent high school graduates insist that gaps exist between high school education and the overall skills, abilities, and work habits expected of them today in college and in the work force (Achieve Inc., 2005). Regardless of the barriers that exist
in mainstream secondary education, programs must be instituted that allow for a successful transition from high school to adulthood.

Although students graduate from the professional practice setting at rates above 80 percent, questions remain as to whether they are ready to successfully transition into college. In addition to attaining the state-required credits and coursework, students have to pass high school proficiency exams in the areas of reading, writing, math, and science. This study will examine these requirements to determine if they are an accurate measure of preparedness beyond secondary education. Using findings from this study, researchers can diagnose specific areas of professional and personal improvement that can better prepare our future leaders.

Specifically in the professional practice setting, researchers can present valuable information to the administration and to Governing Board members to improve college and work force readiness. These members can vote on adopting a more accurate measure of skill development beyond what a high school diploma issued in accordance with state guidelines can provide. Finally, students will graduate with a high school diploma as well as a deeper understanding of college and work force expectations.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to develop a CREST program for public charter high schools to better prepare young adults to transition successfully to college, trade school, the military, or the work force.

Methodology Overview

The central phenomenon was studied by interviewing parents, teachers, and graduates of a local school district and its neighboring high school affiliates. Participants
were given the opportunity to answer voluntarily and anonymously a Likert survey outlining questions relating to their satisfaction and the preparedness of the professional practice setting. These surveys were categorized by satisfaction ratings.

Upon completion of the survey, participants were able to request a follow-up interview that provided insight about the participant’s educational experiences and perceptions relating to the development of college, career, and work force readiness within the professional practice setting. Interviews were recorded and coded using an assigned identification number to protect the identity of the participant. The researcher reviewed each transcript against the audio recording for accuracy.

**Definition of Relevant Terms**

**Adulthood.** The post-secondary lifestyle during which people transition into college or the work force.

**Charter Management Organization (CMO).** A nonprofit organization that operates a network of charter schools with a common mission or instructional design (Farrell, Wohlsetter, & Smith, 2012).

**Charter school.** A public, nonsectarian schools that operates under a written contract from a local school board or other organization (Nathan, 1997).

**Compulsory education.** Education mandated by law (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

**Curriculum.** The aggregate of courses of study given in a school (Merriam-Webster Online, 2015).

**Educational Management Organization (EMO).** A nonprofit company that operates and launches charter schools. (Farrell et al., 2012).
**Employability skills.** The skills needed to perform the duties of a job.

**Functional community.** A school whose goals mesh with the values of the surrounding neighborhood (Coleman, Kilgore, & Hoffer, 1976).

**Graduation rates.** The percentage of a school’s first-time, first-year students who complete their program within 150 percent of normal time to completion (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

**High school diploma.** A formal document regulated by the state certifying the successful completion of a prescribed secondary school program of studies (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

**Higher education institutions.** An institution legally authorized to offer at least a two- through four-year program of college-level studies, creditable toward a baccalaureate degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

**Ninth-grade problem.** Identifies the transition from middle- to high-school years as the critical point for high school completion (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

**Organizational culture.** The behavior of humans within an organization.

**Private school.** A school funded, conducted, and maintained by a private group (Merriam-Webster Online, 2015).

**Proficiency.** Advancement in knowledge or skill (Merriam-Webster Online, 2015).

**Public school.** A school that receive money from and is controlled by a local government (Merriam-Webster Online, 2015).
Secondary school. A school comprising any span of grades beginning with the next grade following an elementary or middle school and ending with or below grade 12 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Skill. The ability to apply knowledge to accomplish a task (Krahn et al., 2002).

Traditional secondary school. Publicly funded school for grades nine through 12.

Transformational leadership. Approach that causes change in individuals and social systems.

Value community. A school that adopt a set of values that are supported by its stakeholders (Coleman et al., 1976).

Work force. The number of persons employed in a specific field.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations to the study include the time during which data was collected. Because data were collected from students, parents, and staff involved with the organization since its first graduating class in 2013, the data reflect a three-year sample.

Delimitations in this study include the study’s location, which was one public charter high school with a student population of less than 200. Study findings may not apply to larger public charter schools.

Personal biases may exist in this study because participants were asked to self-report. Additionally, the researcher has direct access to information, interactions with the group on both academic and personal bases, and is involved with student academic progress toward high school graduation. As an administrator, the researcher makes
decisions that contribute to the overall culture of the organization, sets students
schedules, and is responsible for making structural changes on campus.

The researcher is also aware of issues that exist at the highest level with either the
Governing Board or other administrators. In all instances, the researcher is unable to
disclose this information due to confidentiality among the administration. Administrative
meetings take place once a month where administrators meet and discuss pertinent topics
that contribute to the overall environment. Unfortunately, personal opinions and egos
exist that affect these confidential meetings.

**Leader’s Role and Responsibility in Relation to the Problem**

The researcher is in an administrative position, with the ability to foresee issues
that will directly influence a student’s chance at successfully finishing high school.
Transformational leaders are responsible for identifying the need for change relating to
existing problems, creating solutions, and executing the solutions with group members
who support the cause (Bass, 1985). It is vital for a leader to continue finding ways to
improve education, make it easier, and keep it focused on its long-term effects.

Although recognizing these issues is part of being a leader, successfully
encouraging other administrative leaders to support a decision is another task. In a charter
school setting, one has to convince the Superintendent, as well as the majority of the
Governing Board, to support such a decision. One’s position as a leader, in this case an
administrator, is to advocate for other less publicly recognized leaders, in this case the
students. One must be willing to speak for the students’ best interest, so they can move
forward in their adult lives using the life skills they learned within the professional
practice setting.
Summary

Every year, the United States continues to graduate high school students with the hope that the education they received reflects the expectations of college or the work force. Too often, young adults leave their respective institutions with a high school diploma but with no clear path beyond the educational experience. Rarely do students leave with the confidence that they possess the skills and knowledge to be successful. Charter schools were founded as a means to provide an alternative education for mainstream America. Charter schools operate with a model that allows flexibility and innovation within the classroom and can offer individualized resources to prepare students for a successful adult transition into higher education or the work force.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Education in America has changed dramatically over the centuries from being a voluntary and incidental institution, where attendance was dependent upon the weather and the seasons (Tyack, 1974), to the establishment of compulsory education that legally mandates attendance in school to a certain age that is determined by each state (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014). As institutions of learning, schools are intended to benefit each person, foster the cultivation and improvement of a country, and satisfy the distinctive needs of particular groups (Hochschild, Scovronick, & Scovronick, 2004). Hochschild, Scovronick, and Scovronick (2004) also claim, “for the last half century, controversies over educational policy have resulted from American efforts to put all three goals into educational practice” (p. 12). While reforms and programs addressed these controversies over educational policy, many have failed, and comprehensive solutions to school change remain elusive (Childers-McKee & Hytten, 2015).

Research has been performed suggesting that communities affect the need for the public and private sectors. Coleman et al. (1976) distinguished between the two types of school communities, defining “functional communities” as schools whose goals mesh with the values of the surrounding neighborhood and “value communities” as schools adopted by a set of values that are supported by its stakeholders. Very similar to value communities, private schools are funded, conducted, and maintained by a private group (“Private schools,” Merriam-Webster Online, 2015) and affect the private school sector. Very similar to functional communities, public schools are maintained at the public expense (“Public schools,” Merriam-Webster Online, 2015) and operated by a school
board for students within a certain proximity of the school. While both seek to provide an environment that allows a student to develop to the highest degree for intelligent, useful, happy, and cooperative living (Belding, 1942), the public versus private debate created many nontraditional educational reforms, including charter schools. This strategy continues to be a fairly new and misunderstood movement.

Private Schools

There are 30,861 private schools in the United States serving 5.3 million PK–12 students, private schools account for 24% of the nation’s schools and enroll 10 percent of all PK–12 students (Council for American Private Education, 2015). Unlike public schools, private schools charge an admission price that varies from $5,000–$30,000, private schools enroll fewer disadvantaged students than public schools (Perie, 2005 as cited in Berliner & Glass, 2014). In past decades, private schools were found to produce better cognitive outcomes, and the expectations of educational achievement and aspirations were higher for private schools than in public schools (Coleman et al., 1976). A more recent study found that public school students on average outperformed their peers in private schools (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2005).

Public Schools

Since the early 19th century, public schools have often been the center of educational reforms to improve student achievement and ensure the greater good of society (Reese, 2011). Nearly 90 percent of school-aged children in over 92,000 public schools located in almost 15,000 school districts across every community in the United States attend K–12 public schools (Hochschild et al., 2004). Serving 47 million students nationally, public schools have been at the center of controversy and policy making with
critics arguing that they need to be radically transformed with new forms of schooling, learning, and subject matter (Good & Braden, 2014). Good & Braden (2014) claim several aspects are true of public schooling: (a) they do a good job of educating students; (b) parents are more supportive; (c) public school attackers do so for political reasons or reasons of personal gain; (d) retaining the current system is better than duplicating it; and (e) public schools unify Americans in ways necessary for maintaining a democracy.

**Charter Schools**

**History**

In blending the public and private school structure, the charter school movement has allowed anyone to start an independent, self-governing school of choice. Defined as public and nonsectarian schools that operate under a written contract from a local school board or other organization (Nathan, 1997), charter schools have extended across 42 states and the District of Columbia to include more than 6,700 schools that educate nearly 2.6 million students (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016). Although this alternative form of education is similar to both public and private schools, charter schools are very different.

It is important to know the background of education systems in America to appreciate the charter school reinvention of public education. Finn, Manno, and Vanourek (2000) describe the charter school movement and its purpose in American education by noting three familiar features regarding charter schools: (a) they are deeply rooted in their communities; (b) their autonomy looks much the same as magnet, site-managed, and special focus schools; (c) and they offer institutional innovation and
adaptation to meet educational needs that conventional universities could not accommodate.

**Enrollment**

The enrollment process for charter schools is very similar to both public and private schools. Charter schools are parent-choice, so parents send their children to these schools on their own. These schools can require certain academic and social guidelines to qualify for admissions. Like public schools, charter schools are tuition-free. Although the enrollment process differs by school, Simon (2013, as cited in Welner, 2013) described a variety of ways that charter schools cater to a specific type of student while noting that charter schools tend to have fewer students with disabilities, fewer English learners, and less of a poor population of students than their surrounding schools.

**Funding**

While charter schools are publicly funded, the financial issues surrounding the process and the dictating of funding have been criticized widely. Speakman, Finn, and Hassel (2005) discussed the disparity of charter school funding compared to district school funding and identified four levels of disparity: (a) less than 5 percent gap; (b) 5 percent to 14.9 percent; (c) 15 percent to 24.9 percent; and (d) greater than 25 percent. They credit the disparity to the denial of access to local resources and facilities dollars.

**Management Organizations**

The optional management of charter schools has created much controversy because of the use of Education Management Organizations (EMOs) and Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), as opposed to traditional public school governance. Charter schools have the option of contracting with EMOs to offer administrative
services for a fee. For-profit EMOs are estimated to manage about 15 percent to 20 percent of charter schools (Molnar, 2001 as cited in Bulkley, 2004), but their management affects the autonomy of charter schools and creates negative feedback. In addition, research does not show stronger performance in EMO-controlled schools than in traditional public schools (Miron, 2007).

Unlike EMOS, which have administrative governance, CMOs are nonprofit organizations that operate a network of charter schools with a mission or instructional design (Farrell et al., 2012). The CMO model is highly supported by many policy leaders who call for greater replication of high-performing charter schools as a strategy for reforming or replacing chronically low-performing public schools (Lake et al., 2010). According to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2016), of the approximately 6,825 charter schools in operation, approximately two-thirds are managed by CMOs and one-third are managed by EMOs.

Professional Practice Setting

The professional practice setting for this study is a public charter high school that houses grades nine through 12. This public high school is a state-sponsored charter school that receives funding from the state Department of Education at the same rate per pupil as other state public schools. For the 2015–2016 school year, the high school accounted for nearly 130 students in grades nine through 12, 40 faculty and staff members, and a three-member administrative team. The school is operated by a seven-member Governing Board and a Superintendent that reports to the Board. In 2013, 100 percent of the students graduated; in 2014, that rate dropped to 84 percent (four students would return the following year to complete graduation requirements); and in 2015, the
graduation rate was 96 percent. Each cohort had students who continued to higher education, joined the military, or entered the work force.

In this study, the post-secondary transition problem will be analyzed from the perspective of an administrator with experience in the academic progression and post-high school lifestyles to which students have become accustomed. Because “more than half of our young people leave school without the knowledge or foundation required to find and hold a good job … many of these youth will never be able to earn a decent living … and damage severely the quality of life everyone hopes for” (What Work Requires of Schools, 2000). The question relevant to this study is whether high schools provide proper resources and programs to help place students after graduation as well as to help students gain a better understanding of themselves, college life and its rigor, and society.

**Career-Ready Programs and Initiatives**

Gysbers (2013) suggested that helping all students become career-ready requires a whole school-community approach. These approaches have stretched across a spectrum of programs that focus on certain qualifications to participate because knowledge and preparation are lacking regarding career counseling opportunities (Wilson & Pinckney, 2015). The programs discussed in this section include career and technical education; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; internships; and vocational education.

**Career and Technical Education**

Klein (2015) reported that industries are constantly seeking employees with critical-thinking skills, which are hard to teach but can develop naturally in an environment where students are encouraged to think on their own, craft their own
assignments, do their own research, and teach classmates. Commonly referred to as CTE, the career and technical education track was once designed for students who were not college-bound and has “evolved to include an increased emphasis on rigorous academic preparation and integrated and articulated courses and programs” (Dare, 2006, p. 73). While the basic elements of reading, writing, mathematics, and science are evident in the curriculum, CTE programs have been proven to work for high school students, college students, adults, the economy, and business (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2015). While CTE programs have been perceived by some teachers as the “do nothing, learn nothing” (Gammill, 2015, p.18) classes, the program has been proven to increase school attendance and increase secondary completion rates (Bishop & Mane, 2004).

Similar to the CTE program, vocational education, also known as procedural knowledge, prepares young adults for a specific trade relating to a technology, a skill, or a scientific technique (Garland, 2015). Hanushek, Woessman, and Zhang (2011) argued that with rapid technological changes, gains in youth employment from vocational education may be offset by less adaptability and thus diminished employment later in life. Kincheloe (1995) reported that the integration of academic and vocational education educates and alerts students to the complexities of the world and the nature of its physical, social, political, and economic realities.

**Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education**

While a large majority of secondary school students fail to reach proficient levels in math and science, there is also a perceived lack of qualified candidates for high technology jobs (Reeve, 2015). Kuenzi (2008) reported the growing concern that
students, teachers, and practitioners are not prepared in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Improvement in these areas created STEM education, which has been adopted by numerous programs as an important focus for renewed global competitiveness for the United States (Breiner et al., 2012). In previous research (Daempfle et al., 2003, as cited in Whalen & Shelley, 2010) concern has been shown for the number of students who choose and maintain a science major in college due to a lack of interest and ability. Museus, Palmer, Davis, and Maramba (2011) criticized the efforts of the program. They claimed that the racial and ethnic diversity of the nation were increasing rapidly and cited existing evidence indicating high departure rates and failure among minority students from the STEM education program (Museus et al., 2011). Researchers claim the program does not understand “how to foster success among all students in general and minority students in STEM” (p. 4). In addition to this stereotype, Kulturel-Konak, D’Allegro, and Dickinson (2011) claim that the decline in women involved in STEM-related higher education correlates to gender differences in learning styles.

**Internships**

Allowing students to gain a better understanding of the work force and employer’s expectations, “internships are a concrete opportunity for students to experience employability skills and establish references who can vouch for their workplace skills, rather than just the academic skills that test scores, transcripts, and academic references of teachers and professors tend to report” (Graham & Morrow, 2013, p. 52). Although Bray (1911, as cited in Spradlin, 2009) stated that supervision, training, and filling job openings are the main objectives of the internship, the mutually beneficial
relationship also gives young learners the opportunity to experience a specific trade while allowing companies to train young adults and find the best talent.

Gault, Leach, and Duey (2010) analyzed the relationship between internship participation and student employment marketing and determined significantly more opportunities for employment. Their research also confirmed the value of an internship in job marketability, opportunities, and higher starting salaries. For the experience itself, researchers suggest implications for viability of a variety of structures, the content and methods of quality assurance within the context of competency evaluation, and tailoring internships to student needs (Mangione et al., 2006). Cunningham and Sherman (2008) agreed that school districts and universities need to develop more formal, collaborative, long-term relationships that focus on the nature of preparation for continuous education improvement.

Vocational Education

Prior to the enactment of the Smith-Hughes Act in the 20th century, public sectors criticized the public school curriculum and demanded a practical schooling method that would serve the new skill needs of industry and business (Wirth, 1972). During this time of educational reform, President Theodore Roosevelt urged that schools provide industrial education in urban areas and agricultural education in rural areas (Tanner & Tanner, 1980) to create a well-rounded educational system providing for student needs and economic shifts. The alliance between the American Federation of Labor and the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) supported federal funding for vocational programs (Hyslop-Margison, 2000). This support gave NAM their first project to
investigate how education could provide a more effective way to assist manufacturers in a changing international market (Hyslop-Margison, 2000).

The Smith-Hughes Act passed in February of 1917, allowing federal funding for American vocational education programs (Cremin, 1962). Investigating whether vocational education was warranted by federal grants, Charles Pressor authored the report for Congress (Hyslop-Margison, 2000). In it, he argued that narrowly focused and separately administered vocational programs were the best available way to help non-academic students secure employment after high school completion (Hyslop-Margison, 2000). Dewey (1916), a vocational education antagonist, argued that vocational education should be designed to meet student needs rather than economic demands to prepare students for social life challenges instead of occupational roles. Dewey also advocated for a training model that directly correlated to specific labor force needs of the industry (Drost, 1967). A vocational education was believed to be a predestination of social classes based on a student’s economic or disadvantaged backgrounds (Dewey, 1916). This type of education was thought best suited for non-academic students preparing for the labor force (Dewey, 1916). Arum and Shavit (1995) analyzed secondary vocational education relating to transitions from school to work. They determined that vocational education inhibits students’ likelihood of attending college and finding employment while increasing their chances of employment as skilled workers (Arum & Shavit, 1995).

The Technical Preparation, or Associate’s Degree course of study, model was designed to smooth the transition to college for the majority of high school students. The program helps to participants to complete high school and encourages two-year college
enrollments (Cellini, 2006). Bragg (1995) describes the Tech Prep concept as a combination of the following:

- academic and occupation-oriented education, using applied academics of other approaches to curriculum integration. Tech Prep also requires formal articulation between secondary and post-secondary institutions, ensuring that the last two years of high school are connected programmatically to two years of college leading to an associate’s degree (p. 191).

Farmer (1998) concluded from his study, which identified, categorized, and ranked research needs for Tech Prep, that more research is needed in areas of partnerships and linkages with business, industry, and education with more priority on Tech Prep research for the next century.

Funded by the United State Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Adult Education and administered by the League for Innovation in the Community College, College and Career Transitions Initiative (CCTI) is a model that creates opportunities for students that lead to different career and college pathways (Kempner & Warford, 2009). Its impact has also been unique in creating its legacy of college networks to sustain and extend pathways at the completion of the project (Kempner & Warford, 2009).

**College-Ready Outreach and Intervention Programs**

College-ready outreach programs and initiatives began with similar goals and outcomes to help disadvantaged students explore and attain their own professional goals (McElroy & Armesto, 1998) and to reduce economic barriers to higher education to give every student access to higher education. Making financial aid available to students is not
enough to guarantee access to the benefits associated with attaining a college degree (Gladieux & Swail, 1998, as cited in Tierney & Hagedorn, 2002). Many of these programs address the lack of educational preparation by many low-income students and their families due to the lack of resources and assistance (Engle, 2007). Research determined that first-generation students who attend any post-secondary institution were twice as likely to leave without earning a degree (Chen, 2005). This finding was perhaps in part due to the unfamiliar processes in higher education relating to social and cultural norms of the college system structure that first-generation families have not experienced (Engle, 2007). Research has been conducted from which it has been concluded that first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in the academic and social experiences associated with success in college (Pike & Kuh, 2005). However, Tierney & Hagedorn (2002) concluded that these programs have few funds to hire evaluators to conduct annual evaluations accurately regarding the success or failure of these programs.

**TRIO**

currently serve low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities in order to progress academically from middle school years through secondary education (2014).

Many colleges and universities around the country started their own college programs through federal funds to increase retention rates of first-generation, low income, or physically disabled students (Dale, 1995). Dale (1995) continued to report that the HORIZONS Student Support Program at Purdue University offered mentoring services to its participants and proved to be a pivotal program for students with an increase in retention and graduation rates compared to students who were not a part of the program. While the program offers many services to its students, Modesto Junior College TRIO students claim that counseling services were the most important factor that in their success in the TRIO program (Yousif, 2009). Contradicting these findings, a 2007 evaluation of the TRIO program on the academic achievement of African-American male students at the University of Southern California determined TRIO to be ineffective in meeting its stated goals (Thayer, 2007). Notwithstanding these findings, TRIO has increased graduation rates for low-income individuals, 60 percent of whom are persons of color (Coles, 1998).

**Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness For Undergraduate Programs**

Authorized in 1998, the Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) federal grant program’s purpose was to foster increased knowledge, expectations, and preparation for postsecondary education among low-income and high-poverty stricken schools where more than 50 percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch (Standing et al., 2008) and “increase the number of
students from low-income families enrolled and participating competitively in a college-preparatory curriculum by the time students reach the ninth grade” (Simmons et al., 2007, p. 220).

A 2008 United States Department of Education evaluation of the GEAR UP program reported several findings: (a) attending a GEAR UP school near the end of eighth grade was positively associated with parent and student knowledge and higher expectations of postsecondary education, (b) attending a GEAR UP school measured positively with parent involvement in school and their child’s education, (c) no evidence was found relating attending a GEAR UP school with attendance or disciplinary issues, and (d) attending a GEAR UP school was positively associated with higher level math and science courses in middle school (Standing et al., 2008).

As expected from most outreach programs, encouragement and support from parents is the most important factor when students aspire to enroll in college (Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). So prior to a student’s acceptance to the program, the family is asked to make a commitment to their child’s education and help them graduate from high school and be successful in any postsecondary path the student pursues (Hewett & Rodgers, 2003). In addition to parent involvement, GEAR UP requires schools, higher education institutions, and community entities to partner and support the educational advancement of students (Bergerson, 2009). With the disappearance of manufacturing jobs and the economic downturn for those with limited skills and education, GEAR UP will “provide students with an integrated experience that increases college awareness and aspirations as well as information about financial planning for college” (Bergerson, 2009, p. 90).
Yampolskaya, Massey, and Greenbaum (2006) assessed the effects of GEAR UP at a large urban high school in Florida, where they determined race and gender were associated with high participation in program activities, eventually leading to improved GPAs over a semester and reduced disciplinary referrals. A 2003 study addressed the residual impact of GEAR UP on middle school teachers and schools once a student matriculated to project high schools. The study concluded that few project interventions were sustained a year later due to lack of resources, time, and leadership necessary to sustain initiatives (Skolits et al., 2003). The research also determined that schools and teachers need continued support to continue the program at the high school level. Although some improvements need to be made to the GEAR UP program, data are available showing that students who participate in GEAR UP possess a more thorough understanding of college requirements and are likely to participate in a college course earlier in their high school years than their peers (Mendelsberg, 2012).

**Advancement via Individual Determination**

Designed to help underachieving students with academic potential prepare for entrance into colleges and universities, the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program uses personnel to select participants from low-income and ethnic minority backgrounds to participate in a college preparatory program with support constructs in place to assist with achievement (Oswald, 2002). The AVID program began when the ethnic backgrounds of a California high school changed dramatically, and affluent students were immersed with low-income and ethnic minority students (Swanson, 1994). Years later, faculty began to meet regularly with these underrepresented students to meet the needs of the local job market and neighboring
colleges to increase standardized test scores, eventually to 46.6 percent higher in language and 35 percent higher in mathematics compared to other district schools (Swanson, 1994).

A recent study compared AVID students who were enrolled in middle and high school to AVID students who were in AVID through high school only (Huerta, Watt, & Butcher, 2013). Researchers found that the longer a student was engaged in college preparation activities and courses, the more the student was prepared for high school and college. While AVID produced greater academic performance, Oswald (2002) determined that AVID students appeared to be meeting the goals of increased participation in advanced classes and school involvement. Another study examined the AVID implementation process at a California community college and reported that students enrolled in AVID classes and receiving AVID services were more focused, organized, and motivated to continue their educational goals (Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2012). Although students supported the AVID program on campus, faculty buy-in and resistance to change were encountered by AVID staff members. While many schools have found the AVID program successful, Sparks (2011) argued that the AVID program might not be successful without an existing schoolwide infrastructure, because in her study non-AVID participants performed slightly better than AVID participants.

Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate

Endorsed as pathway programs for postsecondary-bound students, advanced placement (AP) and international baccalaureate (IB) programs are perceived to have benefits that appeal to many colleges and universities (Park & Wimmer, 2014). According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2008, as cited in Fowler & Luna,
AP courses are implemented by highly trained instructors to aid students in the transition from high school to college and potentially receive college credit for passing standardized assessments.

Students enrolled in these time-consuming courses have reported their primary sources of stress included meeting academic demands and seeking balance between academic, social, and extracurricular goals (Shaunessy-Dedrick et al., 2015). While the demands of AP courses are rigorous, Warner, Larsen, Anderson, and Odasso (2015) indicated that students who enroll and pass the AP exam obtain higher ACT scores than students who only enroll in AP courses.

Described as a more comprehensive program than AP, the IB program is based on a positive and flexible concept of education in which students and teachers are motivated to participate in international cooperative projects, ultimately measuring themselves against international competition (Peterson, 2003, as cited in Fowler & Luna 2007). As the IB program continues to grow throughout a number of public and private IB schools around the world, many teacher programs have responded to the need in preparing teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners within a rigorous and global approach to curriculum and instruction (Ryan et al., 2014).

**Dual Enrollment**

A strategy to help advanced high school students begin college early, dual enrollment has gained interest as a way to smooth the transition to college for underrepresented students in higher education (Barnett & Stamm, 2010). Cohen and Brawe (1996, as cited in Fowler & Luna, 2009) argued that community colleges were originally established to meet student needs in transitioning from secondary education to
higher education, while also providing the following services: (a) offer a postsecondary option, (b) become the initial access point for post-secondary education, and (c) educate or serve greater numbers of freshman and sophomore students preparing to attend colleges or universities.

Postsecondary enrollment options (PSEO) has been adopted by nearly 20 states and allows high school students to take college courses and attend college on a full-time basis, changing dramatically from former programs that only allowed high school students to receive college credit through AP courses and enroll in vocational courses (Taylor, 1997). Fowler & Luna (2007) reported their findings related to the PSEO programs: (a) ease of access to college was the most significant indicator of a school’s participation rate, (b) tougher college admissions were required for PSEO students than for the regular college program, (c) PSEO students received higher course grades than other students, (d) most students enrolled to earn college credit, and (e) high schools found problems with the program due to budgeting and scheduling difficulties. PSEO has created stronger pathways from high school through college. These programs can help a variety of students and influence public policy to encourage efforts to create stronger networks among high schools, postsecondary institutions, and the work force (Hoffman et al., 2009).

Summary

Chapter two reviewed the literature on the history of charter schools, college-ready outreach and intervention programs, and career-ready programs and initiatives. Programs and initiatives at the local and federal stages have assisted in closing the gap between academic achievement at the secondary education level and either college or
work force readiness. Although the United States ranks relatively low in the world—24\textsuperscript{th} (reading), 13\textsuperscript{th} (mathematics), and 19\textsuperscript{th} (science) (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2012)—strides are continually being made to improve education. As the United States graduates students and sends them to college, few “make progress toward a certificate or degree” (Bailey et al., 2006), making it harder to reach national educational goals similar to those established by Goal 2025.

Although, we have neglected to provide our children with the rigorous curriculum and instruction needed to prepare them for college and careers (Obama, 2011), several programs are in place for smoother transition from high school to postsecondary lifestyles. To provide more programs that are more conducive to high school graduates, the essential components of preparation programs need to contribute to the development of intellectual scaffolding and cultural and “provide information about higher education and strategies to use that information to reach educational goals” (Bergerson, 2009, p. 12). Chapter three presents information about this study’s sample, methods, and instrumentation as well as a description of how the data were analyzed.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research questions, methodological rationale, participants, instrumentation, the researcher’s role, procedures, data analysis plan, reliability and validity of the study, and ethical considerations of the qualitative study. The study was designed to gain a better understanding of the programs that currently assist in transitioning high school students from school to adulthood. The study was developed during a time of educational crisis in which American students are not learning the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. Currently, approximately 1.1 million American students drop out of school every year, and only one in four high school students graduate ready for college in all four core subjects—English, reading, math, and science (The Broad Foundation, n.d.).

The purpose of this action-research project was to develop an evidence-based educational approach called CREST for public charter high schools as a means of preparing future leaders. The program will focus on students taking courses toward graduation in addition to participating in courses aligned with college readiness and employability skills revolving around their personal interests and goals.

The aim of this study was to develop a CREST program for public charter high schools to better prepare young adults to transition successfully to college, trade school, the military, or the work force. The researcher sought to understand the perspectives of high school graduates, their parents, and employers during the transitional period from high school graduation to adulthood. The study was designed to gain data relating to this developmental process and the evaluation of programs during the transitional period.
Additionally, the study was designed to increase the likelihood that both business and the educational industry would be able to relate to, apply, and benefit from the results of the study.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The following qualitative research question guided this study:

Are high school students receiving effective guidance and educational programs to prepare them for adulthood?

The following was a sub-question to the research question:

Are current high school courses and expectations addressing the needs of high school students?

The study was conducted at an educational institution that administered a 10-item close-ended survey to graduates, parents, and local employers, with regard to high school experiences, assistance, and overall satisfaction with their own educational environments and skills needed for the workplace. The survey allowed participants to rank their experiences on four tiers: not applicable, dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied. Then, open-ended interview questions were developed based on the data collected through the educational institution’s quantitative survey. The questions for the qualitative study were based on the participants’ knowledge, perspective, and experiences in relation to the skills that different employers and career fields require. The open-ended interview questions were designed for the researcher to assess participants’ satisfaction levels in relation to high school expectations.

The following hypotheses were investigated in this study:

Hypothesis #1:
Students will benefit and be more motivated by courses personal to their interests and goals that include different life and employability skills to be used as adults.

Hypothesis #2:
A CREST program would teach students and families the proper ways of determining post-secondary opportunities based on students’ interests and goals.

Method
This action-research study was designed to assess a program that helps to properly educate and prepare students and their parents on the post-secondary expectations of college institutions or the workplace. Education professors at Long Island University found that success at the secondary education level does not ensure achievement in higher education and suggested that services should be improved for first-generation college students from both high schools and colleges (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2015). The structure of these disconnected educational systems between secondary and higher education allows “students to graduate from high school under one set of coursework standards, only to discover that three months later, they must meet a whole new set of standards in college” (Kirst, 2004, p. 51). Conversely, Rosenbaum (1996) recommended that the school–work transition may be improved if schools make academic instruction vocationally relevant, employers base hiring on applicants’ achievements in school, and school–employer linkages are appropriately designed and created.

Results from this study enhanced the data previously collected by the educational institutions’ survey and interview results from graduates, parents, and employers. Results from the graduate survey provided insight on the experiences and challenges faced by recent graduates and demonstrated how more assistance from a program derived from
students’ interests and needs would be beneficial to future graduates. Results from the parent survey highlighted the expectations that a parent has when trusting the secondary educational institution to provide the proper assistance to their child and future employee. Results from the employer survey provided expectations from entry-level or tenured employees at their workplace.

Interviews were used to gain firsthand opinions and perspectives accurately from graduates, parents, and employers. The intent of these questions was to determine areas of improvement across all spectrums, from the high school setting to college environments to the workplace. Data from these interviews provided detail for revising the CREST program.

**Participants**

Participants in the study were systematically sampled from high school graduates at the participating institution, parents of those graduates, and local employers. Graduates were all over the age of 18 and either in college, the work force, the military, or unemployed. Of the 35 graduate participants that completed a survey, six requested a follow-up interview; 91 employers completed the survey and 23 requested a follow-up interview; and 20 parents completed the survey, while six requested a follow-up interview. Of the actual interviews completed, three were graduates, seven were employers, and one was a parent.

**Data Collection Tools**

Prior to distributing surveys and conducting interviews, the researcher planned to collect data through paper surveys. Because digital surveys are in high demand, the researcher contacted the Internal Review Board (IRB) to determine if Survey Monkey®
would be permissible. Most participants lived out of state and preferred a digital survey. With approval, the researcher posted the surveys to Survey Monkey® under three different categories: employer, parent, and graduate surveys (Appendices E, G, and I, respectively). The surveys were available online for three weeks from July 5–July 28, 2015.

The interviews began immediately after the surveys concluded, and were initially scheduled to end on August 30, 2015. The researcher conducted two additional interviews after August 30 for employers who needed an extended deadline. Interviews were conducted in-person or over the phone and were recorded for accuracy. Files were saved to a password-protected flash drive and assigned an identification number (example: E1, G1, P1). Digital files were transcribed by the researcher to text that was used for analysis. The interview questions can be found in Appendices F, H, and J.

The Researcher’s Role

The researcher’s professional experience began four years ago in the professional practice setting. Initially named as the academic adviser, the researcher has held various roles during her four years with the organization: dean of students, assistant principal, site administrator (principal), academic administrator, and athletic administrator. As the site administrator, the researcher opened the school’s first-ever true secondary campus, housing grades sixth through 12 of nearly 500 students. The researcher has played a pioneering role in developing the organization’s reputation. Within her administrative roles, the researcher built the school’s athletic program, so that the school is one of the state’s only local schools with an athletic program that spans K–12. In addition, the researcher has participated as an advocate for charter schools, increasing educational...
opportunities and educating parents on the importance of education. The researcher has also participated in various professional conferences including the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the Nevada Association for School Administrators, the Nevada Interscholastic Athletic Association, Professionals and Youth Building a Commitment (PAYBAC), Special Olympics Nevada, the Nevada Charter School Sports League, the State Public Charter School Authority Nevada, and Polywide Sports.

The role of the researcher in this study is as an internal researcher, employed within the education industry, more specifically, the professional practice setting. Unlike many of her counterparts, the researcher went directly from college to administration, skipping classroom time as a teacher. Additionally, the researcher is an employee within the professional practice setting. To maintain an unbiased study, the researcher kept a journal explaining her actions, reactions, intrinsic and extrinsic feedback experiences, and insights into self and professional knowledge relating to the study. The researcher documented the week’s accounts in the journal, which was shared with a neutral party to keep the study unbiased.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection began July 5, 2015 and was completed September 7, 2015. Surveys were distributed to participants and completed within the month of July. During that time, participants were given the opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up interview, which took place during the month of August. In the first week of June, identified participants were invited to participate in the study. Each participant was given an introduction letter that explained the study and a form that the participant could sign giving his or her permission to take part in the study. A copy of the letter of introduction
can be found in Appendix C, and a copy of the Research Participant Bill of Rights can be found in Appendix D.

For the qualitative interviews, the identities of the participants were protected with an assigned identification number that was stored on a password-protected flash drive. The follow-up interview consisted of a minimum of 10 open-ended questions relating to the students’ or parents’ experiences at the participating institution or the employers’ expectations. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed for accuracy and validity by the researcher. Data collection for interviews was concluded on September 7, 2015.

Data Analysis

After the surveys were finished, the researcher used an Excel workbook to rate each question that stood for a specified score: very dissatisfied = 0, dissatisfied = 1, satisfied = 2, and very satisfied = 3. Each question was placed on columns B – L, with corresponding responses listed in each row by participant. Participants were numbered by the letter assigned to the survey (E = employer, G = graduate, P = parent) and the numerical order in which it was placed. Each response (very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied) was given a numerical value of: 0 = very dissatisfied; 1 = dissatisfied; 2 = satisfied; or 3 = very satisfied) that was placed in the corresponding row below the participant’s answer. Each survey had 10 questions, with a maximum score of three per question, so each survey could generate a total score of 30. The results were then categorized into the following tiers: 0–10 = dissatisfied, 11–20 = satisfied, 21–30 = very satisfied.
Three graduates, one parent, and seven employers participated in follow-up interviews that consisted of 10 open-ended questions. Once interviews were completed, the researcher transcribed them in an effort to organize and prepare the data for analysis. The transcriptions were used to make connections between what participants said and the overall meaning of their responses. Using observational field notes, the researcher began hand-coding the data, which eventually generated three themes: achievement motivation, college-readiness support, and career-readiness support.

**Quality and Verification**

Trustworthiness and validity were maintained through member check and peer debriefing. These processes were conducted with several charter school teachers and administrators by allowing impartial peers to examine researcher transcripts, final reports, and general methodology. Feedback was used to enhance credibility and ensure validity.

**Ethical Considerations**

The research study is based on the ethic of magis, or the philosophy of doing excellent work for Christ, in other words, doing more, for others, so young adults are better prepared to transition into adulthood after graduating high school. The success or failure of high school students directly correlates to the eventual local economy. While not every American has the opportunity or resources to access college or trade school, emphasis can be placed on work force-readiness, a skill that everyone will require.

Composed in part of qualitative interviews regarding experiences in the high school setting, the research study was used in the development of the CREST program. Volunteer participants were required to agree to terms listed in the permission letter (Appendix B), letter of introduction (Appendix C), and bill of rights (Appendix D). Each
participant was assigned a number to protect his or her identity throughout the study and to minimize any physical or mental risks associated with the study. IRB approval was granted for this study and can be found in Appendix A. In addition, the aforementioned information was disclosed to the participating site and permission was granted by them as well (Appendix B).

Transcripts of the qualitative interviews were stored on a password-protected external hard-drive, to be housed in a locked file cabinet for one year following the completion and defense of the study. The researcher used unbiased and non-discriminatory language throughout the study.

**Summary**

This study provides information regarding the preparedness of high school students for post-secondary opportunities upon high school completion. The insights of the participants were those of high school graduates, parents of high school graduates, and employers with entry-level positions. The data collected through institutional survey were used to identify voluntary participants for the interviews. Three themes were generated through the coding process to develop and refine theoretical claims for the CREST program: achievement motivation, college-readiness support, and career-ready support. Additionally, the qualitative data provided perspectives for supplementary actions for post-secondary preparation, ultimately enhancing institutional data.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND EVIDENCE BASED SOLUTIONS

Introduction

This qualitative study examined the disconnect between secondary education and adulthood among high school graduates, parents, and employers in regard to readiness for the collegiate and work force environments. Qualitative research provided insight into the expectations of study participants, their satisfaction with secondary education experiences, and their readiness for post-secondary lifestyles. The study focused on several themes that could help mold potential programs or resources that would assist in the transitional period from high school graduation into adulthood.

This chapter reviews the methodology, analysis, and results of the study. The chapter was structured according to the main themes derived from the qualitative data: achievement motivation, college-readiness support, and career-ready support.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action-research project was to develop the CREST program for public charter high schools as a means to prepare future leaders. The program focuses on students taking courses toward graduation, in addition to participating in courses aligned with employability skills and college-readiness, based on the students’ goals and expectations.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to develop a CREST program for public charter high schools to better prepare young adults to successfully transition to college, trade schools, the military, or the work force.
Summary and Presentation of the Findings

This qualitative study was based in grounded theory, as suggested by Chapa (2014), to contribute to an ongoing national effort to determine whether high school students are being adequately prepared within their respective high school constructs. The research question was as follows: are high school students receiving effective guidance and educational programs to prepare them for adulthood? The study was designed to help develop a CREST program that would assist in placing high school graduates in higher education institutions or the workplace.

The study was designed to examine the issue of college and career readiness in relation to the secondary programs that are implemented in some schools. The study was conducted at a Nevada public charter high school with high school graduates, their parents, and local employers. In the study, the researcher collected data through surveys of graduates, parents, and local employers as well as face-to-face, phone, or Skype interviews. The interviews were conducted over a 23-day span. During the interviews, participants freely responded to open-ended questions.

Participants

Participants in the study were systematically sampled from high school graduates at the participating institution, parents of those graduates, and local employers. Graduates were all over the age of 18 and either in college, the military, the work force, or unemployed. Of the 35 graduate participants that completed a survey, six requested a follow-up interview; 91 employers completed the survey and 23 requested a follow-up interview; and 20 parents completed the survey, while six requested a follow-up
interview. Of the actual interviews completed, three were graduates, seven were employers, and one was a parent.

Achievement Motivation

People are motivated by a variety of things that encourage persistence and the will to be successful. In education, motivation can be obstructed by fear to perform in the classroom. The theory of achievement motivation was initially developed by Atkinson who determined that “all individuals can be characterized by two learned drives, a motive to approach success and a motive to avoid failure” (Covington, 1992, p. 28). Atkinson explained that participating by enticement or force disrupts performance because of the anticipation of failure. Several participants discussed failure in high school due to embarrassment, stress, fear, and anxiety. These emotions eventually led to these participants dropping out of high school and having to earn alternative completion certificates.

Angus and Mirel (1999) reported that most research regarding twentieth-century high schools assumed that the curriculum debate was whether high schools should be academic, vocational, or a mixture of the two. In response to how high school experiences have prepared a participant for college or the work force, it was stated that more elective courses that were interesting and personable would have helped a lot. Another participant stated, “I didn’t enjoy much of high school so I don’t think I would like college. I now love going to school because it’s geared toward my desired career.” Instilling achievement motivation would give students the opportunity to drive their educational aspirations towards a career or field of interest.
Achievement motivation can also be transitioned into the workplace to instill factors of surviving in a professional setting. One participant reported that not every entry-level employee possessed the proper skills to survive in the workplace, although “survival and consistency roots from self-motivation. The desire to want to be employed; show up and earn an income that is an ends to a mean.”

**College-Readiness Support**

Families and schools need to hold their students to higher academic expectations. As opposed to settling for mediocrity, students need to be motivated to want to go to college and increase their chances of completing a college degree. In return, these graduates can find better careers and jobs to support their families and serve as examples to them. As one participant stated, “We do not have enough support from our schools to send our children to a foreign world like college. We are not given the resources to help our children succeed and become better people.” At the very least, a college representative can help students be more informed and able to decide if college is for them or not.

**Academic Advising**

Schools across the country have advisors who meet with students and help them plan for their graduation requirements, but do not necessarily discuss post-secondary plans. Several participants stated no one at the school took an interest in their goals, likes, dislikes, strengths, or weaknesses. Very rarely were administrators present to assist in goals beyond a high school diploma. One participant stated the following:

There was someone in administration that had the title [academic advisor], but I did not have one conversation with them. I was not making a plan
that went college route until I got [athletic] scholarship offers. By then, my advisor had not reached out and neither was I. I wish they would though, because it would have been nice to know or think about. But most importantly, my reaction to not being reached out to or even asked made me feel like the school/administration did not think I was college bound.

The need for administrative support is crucial for these young adults to know they have someone who genuinely cares for their well-being after high school.

Another participant described the need for assistance on campus with the process of selecting a college, because her parents did not attend college. Students without the parental and home support struggled a bit more to complete the college admissions process successfully with limited support from schools. A local university admissions counselor recommended that more schools take the time to mentor and offer additional resources on campus. A parent did not feel that her student received the proper skills and training for college or the work force and recommended that “students need a more focused plan for post-secondary planning.” She also said they need to “know options regarding colleges, scholarships, and apprenticeships.”

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) Center for Public Education conducted a study in 2014 that analyzed recent data from the United States Department of Education to determine the baseline for students graduating from high school who chose not to attend college. The report suggested that two-thirds of non-college enrollees began high school believing they would continue through college. The report stated the importance of public schools preparing all students to be life-long learners, regardless of whether they attend college. The preparation includes, but is not limited to, rigorous
courses and more student support (Center for Public Education, 2014). One participant reported that student support would have helped and hoped that educators would have been “more active, more personable, and willing to help in realizing I am a child and need the reassurance on a down day to convince me that I was made for [college].”

**Family Involvement**

Simon (2004) suggested that high schools have the capacity to conduct activities that encourage families to be involved in their teenagers’ learning and development. When it comes to college planning, parents who have not had the opportunity to attend college have very little experience with the process of preparation and limited access to necessary information (Jarsky & McDonough, 2009). Several first-generation participants discussed the lack of home assistance for college preparation and motivation. One participant stated, “No one in my family attended college, so to hear what the experience or actual work was like from someone that was there would have been extremely helpful.” The uncertainty of college expectations may be too much for one to handle. One participant stated, “My parents did not have a college education, so I was going into the process blind, listening to adults who have done it, but it was not personable to me.” In an effort to involve the family unit, parents are able to speak on their personal experiences and post-secondary options as a lesson or as an example for their own children.

High school alone could not motivate some students to attend college. One participant stated the interest for college did not come until nearly two years after graduating high school, when a family member and a friend recommended investigating colleges. The participant also added that a college-readiness program run by actual
college students would have been more beneficial and personable. Another participant stated that college was instilled at an early age, so there was no choice upon high school graduation. Parents need to be able to offer in-home support and assistance to help their students academically succeed and be prepared for the next stages of life. Although not all parents have attended college, all parents can teach their children through their personal and professional experiences.

**Career-Readiness Support**

Post-secondary planning should not be limited to academic requirements, but should include life skills through self-advocacy, independent living, decision-making, and career goals (de Fur et al., 1996). One participant reported they felt “students needed a more focused post-secondary planning method with in depth knowledge in a particular area, especially computers.” Although schools vary on elective courses offered, several participants felt it was the school’s responsibility to instill life skills in their students that could help them transition to the workplace or college. Even though college is not for everyone, students need to exhibit the skills they gained from the classroom and transfer those skills into the workplace.

**Internships**

As defined by Merriam-Webster (2015), competency is “an ability or skill.” Each workplace differs in the type of skill and background needed to be successful. Most organizations use the education and experience of a potential candidate to determine his or her capabilities. As one participant stated, “we look for expertise and experience … so that the employees can do their job with little or no mentoring or oversight.” Ultimately,
the end goal is to hire people who are self-sufficient and able to perform work duties on an independent basis.

When young adults understand the dynamics of different workplaces, they can transition to a professional setting. Secondary schools can help, by structuring classrooms more like work environments, where students are taught proper business etiquette. Within the charter school setting, teachers are afforded more flexibility in the classroom to create an environment where the teacher serves as the supervisor of the workplace. Students who participate in classrooms that are structured similar to the workplace would have a better understanding of the workplace environment.

Several participants emphasized the need for an internship to help both students and the potential employers who would eventually hire these young adults. One employer stated, the student “would be mentored on a daily basis while working in a profession that they are interested in pursuing. It may encourage the student to go to college if the particular job requires a degree.” Another employer reported that internships allow both the intern and the employer to “see if either one is worth the investment.” The employer continued:

As an employer this [internship] may be detrimental to the business by taking on an intern who may not be adequate for the business. Employers may continue to cycle through interns who fit the needs of the company. As an intern, this is a great opportunity to preview a company that you may want to be employed by and create a visual into the business world to gain experiences and knowledge.
Holt and Tepper (2015) reported the need for internships to help students, schools, and employers ensure a meaningful educational experience open to all who are qualified. The experiences from an internship provide an education completely different from one based on a textbook. Internship opportunities can be helpful for students to experience and adapt to real-world situations. Coco (2000) discussed the try-before-you-buy arrangement, in which the internship allows a student to experience a certain job or career field before they choose to invest themselves. One participant supported the need for internships and stated the following:

I believe that an internship in certain situations would be most beneficial to any student. They would be mentored on a daily basis while working in a profession that they are interested in pursuing. This may encourage the student to go to college if the particular job requires a degree, and be motivated to do well and stay focused. It may also help steer the student in a different direction to know what they like and don’t like so they don’t waste time pursuing a career that they thought they liked. It would give them the opportunity to try another interest and field of study.

In addition, internships benefit students by providing opportunities to engage in classroom theories and knowledge and apply them to the workplace, coming to realize individual skills, professional stature, and goals (Martinez, as cited in Coco, 2000). One participant felt that internships were beneficial because “at the next level or college, most of us are working students. Learning the value of time and how much you can get done in an hour is a weapon we all need to succeed at the next level.”
Internships allow students to learn and understand workplace competencies, or the “ability of individuals to apply knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to standards of perfection required in specific contexts” (Rainsbury et al., 2002, p. 8). These skills involve more than knowing how to perform certain tasks; they also relate to what is expected in the workplace. Several employers stated the importance of time, attendance, and job performance as well as the negative components that could lead to disciplinary procedures and possible termination. One participant stated, “time and attendance are critical. An employee may risk their employment if they develop a habit of showing up late or calling out of work too frequently.”

The Hiring Process

Defined by Malin (2000) as a “set of workplace practices where boundaries have been redefined in response to socioeconomic and cultural pressures” (p. 1), professionalism is vital for any company or organization to maintain a positive image. Participants discussed professionalism in regards to the hiring process, attire, communication skills, and accountability. One participant stated professionalism as the top component employers seek when hiring possible employees by “meeting all deadline requirements of submitting an application with a cover letter and a résumé.” Participants referenced the hiring process as the most crucial and hardest part of landing a job, because the résumé is the first impression an employer receives from a candidate, while it also shows the kind of work ethic the candidate embodies. Therefore, participants recommended a course in how to write a résumé, a cover letter, and follow-up correspondence; how to be interviewed; and how to be professional in the workplace. One employer also suggested the importance of professional conduct in a workplace, no
matter if it was a business or flipping burgers, because “the impression they leave on people will always count throughout their lives and career.”

In addition to the hiring process, students need to understand the roles and responsibilities that are expected in the position. When hiring for positions, employers seek certain qualified persons to exceed the expectations. One employer stated the following:

When hiring, my place of employment seeks the following: a professional who meets the requisite education requirement, relevant work experience, someone who enjoys working with people, and excellent oral and written communication. We seek individuals with such skills in order to properly service our population.

Another employer stated the following regarding specific skills that employers seek in the workplace: “We look for expertise and experience in the particular job that we are hiring for. Why? So that the employee can do their job responsibilities with little to no mentoring or oversight.” Ultimately, employers expect employees to perform duties that do not require constant supervision.

Organizations differ in the types of attire considered appropriate for the workplace, so it would be imperative for students to understand the importance of appearance. Some schools currently implement strict dress codes with mandates regarding shirts, slacks, and skirts that teach students at an early age about dressing appropriately for the workplace.

Meeting deadlines in the workplace can be correlated to time management, because workloads are assigned along with a specific timeframe that requires
consistency. Students must be consistent. One participant said, “[t]he biggest struggle is to be up to par with the caseload provided, and be efficient and consistent with the way you assist the people that you are providing services to.” Deadlines play a major role in many businesses because of the supply-and-demand dynamic that exist in the workplace.

**Disciplinary Procedures**

While the hiring process is an important part of getting a job, students also need to understand the disciplinary procedures and how their own actions including time and attendance, can affect their employment. Regarding time and attendance, one employer stated, “Time and attendance are extremely important! It helps shape the individual’s reputation and character that will follow them for life.” Another employer explained the difference in time and attendance between school and the workplace:

if you miss school, you are able to make up for the time missed and be able to take extra classes to catch up. In most workplaces, it doesn’t matter if you are the most skilled. If you have poor attendance, you will lose your job.

Another employee discussed disciplinary action taken due to abuse of the Family Medical Leave Act, which allows an employee to leave the workplace due to a family emergency: “I lost my job because I worked in a big business where I didn’t think using FMLA would catch up with me.”

Although most workplaces have similar disciplinary measures, participants in the study reported the following: (a) verbal warnings, (b) written warnings, and (c) termination. Each warning included some sort of documentation that the employee acknowledges and signs. The form is placed in the employee’s personnel file and can be used at any time the employee remains at the company. Some companies required an
employee’s previous employer disclose disciplinary paperwork. One participant reported
the disciplinary process in their workplace:

Typically, an employee is verbally warned of an infraction, memo is put
into their personnel file. Next, a formal letter directing them to stop
whatever the infraction is, copy of letter is put into their personnel file.
Last, our board would be given their due process to speak and provide
proof that they were not guilty of the charges being brought against them.
The board would ask questions and then they would vote on whether or
not to continue employment of this individual, put them on suspension
with or without pay, in some cases the law may need to be contacted to
intervene.

To understand their work environments better, students need to understand the
disciplinary process and the repercussions that come from poor job performance or time
and attendance. Similar to the disciplinary records students experience in school,
disciplinary procedures in the workplace are just as important. Unlike in school, these
documents stay with employees throughout their tenure.

Analysis and Synthesis of Findings

The purpose of this action-based research project was to develop the CREST
program for public charter high schools as a means of preparing future leaders. The
program focused on students taking courses aligned with college readiness and
employability skills based on personal goals and expectations.

The data from this research suggested that a high percentage of students, parents,
and employers are satisfied with the educational experience throughout high school.
Since the study was conducted in the professional practice setting with a low population and limited participants, the data may not accurately reflect a larger population of students in a highly populated school.

The results indicated a continued need for data from employers as well as from college advisors or professors. All of the recommendations relating to academia were evaluated through the literature review. In addition, the surveys and interviews from graduates and parents should be conducted yearly to evaluate these participants at different stages of their personal and professional lives. Their potential changes in responses over the years can be used to modify the CREST program to continue to cater to students’ needs and expectations.

**Proposed Solution**

Using data and results from this study, an objective was established to support the aim of the study: to develop a CREST program for public charter high schools to better prepare young adults to successfully transition to college, trade school, the military, or the work force, with its goals being all of the following:

- Increase achievement motivation to students through activities and curricula that are founded on student interest;
- Increase student and family awareness of college-readiness transitions through proper guidance, coursework, and Individualized CREST Plans (ICPs) that are presented as an interview to a panel of teachers, administrators, internship coordinators, and parent(s);
• Provide opportunities for students to integrate professionalism into the classroom setting through teacher instruction and school-wide expectations; and

• Provide opportunities for students to experience the local job markets through mandatory internships, job-shadowing projects, and part-time positions.

This program is designed to give high school students an opportunity to acquire necessary employability skills supplemented with important career-readiness research projects to expand the definition of student success and increase the quality of life for students who complete the program.

Students enrolled in the program will receive one-on-one mentoring with the site facilitator to develop a pathway that will assist in post-secondary placement for students in college, a trade/vocation school, the military, or the work force. Each avenue will be researched extensively by the student, under the guidance of the site facilitator.

Students will participate in regularly scheduled core and elective courses during the regular school day as well as in the CREST program during the latter parts of the school day. Courses are specifically designed to provide an easier transition to college and the needs of local businesses and employers.

Through this program, students are exposed to real-world local job markets with mandatory internships that begin in the ninth grade. In addition to spending days in the classroom, students will be in their chosen fields to experience the day-to-day operations of a particular job. This program helps students to gain a better understanding of the educational experience combined with their personal strengths, passions, and goals.
The CREST program begins in grades six through eight, where students investigate their own learning abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Using ICPs, teachers will have a better grasp on student interests or passions and will be able to provide feedback to the site facilitator. Students will take part in two job-shadowing opportunities per school year (on teacher professional development days) in fields of potential interest.

In grades nine through 10, students will begin researching possible career opportunities in local job markets. During this time, students will take part in two job-shadowing opportunities per school year (on teacher professional development days) in fields of potential interest. Students will use experiences to determine a proper post-secondary route: college, trade school, the military, or the work force. Students will begin the professional portfolio process during this time.

In the 11th grade, students will refine their ICPs using educational experiences gained in previous years. Students will begin either applying to or preparing for (or both) their post-secondary routes. In addition to two job-shadowing opportunities, students will refine their professional portfolios. For college-bound students, they will begin their application processes, which they will complete during grade 12.

In the 12th grade, students will successfully present their ICPs and portfolios to a panel using their educational experiences. Within each route, students will apply to their respective programs. Upon graduation, students will be enrolled in the local school’s alumni network.

Charter schools emphasize the need for parental involvement. With the CREST program, parents will be obligated to attend educational workshops or online webinars throughout the year, educating parents on the educational process. These workshops
include, but are not limited to, state graduation requirements, standardized test preparation and registration, financial aid and scholarships, and athletics.

**Existing Support Structure and Resources**

Since the participating institution opened its doors in 2013, graduation rates have remained exceptionally high: 100 percent in 2013, 85 percent in 2014, and 95 percent in 2015. Still, even with such high graduation rates, students are not being placed in areas where they feel they belong or in which they are interested. Currently, the only assistance provided to them is an appointment with an advisor to determine graduation requirements and possible college routes. No assistance is available for making definitive plans for post-graduate avenues.

The environment and dynamic of the professional practice setting make it a practical location through which to establish an effective alumni network that receives information from graduates on the skill sets that would have helped them to be better prepared after high school. The data from past graduates can assist in yearly refinements to the CREST program. Because the professional practice setting is a charter school and parents are more involved than they might otherwise be, opinions of past graduates would give parents the opportunity to contribute to other life skills that students should learn throughout the course of the program.

In order for the refinements of the CREST program to work, an alumni network must be maintained by an administrator or facilitator who would be responsible for constant communication with graduates, parents, employers, and school personnel. The facilitator can establish a website highlighting alumni, so current and future students are able to reach out regarding their successes in the school and its CREST program.
Support for the Solution from Data Collected

The researcher assumed that students, parents, and employers were not satisfied with the educational requirements for graduation, when in fact, the majority of participants were either satisfied or very satisfied with their experiences. While many graduates reported that they enjoyed their high school experiences and were ready for adulthood, very few of those graduates were enrolled full-time in college. This led the researcher to determine that the college route is not ideal for every high school graduate. Prior to this study, the researcher assumed the study would be conducted for a population that was college-bound. However, early in the process of data collection, the researcher observed that many graduates could not fathom the idea of going to college because of either the lack of support from the current educational system or the lack of family members who had a college history that could guide them toward college.

This information helped the researcher to add the military and work force components to the program once the researcher determined that the college route was not ideal for all graduates. Using data from the employer survey and follow-up interviews, the researcher was able to combine the workplace expectations with the CREST program to incorporate employability skills. For the solution to occur, positive relationships with local employers are necessary as is constant extrinsic feedback to refine the program.

Policies Influenced by and Influencing the Proposed Solution

Within the charter school sector, policies are constantly being developed or refined to support the mission of the school’s charter. In the professional practice setting, a written charter law is renewed every six years by the state’s Public Charter School Authority Board. Under this law, the charter school must file annual reports with its
sponsors, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Director of the Legislative Counsel Bureau for transmission to the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the Assembly (Education Commission of the States, 2014). These reports include information relating to the progress of the charter school in achieving its educational goals and objectives. The CREST program would serve as one evaluation and assessment that could be included in these reports. In the state where the professional practice setting is located, laws, regulations, and policies may be negotiated and specified in the charter or exempted through a waiver process.

Internal policies within charter schools support the autonomy of each school. To provide accountability, a new policy can be established relating to the CREST program. The facilitator would be responsible for providing quarterly reports addressing issues, concerns, strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions from participants. The facilitator would also be responsible for quarterly refinement to ensure program and school objectives are being met and eventually exceeded.

Within the professional practice setting, any volunteers or outside contractors that interact with students are required to undergo background checks and are subject to random drug testing. This policy may create controversy in some workplaces, because not all workplaces require those stipulations of their own employees. The charter school’s leader and administrative team need to provide a legal, yet safe avenue within the workplace to ensure the safety of the school’s students. In addition, students need to be able to voice their opinions about the workplace.

**Potential Barriers and Obstacles to Proposed Solution**
When implementing a program like CREST in any organization, all stakeholders must understand that change is difficult to manage because of factors such as complexity, epistemology, structure, and vested interests (Ben-Eli, 2009). However, changes are made for positive transformations that align with an overall vision. Part of the transformative process is being able to adapt to emerging concepts and practices that prevent a crisis situation, which Ben-Eli defined as “a failure in adaptation … or failure to produce second order change” (p. 8). Resistance may come at any level and from any stakeholder because of the change process and fear of the unknown.

The Governing Board requires only a majority vote for the program to be disapproved. If the program is not communicated properly with the facts, statistics, and solutions, the miscommunication may interfere with the program being launched successfully. Governing Boards ensure that the programs at their schools are benefitting the students and do not waste time or money.

The organizational structure of the professional practice setting includes internal and external parties who must relate with one another as they assume their specific job duties within the organization. Without a clear structure, staff may hold personal opinions and assumptions about their roles that would create false impressions of certain job descriptions. For example, some stakeholders might believe that it is the counselor’s responsibility to assist students in the college admissions process, while others might believe it is the responsibility of the administration. Without a clear understanding of different staff members’ roles, the need for the CREST program may be questioned.

Internal and External Issues Related to Proposed Solution
Internal and external issues will always exist within educational settings due to policies and procedures, laws, and opinions of stakeholders. Most issues relating to the proposed solution will be internal because of the presence of administration, a Governing Board, and the state’s Public Charter School Authority Board. The safety of students on an off-site location will also be an issue for the Governing Board to address. Because students will take part in off-site internship opportunities, the potential for liability to which the school may be exposed will be a risk that both parents and the school must address.

Another issue that may interfere with the solution’s implementation is the lack of support from stakeholders. Opinions and biases about the program may prohibit it from being implemented in some schools because it is something new. Without solid evidence and results, some stakeholders may be resistant to the change.

The site facilitator needs to understand that when a new program is implemented, there will be some resistance, and time will be required to refine the program once it is implemented. The first few months will involve trial-and-error and constant change to ensure that objectives and outcomes are attained throughout the program.

Change Theory

Change theory is relevant to this study because the CREST program is an alternative to the current college and career readiness programs described in chapter two. Although these programs have all been proven successful, the CREST program offers a different solution. The study was based on whether high school graduates are adequately prepared with necessary educational and employability skills to succeed at a post-secondary level.
Innovation-decision theory includes five stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation (Rogers, 2003). Each has been crucial in the foundation of the CREST program. Chapter two serves as the knowledge base for the theory, where information was researched to develop programs, such as GEAR UP and TRIO. Changing roles for leaders allows for “new knowledge, new ways of understanding the knowledge, and ways of organizing knowledge” (Ishii-Jordan, 2013). The willingness to accept knowledge can separate many organizations from one another. Second, persuading administrators and the school’s Governing Board are crucial, since school boards rely on the recommendations of superintendents as the basis for their decisions (Durow, 2007). Once a decision has been made, the implementation stage can begin. While CREST is designed to give students an opportunity to discover and hone their skills and passions at an early age, it also encourages exploration into various industries and areas of study. Confirmation of the change will occur over time, “taking a longer-term perspective on performance than myopically focusing on each year” (Lambert, 2012, p. 89) to help increase the rate of graduation satisfaction and preparedness levels upon graduation.

Summary

This chapter discussed three themes derived from the qualitative data: achievement motivation, college-planning support, and career-planning support. By combining the qualitative data from the survey and interviews conducted by the educational institution with the literature, the researcher developed four objectives that allowed the major themes to be implemented in the professional practice setting. Constant comparative analysis was used to determine the properties and relationships of
the analyzed data to support the aim of this study. That aim was to develop a CREST program for public charter high schools to better prepare young adults to successfully transition to college, trade school, the military, or the work force.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

College and career readiness is a significant topic in American education. Policymakers and politicians regularly revisit issues that have led to the fact that four of every 10 new college students, including half of those at two-year institutions, take remedial courses, and make employers comment on the inadequate preparation of high school graduates (United States Department of Education, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this action-research project is to develop the CREST program for public charter high schools as a means of preparing future leaders. The program focuses on students taking courses toward graduation in addition to participating in courses aligned with college readiness and employability skills based on personal goals and expectations. The study is significant because it provides insight from recent graduates, parents, and employers relating to their high school experiences and preparedness for adulthood. The data collected contribute to the overall framework for the CREST program.

The final chapter of this dissertation comprises three sections: a summary of the study, implementation of solution processes and considerations, and a final summary of the study. The CREST program framework was developed by analyzing the parent and high school graduate survey results and interviews as well as the employer survey results and interviews. Recommendations include educating students on vocational areas (college, trade school, the military, or the work force) while implementing life skills or “how to” courses, including financial literacy, transportation, insurance, and politics.

Summary of the Study
The purpose and aim of this action-based research project were to develop the CREST program for public charter high schools as a means of preparing future leaders. The research question was to determine whether there were high school courses or programs that met the educational and work force readiness needs of high school students. Two hypotheses were developed to support the research question: (a) students will benefit and be more motivated by courses personal to their interests and goals that include different life and employability skills to be used as adults and (b) a CREST program will teach students and families the proper ways of determining post-secondary opportunities based on student interests and goals. The aim of the study was to develop a CREST program for public charter high schools.

Thirty-five graduates, 20 parents, and 88 employers participated in a 10-question close-ended survey related to high school experiences and preparation for adulthood. All participants were able to request a follow-up interview for a more in-depth discussion of the close-ended survey questions. Of the 143 survey participants, three graduates, seven employers, and one parent participated in follow-up interviews. The interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions designed to address participants’ overall satisfaction with the education received from the professional practice setting and to identify areas of improvement. Information from interviews assisted the researcher in determining three themes: achievement motivation, college-readiness support, and career-readiness support.

The CREST program’s goals were derived from the data collected and analyzed in the study. Its objectives are as follows:

- Increase achievement motivation to students through activities and curriculum that are founded on student interest;
• Increase student and family awareness of college-readiness transitions through proper guidance, coursework, and Individualized CREST Plans (ICPs) that are presented as an interview to a panel of teachers, administrators, internship coordinators, and parent(s);

• Provide opportunities for students to integrate professionalism into the classroom setting through teacher instruction and school-wide expectations; and

• Provide opportunities for students to experience the local job markets through mandatory internships, job-shadowing projects, and part-time positions.

This program is designed to give high school students an opportunity to acquire necessary employability skills supplemented with important career-readiness research projects to expand the definition of student success and increase students’ quality of life.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action-research project was to develop the CREST program for public charter high schools to prepare future leaders. The program focused on students taking courses toward graduation in addition to participation in courses aligned with college readiness and employability skills, based on personal goals and expectations.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to develop a CREST program for public charter high schools to better prepare young adults to successfully transition to college, trade schools, the military, or the work force.

Implementation of Solution Processes and Considerations

The CREST program’s strategic plan follows Bryson’s (2011) ten-step process: initiating and agreeing on a strategic planning process; identifying organizational
mandates; clarifying an organizational mission and its values; assessing the external and internal environments to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; identifying the issues facing the organization; formulating strategies to manage the issue; reviewing and adopting the strategies or strategic planning; establishing an effective organizational vision; developing an effective implementation process; and reassessing the strategies and the strategic planning process.

Using data from this study, a site facilitator could present evidence for the areas of improvement to which the CREST program would contribute at the institution. For this particular study, the site facilitator can show evidence from the professional practice setting showing that the majority of students are satisfied with the education they have received. However, local employers can provide tangible recommendations for implementation into classrooms to better prepare students for life after high school.

**Roles and Responsibilities of Key Players in Implementation**

If the CREST program were to be chosen for implementation in charter schools and districts around the country, leaders would need to seek approval from school administrations and Governing Board members. Rogers (2003) said, “knowledge of the existence of an innovation can create a motivation to learn about it, and ultimately adopt it” (p. 172). Site administrators or principals are typically the first people to determine if a program will benefit their population. The second step of approval would be the Superintendent or the highest employee on the organizational chart. Once approval has been given, a contract would go before the Governing Board for approval, where it would need to receive a unanimous vote.
Because the program is not led by one full-time person, teachers responsible for instructing CREST courses or integrating CREST tactics would require professional development. The site facilitator would be responsible for providing quarterly updates to the Superintendent, the Governing Board, and the administration on the progression of students in the program. If the organization chooses the site facilitator to be the person who teaches the classes, that person would need to complete any teaching certifications required by the state’s Department of Education. Alternatively, the site facilitator could only provide professional development for the teachers.

**Leader’s Role in Implementing Proposed Solution**

The site facilitator has the most significant role in gaining support from all stakeholders involved in the CREST program. When a proposed solution is implemented, the site facilitator must understand “how interpersonal communication drives the diffusion process by creating a critical mass of adopters” (Rogers, 2003). The site facilitator serves as the program’s representative and must be able to communicate the idea of a program designed to transition young adults into adulthood effectively.

A site facilitator must consider the preparation needed to develop a program like CREST. In addition to effective communication, building the program also requires data and research from local areas that are used as supporting evidence. As in any newly created program, there will be a period of trial-and-error, so it is important for the site facilitator to be transparent and open to change. Suggestions for changes can come from any stakeholder, including local businesses, and will ultimately be decided by the administration. The CREST program is designed to change with the local markets, social needs, and the individual student.
Finally, the site facilitator must be transformational throughout the process. When implementing any change, site facilitators and stakeholders must understand that change is difficult because of the factors of complexity, epistemology, structure, and vested interests (Ben-Eli, 2009). But changes are made for positive and better transformations for the overall vision. Part of the transformative process is being able to adapt to emerging concepts and practices that prevent crisis.

**Evaluation and Timeline for Implementation and Assessment**

The timeline for proposing the CREST program will vary based on the demographics of an area. The program is designed to revolve around student interests as well as the local market. A tentative timeline for implementation would be at least six months prior to the start of the program because of the three stages needed to implement the program successfully.

Stage one lasts nearly three months, during which the site facilitator should focus on the local markets by interviewing businesses with entry-level positions in the area. These interviews would consist of questions related to the types of skills needed in the specific workplace. At the conclusion of stage one, a list of skills would be combined for a specific industry, for example, fast food, retail, or clerical.

Stage two would consist of interviews from current high school students and their parents to determine the needs of the local population. During months four through six, this data would be combined with the data from the workplace interviews to develop different areas of study for the program and skills to be implemented in the classroom.
The final stage would be finalizing the areas of study and implementing these skills in the classroom. Once these have been established, the program can be presented to an administrator, a superintendent, and eventually the Governing Board for approval.

Each quarter, the site facilitator should assess the program by arranging a job shadow day, on the same day as professional development for teachers, with local businesses and select students. The students would have the opportunity to spend a day in a workplace setting and put their skills to use. They would be evaluated by the person they shadow as well as by the supervisor. The supervisor would provide the site facilitator with an evaluation and a recommendation, eventually leading to whether or not the student would be hired. From that evaluation, the supervisor would offer recommendations or areas of improvement for the school and the student.

For the program to be successful, a site facilitator must be able to reduce the risk of a crisis, or as Ben-Eli (2009) defined it, “the failure in adaptation … or failure to produce second order change” (p. 8). Fortunately, the program allows for continuous change in the industry expectations as well as in the classroom.

**Convincing Others to Support the Proposed Solution**

Governance plays a major role in convincing stakeholders to support a proposed solution. In creating an effective team of supporters, cohesion is crucial to bring together a group of individuals whose sole purpose is aimed toward the mission of the organization. As Townsend et al. (2007) advocated, the Superintendent and the Board must not only create but also maintain a strong governance team to lead the team of supporters. Stakeholders must be convinced that the program is a positive movement for all parties involved.
Once a Governing Board understands the long-term investment in education that the CREST program offers, they can reinforce the need for its existence within the school. Support for the CREST program would then trickle down from the administration to other stakeholders. The administration and the Governing Board must support higher rates of college-bound or employable students. To gain the support of teachers, adequate training from administration would help to implement a “comprehensive system for the preparation, induction, and professional development of teachers, with a particular emphasis on strategies for teaching” (McRobbie, & Makkonen, 2005, p. 2). When changes are implemented, it is helpful to have proper and effective resources in place.

Edwards (2005) recommended the Precautionary Principle which “challenged businesses to rethink their responsibility to society … using foresight in the development of new products and processes” (p. 55) as a means of gaining the support of external stakeholders. When local businesses assist with the program, leaders allow them to be inclusive with the Precautionary Principle, while providing management teams the ability to hire student participants eventually.

**Critical Pieces Needed for Implementation and Assessment**

To begin this program effectively, a site facilitator must be responsible for overseeing the program and reporting directly to the administrator. The site facilitator serves as the liaison among stakeholders, local employers, and college admissions representatives to ensure that expectations are being met. The site facilitator serves as a CREST representative and must understand the school’s dynamic, environment, mission, and vision and be willing to assist in refining the program based on those ideas.
Funds for the CREST program would not be too demanding. It would be helpful if students in the program had direct and personal access to a laptop that would be provided by the school. The student could rent the computer and eventually turn it in at the end of the program. The computers would need to have Microsoft Office and other programs that are used in the workplace. Additionally, students need to have access to a professional email account that could be used when contacting colleges or employers.

**Implications**

**Internal and External Implications for the Organization**

When implementing the proposed solution, the site facilitator should consider the political implications, including finances and personnel. Although the program is specifically designed for public charter high schools, it could be adopted by private schools or smaller public schools eventually. Because the program has the potential to grow exponentially, qualified personnel will be needed to serve as site facilitators on campuses. The site facilitator must be aware of the supply and demand in different regions of the country. The program could benefit any student, but it will require the support of local districts and administrators.

With an exponential growth model, the program may be overwhelmed if many schools or districts decide to implement it. The site facilitator must be able to train and offer support to site facilitators adequately. Conversely, if the program remains within one school, the site facilitator may need to adopt teaching or administrative duties to justify his or her salary. School districts must determine if the site facilitator of the CREST program will be serving the population as an independent contractor or as a school employee.
Implications and Considerations for Leaders Facing Implementation of the Proposed Solution

The site facilitator and the administration must understand that the early stages of the program require extra hours, beyond contracted times, to provide an effective program. The site facilitator must be available to teachers, students, administrators, and local employers at any time, including weekends. This time commitment is a major aspect to initiating a program like CREST, and the site facilitator must understand the sacrifice that accompanies the pioneering of this program.

The site facilitator will need to research to address any concerns or questions raised by the program’s implementation. The site facilitator must be transparent in his or her research and in the implementation of any refinements to the program so every student has the opportunity to meet the program outcomes and objectives successfully.

From an ethical perspective, the site facilitator must understand that the program is designed for young adults to make a professional transition. Because many of these young adults and their parents may struggle in the beginning, once a student is enrolled in the program, he or she must continue until the program is completed successfully. Too often, parents allow their children to abandon a project when it becomes too difficult to manage. The site facilitator must be able to convince these stakeholders of the long-term investment in their futures.

Evaluation Cycle (or Evaluation Cycle Outcome if Implemented)

Evaluations should be done quarterly to confirm that program goals and objectives are being met and addressed. During this quarterly process, the site facilitator should present data and feedback from local businesses and participants at an open board
meeting as an informational item. This would allow the success of the program to become public record and would provide transparency to stakeholders.

The evaluation should consist of variables of satisfaction. The evaluation plan, expectations, and outcomes should be developed with several panels, including teachers, the site facilitator, Governing Board members, superintendents, and a parent. The parent would be responsible for relaying information from the student to the panel. Using the evaluation outcomes, the teacher would then be able to set rubrics to grade assignments in the course.

**Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this action-based research project was to develop the CREST program for public charter high schools as a means of preparing future leaders. The program focuses on students taking courses toward graduation in addition to participation in courses aligned to either employability skills or college readiness based on personal goals and expectations. The purpose of the study led to the aim, which was to develop a CREST program for public charter high schools, including the professional practice setting.

After the data were analyzed, the results were categorized into three tiers: dissatisfied, satisfied, and very satisfied. Each question was given a three-point cap score, for a possibility of 30 points. The graduate survey reported the following: 0 percent dissatisfied, 85.7 percent satisfied, and 14.3 percent very satisfied. The employer survey reported the following: 2.2 percent dissatisfied, 90.1 percent satisfied, and 7.7 percent very satisfied. The parent survey reported the following: 10 percent dissatisfied, 75 percent satisfied, and 15 percent very satisfied.
DEVELOPING COLLEGE READINESS EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TRANSITIONS (CREST): A COLLEGE AND CAREER TRANSITION PROGRAM

Employee Survey Results

- Dissatisfied 2.2%
- Satisfied 90.1%
- Very Satisfied 7.7%

Figure 1. Employee survey results.

Parent Survey Results

- Dissatisfied 10%
- Satisfied 75%
- Very Satisfied 15%

Figure 2. Parent survey results.

Graduate Survey Results

- Dissatisfied 0%
- Satisfied 85.7%
- Very Satisfied 14.3%

Figure 3. Graduate survey results.
Of the 35 graduate participants, only six requested a follow-up interview; 88 employers completed the survey, with 23 requesting a follow-up interview; and 20 parents completed the survey, with six requesting a follow-up interview.

![Survey and Interview Results](image)

*Figure 4. Interview results.*

The professional practice setting is located in Las Vegas, Nevada, which is also the site of the fifth largest school district in the country. The state of Nevada continues to report substandard graduation rates compared to its performance a few decades ago. According to a 2008 report from the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, Las Vegas graduation rates dropped from 67.6 percent in 1995 to 44.5 percent in 2005, a 23.1 percent decrease (Swanson, 2008). Considering the low rate of high school graduates in Las Vegas, the high satisfaction rate reported by participants in this study was surprising.

If the same interviews were conducted with the same participants yearly for five years, the answers to some questions may change. When students are interviewed within a year or two of graduation, they may answer about their post-high school experience without adequate experience about independent living. Most of the participants were
active when they were enrolled in school, so it was no surprise they were active after graduation. Students on the other end of the spectrum may have different answers from the ones reported in this study and could provide information that would refine the program.

Four goals were established for the CREST program that together constitute the benefits of the program’s implementation and eventual completion. The first goal is to increase achievement motivation for students through activities and curriculum that are founded on student interest. In addition to core courses needed for graduation, the CREST program will offer courses in which students are interested. For example, much of Generation Z—the cohort of people whose birth years are between the 1990s and the 2010s—is driven by modes of social media. CREST would offer a marketing course using social media for students to understand the importance of marketing oneself for a future job or applying to college. When students can perform well in an area in which they are interested, they can be more motivated to complete the course successfully. Students will learn how to accurately determine several potential areas of study based on their interests.
For students to have a better grasp on their futures, they must be able assess themselves. Their career choices must be triggered by their own interests or passions, so they are not stuck in a career in which they have no interest. Their college major is determined by their potential career choice, and their college can be determined based on their intended major. During the high school phase, students would know what parts of the college admissions process would need to be completed before applying to prospective schools.

The second goal is to increase student and family awareness of college-readiness transitions through proper guidance, coursework, and Individualized CREST Plans (ICPs) that are presented as an interview to a panel of teachers, administrators, internship coordinators, and parent(s). Researchers have argued that students are more academically successful when parents are involved in the educational process. Parents will be included in the career model to better understand their roles as home support to their students. In addition, parents will be expected to attend monthly workshops on the educational process that include graduation requirements, standardized testing procedures, college admissions, Free Application for Federal Student Aid, and other topics that can be covered at the parents’ request.

The third goal is to provide opportunities for students to integrate professionalism into the classroom setting through teacher instruction and school-wide expectations. For students, high school should be treated like a full-time job with real world expectations: four years of courses (training), examinations and grading (work performance evaluations), and graduation (pay day). Workplace competencies, such as attendance, will
be used in the grading process. Grading will no longer be subjected to curriculum but supplemented by workplace competencies that are established by staff and administration that will be used to attain the fourth goal.

The fourth goal is to provide opportunities for students to experience the local job market through mandatory internships, job-shadowing projects, and part-time positions. Internships would be beneficial for businesses to determine whether students would be capable of workplace competencies. Businesses would be able to enjoy free labor as a means of providing an educational opportunity supplemented with work experience. Internships would be beneficial for students to learn if a certain industry would be suitable for their needs and expectations.

**Implications for Action and Recommendations for Further Research**

Forty percent of high school graduates are not prepared to transition into adulthood. Achieve Inc. (2005) reported that two in five recent high school graduates insist that gaps exist between high school education and the overall skills, abilities, and work habits expected of them in college and the work force. This study’s significance is based on the assumption that young adults are not given the proper resources and assistance to transition into college, trade school, the military, or the workplace.

A review of the data from this study suggests that 14.3 percent of recent high school graduates in the professional practice setting are satisfied or very satisfied with their educational preparation in high school. However, local employers are only 7.7 percent very satisfied with the skill set young adults exhibit while at the workplace.

The combined results from the Achieve report and the data from the professional practice setting suggest that CREST should be tailored to meet the needs of students,
parents, and local employers. The next generation of students and local employers will both benefit from this study. Students would be given the opportunity to receive experience in a workplace setting, supplemented with theory and educational practices. A combination of the two ideas would better prepare young adults to transition into adulthood, after gaining life and employability skills needed in the workplace.

Local employers will benefit from the study, because they are able to provide the site facilitator with expectations and recommendations to refine the program. While serving as supervisors to students, these employers will also be able to select from a pool of young students, some of whom may be suited to hold part-time positions eventually throughout the summer and full-time positions potentially upon graduation.

To build upon research for future studies, researchers should investigate topics that relate to college expectations at the Associate’s, Bachelor’s, and Master’s levels. Combining those ideas with CREST would give the program more credibility.

**Summary**

This qualitative study used grounded theory to examine the development of a CREST program as a way to better prepare students for post-secondary options after high school. Data were collected through a Likert survey and semi structured face-to face, Skype, and phone interviews with self-selected voluntary participants. Through comparative analysis, properties and relationships emerged from the open and axial coded data. Specifically, four themes evolved: post-secondary planning, workplace competencies, efficiency and professionalism, and the hiring process. The study found that over 70 percent of high school graduates, parents, and employers were satisfied with their high school educational experiences and the preparation they received for
adulthood. Furthermore, participants in the study suggested that more focus should be placed on the college admissions process and employability skills. However, it would be immensely beneficial to have effective programs to assist high school students with the transition into adulthood. To address this need, the CREST program was developed.
References


Skolits, G., Lashley, T., & King, P. *The sustainability of GEAR UP project initiatives in East Tennessee Middle Schools: A study of the residual impacts of the University of Tennessee GEAR UP partnership.*


Yousif, L. Enrollment, attrition, retention, and degree completion among first-generation college students: An evaluative analysis of the Modest Junior College TRIO program. (Doctoral dissertation, Mills College).
Appendix A

Social Behavioral Institutional Review Board
2500 California Plaza - Omaha, Nebraska 68178
phone: 402.280.2126 • fax: 402.280.4766 • email: irb@creighton.edu

DATE: July 2, 2015
TO: Yasmin Gago
FROM: Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: July 2, 2015
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category #2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The following items were reviewed in this submission:

• Application Form - 114.1 B (UPDATED: 07/1/2015)
• Creighton - IRB Application Form - Creighton - IRB Application Form (UPDATED: 07/1/2015)
• Letter - Information letter (UPDATED: 08/12/2015)
• Letter - Approval letter (UPDATED: 05/11/2015)
• Proposal - DIP (UPDATED: 08/30/2015)
• Questionnaire/Survey - Follow-Up Interview Questions (UPDATED: 07/1/2015)
• Questionnaire/Survey - Parent Survey (UPDATED: 07/1/2015)
• Questionnaire/Survey - Graduated Student Survey (UPDATED: 07/1/2015)
• Questionnaire/Survey - Employer Survey (UPDATED: 07/1/2015)

This project has been determined to be exempt from Federal Policy for Protection of Human Subjects as per 45CFR46.101 (b) 2.

All protocol amendments and changes are to be submitted to the IRB and may not be implemented until approved by the IRB. Please use the modification form when submitting changes.

If you have any questions, please contact Patsy Nowatzke at 402-280-3568 or nowatzke@creighton.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral’s records.
May 10, 2015

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

Aloha Quest Preparatory Academy Administration and Governing Board,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your institution. I am currently enrolled in Creighton University’s Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Leadership and am in the process of writing my dissertation in practice piece that focuses on the benefits of a fifth year of high school to better prepare students for the work force or college.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to interview parents, administrators, students, and staff to anonymously complete a 15 minute, 10 question interview (copy enclosed). Due to the nature of the study, I hope to recruit the guardian of underage participants to anonymously complete the same interview. Interested students who voluntarily participate will be given a consent form to be signed by their parent/guardian before the interview takes place. All other participants will also be given a consent form to be signed and returned to the primary researcher.

If approval is granted, student participants will complete the survey via phone, email, or physical contact with a parent/guardian present at all times. If physical interview takes place, it will be held in a public setting. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes and can also be completed at the comfort of one’s home via email. The results will be pooled for the project and individual results will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your school/center or the individual participants. Your approval to conduct this survey is greatly appreciated. I will follow up with a telephone call next week and would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at this time. You may contact me at my email address: yasmingago@creighton.edu.

If you agree, please sign below and return the signed form to me. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution’s letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study.

Sincerely,

Y. Mahina Gago
Creighton University

Approved by:

Print your name and title ___________________________ Signature ___________________________ Date ___________________________
May 11, 2015

To Whom it May Concern,

This letter is to confirm that Mahima Cega has been granted permission to conduct her research study, Developing a Fifth Year Program at Public Charter Schools, at Quest Preparatory Academy in Las Vegas, Nevada. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Thank you,

[Signature]

Debra Roberson, Superintendent
(702) 515-4021
d.roberson@questlv.com
June 10, 2015

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study that will assist in developing the Career Readiness and Employability Skills Transitions (CREST) Program for public charter high schools. The study involves research from a Likert-survey and a follow-up interview, if requested. The 10-question Likert survey is anonymous with only a section at the bottom outlining an optional follow-up interview, for a more in depth perspective from the participant. The study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.

You will be exposed to minimal risks, no greater than one would encounter in daily life. The interview questions inquire your educational experiences and perceptions related to the development of college, career, and work force readiness. Additionally, you will not be required to answer any questions that may cause you discomfort.

There are no direct physical, social, emotional, behavioral, or intellectual benefits to you. However, a theory may emerge from the data collected from this study that the school may use to enhance curriculum and instruction in relation to college, career, and work force readiness.

To protect your privacy and identity, an assigned number will be used to distinguish each interviewee participant. The recordings of the interview will be securely stored on a password protected hard drive for a period of three years after the study has been presented, after which the recorded interviews will be destroyed. I will do everything I can to keep your record confidential.

You will not receive compensation for participating in the study.

I can be reached at any time to provide answers to general questions concerning this research. To contact via email: gagomahina@gmail.com or by phone: (808) 343-0564.

Sincerely,

Y. Mahina Gago
Appendix D

Bill of Rights for Research Participants

As a participant in this research study, you have the right to:

1. Have enough time to decide whether or not you would like to participate in the research study, and to make that decision without any pressure from people who are conducting the research.
2. To refuse to be in the study at all, or stop participating at any time after the study has begun.
3. To be told what the study is trying to find out, what will happen to you, and what you will be asked to do if you are in the study.
4. To be told about the reasonable foreseeable risks of being in the study.
5. To be told whether there are any costs associated with being in the study and whether you will be compensated for participating in this study.
6. To be told who will have access to information collected about you and how your confidentiality will be protected.
7. To be told about the possible benefits of being in the study.
8. To be told whom to contact with questions about the research, about research-related injury, and about your rights as a research subject.
9. If the study involves treatment or therapy
   a. To be told about the other non-research treatment choices you have.
   b. To be told where treatment is available should you have research-related injury, and who will pay for research-related treatment.
Appendix E

Please circle which field your organization belongs:

Business    Computers    Education    Engineering    Fast Food/Culinary    Health/Medical
Recreation    Tourism
Retail    OTHER (please specify): ______________________

Using the 1 – 3 scale, please rate your satisfaction for each question from within your specific workplace.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied/No</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The current graduation requirements for this state accurately reflect employer expectations.
2. A mandatory internship for high school students would benefit their future career plans.
3. An extra year of high school that focuses on a student’s future career plans would be beneficial. This includes an additional year of internships and life skills courses.
4. Four years is enough time for students to grasp sufficient skills for the workplace.
5. High school should be a motivation for students to have higher expectations of the workplace and college.
6. Local high schools offer enough elective courses that allow students to better determine their future career goals.
7. Local high schools have enough resources to help students better determine their future career goals.
8. Local high schools need a better transition program from high school into adulthood (i.e. life skills courses that focus on post-secondary expectations from employers, college, etc.), to motivate students for their futures.
9. Entry-level employees possess the necessary skills and training to survive in the workplace.
10. College should be mandatory for high school graduates.

If you would like to request a follow-up interview for a more in-depth perspective of your educational experiences, please complete the following:
Name:  ___________________________
Email:  ___________________________
Appendix F

1. What specific skills does your workplace look for when hiring potential employees? Why?
2. How important is a resume, cover letter, interview, and other parts of the hiring process?
3. What do employers look for within the hiring process?
4. What is the biggest struggle in the workplace for entry-level employees?
5. What is the easiest part in the workplace for entry-level employees?
6. Do entry-level employees possess the proper skills to survive in your workplace?
7. If your workplace could implement a course into local high schools, what course would it be and why?
8. Why or why wouldn’t an internship be beneficial for students?
9. How important is time and attendance at the workplace?
10. Explain the disciplinary process at the workplace.
11. What are some things that employees can be disciplined for?
12. If could pinpoint the biggest downfall of entry-level employees, what would it be and why?
Appendix G

Using the 1 – 3 scale, please rate your satisfaction within each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied/No</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The current graduation requirements for this state accurately reflect college and career preparedness.
2. A mandatory internship would have been beneficial for my child’s future career plans.
3. An extra year of high school would have helped my child to determine their future career goals.
4. Four years was enough time for my child to properly assess his/her future career goals.
5. High school motivated my child to want to go to college.
6. High school discouraged my child to want to go to college.
7. My child’s high school experience was a positive one.
8. My child’s school offered enough elective courses for him/her to determine his/her future career goals.
9. My child had enough resources on campus to determine their future career goals.
10. An adult transitions program would have helped my child to get a better grasp on their career goals.

If you would like to request a follow-up interview for a more in-depth perspective of your educational experiences, please complete the following:

Name: ___________________________
Email: ___________________________
Appendix H

1. Do you feel that your child received the proper skills and training to enter college or the work force? Why or why not?
2. Did/do you feel confident that your child will be prepared for post-secondary options? Why or why not?
3. How could your local high school have made the post-secondary experience more attractive?
4. Are you familiar with your state’s graduation requirements?
5. Do these requirements accurately reflect the post-secondary transitions into adulthood? Why or why not?
6. What courses do you think would have helped your child to be more prepared?
7. Was your school cooperative in mapping your child’s career plans and expectations?
8. Would college/has college helped or hindered your child’s future career goals? How?
9. Would an extra year of high school that focused on career goals and expectations have been a benefit for your child? Why or why not?
10. If your local high school were to implement a program specifically towards career readiness and employability skills, would you enroll your child in the school? Why or why not?
Appendix I

Using the 1 – 3 scale, please rate your satisfaction within each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied/No</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The current graduation requirements for this state accurately reflect college and career preparedness.
2. A mandatory internship would have been beneficial for my future career plans.
3. An extra year of high school would have helped me to determine my future career goals.
4. Four years was enough time for me to properly assess my future career goals.
5. High school motivated me to want to go to college.
6. High school discouraged me to want to go to college.
7. My high school experience was a positive one.
8. My school offered enough elective courses for me to determine my future career goals.
9. I had enough resources on campus to determine my future career goals.
10. An adult transitions program would have helped me get a better grasp on my future career goals.

If you would like to request a follow-up interview for a more in-depth perspective of your educational experiences, please complete the following:

Name: ___________________________
Email: ___________________________
Appendix J

1. Do you feel that the current graduation requirements for this state accurately reflect college and career preparedness? Why or why not?
2. Why or why don’t you think a mandatory internship would be beneficial for your success as a student?
3. Would you consider taking a fifth year of high school to prepare you for college and/or the work force? Why or why not?
4. Are you confident after graduation that you can compete academically in college? Why or why not?
5. In what ways has your high school experience motivated you to attend college?
6. In what ways has your high school experience discouraged you from attending college?
7. Why do you think Nevada has such a high dropout rate?
8. How could your high school experience better prepare you for college/work force?
9. When did you really start researching college and career choices? Did you have any assistance? How do you know the research that you are doing is effective?
10. If you had a college adviser on your campus, how do you think it would help you better prepare for college?
11. If you had a course dedicated to college preparedness, how will it better motivate you to attend college?
12. Is college for everyone? Why or why not?
13. What are your plans after high school, as of today?