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# Latino Students: on Dropping out and Reentering School

Shawn Rios

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

LATINO STUDENTS: ON DROPPING OUT  
AND REENTERING SCHOOL

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Shawn Rios

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Department of Leadership, Policy, and Development  
Higher Education and P-12 Education  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

July 2016

This Dissertation by: Shawn Rios

Entitled: *Latino Students: On Dropping Out and Reentering School*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of Leadership, Policy, and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education, Program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

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While research exists that examines the underlying factors related to Latino underachievement, the research on reengaging Latino students who previously dropped out is lacking. This qualitative phenomenological study examined the phenomenon of dropout and reentry of Latino students. It also highlighted underlying factors that affected their achievement. The overarching research question was, “According to participants, what factors contribute to Latino student reentry in school after dropping out?” This study was conducted in a rural resort Rocky Mountain region. Nine participants were from alternative high schools and one from a traditional school. To meet the selection criteria, participants had to have previously dropped out and then reentered school.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation was that of critical research theory. Data were collected through individual interviews and then analyzed through an inductive and comparative analysis strategy. The goals were to understand the factors that contributed to dropout and reentry for the participants, while uncovering strategies for dropout prevention and increased achievement. Additional goals were to provide voice to an underserved population and advise school reform efforts. This study addressed a gap in the literature between researchers’ recommendations based on the process of dropping out and what proved to be effective in the cases of these Latino participants who reentered. The

findings reinforced the potential of the following in decreasing Latino dropout rates: individual support/monitoring, engaging and relevant instruction, and a trusting relationship with an adult advocate at school. The participants also recommended a motivational component intended to educate students on the value of educational attainment to one's financial future.

Key words: achievement gap, critical pedagogy, disengagement, dropout, dropout prevention, engagement, reengagement, Hispanic, Latino, pushout, reentry, dropout recovery, student engagement, student disengagement, student reengagement

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter Maya with the hope that she and future generations will benefit from more equitable access to opportunity, thereby allowing more students to reach their potential.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With deep gratitude for supporting me in pursuit of this dissertation and degree, I wish to thank my parents and my husband. I thank my parents for providing loving, tender childcare while I worked. Above all, I thank my mother, Dr. Kay Rios, for providing support that surpassed any reasonable level of duty to one's adult child. In addition to helping me with household tasks, she served as my greatest advisor, sounding board, coach, mentor, editor, and my greatest cheerleader. Were it not for her, I do not know how I would have completed this program. Last but not least, I am eternally grateful to my husband, Eric, who sacrificed and supported me throughout this rigorous process. Thankfully, he has always provided me with enduring support.

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Certainly this dissertation would not be possible were it not for the participants who graciously agreed to share; many were candid and vulnerable as they recounted memories that were at times painful. It was a privilege to learn about their experience and document their insight. I am forever grateful to them. A special thanks to the administrators who provided access and helped me connect with participants. Finally, I would like to thank friends and colleagues who read my work, listened, coached me,

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

With effort, we can roll back poverty and the roadblocks to opportunity. . . we do expect equal opportunity, and if we really mean it, if we're willing to sacrifice for it, then we can make sure every child gets an education suitable to this new century, one that expands imaginations and lifts their sights and gives them skills. We can make sure every person willing to work has the dignity of a job, and a fair wage, and a real voice, and sturdier rungs on that ladder into the middle class. (Obama, 2015)

While President Barack Obama's words are inspirational, the well-documented academic underachievement of Latino students in the United States continues (Kena et al., 2014; KewalRamani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007; Mather & Foxen, 2010; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Verdugo, 2011). With the problem of underachievement in mind, this dissertation focused on the phenomenon of Latino student drop out and reentry in school. Latino students who have reentered school could potentially provide valuable insight into the school completion aspect of the achievement gap, since they all disengaged from school and, yet, for some reason reentered.

What brought them back and/or reengaged them? Through interviewing Latino youth who reentered school after dropping out, this study explored the factors that affected their educational decisions. An examination of this process yielded valuable information for potential use in educational reform that might increase Latino student achievement and reduce the number of Latino students who drop out.

## **Background of the Problem**

Collectively, Latino students in the United States lag behind their peers in educational achievement (Kena et al., 2014; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Mather & Foxen, 2010; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Verdugo, 2011). As the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Mather & Foxen, 2010; Motel & Patten, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), the lack of achievement among Latinos reflects a pervasive societal problem. Mather and Foxen (2010) emphasized that, between 2000 and 2008, the Latino child population (under age 18) increased by 30%, as opposed to 2% for the child population overall. One out of five American children is Latino, and Latinos are projected to be one-third of the child population by 2035 (Mather & Foxen, 2010). “Today’s 16 million Latino children and youth--92% of whom are U.S. citizens--thus represent a crucial segment of our country’s future workers, taxpayers, parents, citizens, voters and leaders” (Mather & Foxen, 2010, p.iii).

The differential academic outcomes have been described as achievement gaps. The projected growth of this population indicates that, unless the Latino achievement gap is addressed, the issue will likely remain and has the potential to increase in the future. The lack of achievement highlights untapped potential that is extremely costly to the economy in terms of lost GDP and increased costs spent on welfare, healthcare, and incarceration (Auguste, Hancock, & Laboissiere, 2009). “These educational gaps impose on the United States the economic equivalent of a permanent nation recession” (Auguste et al., 2009, p. 5). At the broadest levels, efforts have been made to address this issue but with limited effectiveness.

## **Political Agendas to Improve the Education of Latinos**

Education policies at both the national and state level work to close the achievement gap (Kena et al., 2014). The political agendas highlighted below provide additional support for the significance of this issue and the political effort that exists to address this problem. Numerous presidents have led initiatives to improve educational services and increase achievement. Some have focused specifically on targeting underserved populations such as Latinos, while others have supported broader agendas aimed at better serving all students.

In 1990, President George H.W. Bush established the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Latino Americans (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Its purpose was to provide guidance to the Secretary of Education on issues related to the education of Latinos (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). It was continued by President William J. Clinton and President George W. Bush and renewed by President Obama in 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

The passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001 served to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). It increased accountability for states and school districts, stipulated more flexibility in the use of federal education funds for states and local educational agencies, increased choice for students, and placed a greater emphasis on reading in the younger grades (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). For the first time, NCLB required that high schools be held accountable for graduation rates, thus casting more light on the achievement gap and dropout issue (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Even though graduation rates are a valuable indicator of school system

performance, they had not garnered much attention before NCLB (Ream & Rumberger, 2008).

As of the writing of this paper, the current U.S. President's education reform effort incorporates a broad agenda aimed at better serving all students. In addition to renewing the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans, the Obama Administration declared educational reform to be a priority through a variety of approaches (The White House, 2013). President Obama established a goal of becoming the country with the highest proportion of college graduates by the year 2020 (The White House, 2013). This would be done by increasing access to rigorous standards, ensuring quality educators, implementing strategies to reform low-performing schools, and improving assessments/data to show growth and better inform teaching (The White House, 2013).

The Obama Administration expanded funding for early childhood programs and designated funds for Race to the Top that awards monies to spur systemic educational reform (The White House, 2013). In addition, President Obama signed the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act (HCERA) to address college affordability and access to opportunity in higher education (The White House, 2013). These approaches are all intended to increase academic achievement for underserved populations, including Latinos. However, in spite of initiatives and agendas to reform education to ensure that all students succeed, Latinos continue to achieve at a lower level than Whites in the United States (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Kena et al., 2014; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Mather & Foxen, 2010; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Verdugo, 2011).

## **Achievement Gap Indicators**

The Latino achievement gap is documented through many different indicators that include educational attainment rates, the graduation rate, and standardized assessment scores. There are various data sources highlighting achievement gaps, but most often in comparison to Whites only. One study from the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (KewalRamani et al., 2007) appeared to yield the most consistent comparison of achievement among the larger ethnic and racial groups. Much of the data analyzed in this study came from U.S. Census Bureau and U.S. Department of Education surveys, studies, and reports (KewalRamani et al., 2007). While it is important to compare the achievement of Latinos with that of the dominant White group, it is equally valuable to compare their achievement with other groups. For example, if two groups show signs of significant underachievement, as is the case with Blacks and Latinos, then it may be useful to examine the similarities of their experiences. Moreover, in the case of English language (EL) learner groups who have significantly different levels of achievement, as with Latinos and Asians, examining their experiences as language learners could also yield valuable information on closing the achievement gap.

**Educational attainment.** Educational attainment refers to the level of education completed and can be used as a gauge of one's quality of life, as well as one's potential for income and employment opportunities (KewalRamani et al., 2007). In spite of achievement and attainment gaps, Latino youths are equally as likely as other youths to claim that a college education is key to success in life (Lopez, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

The high school dropout status rate was consistently lower for Whites than for Blacks and Latinos (Kena et al., 2014). It is important to note that estimates of high school dropout and graduation rates vary depending on the method of calculation used (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Kena et al. (2014) and KewalRamani et al. (2007) defined dropout status as someone 16 to 24 years old who was not enrolled in school and had not earned a high school credential; military, institutionalized, homeless, and incarcerated persons were excluded.

In 2012, Kena et al. (2014) found the dropout rate was 4% for Whites, 8% for Blacks, and 13% for Latinos. However, a more accurate picture of the dropout rate can be found in the following report. The Center for Labor Market Studies and Alternative Schools Network (2009) included GED (General Education Development) certificate holders in their dropout statistics, because they do not fare as well in the labor market as regular high school graduates (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). Under this expanded definition, 16% from the general population (same age group) dropped out in 2007 (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). When separated by race/ethnicity, 12% of Whites, 21% of Blacks, and 27.5% of Latinos dropped out in that year (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). Regardless of how the dropout rate is calculated, Latinos continually have the highest dropout rate of ethnic/minority groups (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009).

KewalRamani et al. (2007) and Kena et al. (2014) confirmed that, as educational attainment increased, so did median income overall. Kena et al. (2014) also found that those with at least a bachelor's degree experienced lower unemployment than those with

less educational attainment. In 2005, the median income that year for all adults 25 years of age and over was \$40,000 (KewalRamani et al., 2007). High school-only completers had a median income of \$30,300 while those with graduate degrees had a median income of \$65,000 (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

In 2005, only 58% of Latinos had completed a high school or a higher level of education (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Moreover, even though the achievement gap with regard to high school completion narrowed between Whites and Blacks from 1990 to 2005, the gap between Whites and Latinos remained consistent (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Mather and Foxen (2010) calculated an estimate of the percentage of students who enter the ninth grade and graduate from high school on time with a regular diploma. They stated that, in 2006, 55% of Latino youth graduated on time compared to 76% of Whites and 51% of Blacks (Mather & Foxen, 2010).

Between the years of 1990 and 2013, of those who were 25- to 29-years old, the percentages with at least a high school diploma or its equivalent increased (Kena et al., 2014). The increase placed Asian, White, and Black students at 90% or above earning a high school diploma or its equivalent (Kena et al., 2014). Latinos produced the highest increase (from 58%) but still lagged behind at only 76% completion or its equivalent (Kena et al., 2014). During the same time period of 1990 to 2013, the percentage within this age group of those who attained a bachelor's or higher degree grew (Kena et al., 2014). Even though Asians/Pacific Islanders increased to 58% and Whites to 40%, Blacks and Latinos still lagged well behind at 20 and 16% respectively (Kena et al., 2014). That means that during these years, the overall gap in bachelor's or higher degree

attainment actually increased with the White and Latino gap increasing from 18 to 25 percentage points (Kena et al., 2014).

Moreover, although there was a record number of college enrollment for Latinos in 2010, there are still continuing gaps in enrollment and attainment when compared to other ethnic/cultural groups (Fry, 2011). The gap in attainment remains at a time when a college degree has become required for entry into the middle class and for increased earning potential (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). The lagging achievement and degree attainment of Latinos calls for systemic reform through efforts by educators, educational researchers and policy makers.

**Standardized assessments.** In looking beyond the gap in educational attainment statistics, standardized assessments also paint a bleak picture. White students continue to score higher than Black and Latino students on the long-term National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in reading and mathematics (Kena et al., 2014; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Mather & Foxen, 2010). Mather and Foxen (2010) found that, in 2009, Whites scored well above the average score on the NAEP reading test, whereas Latinos and Blacks scored well below. Even though Kena et al. (2014) reported a narrowing of the achievement gap between the 1970s to 2012, the average reading score of White students in 2012 was still significantly higher than that of Black and Latino students.

More recently, Verdugo (2011) examined claims of the achievement gap narrowing in the United States based on the NAEP scores of Black, Latino, and White students. However, based on his research, he warned of upwardly-biased data that

longitudinally compares the achievement scores of, in his example, students in eighth grade to the scores of the same students in 12th grade (Verdugo, 2011). Verdugo (2011) explained that, if the dropout rate is not taken into account, these data appear to show a narrowing of the achievement gap, because the 12th-graders tested excluded dropouts (who tend to be the poorest performing students). He emphasized the importance of adjusting longitudinal comparisons to account for dropouts to create a more accurate picture of the achievement gap of racial/ethnic minorities (Verdugo, 2011).

KewalRamani et al. (2007) also found an achievement gap on college entrance exams with Latino and Black students consistently scoring far lower than average scores. On the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), Asians/Pacific Islanders scored higher in the verbal and mathematics portions of the tests than the other minority groups (KewalRamani et al., 2007). On the verbal portion of the test, Whites scored well above average, Asians/Pacific Islanders scored just above average, while Latinos and Blacks scored well below average (KewalRamani et al., 2007). In mathematics, Asian/Pacific Islander students had the highest achievement, followed by White students who also scored well above the average (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Latinos and Blacks scored well below that average (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

Similar patterns were found on the American College Test (ACT) in both English and mathematics in 2005 (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Additionally, throughout the years 1997 and 2005, only White and Asian/Pacific Islander students showed gains in their average ACT English scores (KewalRamani et al., 2007). The other ethnic/minority groups showed no statistically significant gains (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Of the groups studied, Asians/Pacific Islanders and Mexican Americans both had significant gaps

between their verbal and mathematics scores, while Whites did not (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

**Income and family structure.** There are a number of potential reasons put forth for this long-standing achievement gap experienced by Latino students. Among some of these explanations, poverty and family structure have been described as negatively affecting children's learning (KewalRamani et al., 2007). For example, in early research, Rumberger (1995) found that the dropout rate for students from a low socioeconomic status (SES) was double that of those from average SES families. Unfortunately, in 2010, there were more Latino children living below the poverty threshold than of any other racial/ethnic group (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). For the first time in U.S. history, the largest poor racial/ethnic group was not White (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Of the children living in poverty, 37% were Latino, 31% were White, and 27% were Black (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Incidentally, of the 6.1 million poor Latino children, 67% (4.1 million) had immigrant parents (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Of those 4.1 million poor Latino children of immigrant parents, the majority (86%) were born in the U.S. (Lopez & Velasco, 2011).

The Great Recession that began in 2007 led to a sharper increase in Latino children living below the poverty line than other racial/ethnic groups (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). From 2007 to 2010, the numbers of impoverished children increased the most for Latinos (36%), followed by Whites (18%), then Blacks (12%). Among all impoverished children, Blacks possessed the highest poverty rate at 27.4%, trailed by Latinos at 26.6%, and Whites at 10% (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). The childhood national poverty rate in 2010 was 22% and the national poverty rate for the whole population was 15% in that year (Lopez & Velasco, 2011).

Family structure also impacts the learning environment of children (KewalRamani et al., 2007) and is often directly related to issues of poverty since single-parent families tend to experience higher poverty rates than those of married couples (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013). The incidence of single-parent families was higher for Latinos than the national average and had the highest increase from 2000 to 2008 (32% to 38%), as compared to the U.S. average increase (28% to 32%). Latinos were well below the average of Black single-parent families of 65% in 2008 (Mather & Foxen, 2010)

### **Costs of Dropping Out**

Given that the rapidly-growing Latino population has one of the highest dropout rates among ethnic minorities in the United States (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009), the social and economic costs of dropping out are substantial (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). With almost one-third of all public high school students not graduating on time with their peers, Ream & Rumberger (2008), the Center for Labor Market Studies and Alternative Schools Network (2009), and Swanson (2004) named this issue a dropout crisis for America.

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) labeled it the silent epidemic in our nation. In their study on students who dropped out (Bridgeland et al., 2006), the participants almost universally conveyed great remorse for leaving school and wanted to reenter with students their age. A majority stated that high school graduation was important to success in life and, if they had the opportunity to do it over again, they

would stay in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Forty-seven percent of respondents experienced difficulty in finding a good job because they lacked a diploma (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

In today's global economy, high school completion, or its equivalent is essential for achieving employability and avoiding poverty (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). Additionally, a college degree is now required for a well-paying job (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009) and future workforce demands are projected to require higher levels of education (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). For those who drop out, the significant costs of dropping out continue to rise (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). Adults who do not complete high school earn significantly less money and have fewer job opportunities (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009; Ream & Rumberger, 2008). In fact, over a lifetime, those who drop out earn an estimated \$400,000 less than high school graduates (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). Those who drop out are more likely than graduates to be unemployed, poor, on welfare, in prison, unhealthy, and also to become single parents (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Men, Blacks, and Hispanics are affected the most by dropping out (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009).

Dropouts also tend to create higher social costs for taxpayers in the area of health care, welfare, incarceration, and decreased tax receipts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011; Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). The combined fiscal benefits a high school graduate contributes over a lifetime through taxes

is estimated at more than \$250,000 per graduate (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2011) estimated that, if dropout students from the Class of 2011 had graduated, the U.S. economy would have benefitted from approximately \$154 billion in additional income over the course of their lives. Moreover, states with less-educated populations are more challenged by attracting new business investments (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). Overall, higher dropout rates diminish our country's economy and competitive standing (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011). It is a loss of human potential and productivity; it diminishes the country's capacity to compete in a global economy (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011).

Not only do we need efforts to keep students in school, but also to help those who have dropped out to reenter. The cost of funding re-enrollment programs is substantially cheaper than the social costs of dropping out (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009). Effective re-enrollment programs have found that “young people who have left high school before earning a diploma are not dead-end dropouts, but often are in fact students waiting and looking for opportunities to reenroll and finish high school” (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009, p. 4). Given decades of disinvestment in re-enrollment programs, if a national re-enrollment strategy were part of this country's education agenda, it could provide a substantial savings to taxpayers at an estimated minimum \$250,000 per graduate (Center for Labor Market Studies & Alternative Schools Network, 2009).

## **Population Data**

With research substantiating numerous achievement gaps (Kena et al., 2014; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Mather & Foxen, 2010; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Verdugo, 2011), it becomes important to place that information against the backdrop of the increasing population demographics in order to consider the magnitude of the problem now and for the future. By the year 2000, the Latino population had exceeded Blacks as the largest minority group in the United States (KewalRamani et al., 2007). According to the 2010 U.S. Census (Ennis et al., 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011), between the years 2000 to 2010, more than half the population growth came from the Latino population. The Latino population grew in all 50 states (Ennis et al., 2011). During that decade, Latino numbers increased from 35.3 million to 50.5 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). That represented a growth in the Latino population by 43% (as opposed to 5% for the non-Latino population). With regard to citizenship, the majority (63%) of all Latinos in 2008 were U.S. citizens. In fact, 91% of Latino children (under 18 years of age) held U.S. citizenship status (Mather & Foxen, 2010). So this is a population that will likely remain and grow. It is estimated that, by 2050, one-third of the total U.S. population will be Latino (Mather & Foxen, 2010).

Tracking minority school enrollment also provides an indication of the increasing Latino population. The proportion of minority school enrollment (preschool through secondary) continually increased from 34% in 1993 to 41% in 2003 with the highest numbers in inner city areas (KewalRamani et al., 2007). In all types of locales (i.e., suburban, rural, urban, etc.), Latinos accounted for the majority of that increase in minority enrollment (KewalRamani et al., 2007). In inner city public schools in 2003,

65% of students were minorities, in comparison with 21% in rural schools (KewalRamani et al., 2007). By 2004, minority students accounted for 42% of public school enrollment overall (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

When focusing on the data of the Latino population as a whole, English language learners need also be included. In the reporting of their research, KewalRamani et al. (2007) stated that roughly 20% of public school students (10.8 million) spoke a language other than English in the home in 2005. Approximately one-fourth of these students also had difficulty speaking English (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Among the racial/ethnic groups studied, Latino students had the highest proportion of students who spoke a language other than English in the home (70%) trailed by Asian/Pacific Islander students (65%). Latinos also had the highest proportion of students who had difficulty speaking English (19%) followed by Asians/Pacific Islanders (18%; KewalRamani et al., 2007). By 2010, the number of Latinos who spoke Spanish in the home was 17.3 million (75% of Latinos; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012). The percentages of Asian and Latino English language learners are noteworthy when the high academic achievement of Asians is compared with the underachievement of Latinos. This finding indicates that Latino underachievement is not simply related to English proficiency, but is also likely related to other complex factors.

### **Dispelling the Myth**

Given that the Latino achievement gap is significant and this population is rapidly growing, a focus on this segment of society is essential. However, before continuing, it is prudent to dispel a pervasive myth that Latinos simply do not care about their education

as much as other ethnic groups. Seeing past the myth may serve to guide the focus toward a better understanding and possible solutions.

On the subject of student underachievement, Finn and Zimmer (2012) commonly found negative responses:

Status and academic risk factors are sometimes used as explanations for these problems, for example, students' attitudes are poor ("blame the student"), single parents, parents who do not monitor their children's behavior or who are not involved with school activities are at the root of the problem ("blame the family"), and/or friends or street life are not conducive to staying in school ("blame the community"). (p. 124)

Stereotypes that exist within the myth are: (a) Latinos do not value education and (b) Latinas are not expected to get an education but rather stay home and have babies from a young age. The findings of the following study contradict these stereotypes (Lopez, 2009). Lopez (2009) studied responses from the 2009 Pew Hispanic Center survey that asked Latinos about the academic underachievement of their ethnic group. The responses demonstrated that there is no pervasive undervaluing of education among Latinos (Lopez, 2009).

According to the Pew Hispanic Center survey (Lopez, 2009), the majority (77%) of Latino youth respondents claimed that their parents believe "going to college is the most important thing to do after high school" (p. 3). Only 11% identified working full-time as the most important step after high school (Lopez, 2009). A large majority (89%) of Latino youth claimed that a college education is important for success in life, but only 48% said they plan to get a college degree (Lopez, 2009). The most common reason for this difference appeared to be financial (Lopez, 2009). Seventy-four percent of Latino youth respondents claimed they ended their education prematurely because they needed to help support family (Lopez, 2009). Only 11% said their parents think getting a full-

time job is most important and only 1% think that it is important to start a family after high school (Lopez, 2009).

Asked why Latino students do not do as well in school as other populations, more Latino respondents blamed poor parenting (61%) and lack of English skills (58%) than on poor teaching (Lopez, 2009). Fewer respondents (38%) cited a lack of effort on the part of Latino students (Lopez, 2009). In fact, of the Latino youths (ages 16-25) surveyed, a majority (66%) strongly agreed that they received or are receiving a quality education and a majority (62%) strongly agreed that their high school teachers worked to help them succeed (Lopez, 2009). Moreover, 65% strongly agreed their parents played an active role in their schooling (Lopez, 2009) The results of this study seem to indicate that Latino students place a high value on their education and, although they would like to pursue higher education, they perceive the financial burden to be the greatest barrier. With the understanding that Latinos do in fact value education yet are underachieving, the focus now shifts to the need for this study.

### **Need for the Study**

Although much has been written about the existing achievement gaps, Velez and Saenz (2001) cited a dearth of research on programs shown to be successful with Latinos as well as a lack of studies on Latinos who have succeeded academically. Research on reengaging students who have dropped out of school is limited and typically not specific to Latinos. Based on this gap in the literature, the purpose of this study was to focus on one aspect of Latino underachievement by examining the phenomenon of Latinos dropping out and then later reentering school. This included focusing on underlying factors affecting their decisions to drop out and reenter.

One goal of this study was to uncover strategies for dropout prevention and increasing achievement by examining the factors that contributed to the participants dropping out and reentering. Another goal was to provide voice to an underserved and underrepresented population. While research exists on why some Latino students drop out of school, there is a dearth of research on reengaging Latino students. The intended audience of this study was educators, policymakers, stakeholders, and others who work with Latino students. From the information gathered in this study, I sought to inform school reform efforts for leaders and policymakers while contributing to the present body of research on educating underserved populations and narrowing the achievement gap.

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach to the dropout and reentry process of Latino students, I wanted to highlight the lived experiences of the participants. Based on the purpose of the study, the overarching research question was, “According to participants, what factors contribute to Latino student reentry in school after dropping out?” The participants of this study were a convenience sample of Latinos who had dropped out and then later reentered school. To collect these data, I held semi-structured interviews with each participant. Participants were asked about the factors affecting their dropout and reentry process, as well as about their educational experience and personal background.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation was that of critical theory as defined by Merriam (2009). The data acquired from this phenomenological study was viewed through a critical theorist lens, mindful of social justice. The critical theory component of this study shifted from not only seeking to understand a phenomenon but

also looking to provide solutions toward a more just society with regard to educational opportunities for Latinos.

### **Definition of Terms**

Following is a list of definitions of terminology used in this dissertation.

*Alternative school.* “A public elementary/secondary school that (a) addresses needs of students typically not met in a regular school, (b) provides nontraditional education, (c) serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or (d) falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education” (Sable, Plotts, & Mitchell, 2010, p. C-1).

*Disengagement/student disengagement.* A lack in the combination of academic engagement (as in participation), social engagement (as in compliance), cognitive engagement (as in the expenditure of thoughtful energy), and/or affective engagement (as in valuing school and a sense of belonging; Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

*Dropout/Status dropout.* A 16- to 24-year-old who is not attending school and who has not earned a high school diploma, or its equivalent (Snyder & Dillow, 2011).

*Engagement/student engagement.* A combination of academic engagement (as in participation), social engagement (as in compliance), cognitive engagement (as in the expenditure of thoughtful energy), and affective engagement (as in valuing school and a sense of belonging; (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

*First generation.* A person born in another country (Ennis et al., 2011; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

*Hispanic.* (Used interchangeably with *Latino*) A person of any race and also of Latin American/Spanish culture or origin. The data presented here referring to Whites and Blacks excludes persons of Latino origin.

*Immigrant or non-native.* (Used interchangeably) A person born in another country who has permanently moved to another country.

*Latino.* (Used interchangeably with *Hispanic*) A person of any race, and also of Latin American/Spanish culture or origin. The data presented here referring to Whites and Blacks excludes persons of Latino origin.

*Mexican-American.* A person of Mexican descent who was born in the United States.

*Minority.* Refers to people of all races/ethnicities other than White, non-Latino.

*Recovery/Reentry.* The act of reenrolling in school after having dropped out.

*Second generation.* A person born in the United States, Puerto Rico, or other U.S. territories with at least one immigrant parent (Ennis et al., 2011; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009).

*Traditional school.* The structure and type of programming commonly provided in most public and private schools in the United States.

### **Summary**

Without educational and policy reform, the issue of Latino academic underachievement will not disappear or even diminish. This phenomenological study addressed the gap in knowledge about Latino students who have reentered school after dropping out. It also provided voice to an underserved and underrepresented population. Finally, the study aimed to inform school reform efforts that focus on better serving this

population in the future so that the achievement gap may be diminished. The following literature review provided an exploration into the factors surrounding Latino underachievement, disengagement, and dropping out. The chapter concluded with research on and recommendations for better serving Latino students.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A significant achievement gap exists between Latino and White students in the United States (Ennis et al., 2011; Kena et al., 2014; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Mather & Foxen, 2010; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Verdugo, 2011) despite efforts to create a more equitable educational system. Poor achievement has substantial consequences for the economic future of the United States (Auguste et al., 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau (2011) reported that the Latino population is the largest minority population in the United States and that number is projected to increase substantially (Ennis et al., 2011; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Mather & Foxen, 2010; Motel & Patten, 2013). When all of this information is considered, it becomes clear the issue of Latino underachievement is pervasive and combined with population changes, has great potential for increase. Thus, it requires significant intervention and reform.

Although recent political agendas addressing underachievement emphasize the political will to increase achievement, current statistics on this issue inform us that the problem has yet to be effectively addressed. According to Madrid (2011), the achievement gap is a complex problem affected by many causes and the solution will not be found in a certain program, intervention, or curriculum. Luna and Tijerina Revilla (2013) reinforced this message of complexity in their qualitative study of Latino dropout (or pushout) students. The complexity of the issue called for a multi-faceted literature review.

The following literature review highlights both empirical and theoretical work of researchers at the forefront of their field. The review begins with broad examination of underlying factors surrounding dropping out and the achievement gap. It includes data disaggregated by ethnic and minority groups for comparison. The underlying factors are organized into the following three categories: institutional, environmental, and individual. Following this exploration, literature that examines potential solutions for decreasing dropouts is introduced. Finally, a brief exploration on the topic of student reentry is provided.

### **Examination of Factors**

The process of dropping out is usually a long one and associated with many individual, family, and school-related factors (Rumberger, 1995, 2011; Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012; Verdugo, 2011). When examining the issue of dropping out, it is important to note that many individual, family, and school-related factors can not be used to generalize across racial ethnic groups (Rumberger, 1995). This highlights the intrinsic limitation of studies that ignore the effects of race, gender, and social class. It also supports the value of studying cultural factors within the racial/ethnic groups to develop a better understanding of the factors contributing to and preventing the dropout process.

Rumberger (1995) examined numerous individual and institutional factors for predicting dropouts using a predictive hierarchical linear model. His results confirmed that many of the factors that can be used to predict high school dropout rates could also be used for predicting middle school dropout rates (Rumberger, 1995). In their nationwide study, Bridgeland et al. (2006) found general categories of reasons for dropping out that were consistent regardless of whether in an urban, suburban, or rural

area. Most participants believed they could have succeeded in school, yet personal circumstances coupled with an inadequate response to the circumstances led to the students dropping out (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The majority of participants had passing grades and career ambitions requiring education beyond high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Seventy percent felt sure they could have graduated if they had tried (Bridgeland et al., 2006). So what happened? The participants described various reasons for dropping out that included a lack of connection to school, a lack of motivation, a perception that school is boring, academic challenges, and the burden of real world events (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Bridgeland et al. (2006) point to the abundance and complexity of the factors contributing to dropping out as examined in the following.

### **Institutional Factors**

Of the many institutional factors studied, Rumberger (1995, 2011) emphasized the importance of school policies and practices in preventing dropouts. He stated that policies in the areas of grade retention, discipline, and school transfer all affect the dropout rate, yet are seldom included in the school reform debate (Rumberger, 1995). Rumberger (1995, 2011) found, of the school-related factors, the most significant predictor of dropping out was grade retention (being held back in an earlier grade). Those retained a grade were more than 11 times as likely to dropout (Rumberger, 1995). The likelihood dropped to six times as likely when controlled for demographic and family background factors (Rumberger, 1995). Latinos and Blacks had higher grade-retention rates than that of Whites (Rumberger, 1995). Retention was a strong predictor for Latinos and Whites, but not for Blacks (Rumberger, 1995).

With regard to discipline, schools that rely on exclusionary discipline practices may interfere with the educational process and promote a cycle of failure (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007). Naturally, students who are excluded from school, as in a suspension, have fewer opportunities to increase academic skills (Christle et al., 2007). Thus, this practice potentially contributes to the cycle of failure, because students who struggle academically are more likely to dropout (Christle et al., 2007). Moreover, Rumberger (1995) found that students who rated their school as offering fair discipline policies had a lower chance of dropping out.

Lowder's (2013) findings reinforced the issue retention and its link to students dropping out. All of her Latino participants had been retained at least one school year and were older than most of their peers (Lowder, 2013). Thus they were all eligible to withdraw from high school in an earlier grade, the ninth and tenth grades, once they turned 16 years of age (Lowder, 2013).

Credit policies also played a significant role in deciding to withdraw from school (Lowder, 2013). Students were not earning the required credits to graduate on time for several reasons, including a lack of academic preparation and absences as a result of family or economic hardship (Lowder, 2013). Missing were critical interventions to keep them in school such as credit recovery education, college path education, additional academic support, and flexible scheduling to accommodate work schedules (Lowder, 2013).

Lowder (2013) reported a complete structural breakdown within the school in the areas of communication (with families and students), monitoring for at-risk signs, and dropout prevention. School personnel and families did not communicate with each other

effectively regarding academic concerns, economic hardships, and personal family issues (Lowder, 2013). Students were misinformed about withdrawal procedures and were not informed of credit recovery options (Lowder, 2013). School counselors were not well informed either (Lowder, 2013). There was simply no safety net provided for content and credit recovery when students faced numerous economic hardships and family issues that had interrupted the educational process (Lowder, 2013).

In their qualitative study of the experience of seventeen Latino dropouts (or pushouts as they called them) in Las Vegas, Nevada, Luna and Tijerina Revilla (2013) found as the most salient theme in the participants' experience to be racism and discrimination by teachers and administrators. The participants generally perceived preferential treatment given to Whites and Blacks (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013). All participants described personal feelings of discrimination in school through both subtle and not-so-subtle ways (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013). Several of the participants left school out of resistance to the discrimination they experienced daily (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013). Lowder (2013) found similar salient themes in her dissertation on Mexican immigrants who dropped out from a Georgia high school. Participants reported perceptions of racism and deficit thinking on the part of educators (Lowder, 2013). A salient theme for all participants was feeling "othered," as described by Lowder (2013). Participants reported perceptions of cultural incongruence (between school and home) and an unfamiliar educational system (Lowder, 2013).

The institutional factors previously identified contribute to an opportunity gap for Latinos. This opportunity gap is documented through numerous indicators. Rumberger (1995) uncovered that, when controlled for SES, attending a school with a high

percentage of minorities increased the tendency to drop out. KewalRamani et al. (2007) highlighted that 58% of Latino students and 52% of Black students attended schools of high minority enrollment as compared to the average of 24% for all public school students. Rumberger (1995) also uncovered that a student body from a lower SES increased the odds of leaving school. Moreover, Latinos and Blacks described the quality of their teachers as lower than that of Whites (Rumberger, 1995). They also rated their academic subjects as less useful to their futures than Whites (Rumberger, 1995).

The research on educating Latinos specifically in California is intriguing and relevant to the larger nation, because California has such a large Latino population (California Department of Finance, 2013). The University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access (2007) reported that California's Latinos are significantly disadvantaged by a lack of access to educational opportunity. On average, they are provided less resources than White and Asian students in the state (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). This disparity in resources was seen in larger class sizes, overcrowded schools, lack of qualified teachers, lack of access to college preparatory courses, lack of support staff, and fewer counselors (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). The opportunity gap was reinforced in Luna and Tijerina Revilla's (2013) study in Las Vegas of Latino students who dropped out. They (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013) were aware of the disparities between schools, recognizing more violence in low-income areas than in schools in "rich" neighborhoods and knowing their schools were profoundly under-resourced (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013).

In her dissertation on Latinos who had dropped out in Southern California, Tavitian Méndez (2013) uncovered the following three themes: (a) lack of sense of belonging to the school community, (b) disengagement as a result of school practices, and (c) self-blame for dropping out (Tavitian Méndez, 2013). Their disengagement was a process that happened over time (Tavitian Méndez, 2013). The participants (Tavitian Méndez, 2013) echoed the perception of disparity. They reported that their school experiences deprived them of opportunities and support (Tavitian Méndez, 2013). They lacked access to academic courses and extra-curricular activities that might have been more meaningful to them (Tavitian Méndez, 2013). Moreover they experienced a lack of guidance in order to successfully complete high school (Tavitian Méndez, 2013). These resources and opportunities are essential for success in higher education, in many careers, and for full participation in public life (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007).

During the 2005-2006 school year, 35% of Latino students attended overcrowded California high schools (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). That was more than twice the percentage of White students attending overcrowded schools (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). Incidentally, California schools with a large percentage of English Language (EL) students were twice as likely as other schools to be overcrowded (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007).

Of the California students who experienced serious qualified teacher shortages, Latino students were two and one-half times more likely than Whites and three times more likely than Asians to encounter severe teacher shortages (UCLA Institute for

Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). That equated to 10% of Latinos, 4% of Whites, and 3% of Asians who experienced severe qualified teacher shortages in their schools (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). The researchers noted that English Language students are at a particular disadvantage because of the specialized resources and teacher training required for effective instruction (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access . Schools with the highest percentage of EL students were less likely to have a quality-learning environment than other California schools (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). Schools with larger proportions of Spanish-speaking EL students were two and one-half times more likely to experience serious shortages of qualified teachers than other schools (24% and 9%, respectively). The authors of the report (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, Education, and Access, 2007) asserted that, in order to close the “achievement gap,” the “opportunity gap” first must be closed. (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007)

Additional evidence of an opportunity gap might also be found in the lower enrollment of Latinos in early childhood education in comparison with that of other ethnic/racial groups. In 2005 (KewalRamani et al., 2007), White, Black, and Asian/Pacific Islander preschoolers (ages 3 to 5) enrolled at higher percentages in center-based preschool programs than that of Latino preschoolers. More families at or above the poverty threshold (60%) were enrolled than those living in poverty (47%). Of children living in poverty, 65% of Black children were enrolled, 45% of White children, and only 36% of Latino children (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Of children living at or above the

poverty threshold, 73% of Asians/Pacific Islanders were enrolled, 68% of Blacks, 61% of Whites, and only 48% of Latinos (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

Schools with high percentages of low-income students (more than 50% of the student body qualifying for free- and reduced-price meals) tend to lack some of the critical resources previously mentioned (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). In these schools, student achievement across all racial/ethnic groups tends to be lower and dropout rates tend to be higher (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007). During the 2005-2006 school year in California, a higher percentage of Latinos (51%) attended high-poverty schools than that of Asians (25%) and Whites (11%;). Of schools designated “Program Improvement” for not making the Adequate Yearly Progress as defined by NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), Latino students were more than four times as likely to attend these schools than White students (UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access, 2007).

KewalRamani et al. (2007) found Latino and Black students more likely to go to high-poverty schools (defined as having more than 75% of the student population qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch). Of fourth-grade students, 49% of Latinos attended a high-poverty school, while 48% of Blacks and only 5% of Whites attended schools of this nature (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Asian/Pacific Islander peers were the most likely to attend low-poverty schools (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

More Black, Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch than White and Asian/Pacific Islander students (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Eligibility for the free and reduced-price lunch program is commonly used as a measure of family income level (KewalRamani et al., 2007). In

2005, 41% of fourth-graders qualified for the program (KewalRamani et al., 2007). By race/ethnicity, Latinos had the highest eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch at 73% of Latinos, followed by Blacks (70%), and American Indians/Alaska Natives (65%; KewalRamani et al., 2007). In comparison, the two groups with less eligibility were Whites (24%) and Asians (33%). Additionally, the data reinforced the higher concentration of poverty within inner cities and among Blacks, Latinos, and American Indian/Alaska Natives (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

In their qualitative study of students who dropped out, Bridgeland et al. (2006) discovered that two-thirds of the students claimed they would have worked harder if more had been required of them, as in higher expectations and more work (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Of the 45% who claimed to be poorly prepared upon entering high school, many reported a lack of support that could have helped them to succeed, as in tutoring and after-school support (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Of the participants, 32% had been previously retained a grade or more (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Thirty-five percent described academic challenges they faced as a reason for dropping out and 43% reported missing too many days of school to stay caught up (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The most academically challenged students were more likely to recount receiving insufficient support and they doubted whether they would have worked harder with increased expectations (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Luna and Tijerina Revilla's (2013) Latino participants advocated for improved teaching and a more relevant curriculum. All participants maintained that educators did not value their culture and language and the participants did not see themselves represented in the curriculum (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013). One student explained,

“they say it is Hispanic Month, but don’t do anything, don’t teach us anything about our history” (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013, p. 29). Luna and Tijerina Revilla (2013) discovered that participants perceived the majority of their teachers as apathetic. They felt teachers did not care about them (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013). Tavitian Méndez’s (2013) Latino participants reinforced this experience of apathy in teachers. They perceived the educators as not trustworthy, not supporting them in their learning, and not genuinely caring (Tavitian Méndez, 2013). Participants wanted to participate and follow the school rules, but felt that educators discouraged them (Tavitian Méndez, 2013). Additionally, Latino participants in Lowder’s (2013) study reiterated a lack of relevance of academic content.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) participants also recommended that teaching and curricula be improved to increase relevance and engagement. Seventy-one percent of participants explained that schools did not make school interesting (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Most suggested providing better teachers, more support, and smaller classes with increased individualized instruction (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Participants stated that their chances of graduating would have been more likely with more tutoring, summer school, and additional time with teachers (Bridgeland et al., 2006). They also advocated for creating a better understanding among students of the connection between school and getting a good job (Bridgeland et al., 2006). A majority (70%) recommended increased supervision and many (62%) advocated for more classroom discipline (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Fifty-seven percent did not feel safe from violence while in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Participants also advocated for ensuring each student has a strong relationship with a school staff member (Bridgeland et al., 2006). They highlighted the importance of

students having at least one adult in school to whom they could go for academic and/or personal problems (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Seven in 10 advocated for increased parental involvement and improved home-to-school communication (Bridgeland et al., 2006). With regard to communication, fewer than half stated that the school contacted their parents when they were absent or had dropped out (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

When combined, institutional factors contribute to a large degree in creating an opportunity gap for Latino students in our country. The achievement gap will not disappear without addressing the opportunity gap first. Fortunately, all institutional factors fit within the category of educational reform.

### **Environmental Factors**

Environmental factors include variables and conditions in the context of one's life such as social, cultural, economic, physical, demographic, and geographic. An environmental factor found to be highly predictive of dropping out is the socioeconomic status (SES) of one's family (Rumberger, 1995, 2011). Rumberger (1995) found that students from a low SES were twice as likely to drop out as those from average social class families. Interestingly, when the data in Rumberger's study were disaggregated according to racial/ethnic group, SES was found to increase the odds of dropping out for Latinos and Whites but was not as strong of a predictor for Blacks (Rumberger, 1995). Swanson (2004) also found a strong link between increased dropout rates and the environmental conditions often present in situations of poverty and segregation. In addition, the need for more income could draw students away from the goal of educational attainment. Latino students who had quit school in Luna and Tijerina Revilla's (2013) study admitted that having a job made it easier for them to drop out.

While low SES can predict a higher dropout rate, low educational attainment of parents also predicted a greater likelihood of living in poverty (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). Lopez and Velasco (2011) noted, that in 2010, close to half (48%) of Latino children whose parents achieved only a level of high school completion or less were impoverished. Of children with Latino parents with a high school degree or less, 79% lived in poverty as opposed to 45% of children whose parents achieved a higher level of educational attainment (Lopez & Velasco, 2011). KewalRamani et al. (2007) found that Latino, Black, and American Indian/Alaska Native children were less likely to have parents with at least a bachelor's degree. Moreover, Latino children had the largest percentage (41%) of mothers who had not finished high school, as compared to Blacks (18%), Asians/Pacific Islanders (16%), American Indians/Alaska Natives (12%), and Whites (6%) children (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Therefore, low educational attainment of parents, likely related to low SES, was also related to lower levels of school achievement among Latino youth.

Family process factors such as parental support, parental supervision, and parents' educational expectations for their children were found to be reliable predictors of dropout rates (Rumberger, 1995). Students whose parents were actively involved and volunteered in school had lower odds of dropping out (Rumberger, 1995). Students with less parent supervision were 34% more likely to leave school (Rumberger, 1995). Students of parents who had the educational expectation for their child of only graduating from high school were more than five times as likely to leave school (Rumberger, 1995). Latino parents were less likely to volunteer in school and help with homework than the other racial/ethnic groups (Rumberger, 1995). Black and Latino parents tended more toward

establishing rules surrounding homework and grades than White parents (Rumberger, 1995). Rumberger (1995) also noted that Latino families had higher levels of supervision than the other groups.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) reinforced the value of parental involvement. Their participants who dropped out claimed to have low levels of proactive parental involvement in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Sixty-eight percent of their respondents stated that their parents became more involved only upon learning that their child was on the verge of dropping out (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

### **Individual Factors**

Of the numerous individual factors studied, attendance was found to have a significant impact on both academic achievement and dropping out. Rumberger (1995) discovered that those absent 25% or more of the time were three to five times more likely to leave school. He found this to be consistent across all racial/ethnic groups (Rumberger, 1995). Bridgeland et al. (2006), Christle et al. (2007), and Rumberger (2011) also reiterated the importance of attendance as a critical indicator of students at risk of dropping out. Bridgeland et al. (2006) found that approximately 60% of their participants who dropped out reported missing class often before quitting school. When referred to a truancy officer, students were then placed back into the same environment in which the initial disengagement took place (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Thirty-eight percent of their respondents claimed to be given too much freedom in school thus making it too easy to skip class and find other activities outside of school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Moreover, peer influence played a role for the 42% of participants who admitted to spending time with students who were uninterested in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Respondents

also cited personal reasons for dropping out, as in needing to get a job, becoming a parent, or needing to care for a family member (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

In looking at attendance and achievement across racial/ethnic groups, KewalRamani et al. (2007) reported that, in 2005, of students who were absent from school for three or more days in the preceding month, Asians/Pacific Islanders had the lowest absences (12%) followed by Whites (20%), Latinos (24%), Blacks (25%), and American Indians/Alaska Natives (30%). Those with fewer absences scored significantly higher on average on the eighth grade NAEP mathematics assessment (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Of students with no absences in the previous month, 75% scored at or above Basic, while of those with one or two absences, 71% scored at or above Basic (KewalRamani et al., 2007). Of students with three or more absences, only 56% achieved at a level considered at or above Basic (KewalRamani et al., 2007). This pattern remained consistent across each racial/ethnic group studied, with the exception of American Indian/Alaska Native students, as there was no measurable difference in results between zero absences and one or two absences (KewalRamani et al., 2007).

Christle et al. (2007) found that students who struggle academically are more likely to dropout of school. Incidentally, low grades, changing schools, and misbehavior were also determined to be strong predictors of dropping out for Blacks and Whites, but not Latinos (Rumberger, 1995). Poor academic performance was found to be a predictive risk factor for all (Rumberger, 1995). Interestingly, high grades did not improve the odds for Latinos, but high test scores did (Rumberger, 1995).

Research that focused solely on Latino students who left school early found that many participants also cited personal issues as contributing factors to dropping out (Luna

& Tijerina Revilla, 2013). Many of the students claimed to have ditched, taken drugs, hung out with the wrong crowd, fought, and been lazy (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013). Several students left because of pregnancy (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013). In spite of their negative school experiences, the participants blamed themselves for dropping out and did not believe it was the school's responsibility to be more engaging (Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013). Tavitian Méndez's (2013) study on Latino students who dropped out also uncovered a theme of self-blame. Peer associations were among the numerous poor choices for which they blamed themselves (Tavitian Méndez, 2013). Additionally, participants described themselves as failures for their continuously poor academic performance (Tavitian Méndez, 2013).

### **Closing the Gap**

Given that the factors affecting the academic achievement gap are numerous and complex, the recommendations to close the gap will need to be multi-faceted. Following are several perspectives on what may be required to achieve that goal. This section begins with theoretical perspectives of ecological and cultural-ecological theories. It then shifts to provide more institutional and proposed approaches to closing the gap.

#### **Ecological and Cultural Perspective**

In this quantitative study, Ruiz (2009) examined the influence of a set of independent variables and their ability to predict academic achievement among Latino middle school students. Using an ecological perspective as the theoretical framework, Ruiz (2009) found that acculturation, parent involvement, and school identification account for a significant amount of the variance in school participation. School identification, defined as a feeling of personal connection with members and activities of

the school community, accounted for the majority share of the variance implying that a higher level of school identification predicts more school participation (Ruiz, 2009).

They feel a sense of acceptance and belongingness appears to act as a protective factor (Ruiz, 2009). Both parental involvement and acculturation appeared to be significant predictors of school participation, but not of course grades (Ruiz, 2009).

Ruiz's (2009) study reinforced the importance of students feeling accepted and valued in their school environments. It also emphasized the critical role that parents play in supporting and encouraging their child's education (Ruiz, 2009). Ruiz (2009) directed many of her recommendations toward promoting communication, collaboration, school identification, and parental involvement. Ruiz (2009) also recommended connecting curriculum directly to students' lives and increasing the visibility of ethnically diverse role models in the school system. In an interview with educator and critical pedagogue Paulo Freire (Freire, D'Ambrosio, & Mendonça, 1997), Freire also reinforced that instruction must begin by recognizing the background knowledge of the learner, as opposed to the knowledge system of the educator. He reiterated that education is an inconclusive process and that students need to adapt a conscious awareness of this inconclusiveness as they learn, question, and acquire more knowledge (Freire et al., 1997). "To teach is to struggle, together with the students; it is to create conditions for the construction of knowledge, for the reconstruction of knowledge" (Freire et al., 1997, p. 9)

In his examination of dominant patterns among cultural groups, Ogbu's cultural-ecological theory (Ogbu & Simons, 1998) placed significant emphasis on the non-school community forces affecting academic performance. Nevertheless, Ogbu and Simons (1998) briefly addressed the implications of oppositional identity for schools. Of the

recommendations they outlined for educators, one was to work to build trust among students and the community (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). They recommended clearly stated high standards and a culturally responsive curriculum that explicitly addresses issues of opposition and ambivalence to education (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Moreover, they encouraged increased exposure to professionally successful role models, as well as increased parental and community involvement (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

### **Engagement**

Dropping out is the result of a disengagement process that happens over time (Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Reyna, 2011). No single model currently exists that can effectively explain the disengagement and dropout process for all students who drop out (Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012). While researchers have developed various models to examine the factors affecting the dropout process, student engagement is one of the most prominent factors in many of the models (Rumberger & Rotermund, 2012). Dynarski et al. (2008) also emphasized the critical role that student engagement plays in dropout prevention.

Finn and Zimmer (2012) dismissed the value of examining difficult-to-change underlying factors leading to disengaging and dropping out, such as parental support and peer influences. Focusing on difficult to change factors would not be very productive (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). The researchers proposed that narrowing in on the topic of engagement will likely prove to be more fruitful (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

Finn and Zimmer (2012) reviewed current research on student engagement and reinforced main themes. To clarify, this research focused on the behaviors surrounding engagement, as opposed to the broader concept of motivation (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

They claimed that affective engagement is more closely related to the behavioral forms of engagement that affect academic achievement than that of motivation (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). They concluded that engagement is critical to academic achievement and attainment (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Student engagement is essential for learning and school policies/practices can affect engagement (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). The idea that engagement behaviors can be modified to improve achievement can prove to be particularly promising for at-risk students (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Examples of necessary engagement behaviors are attendance, work completion, compliance, and attention paid to lessons (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Engagement and disengagement are developmental and happen over time (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

Of particular relevance to this dissertation, Finn and Zimmer (2012) supported the concept that school engagement can help students overcome barriers related to status and academic risk factors, such as a low SES, primary home language other than English, and minority cultural status. Engagement behaviors, or a lack of, can be identified early to prevent the gradual process of withdrawal that, for some, results in dropping out of school (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Therefore, efforts to prevent disengagement should be targeted early at the elementary, middle, and high school grades (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Rumberger and Rotermund (2012) found that the two most consistent gauges of likelihood to drop out or graduate were early academic performance, academic engagement, and social engagement in school.

Finn's participation-identification model of engagement (Finn & Zimmer, 2012) portrayed a cycle beginning with early components of student behavior (participation) that can transition into bonding with school (identification) then lead to continued

participation. Finn considered behavior in the early grades to be important to academic success (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). This engagement model does not include antecedents such as parental support, teacher expectations, and peer acceptance (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Nor does it include outcomes such as academic accomplishments or dropping out (Finn & Zimmer, 2012).

Researchers agree that student engagement is multidimensional with behavioral and psychological components (Appleton et al., 2006; Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Finn & Zimmer, 2012; Wang, Willett, & Eccles, 2011), yet there is disagreement on the definitions and quantity of the dimensions (Christenson et al., 2012). In Finn and Zimmer's (2012) review of the research, they found that four dimensions commonly appeared throughout: academic engagement (as in participation), social engagement (as in compliance), cognitive engagement (as in the expenditure of thoughtful energy), and affective engagement. The first three fell under the participation category of Finn's participation-identification model while affective engagement addressed the identification component (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Affective engagement speaks to the sense of belonging and the valuing of school that leads a student to engage (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). While the research supported behavioral engagement as having a strong effect on academic success, the effect of affective engagement is less consistent (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Nevertheless, Finn reinforced the positive effect that affective engagement has on behavioral engagement and high school graduation (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Finally, the authors defined four of the characteristics of the school setting that support student engagement: "teacher warmth and supportiveness, instructional approaches that encourage student participation, small school size, and a safe

environment with fair and effective disciplinary practices--and there are more” (Finn & Zimmer, 2012, p. 125). These characteristics could potentially be used in forming recommendations for school reform aimed at closing the gap (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Wang et al. (2011) suggested that interventions be focused on multiple dimensions of school engagement by integrating distinct intervention strategies that address the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive needs of students.

### **School Policy**

Based on the findings of Bridgeland et al. (2006), the authors concluded with numerous recommendations for school reform to increase student engagement, achievement, and graduation rates. They advocated for expanding options for students as in offering schools of choice (Bridgeland et al., 2006). They promoted the organization of schools into smaller learning communities, more individualized instruction, and a curriculum more connected to real-life experiences (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Districts also need to provide alternative schools with specialized programs for those at-risk of quitting school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Regardless of setting, teachers must have high expectations for all students and try different approaches to increase motivation (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The authors (Bridgeland et al., 2006) advocated for significant improvements to home-to-school communication. This included following through on truancy issues as well as feedback on class participation, assignments, and grades (Bridgeland et al., 2006). They (Bridgeland et al., 2006) recommended the implementation of individual graduation plans. The authors (Bridgeland et al., 2006) viewed this as accomplishing several goals. The plan would ensure that students not only show up, complete their work, and

graduate, but the plans also could be used to strengthen home-to-school communication throughout the process (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Bridgeland et al. (2006) held that early warning systems are critical to the prevention of dropping out. Based on accurate daily attendance reports, schools must notify parents immediately of absences (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Given that attendance can be an early warning sign of dropping out, a system must be in place to ensure that students attend school and are provided the necessary support to stay in school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

In addition to attendance monitoring, Bridgeland et al. (2006) advocated for a wide range of support services to prevent dropping out. Dynarski et al. (2008) added that data monitoring of individual students be continual and used first to target at-risk students, then evaluate the effectiveness of any provided interventions. Bridgeland et al. (2006) recommended providing struggling students with an adult advocate in the school who can ensure that the student receives necessary support (Bridgeland et al., 2006). They suggested an increase in literacy programs, school and peer counseling, tutoring, mentoring, double class periods, internships, service learning and summer school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Schools also need to expand their coordination with institutions and agencies in the community (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

In addition to expanding services, an increase in the compulsory school age requirement from 16 to 18 could serve to significantly reduce the dropout rate and would be more consistent with our nation's commitment of providing public education through the 12th grade (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The researchers (Bridgeland et al., 2006) also recommended more accurate reporting and better data systems for monitoring progress

state by state. Dynarski et al. (2008) reiterated this recommendation. Unfortunately, most people are unaware of the extent of the dropout problem, because the rates are often underestimated (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Differences in the methods for calculating graduation rates continues to disguise the problem (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Federal law under NCLB should provide stronger incentives for schools to produce higher graduation rates (Bridgeland et al., 2006). If the incentives focus on raising test scores above all, then schools are encouraged to “push out” lower-performing students whose test scores would otherwise lower school averages (Bridgeland et al., 2006). A healthy balance between the two measures would serve as a better approach (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Also needed is a federal evaluation of existing dropout prevention programs and dissemination of best practices in this area (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

### **Teacher Training**

Another potential area for reform is that of professional development. Given that Luna and Tijerina Revilla (2013) and Lowder (2013) discovered that their participants who had dropped out experienced deficit thinking from educators, the perceptions that teachers hold of their students and how it affects achievement is an intriguing concept. Garcia and Guerra (2004) examined deficit thinking among educators and equity-oriented staff development. In this study, the researchers provided staff development to educators in an attempt to shift their deficit thinking toward a more additive perception of their students (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). While they found the majority of educators to be well intentioned, they discovered pervasive negative perceptions that teachers and administrators often held about their culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and communities (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Instead of viewing the diversity of their

students as an asset (an additive view), the tendency was to assume that most, if not all, CLD students were deficient and did not begin their schooling ready to learn (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). In other words, many educators viewed their students and their background from a deficit standpoint (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

The authors claimed that school reform efforts frequently fail because educators do not examine the root causes of underachievement of students from low-income and/or diverse backgrounds (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). The researchers found that a majority of their participants in this study expressed deep concern and caring for their students, but this expression of caring frequently occurred at the expense of academic instruction (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). This seemed to lead to lower expectations of student achievement (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). In their recommendations, the authors warned of focusing on teachers as the problem because of the tendency to detract from a critical assessment of systemic factors that perpetuate this type of thinking (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). They also recommended expanding the assessment of deficit thinking to include non-White educators (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). Often the idea of providing students with staff who have racial and ethnic similarities is not sufficient in recognizing differences in, for example, social-class memberships (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). In reforming schools, Garcia and Guerra (2004) advocated for equity staff development that promotes an awareness of school culture and an examination of systemic practices that may discriminate against specific groups of students.

Another significant concern is the lack of linking culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical theory to actual practice in the classroom (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). While there is a plethora of literature on multicultural education, “there is little

empirical research that links specific elements of teacher education (i.e., content, activities, or process) to explicit educational practices in CLD classrooms” (Garcia & Guerra, 2004, p. 158). Based on their research in intercultural communication and training, Garcia and Guerra (2004) defined following five underlying assumptions necessary in creating effective staff development in this area and thus, providing equitable practices in the classroom:

- (a) deficit thinking permeates society; schools and teachers mirror these beliefs;
- (b) professional development in diversity is not just for White educators;
- (c) intercultural communication permeates every aspect of schooling;
- (d) cultural sensitivity and awareness do not automatically result in equity practices; and
- (e) professional development activities must systematically and explicitly link equity knowledge to classroom practices. (p. 154)

The authors concluded that the following three factors diminish equity educational practices: educators’ beliefs and values, educators’ cultural awareness, and a lack of opportunities to develop the skills to implement more culturally responsive practices (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). They determined that these factors are interrelated and that an educator’s beliefs are the most essential, yet challenging, to address (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

### **Relationship with Educators**

In an interview with education researcher Angela Valenzuela, Valenzuela spoke on the topic of dropping out.

The dropout rate is just the end product of a long process of being disengaged. What I learned firsthand from my study is that students who were considered potential dropouts [but didn't drop out] were ones that had relationships with an adult at school. They said that there was someone there who helped them hold on. Caring meant a lot to the kids. The children that felt cared for by the teachers had a stronger relationship to the schools and to achievement. (Adam, 2003, p. 2)

Valenzuela cautioned that the word “care” held different meanings for teachers and students (Adam, 2003). Teachers thought the word meant "I will care for you if you care about the curriculum," but the students thought "I will care about the curriculum if you care about me" (Adam, 2003, p. 2).

Adam (2003) also interviewed education researcher Rogelio Saenz about his work on the Latino dropout rate. From Saenz’ research, Adam concluded that the following are top priorities (Adam, 2003). He stressed the importance of a caring environment in which students feel connected to schools (Adam, 2003). He was particularly concerned about Latinas and gender issues (Adam, 2003). He recommended connecting with Latina students at an early age, and providing female role models and support (Adam, 2003). He also cited the issue of socioeconomic status and its affect on achievement (Adam, 2003). He proposed building stronger relationships with parents and supporting them to navigate a likely unfamiliar system (Adam, 2003).

Based on their study of dropout prevention approaches, Dynarski et al. (2008) recommended assigning trained adult advocates/advisors to at-risk students. They claimed that through a meaningful and sustained personal relationship with a school advocate, the personal and academic needs of at-risk students could be met (Dynarski et al., 2008). They recommended the adult also be responsible for communicating with families (Dynarski et al., 2008).

### **Reentry Students**

According to Reyna (2011) , considerable work must be done to increase dropout recovery/reentry options and effectiveness. Given that the decision to quit school is complex and multifaceted (Zammitt & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011), understanding the

factors leading to that decision provides a path to reengage students (Zammitt & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). This understanding creates the foundation for dropout recovery/reentry programs (Zammitt & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). However, the data on reengaging students who have dropped out is limited (Zammitt & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). The research that does exist focused on the general population and did not specifically target Latino students.

For various reasons, traditional schools can be challenged by serving reentry students well (Reyna, 2011). In reviewing the literature on options for dropout recovery/reentry, two categories are prevalent: alternative schools and continuation programs. Alternative schools function both within public school districts and also independently. Continuation programs include GED preparation programs, adult high schools, Job Corps, and community colleges. In Zammitt and Anderson-Ketchmark's (Zammitt & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011) review of the literature, they found that effective dropout recovery programs are "relationship based, individualized, student-centered, and success oriented instead of discipline oriented" (p. 251). Following are two qualitative studies on the experience of dropout and reentry students.

In Keene's (2003) study of participants in an adult school program, he examined their motivations for reentry. Participants were all in adult school programs (Keene, 2003). When Keene (2003) asked participants about the contributing factors leading to their decision to drop out, the responses were numerous and varied. He categorized them by family, social, school, and personal/financial (Keene, 2003). The majority of responses (65%) were categorized as perceived by participants as problems not within

their control, while the remaining responses fell within the category of within their control (Keene, 2003).

As a result of this study (Keene, 2003), many recommendations emerged for increasing motivation for reentry. They included increasing opportunities to obtain certification or licensure through vocational training programs that are connected with high school attendance. Another recommendation was to reform laws and policies to encourage reentry. He also claimed that students would be better served by reducing school and class size, as well as offering teacher advisor programs. Finally, the offering of more flexibility in class scheduling and improved advertising for short-term training programs could attract more reentry students (Keene, 2003).

Iachini , Buettner, Anderson-Butcher, and Reno (2013) explored disengagement and reengagement with an Anglo and African-American population. Participants were students attending an urban dropout recovery charter school focused on workforce development (Iachini et al., 2013). Similar to my dissertation, the authors examined the factors that led to dropping out and to reentering school (Iachini et al., 2013). The most significant barriers to success that emerged were lack of teacher support and behavioral/discipline challenges (Iachini et al., 2013). Both self-determined motivation and referrals from family, friends, or school personnel presented as the most common motivation for reentry. Participants identified the following as promoting their success in school: individualized instruction, school structure, and school climate (Iachini et al., 2013).

## Conclusion

The literature review revealed the complexity of the issue of academic underachievement of Latinos. Moreover, it reinforced the importance of a multi-faceted approach to closing the achievement gap. An essential component in closing the achievement gap is continuing the introduction of new research that provides a more layered view. In my search, I found an abundance of research on dropouts from the overall population and research on the Latino achievement gap. I also found a few dissertation studies that concentrated on the perceptions of Latinos who have dropped out (Lowder, 2013; Luna & Tijerina Revilla, 2013; Tavitian Méndez, 2013). Tavitian Méndez (2013) emphasized that, “More studies exploring the dropout phenomena from the perspective and the experiences of the people who experience them in the schools are essential” (p. 4). The literature review only uncovered two studies that focused on reentry students (Iachini et al., 2013; Keene, 2003) and they were not specifically focused on Latinos. Keene’s (2003) study concentrated on student motivation and ways to encourage dropouts to reenter school, whereas this dissertation focused on examining underlying factors in both the dropout and reentry process with dropout prevention in mind. This qualitative study as described in Chapter III highlighted Latino underachievement by examining the phenomenon of Latino student dropout and reentry, and addressed a gap in the literature that could prove helpful in increasing Latino student success.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research was a qualitative phenomenological study of the experience of Latinos that have previously dropped out from school and then later reentered. The purpose for this study was to examine the phenomenon of dropping out and reentering as experienced by the participants, as well as to better understand the barriers or supports that contributed to the students' decisions to leave or reengage. The study was conducted with students currently enrolled in high school, as well as recent high school graduates. The intended audience was educators, policymakers, stakeholders, and others who serve a Latino population. The overarching research question was, "According to participants, what factors contribute to Latino student reentry in school after dropping out?"

#### **Research Design**

Three major goals directed this study. One was to better understand the factors that contribute to Latino dropout and reentry with the aim of increasing achievement of Latino students. Another goal was to give voice to an underserved population by documenting their opinions and experiences. The final goal was to use this information to inform school reform efforts and to help school leaders understand how schools may better serve Latinos in the future. With regard to the goal of giving voice to participants, Briggs, Morrison, and Coleman (2012) reinforced the value of including learners in educational leadership research by explaining that, "Learners are able to structure and contribute to the collection of data about how leadership impacts on the whole learner

experience in a way that enhances both research and potentially the learner's development" (Briggs et al., 2012, p. 243). The act of including the learner's voice in research has the potential to enhance the current body of research while providing a chance for the participant to grow.

Creswell (2012) indicated that qualitative research is recommended to examine a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore. Because there is limited information with regard to the process of disengagement leading to dropping out of school and then reengagement of Latino students who later reenter school, an exploration of this phenomenon and its surrounding factors was called for here. Given the goals of providing an opportunity for voice and informing school reform efforts, a qualitative phenomenological research design was a logical choice, because qualitative researchers focus on uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon (Merriam, 2009) as they seek to understand how people interpret their experiences and how they construct their worlds. The first goal could have categorized the study as basic research in which the researcher is driven solely by intellectual interest in a phenomenon. However, this study also had the goals of informing school reform efforts on better engaging Latino learners and potentially improving the field of education. The latter goals required a research design that clearly placed the study into the applied research category in which the researcher aimed to improve practice in a particular discipline.

The data acquired from this phenomenological study was interpreted through a critical theorist lens with social justice in mind. The phenomenological component of the study focused on the experience of individual students and considered the data and themes obtained through the context of the participants' experiences. Central to critical

theory was the examination of power dynamics (Merriam, 2009). Who has power, how is it distributed and negotiated, how is the distribution reinforced, and how are those who are marginalized affected (Merriam, 2009)? The critical aspect of this research transitioned it from not only seeking to understand a phenomenon but to also seeking to create greater equity in education.

### **Participants**

Current students and recent graduates (within 5 years) of high schools and alternative schools within the same region were invited to participate in the study. All participants were former dropouts who reentered school. I included both graduates and current students to include a broader perspective. My belief was that the perspectives of these two groups could vary. The current students have the benefit of the experience being more recent whereas the graduates might have the benefit of hindsight, successful graduation, and more maturity.

The study was conducted in a rural, resort Rocky Mountain region. The Latino population of the area primarily consisted of immigrants (first generation) and their children born in the United States (second generation). Participants were initially chosen based on a convenience sampling according to the definition of Briggs et al. (2012). The majority of the participants had attended alternative schools. The alternative schools were from two separate rural, resort communities that rely on the ski resorts and recreational tourism for their economic base. The participants primarily lived in bedroom communities that provided the workforce for neighboring resort areas.

Seven participants all came from the another valley also linked by a string of small towns. Six participants attended an alternative school referred to here by the

pseudonym of Snowy Ridge High School (SRHS). It was located in a town of less than 10,000 residents with a median household income of less than \$55,000 and an estimated 16% living below the poverty level in 2014 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In that town, an estimated 30% of the residents were Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The alternative school functioned separately from the public school district and drew students from four neighboring school districts over an approximately 90 square mile area. The school offered individualized programming with supportive advisory services. The student body of 90 consisted of 40% Latino and 55% White students. Nine percent received special education services and 3% received ELL services. Sixty percent qualified for free and reduced lunch and 9% were identified as homeless according to the legal definition (McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act, 2001).

Additionally, one participant had previously attended another nearby alternative school and that school was part of the public school district. The sole participant, Alejandro, who had returned to a traditional school was in a nearby small bedroom town outside of the ski resort. This school was not focused on in this study, because Alejandro's experience differed from the rest of the participants in that he was not disengaged before dropping out (see the introduction to Alejandro in Chapter IV).

The remaining three participants attended an alternative school referred to by the pseudonym of Pleasant Mountain High School (PMHS). It was located in another valley and mountain community that also consisted of a string of small towns. The school had campuses in two mountain towns and was an Expeditionary Learning School (Berger, 2016). The three participants attended a campus in an unincorporated area with a population of over 10,000 residents in 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to

U.S. Census Bureau (2010) estimates for 2014, the median household income in the area was over \$77,000 with over 14% living below the poverty level. An estimated 34% of the residents were Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The alternative high school was part of the public school district and primarily drew students from within that school district. The school had a student body of 190 students consisting of approximately 70% Latino and 30% White students. Twenty percent qualified for special needs services and 40% qualified for ELL services. Almost 70% qualified for free and reduced lunch and 30% were homeless according to the legal definition (McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Improvements Act, 2001).

After Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix A), I obtained consent from the school district and alternative schools in the region. (See Appendix B for request letters and Appendix C for consent and assent forms.) My contacts in the schools were principals, counselors, and ELL teachers. After explaining my study, I asked them to extend an invitation to participate to potential participants who previously dropped out and then reentered school. With permission from potential participants, those educators then provided me with the contact information of those who were interested and provided potential participants with my contact information. I contacted those who expressed interest in being part of the study. I informed all participants that confidentiality would be maximized to protect their identity. In reporting, I used pseudonyms for any identifying information, as in the names of people, schools, and the region.

Participants who were emancipated and 18 years of age or over were asked to sign a consent form. Minors under the age of 18 or those who had not yet emancipated were given both a consent and assent form. Parents signed the consent form first and then

minors signed the assent form before participation in the study began (see Appendix C for consent and assent forms). Attached to the consent and assent forms was an index card for the participant's name, contact information, age, gender, school, ethnicity, grade level status, and current GPA. The index cards also asked if participants had been present and attending for the majority of school days within the past month. I used these index cards in my selection process and in organization of the data. Potential participants were excluded from this study if their reentry into school was court mandated or if it was clear from their attendance or GPA that they had not successfully reentered into school. To further clarify, if the student was absent a majority of days within the previous month or had a GPA of lower than 1.5, then h/she was excluded. From the convenience sample, I purposefully selected a minimum of six participants with the goal of achieving a balanced distribution of males and females. For phenomenological research, Dukes (1984) recommended 3 to 10 participants. For qualitative research in general, Merriam (2009) contended that this number should be flexible and may need to be adjusted during the investigation. The aim was to reach a level of saturation through redundancy of data that supports the emerging themes (Merriam, 2009). See Table 1 for a summary of the participant demographics.

Table 1

*Population and Sample*

Population	Number
<b>Gender</b>	
Female	5
Male	5
<b>Age Range</b>	
16-17 years	2
18-20 years	7
21-25 years	1
<b>Country of Birth</b>	
El Salvador	1
Mexico	8
United States	1
<b>School Type</b>	
Traditional	1
Alternative	9
<b>High School Graduation Status</b>	
Student	7
Graduate	3

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$N = 10$

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative researchers often collect data in a naturally-occurring setting where the participants experience the issue or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, for as many as possible, I held the interviews in the schools of the participants. There were two

exceptions. I held Skype and phone interviews with the oldest participant, as he had moved to another region. I also held one interview in a restaurant, because the participant's school was closed for the summer. All names of participants and locations were changed to protect the identity and confidentiality of the participants.

My bachelor's degree in Spanish and my experience in teaching language/bilingual education for many years provided me with the Spanish fluency to communicate with participants and families in either language. I provided participants and parents with permission forms and interviews in their choice of either Spanish or English. Participants also had the option of participating in the interviews using either Spanish or English.

Once parent consent was obtained if needed, I conducted individual interviews in a private location at the school. Each interview began with an introduction of my research and obtaining assent or consent as appropriate. Interviews were audio-recorded. Depending on the time of day, I provided food and refreshments for in-person interviews. Students could receive reimbursement for minimal transportation costs associated with traveling to and from the interview if not already at school, but that proved unnecessary as all participants were already at school. The interview questions were primarily semi-structured in order to avoid leading questions (see Appendix D for interview questions). I asked participants about their history and process of dropping out then reentering school. They were asked to define obstacles, as well as supports, that they believe affected their trajectory through school.

Following the interviews, I and hired transcriptionists transcribed them. Some of the transcripts I transcribed alone. Of the transcripts for which I hired transcriptionists, I

then reviewed everything for accuracy and made any necessary changes. Once interviews were transcribed and initial data analysis occurred, I held follow-up interviews with any participants with whom I needed clarification on any remaining questions. Follow-up was done in-person, through email, or phone call. This also provided an opportunity for member checks for increased credibility (see Credibility and Trustworthiness section).

### **Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data, I used a basic inductive and comparative analysis strategy common to qualitative research (Merriam, 2009). An inductive process of gathering data to build theories is a fundamental characteristic of phenomenological research, as opposed to a deductive process of testing hypotheses (as in a positivist approach). I used inductive reasoning by coding open-ended responses into logical categories. Creswell (2013) described it as an inductive-deductive logic process, because the researcher employs deductive thinking while building themes and checking them against the data. I also used horizontalization as described by Merriam (2009) as initially examining all the data as having equal weight and then organizing them into possible categories or themes. Another strategy used in phenomenological research is phenomenological reduction or continually returning to the essence of the experience to develop the meaning behind the experience (Merriam, 2009). I continued to do that as I uncovered pertinent themes. My background and experience likely guided my deductive logic to draw conclusions about common themes found in the responses. Another strategy common to phenomenological research is that of imaginative variation which I tried to use. It consists of viewing the phenomenon or experience from different perspectives (Merriam, 2009).

More specifically, I read and reread the transcripts until the experiences of the participants and the stories surrounding them began to crystalize. I entered the data into the data analysis software NVIVO. I used an open-coding process in identifying segments of data that might respond to my research questions. In addition, if other themes evolved that may not directly relate to the research question I tried to include them. As I reviewed my notes of the data, I grouped my comments (codes) into categories. Then I used axial (or analytical) coding to interpret or reflect on the meaning of my comments (codes). I continued to revise and refine my categories and subcategories as I wrote the findings. Any discrepant cases were included in the discussion of the data analysis in Chapter IV.

### **Limitations, Assumptions, and Delimitations**

There were potential limitations to this study related to the nature of human fallacy. The first can be found in the nature of self-reporting since I was relying on the participants' ability to recall information accurately. Because I asked them to describe their experience, their perceptions may be influenced by biases. Participants also might have chosen to answer in a more socially desirable way when describing their own behaviors and attitudes. While my assumption is that they reported honestly and candidly, I realized that may not always have been the case, thus presenting a concern. Two additional potential limitations might have been the number of available participants as well as the time constraints required for dissertation completion.

Dukes (1984) identified the limitations specific to phenomenological methodology as requiring flexibility, patience, ingenuity, and continual self-checking on the part of the researcher. Another potential limitation in the research design and data

interpretation is that of my own personal biases. Creswell (2012, 2013) asserted the importance of reflexivity to decrease bias. This means that the researcher reflects on her own biases, values, and philosophical assumptions and includes them in the research (Creswell, 2012, 2013).

Merriam (2009) indicated that a phenomenological study begins with the researcher examining her own experience with the phenomenon to become aware of personal bias and assumptions before data collecting (see my examination in the Researcher Bias section). Only then is she better able to bracket her biases and assumptions during the interview phase (Merriam, 2009). The researcher tries to “bracket” herself out of the study in order to better engage with the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). She does this by temporarily setting aside prior beliefs so as to not cloud her understanding of elements of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). I worked toward the goal of bracketing during data collection in that I wanted to remain open-minded and clearly understand the participant. A strategy I used to clarify my understanding is to paraphrase often the essence of the participant’s message. I suspect that bracketing becomes more difficult during the data analysis portion, because I, as a human being, am likely to create assumptions based on my previous knowledge and biases. An example of a more obvious bias that I hold is the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities among racial/ethnic groups (see Researcher Bias section for more elaboration). This bias was evident in my choice for this study of critical research theory as the theoretical framework. Given that, I needed to make sure to not project my biases of inequity onto the participants’ opinions. I did that by continually reflecting on the process, as well as including any discrepant or

contradictory data. Throughout this process however, when I discovered additional previously held biases and assumptions, I recorded those in my research journal and disclosed them in my final dissertation manuscript.

Finally, the delimitations imposed by the researcher were as follows. The study was limited to one regional area that encompassed separate rural resort mountain communities. It included students and recent graduates primarily from two alternative schools that serve separate school districts from different communities. It included the maximum of ten participants. The participants were only those students who had dropped out and reentered school.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Researchers use various strategies to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). One of the most valuable strategies for establishing credibility is that of member checks (or respondent validation). Merriam (2009) described member checks as a critical tool for ensuring internal reliability by gathering feedback of the preliminary analysis. Instead of giving participants transcripts or raw data, Creswell (2013) gives them his preliminary analyses with description or themes. Merriam (2009) reiterated that, although the description or themes are interpretations and may include different wording, participants should be able to recognize their experience in the interpretation or offer modifications to better express their perspectives. Merriam (2009) recommended asking whether the interpretation “rings true.” After my initial analysis of the data, I conducted member checks by giving three participants lists of key participant comments grouped by emerging themes. I asked them to consider my interpretation and comment on whether my initial analysis was plausible.

More specifically, I asked chosen participants, “Please take a look at the themes based on what I have heard from participants and tell me if you think the themes seem true and reasonable.” I documented their comments, as well as the resulting actions I took in response to their feedback. Follow-up and member checks were done in-person, through email, or phone call.

Another method is ensuring adequate engagement in data collection (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) defined it as the data and emerging findings indicate a level of saturation, as in the information gleaned from the data becomes repetitive. I, with some services from hired transcriptionists, transcribed and analyzed data throughout the collection process. The process indicated that I had arrived at the level of saturation when I found myself repeatedly grouping similar comments that supported the same themes. An approach that complements the strategy of adequate engagement that I used is negative case analysis (or discrepant case analysis). Negative case analysis is when a researcher intentionally seeks data that might challenge the emerging findings (Merriam, 2009).

Yet another method provided in this study was reflexivity. Merriam (2009) recommended a self-examination section that includes a critical self-reflection of one’s biases and assumptions regarding the research. Creswell (2012, 2013) recommended that reflexivity happen throughout the research. I continued to add to the critical self-reflection throughout the research and used it as I continually self-assessed as I attempted to bracket out my assumptions and biases. I have included the results of my reflexivity process in the following section.

### **Researcher Bias**

I am Latina from my father's side of the family. As a young child, I believed that being brown signified shame and lower social status. I wanted to be White and I ignored the Spanish around me. I felt embarrassed by my great-grandmother's limited English and did not like when my grandparents spoke Spanish to me.

As an adult, I moved to a mountain resort town and met more families who led international lives. They valued multilingualism and multiculturalism for their children. I started to question my previously held biases about bilingualism and biculturalism. I began working in a school with a bilingual program and studying multicultural issues. I came to understand that I had internalized the falsehood of superiority of a majority language and culture. I learned that I did not have to choose one culture over another and came to understand how richly I benefitted from bilingualism and biculturalism.

As a "professional" student for most of my adult life, I have studied multicultural education, equity issues, and linguistic diversity at both the undergraduate and graduate level. As an educator for over 20 years, I taught preschool through eighth grade in various educational models, including bilingual. My teaching endorsements are in linguistic diversity, bilingual education, and elementary education. Additionally, I hold a principal's license. My understanding of issues surrounding inequity, oppression, and discrimination at a personal, academic, and professional level will naturally inform my perspective throughout this study. Because of my background, I hold a personal assumption that, in a democracy, all students must have equal access to opportunity and quality public education.

A personal bias I hold is that the insidious message of superiority of one language and/or culture negatively impacts minority student achievement. (This is specific to a culture that is commonly assigned a lower status, as in the African-American and Latino cultures in the United States.) When students believe they are judged to be from an inferior culture, they often choose between dismissing their own culture to benefit from the majority culture (as I did) or cling to their minority culture to preserve their self-esteem while dismissing the majority culture. Either choice presents negative consequences. (The theoretical foundation for these beliefs is grounded in John U. Ogbu's work on minority status and education [Hamann, 2004; Ogbu & Simons, 1998].) I believe that when minority students do not see themselves in the curriculum and struggle with the issue of cultural status, it sets the ground for increased disengagement in schools. What I know from my personal, academic, and professional experience is that those who benefit the most are those who can label oppression for what it is and not internalize it. These are students who can navigate both cultures with no shame and, at the same time, reap the benefits from both cultures. Our schools serve to acculturate our students. We can either teach them to believe the falsehood of inferior cultures or we can teach them to think critically about equity issues. We can teach them to dismiss the benefits of one culture or we can teach them to reap bicultural (or multicultural) benefits while preserving one's self-esteem and achieving one's potential. If this were the case and if all students had equal access to opportunity and quality education, the achievement gap would not exist. This forms the basis of my personal bias in terms of educational and cultural identity.

My personal and professional goals include providing voice to an underserved population and discovering ways to improve our educational system so that all students have the opportunity to succeed. This study aimed to address those goals. Even though the methodology was inductive as I gathered data, the interpretive framework used to identify themes and draw conclusions was naturally that of a critical theory framework with the goal of social justice and increasing equitable access to opportunity.

### **Summary**

This phenomenological study focused on one aspect of the Latino achievement gap by examining the phenomenon of Latino dropouts and reentry into school. I also worked to uncover strategies for increasing achievement of Latino students. Through this process, I anticipated providing a vehicle that could offer voice to an underrepresented and underserved population. Additionally, I hoped to provide information for use in school reform for leaders and policy makers as well as make a positive contribution to the body of existing research surrounding educating Latinos and closing the achievement gap.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FROM THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE**

Of the 10 Latinos who graciously agreed to participate, five were male and five were female. All were under the age of 21, except for David who was 25 years old. Six of the ten were teenagers (ages 16 to 18) and four were adults. One participant happened to be a teen mother. Most were immigrants and all came from Latin American immigrant families. With the exception of Sara and Alejandro, all had grown up primarily in the United States. They were all living in rural mountain communities that provided much of the workforce for two separate resort areas. The fact that all participants except one had attended an alternative school reflected the challenge of finding participants who had reentered a traditional high school. At the writing of this dissertation, seven of the participants had graduated from high school, two were still pursuing their diploma, and one had dropped out again. Before delving into the themes that emerged from this study, I have inserted a section with personal information shared by each participant to allow the reader to capture a glimpse of each person. The following introductions are listed by age at the time of initial interview, from youngest to oldest.

#### **Meet the Participants**

##### **Natalie**

As the youngest participant, Natalie was sixteen years old and had grown up in the same Rocky Mountain region. She and her mother were from Mexico and undocumented. Her father lived in Mexico and she had not seen him in eleven years.

Natalie did not comment on the education level of her parents. The only U.S.-documented resident in the household was her younger sister who was born in this country. Of all the participants in this study, she seemed to be the most in crisis at home and the farthest from graduating.

Natalie seemed to carry the weight of the world on her shoulders. Her single mother came from an abusive and desperate past. As her mother struggled to find reliable work without legal documentation, Natalie was concerned with helping her family survive. For cheaper rent, they lived in a decrepit tiny trailer far from the resort community, yet commuting meant the risk of driving without a driver's license and insurance.

Even though she had attended school in the same Rocky Mountain region her entire life, she experienced moves in housing that were disruptive to her education. She described herself as previously engaged in school. She had participated in sports, was respectful of teachers, and had a good relationship with them. In her sophomore year, she moved to a different school district and was not immediately accepted into her neighborhood high school because of the timing of the semester. Since she did not want to attend that school anyway because of rumors she had heard, she dropped out. The threat of truancy charges brought her to Snowy Ridge High School after several weeks. During that time, she "was just at home doing nothing." She described herself as continuing a disengaged pattern as a student for the rest of that sophomore year. At the time of the initial interview, Natalie was focused on making up for lost time and hoped to graduate the following year.

She spoke of her dreams of going to college and becoming a legal resident. She viewed legal documentation and education as key to a better future. However, she had limited information about the steps to achieve those goals. She wanted “papers” to access job opportunities but also so she could visit her father in Mexico after she graduated. She wanted to financially help her family in the future and also hoped to someday work with infants and children with special needs. She made a point of adding that getting pregnant would not be a problem for her as far as finishing high school, because she never wanted to have children of her own.

### **Sara**

During Sara’s initial interview, she appeared wide-eyed and enthusiastic in a way that gave her an open, bubbly quality. She seemed happy to share her experience, yet frequently, she shrugged shyly, spoke quietly and appeared timid. Sara was 17 years old and from Mexico. She had spent four years of her childhood in the United States between the ages of six and 10. At 10, she returned to Mexico. In her sophomore year of high school, she returned to the United States. Until that point, Sara had always liked and valued school. She remembered being a highly-engaged student until the 10th grade. She attended her neighborhood traditional high school then dropped out twice. Then, she unsuccessfully tried another traditional high school and dropped out again. Each dropout period only lasted a matter of weeks and during those periods she would stay at home. Sara wanted to continue her education, but despised her experiences in her traditional high schools. In the end, she found success at Snowy Ridge High School.

She lived with her single mother who only had the opportunity to attend school through middle school and was married at 15 years old. Sara’s father did attend some

high school, however she was not in contact with him. Her mother encouraged Sara to stay in school, become educated, and go to college. Sara also felt the need to be a strong role model for her two younger siblings by becoming educated. Incidentally, we did not discuss the documentation status of her or her family members, so I do not know if documentation was a hindrance in her life.

She spoke slowly and quietly when talking about her dropout process yet became more animated when talking about her experiences and achievements since arriving at an alternative high school. She had volunteered and gone on trips with her school. She felt proud that she had secured a job that helped her become more outgoing. She elaborated on her accomplishments,

Pude agarrar mis dos becas . . . y pude ir a tomar, gracias a la escuela, . . . una clase de college algebra . . . . Agarré una A . . . . También agarré un certificado de Personal Care Attendant (I was able to get my two scholarships . . . and I could take, thanks to the school . . . a college algebra class . . . . I got an A . . . . I also got a Personal Care Attendant certificate).

She had just recently graduated with clear career goals. Her excitement grew as she talked about the pride she felt and the next chapter of her life. She was going to the local community college. She wanted to be a nurse and go to medical school. She would be the first in her family to graduate from high school and the first to go to college,

Voy a ser la primera en mi familia en ir. . . . Me siento orgullosa de eso porque a pesar de que . . . salí muchas veces de la escuela y no iba, sí pude. . . . Estoy feliz, porque sí se puede (laughed) (I will be the first in my family to go. . . . I feel proud of that, because although I left school many times and I wasn't going, I could do it. . . . I am happy, because, yes, you can do it (laughed)).

### **Liliana**

Within two weeks, Liliana would also graduate from Snowy Ridge High School where she attended a program for teen mothers. She was 18 years old and from Mexico.

She did not comment on when she arrived to the United States or much about her childhood outside of the topic of school. She described herself as not very engaged throughout her school career and not really caring. However she did remember paying attention in the eighth grade and having good attendance. She became disengaged from school and had poor attendance in the ninth grade. Then she dropped out in the 10th grade. When she was not in school, she was “just hanging out with my friends, doing drugs, drinking, not really caring.” She then became pregnant, and enrolled in an alternative high school. She dropped out again and then reentered to graduate. She never mentioned her parents or whether they influenced her educational decisions.

At the beginning of the interview, Liliana initially spoke with an expressionless face and eyes at half mass that gave her an indifferent appearance. However, her appearance softened and she became more animated as she spoke of her son and her experience in an alternative program. She began to smile and laugh more as she expressed gratitude for a peaceful school with a hippy “vibe.” She liked that she could bring her son to school, “he’s here with me. He’s learning, he’s learning with me, so, we’re both pretty much in school.”

We did not discuss immigrant documentation status, so I do not know if that was a hindrance in her life. Liliana described her dreams of becoming a registered nurse and full-time mom. She felt driven to ensure a good future for her son. She hoped to provide for him so that he would not have to suffer like she and other poorly educated young Latina mothers had suffered. She felt acute responsibility for serving as a positive role model in his life and the resulting feeling of pressure, “As a single mom, I feel like I have to be super mom.”

**Erik**

Erik was 18 years old and was weeks away from graduation as well. He appeared easy-going, and social as he interacted with various students and teachers with an impressive level of ease. He seemed to be well liked.

He did not talk much about his childhood outside of his school experiences. Before his junior year, he had been a very engaged student. He was an athlete who dreamed of playing sports competitively. The primary motivating force for his engagement in school was his commitment to football and wrestling. He reminisced:

I felt like I belonged, just because . . . coming out of eighth grade, I was like ready to play football. The high school football coach had already asked me, like, my first three games, I played varsity, and freshmans (*sic*) don't get to play varsity, but I did. . . . that's when I felt like I belonged, that's why I kept pushing and striving.

In his junior year, he started falling behind in the content and began to feel hopeless. He dropped out for two and a half months. When asked what he was doing during that time, he said, "just staying home, kind of feeling really, really depressed, really, really down." He then enrolled in Snowy Ridge High School. Erik expressed a deep appreciation for the alternative programming and additional support he had received in his alternative school. He did not mention his parents, their educational expectations, or the influence they may have had on his educational decisions.

Although Erik was from Mexico, we did not speak of immigrant documentation status and whether it affected his future opportunities. He was looking forward to graduating and felt proud of this accomplishment. He loved cars and had already registered for the auto mechanics program at a local community college.

**Stefán**

When I met Stefán, he was 18 years old and had freshly sewn stitches on his lip that were the result of a physical altercation. As he recalled the event that led to the sutures, he stated, “It was pretty messed up.” He did not appear to want to elaborate, so I quickly shifted the conversation to the interview questions. Initially in the interview, he spoke with little expression on his face while looking at me out of the corner of his eye in a way that gave him a guarded appearance. As we continued, he began to look directly at me and began to appear increasingly relaxed.

Stefán arrived from Mexico when he was four years old and grew up in the Rocky Mountains. He had two younger brothers. Stefán never liked school, even as a young child. “School wasn’t for me,” he recalled. He disliked many of his teachers, the students, the schools, and waking up in the morning. Throughout his school years, he got into trouble. He dropped out of school for half of his freshman year and all of his sophomore year. During much of that time, he worked. Then he enrolled in Pleasant Mountain High School. Even after reentering school, he continued to dislike it, but he came to recognize the value of finishing to his future. He appeared focused on getting his diploma and described himself as an engaged student now. He emphasized, “I just do it because I have to do it. Because I wanna help myself.”

He alluded to having significant social and trust issues throughout his life. In high school, he despised the “drama.” His friends tended to be older and also got into trouble. He admittedly created social barriers for teachers and peers. In high school, he tested every teacher to see if she/he really cared about him and saw him as capable of something better. Only if the teacher passed his test would he attend and pass a class. He regretted

treating teachers poorly and had come to realize that, “The teachers are here to help us . . . to become something better.” He admitted that he continues to test peers and authority figures with, as he described it, crazy behavior to see if they can see past it and appreciate him for who he is. He viewed this self-protection tactic as positive, because he knew whom he could trust and, as a result, had made loyal friends.

Stefán did not mention immigrant documentation status and whether it provided a hindrance. Nor did he comment on the educational attainment and expectations of his parents, so it was unclear as to what extent they might have influenced his educational decisions. He did talk about his father’s encouragement to find something that he loves and pursue it. At the time of the interview, he and his parents were working in the food service industry. He loved good food and, even though he enjoyed the benefit of eating well, his future goals did not include the food industry. He hoped to study business in college and attend mechanic school, so he can obtain a better job. He wished to provide a better financial future for his family. Unfortunately, at the writing of this dissertation, Stefán had dropped out again.

### **Alejandro**

Alejandro’s story was a stark contrast from those of the other participants. As the only participant to return to a traditional school, his school experience was positive overall. Moreover, he had none of the feelings of regret and self-blame portrayed by other participants. He came from a place where public education for all could not be taken for granted and he only planned to be in the United States temporarily.

He was 18 years old and about to graduate. He described his plan of working in this country and then returning to El Salvador in five years. We did not discuss immigrant

documentation status or whether it might have served as a factor in employment. He was doing what he could to support his family financially while taking advantage of educational opportunities available to him. He had lived in the United States for four years with his mother. His father and four siblings were still in El Salvador. He explained that he wanted to work while here and he viewed a high school diploma as a path to increased opportunity. Moreover, he hoped to please his parents by graduating. His mother had only attended school until the fourth grade and his father never had the opportunity. He clearly appreciated that opportunity.

Alejandro described himself as a very engaged student until his senior year. He always liked school. He had good relationships with teachers and perceived them as willing to provide support. He had friends and felt a sense of belonging at school. He explained, “Pienso que es divertirse al estudiar y todo de dedicarse a estudiar y echarle ganas (I think it is fun to study and dedicate oneself to study and put forth effort).” In his senior year, he dropped out three times each approximately for a month. During that time, he worked to support his family. At the time of the interview, he did not consider himself entirely engaged, but was doing what he needed to graduate while working to help financially support his family.

### **Flora**

When I met Flora, her eyebrows were drawn in severe peaks that initially gave her a hardened appearance. She began the interview with an expressionless face and eyes somewhat narrowed in a way that seemed guarded. Yet, the façade quickly melted and she became more animated and emotional while talking about her past mistakes, intense gratitude for her teachers, and how much she had come to value education.

Raised primarily by aunts and uncles, she grew up with no consistent parental support in unstable environments and moved frequently. Her mother had only attended school through the fourth grade. She explained that her mother worked too much to raise her and “she had a lot of things going on.” She often had no one to tell her to go to school, so she and her sister skipped school a lot. Throughout her life, she often lived with whatever relative or friend would take her and her sister. Sometimes the situation included their mother and sometimes not. When she was six years old, an aunt and uncle paid for her and her sister to be brought illegally to the United States from Mexico. Yet, she did not attend school until the third grade and does not remember ever being an engaged student. She had poor attendance throughout her school years and, in middle school, had an assigned truancy advocate.

She openly admitted to being emotionally troubled and angry as a child and teen. Throughout her school years, she was often in trouble and got into fights frequently. As a result of the truancy reduction program, she did receive some counseling and anger management training. She entered Snowy Ridge High School as a freshman where she inconsistently remained throughout her high school years. She had difficulty quantifying her total dropout period, because of her excessive truancy throughout her school career. Toward the end of her high school years, truancy became less of an issue. During the periods when she was not in school, she would stay home, take care of the household and family members, or “hang out” with friends. She would return to school when faced with the threat of legal issues with regard to truancy.

When I met her, she was 19 and living with her mother and stepfather. She had finished all her required classes and would graduate in three days. She talked of her

realization that “education is the key to the future.” She struggled to express the deep appreciation and gratitude she felt for her teachers who continually supported and challenged her to do better, in spite of mistakes along the way. Flora was looking forward to the future in spite of a keen understanding of the reality of the job market as an undocumented worker. She had just received a scholarship to a local community college. She was considering a career in health care and had recently obtained a Personal Care Attendant certificate. She began to share her dreams of helping others, but then shifted the conversation to a more limited reality,

I want to help people. . . . I want to make the world a better place too, but I don’t know. How can I do that? . . . I just want to work. Like, go to college but also work, just be an independent person.

### **Aurora**

Aurora was an upbeat and candid participant who was passionate about sharing her life lessons so others may make better choices. At the time, she was 19 years old and was packing in many classes to try and finish her last year of high school. She had dropped out for two years. During that time, she worked and helped to support her parents. She also attended some GED classes but never followed through with taking the tests as she was intimidated by the fact that the test could only be taken twice. Her confidence was admittedly low at that point and she was afraid of failing. Then she enrolled at Pleasant Mountain High School.

Aurora’s parents had always been supportive of her education. She described them as “very smart.” In Mexico, her mother had gone to school for nursing and her father had dreamed of being a history teacher, but did not complete his education. At the time of her initial interview, her mom was disabled and had been injured on the job. Her

disability and lack of legal documentation meant that she could not find employment. Her father was working in construction. Aurora commented on a feeling of financial insecurity if her father were to become injured.

Aurora described herself as artistic and not brainy. She alluded to quickly giving up if not successful. Her parents encouraged her to get involved in everything in school. She tried one sport, but was not successful. She did not try another. She blamed herself for not being the type of person who would ask questions when not understanding the class content. Yet, she used to help her brother, three years her senior, with his high school work. She was confused by the fact that her brother was a struggling student who graduated on time, yet she reached a point in her academic career in which the work became too rigorous to continue. She felt the expectations for her brother were different than for her and suspected that the school had significantly increased their academic expectations by the time she was in high school.

She viewed herself as an engaged student until the 11th grade and as a reengaged student now. She had arrived to the United States from Mexico at the age of seven and felt that school was easy. She continued to feel a sense of engagement and success. She would take notes and pay attention. She valued the content and felt a sense of belonging, but in the 11th grade, she didn't feel like she fit in, because "everybody got too smart and I didn't; I stayed behind." She expressed deep regret for dropping out and lamented the time lost during her dropout period.

She wanted to spread the knowledge of her lesson to others who think it's cool to drop out. When she talked about preventing others from doing the same, her eyes lit up much like a person with a newfound religion. It was as if, within her, she held valuable

knowledge that must be shared to better the lives of others. She appeared eager to lecture any disengaged teen that might be going down the same path as she did. She recalled a time when she tried to prevent others from making the same mistakes,

I saw all these girls ditching from there. I got so pissed and I told them that they had to go back to school 'cause I was like, I used to do this, like stop it, don't do this . . . . Take some classes and instead of just ditching and not doing anything with your life, because that's not gonna take you anywhere. You're just ditching and not doing anything, not learning anything.

Aurora's immediate goal was to graduate from high school. She then planned to get documentation as a permanent resident through the yet-to-be-passed Dream Act (DREAM Act Portal, 2016). Although recently, she married a U.S. citizen and recognized that she may be able to achieve citizenship because of her marital status. Her long-term goals included achieving financial stability for herself and her parents. She explained that, if she becomes documented, she might be able to get her parents documented. Then her parents could start a business or her mother could go back to working as a nurse, as she had in Mexico. With the idea of graduating and obtaining legal documentation, Aurora envisioned a brighter future. At the writing of this dissertation, Aurora had graduated and was hoping to go to college and study business so that she might have her own business someday.

### **Christian**

Christian was almost 21 years old at the time of the interview and the oldest enrolled student in this study. He arrived from Mexico just as he was turning six years old and moved to a border state. He moved to the Rocky Mountains at ten years old. He described himself as a person who likes having fun, learning new things, and working. He hoped to learn a third language, possibly French or Chinese.

He claimed to be an engaged student through the eighth grade. Throughout those years, he liked school, worked hard, tried to achieve as much as he could, and supported fellow students. If classmates had a problem, he supported them emotionally by talking to them about it. Up to the point of entering high school, he had a good relationship with teachers and tried not to get in trouble. Although, he admitted that he wasn't always successful in staying out of trouble. For him, high school was the turning point and it was "where everything just came down hill."

At the time of the interview, he indicated he was currently an engaged student overall at Pleasant Mountain High School. Although his level of engagement was admittedly inconsistent. He had a clear desire to graduate and claimed to get everything done when focused. He implied that his focus waned at times and that transportation issues were affecting his attendance. To attend his alternative school, he had to walk in a mountainous region for two hours each way or rely on others for a ride. Even though he claimed, "It sucks to be 21 and trying to graduate. . . . It's stressing," it relieved some of the stress to be in an alternative school setting with peers of similar experience.

At the time, he was getting temporary work wherever he could, often as a construction worker, dishwasher, or cook. Christian expressed a strong sense of responsibility for helping his mother financially. As an undocumented worker and single mother, she struggled to support the two of them. Christian did not mention his father. Neither did he mention the education level of his mother nor how her expectations might have influenced his educational decisions. He dropped out on three different occasions for a total of about two and a half years. He left school twice to support himself and his mother, and another time, because he "didn't get along with some people." During that

time, he was working, looking for work, or “chilling with friends” who were not in school. Each time, he reentered school, because his top priority was becoming documented as a legal resident. He believed this was the path to alleviate the stress of living as an undocumented worker and increase his job opportunities. He hoped to attend a college in Texas. Christian wanted to be both a contractor and engineer so he could save money by providing both services on the job.

### **David**

At 25 years old, David was the oldest participant. He was born in the United States and raised in the same Rocky Mountain region. His father, a carpenter, was born in Mexico and his mother, a housekeeper, was born in El Salvador. His father completed high school, “but barely” he said, laughingly. His father struggled in school and his primary motivation for graduating was tied to his desire to go to the United States. A family member had promised to help his father come to this country, but only if he graduated from high school. David’s mother, however, dropped out in the fifth grade. We did not discuss the documentation status of his parents nor whether it influenced their job opportunities.

David viewed himself as a fairly engaged student and had good relationships with teachers. He felt supported by them. As an ELL student, he remembered receiving additional reading comprehension support in elementary school. He felt confident with his math skills and remembered being placed in advanced classes in sixth grade. In the seventh grade, his level of engagement began to decline and continued into high school. He dropped out in his freshman year for a period of seven months. During that time, he worked doing jobs he disliked for little pay. He appeared to be a highly reflective person

as he openly discussed mistakes along the way that led to his process of disengaging and dropping out.

After dropping out and then reentering an alternative high school, David lacked confidence in his academic skills when it came to considering college. As a graduate of Snowy Ridge High School, he questioned whether he would be able to compete with students from traditional high schools. Fortunately, he was recruited into a precollegiate program. It not only validated his academic skills and potential, but helped him see that college was a viable option for him.

David talked about the sense of pride he now feels with his accomplishments. He graduated from college with a Bachelor of Science degree in construction management. He was working as an estimator and project manager for a construction company. During his interview, he appeared to be a highly social person as he talked about the social aspects of school at each stage in his school career. As a person who was highly socially-motivated, he commented on how few Latino students he met while in college, “When I went to college, I didn’t see a whole lot of Latinos there, but the few that I did meet and the few that I did become close to, . . . I thought it was really cool to see Latinos going to college.”

### **Themes that Emerged**

After reading and rereading the interview transcripts, clear themes began to appear. Topics addressed by a minimum of four participants were officially designated as themes. What emerged was multi-faceted. To align with the literature review, the themes were organized under the categories of institutional, environmental, and individual.

## **Institutional Factors**

The most abundant data emerged under the category of institutional factors.

Under this category, participants commented on the theme of individual support more than on any other theme. Table 2 depicts the number of participants who addressed each theme in this category.

Table 2

### *Institutional Themes*

Themes	Number of Participants Commenting (out of 10)
Individual Support	9
Academic Support	6
Wider Range of Support	3
Instruction and Relevance	4
Relationship with Educators	8

**Individual support.** Of all the themes that arose, the participants had the most to say about individual support. Nine participants addressed the topic. I divided the topic of support between academic support and a wider range of support. However, the two often overlap.

*Academic support.* Six participants addressed the topic of academic support. Four of the ten participants perceived gaps in academic skills. They felt they lacked the support necessary to close those gaps. For example, as soon as Liliana entered high school, she felt it was too hard for her. She never liked school, but before the ninth grade, she was able to pay attention because she grasped the concepts taught in class.

Driven by school sports, Erik was an engaged student until his junior year. As a promising young athlete, he had the rare opportunity to play varsity sports as a freshman. Although he struggled academically throughout his school years, he was motivated to remain eligible for sports based on passing grades. He found himself in a cycle of his diminishing grades affecting his eligibility. Thus, he was playing less. When he was not producing on the field as before, teachers and coaches stopped providing the extra academic support previously afforded to him as a promising athlete.

My grades were so bad that I just wasn't playing anymore . . . so, at that point, they just wouldn't give me anymore time. So it's literally like, if you're playing a sport, you get their time, if you don't, you just get whatever you get in class and that's it.

By his junior year, he felt hopeless.

I mean, all the teachers represented that there wasn't any hope, they would pretty much tell you . . . at the rate you're going, you're going to be in school 'til you're twenty-one. You're not gonna be able to graduate. . . . you don't have the credits that are necessary. So, um, I started ditching school.

Erik lamented the lack of communication and support from teachers outside the classroom. He needed additional support, but did not feel comfortable asking clarifying questions in class, because of the negative responses he had received and witnessed in the past. It felt too risky. Christian also noted the lack of support he received,

They (teachers) don't know how to explain it, or they make the words too hard, or they just give you a pack of papers, so you can do "what I explained." And that's what I hate the most, is the pack of papers they used to give me.

Aurora experienced a skills gap and lack of support later in her school years. She was an engaged and confident learner until she began 11th grade math. At that point, she encountered the barrier of no longer understanding the content.

And then, when I didn't get it, the students around me wouldn't help me and I didn't want to ask the teacher, because I didn't like teachers. I was really

immature, you know? And I wouldn't be able to talk to people the way I talk to them now. . . . But when I got to 11th grade, it just seemed like I didn't fit in. It seemed like everybody got too smart, and I didn't. I stayed behind.

The skills gap led to her truancy.

This is getting too hard. . . . Like math, I couldn't get anything. Like, I immediately started ditching it, 'cause I couldn't get it. . . . And then, when I started ditching and seeing that when I would come back, I wouldn't get anything, I started ditching even more. . . . I wasn't passing that class or any of my math classes.

Unfortunately, the warnings she received from teachers were ineffective, such as, "if you keep ditching, you're probably going to end up just pregnant and like working in a Wendy's." She elaborated on the intervention she would have needed to be successful.

She needed additional instruction or a different approach:

At least, have a teacher . . . explain it a little bit deeper . . . because it was just, "go to class, learn, leave." And if you learned, you learned, if you didn't, you didn't. . . . I need like another class that could teach me everything but slower . . . or just more detail, not how they did it.

At the point of failing math, the school counselor told her she could not graduate from that school. She gave her two options: an alternative school or a GED program at a community college. She saw the options as either the "stoner school" or "the adult school." She did not like either option and did not want to tell her parents, so she dropped out.

When asked if there were other resources available to help her with math, she said, "Not at all. I didn't know there was help for that." She continually asked for a class where she could complete homework. Each time, she was denied because she did not have a learning disability. On the other hand, she received much needed support in the alternative school she attended. She described how the principal met regularly with her to monitor her progress and assess whether her programming was working for her, "He tells

you how you're doing, how many classes you need, if you need anything, he'll make sure he gets it for you, so that you're in a better environment for learning and your schedule."

Aurora also seemed surprised by the encouragement she receives from her job. Her boss wants to know her school schedule so he can work around it. He tells her, "School is first" and checks in with her on whether she attended and how it went. She said, "I don't know why, but he cares about it."

While David did not portray a skills gap, he recognized that, during his period of disengagement, he could have found academic support if he had sought it. Moreover, he later found the support system at his alternative school to be beneficial. He was assigned an advisor who oversaw much of his work and progress. David appreciated that he pushed him and motivated him to graduate.

And he would do a really good job of motivating me and letting me know, "hey, if you don't get it done . . . it's not going to work out and . . . you're just going to be in the same boat."

As the oldest and having achieved a bachelor's degree, David described very specific support and opportunity that led to his success. One impactful and life-changing opportunity was his involvement in a pre-collegiate program. The director helped him to see college as an option. She helped him fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), scholarship forms, and college applications. He attended a two-week pre-collegiate session on a college campus. That experience quelled his insecurities about his academic abilities and in fact, validated his skills.

I remember, before going there, I was kind of worried about the academics, because I thought, "Man I'm not going to a traditional high school and am probably a lot dumber than these kids in the classes that they take." . . . I did pretty well. . . . I felt really good after that. I felt like I could actually go to college and I could actually graduate high school after I had passed those classes. I felt really good about myself. It gave me more confidence in my academic ability.

Sara's struggles and experiences were more a result of a language gap. As an engaged student, she had always loved school. She moved back to the United States for a second time in her sophomore year. As soon as she began classes, she struggled to communicate even though she had spent four years in a U.S. school as a young child. She felt insecure and alone, because she could not communicate in English. She described one particular event:

Una maestra me preguntó algo y no le supe contestar bien, y recuerdo que se rieron de mí, y eso creó inseguridad. . . . fue un cambio muy drástico . . . yo me quería regresar de nuevo a México para seguir estudiando. Entonces venir para acá y tener que continuar mis estudios aquí fue difícil adaptarme . . . (a teacher asked me something and I didn't know how to answer and I remember that they laughed at me and that created insecurity . . . it was a drastic change . . . I wanted to go back to Mexico to continue studying. So coming here and having to continue my studies here made it hard to adapt . . .).

She stopped attending then went back for a short period with no success. Then she tried another traditional high school, "Y fue lo mismo. No me sentía encajada. Estaba sola. (And it was the same. I didn't feel like I fit in. I was alone.)" She switched to English when describing the support she later received at Snowy Ridge High School:

In the big schools . . . I didn't have like much communication with them . . . they didn't ask what I was doing, if I needed help with anything. I didn't feel as (much) support. But as soon as I came to (the alternative school), since it's a smaller school . . . they were always umm, asking me, "Have you done this?" or "Look we can do this to help you." . . . I felt better support here . . . more attention.

Participants who struggled academically and/or had excessive absences eventually encountered a credit gap. This meant they were not on track to graduate on time. Four of the participants portrayed a hopeless situation with regard to graduating from their traditional high school because of that gap. Aurora was simply told she could not graduate from her school. David was told that in his freshman year he was not on

track to graduate. Sara realized very quickly that she was missing many credits and Erik recalled:

I mean, all the teachers represented that there wasn't any hope. They would pretty much tell you, . . . "you're going to be in school 'til you're 21. You're not going to be able to graduate . . . you don't have the credits that are necessary. "

Even though four participants mentioned the topic of credit gap, it was not designated as a theme because it was more the result of other underlying factors discussed previously and in the following themes.

***Wider range of support.*** Included in the following category are services other than what might be provided in a typical classroom. For instance, during Natalie's troubled childhood, she needed more emotional support to be successful in school. In elementary school, she needed someone to ask her about the bruises she received from the physical abuse from her father.

Like, no one would ever question it . . . that . . . just also keeps you away from school . . . you're not focused, you're like thinking, oh what's gonna happen to me when I get home. . . . no one would ever ask me about my Dad or my Mom. . . . I never told anyone about anything. I just kinda kept it to myself until I got to middle school . . . that's when I told everyone. . . . and I started getting help actually.

Flora also received services through a truancy reduction program for the middle school years she spent in an urban Rocky Mountain area. She had an assigned advocate who also served as somewhat of a buddy. She would monitor her school attendance and convince Flora to do extracurricular activities after school and during the summer. As a result, Flora also attended counseling sessions and anger management classes. Her advocate would help both Flora and her sister.

. . . she would help us with everything. She would help us with things we needed, like, you know, clothes or uniforms for school or food or whatever it was. She would help us. And she would meet with us all the time. . . . It did help, 'cause I

didn't used to get in trouble as much as I did. . . . And she'd just support me and my sister.

Flora and her sister then moved to a rural area. Unfortunately, the services that had kept her in school were no longer available to her in her new smaller community.

Stefán also could have benefited from counseling services, as his anger and trust issues impeded his education. He avoided going to school, because he did not want to deal with teachers. He would refuse help offered by his teachers. He admitted to treating teachers poorly as a test to see whether they really cared about him and whether they were able to manage his behavior. Most teachers failed his test by sending him to the office. "I used to be so mean like that, you know, but now I don't see it that way . . . it's just teachers doing their work, like me, a student, doing my work." He also avoided school, because he did not want to see students. There was "too much drama" at his traditional high school. He also tested peers by acting out to see if he could trust them. "I had friends, you know, but nobody has friends . . . I was sociable, yeah, but I never trusted people." He referred to a Spanish expression, "Mis amigos los cuento con los dedos de una mano (I count my friends with the fingers on one hand)."

**Instruction and relevance.** Four participants noted the instructional differences between their traditional schools and their alternative schools. Christian viewed the curriculum as more relevant than in his traditional high school. To him, it did not seem like school material, but rather useful skills and content to understand the world around him. He stated, "it's more about the actual outside world. . . . It seems real."

Erik also perceived the instruction as very different than that of a traditional school. The example he gave was, instead of going to science class, his class went on a

trip to see how solar remote control cars are made and they built cars. He described the instruction as more hands-on and social in which students talk to each other.

Instead of them making you sit in a class all day long, they stand you up, and they're like, "We are going to be hands on, like everybody talk to everybody." Like, that's how they do it here. They make you feel like learning is fun and it really is.

Liliana attended the same school as Erik. She reiterated the difference in instruction. She recalled, "Instead of doing schoolwork, we do, like, fun projects that are actually fun to listen to and learn about."

Flora's alternative school provided her with opportunities to learn about the world in a way she believed she would not have gotten otherwise. At her school, students chose from various experiential trips throughout the United States. She accredited the difference in instruction with inspiring her to want to make the world a better place. In particular, one trip to a Native American reservation made an impression on her. "And just, the stories they have and their history and culture . . . it's inspiring and I want to just be able to help them more."

**Relationship with educators.** Eight of the nine students who had attended an alternative school talked about the importance of having a relationship with a caring educator. The ninth student happened to be the youngest; her achievement, progress and goals seemed more tentative. The other participants spoke with more of a sense of accomplishment and hindsight.

As a former school athlete in a traditional high school, Erik had transitioned from feeling that teachers were interested in him to feeling completely invisible. Upon entering an alternative school, he knew immediately that teachers cared about him. He felt inspired.

And the first day I walked in here, instead of any other day at (his traditional high school) where they'd be like, "You can't, you can't," (here) they were like, "You can, you can, you can do anything you want" and this is the place to come if that's really what you believe.

He described close, supportive relationships with teachers in his alternative school:

I can feel how the teachers care and how they really do truly want to help everybody out and how they're here every day and they, they show us that they care and even, they give us our space, so that when we're a little bit flustered, a little bit stressed out, they give us our space to just come back and then once we come back, they're just there all over again and they don't leave our side. . . . I know for a fact that I can walk into this school and talk to anybody in the school about anything.

He credited the teachers in the alternative school with his success:

When I showed up here . . . I was a junior with the credits of a freshman and I'm a senior now. I'm graduating. . . . I'm already registered in the auto mechanics classes up at (the community college). . . . They let you know that, that you can do absolutely anything, as long as you set your mind to it. . . . And they provide that back-up in case you start doubting yourself.

Erik recalled the recent support and access provided by his advisor. He had her cell phone number and texted her, because the workload seemed insurmountable. He was losing all hope of graduating. She reassured him and committed to working on it all day. He explained, "She just let me know that everything was going to be alright. It's just that communication."

Flora described the transformation she underwent in an alternative setting. For the first time, she felt connected to teachers.

And I changed a lot when I came to this school. I used to be in trouble all the time. . . . And when I started here in school there was something different. Like, teachers are just, they understand more and they put themselves in your shoes and they try to help you out . . . I . . . would come more to school when I started making connections with the teachers here.

Flora credited her advisor with much of her success. He would regularly talk her into coming to school and would push her to do better. She claimed she had no idea

where she would be today without her advisor. He convinced her try new things, like go on school trips, for instance. She did not envision herself as college bound. He convinced her by saying, “. . . you deserve a good future and you can make anything you want possible.” And that is why she applied for a scholarship at the local community college. “And I got it and I’m now actually excited about it and I think that education is the key to the future.” As a result of her experience, she viewed education as particularly beneficial to her as an undocumented Latina.

Flora recalled a time when an employer was treating her poorly. She was working 12 hours a day and was not eating. Her advisor and another teacher would visit her and provide help in various ways.

I really feel like I can tell them anything and they would understand. . . . (They) would always, like, come and take me something to eat and help me out and bus passes to get to school . . . they are always there for everything that I need. . . . I feel like they are my parents. They’re even better, because they help me out even more than them, then they do. I really appreciate what they’ve done and they’ve done so much for me, like, I don’t know how to thank them.

Liliana also portrayed a marked difference between her experience in a traditional school and an alternative school. She described the environment as peaceful and the teachers as happier and friendlier. She said it feels like home.

They, they won't push you to do things. But they will give you the help that you need and they will care for you. (My teacher) to me, is like my mom, my second mom. You know, she helped me out a lot. (The teachers) they're actually really caring, and they try to help you with as much as they can whether it's money or whatever it is and the vibe here is different than at a normal high school. . . . The teachers here are more, they're happy to be here. . . . I feel like they actually wake up in a good mood and say, "Oh my god, I get to see my students again." . . . (My teachers) they're like family.

For Liliana, the teachers made the difference between wanting to be in school or not. She admitted to having self-destructive and emotional tendencies. She often exhibited a bad attitude with teachers, "I felt I had to have an attitude, because they didn't understand me." She also explained that she currently had a personality conflict with a teacher in the alternative school, yet Liliana had the option of choosing not to attend her class and completing her work in another classroom.

Aurora also compared her experience in a traditional setting with that of an alternative setting. She did not like the teachers in the bigger traditional high school. She did not feel accepted and recalled teachers questioning her in front of the class about her being tardy. She also felt invisible, as if teachers did not care about her. She had never had contact with the principal. Yet in her alternative school, the principal knew every student, called them by name, and monitored their progress. There she felt accepted by teachers. She described them as friendly, helpful, and regularly made attempts to know how each student was doing. Instead of asking why she was late, teachers said "Welcome to class." She found the teachers to be more understanding even when faced with antisocial behavior, such as cussing.

In his traditional high school, Christian would not attend the classes of teachers he disliked. In an alternative school, he felt that teachers were more understanding of each student's situation. "They know what you're talking about and they give you a break." He

felt he could talk to his teachers about anything and that was not the case in a traditional setting.

David also valued the support he received in his alternative school as well as the relationship he had with his advisor. He appreciated his honesty and friendship. He viewed him as more of a friend than an authority figure. He did not feel that he had to act a certain way around him, but could simply be himself. He felt accepted. When David considered dropping out again and going to work, his advisor did not judge him. He left the choice to David and made it clear he would respect his decision either way.

Upon entering an alternative school, Sara felt a difference immediately. She was greeted with a warm, friendly welcome. She felt understood by teachers from the beginning. She no longer felt alone and they provided the support she needed, “me ayudaron, umm, siempre estaban al pendiente de mí. . . . Aquí no me juzgaron (They helped me, umm, they were always looking out for me. . . . Here, they didn’t judge me).” They would ask her how she was doing and they would take her needs into consideration. Sara did not feel that was the case in her traditional high schools.

For Stefán, his relationship with the teacher meant the difference between doing the work and attending or not. If he liked a teacher, he would get his work done even if he resented having to do the work. And he would only request help from a teacher he liked. He admitted to not treating them well. “I don’t know why I used to have so much hate for teachers.” He professed that if there had been no social “drama” and, if teachers had been more responsive to him, he would have stayed in school. But everything combined created a stressful situation.

He described the respect and appreciation he now has for all that teachers do for him,

I want to go to college, and this school helps me. Like (my teacher is) helping me so much. He's been so good to me . . . all the teachers here have been good. . . . The teachers are here to help us . . . to become something better. . . . They're here for us . . . and that's why we have to be here for them too. And show 'em that we do want to do our work.

Stefán now has trusting relationships with teachers whom he also considers friends. He portrayed a feeling of safety and said that he confides in them. He explained that the teachers he has now show more interest in him and spend more time talking with him about his personal life.

**School size.** Given that only three students spoke directly about a small school size as key to their success, the topic did not technically qualify as a designated theme. However, I included the topic because many of the themes identified by students as instrumental to their success were experienced in a small school setting. Individual support and monitoring, engaging instruction, and caring relationships with educators were all provided within their alternative school setting.

After many years of ditching and then dropping out, Flora knew she did not want to attend another traditional school. Her sister was a pregnant teen and was moving to an alternative school. She was attracted to the school, "because it was a small school and there's less people."

Stefán also preferred a smaller setting. He despised the drama of his traditional high school and claimed it was simply too big to develop a sense of community. The size created the opportunity for cliques to flourish thereby producing divisiveness. It made it impossible to know everyone well.

Moreover, Sara struggled with the size of traditional high schools. There, she felt socially isolated and unsupported by teachers as she tried to bridge a language gap. “No me sentía a gusto (I didn’t feel comfortable).” After dropping out, she was attracted to an alternative school, because of its small size. In that smaller setting, she felt supported and had a sense of belonging.

Although only three participants identified a smaller school size as a factor in their success, all who had attended an alternative school benefited from services and school characteristics not previously experienced in their traditional larger schools. What was unclear at the completion of this study is the extent to which smaller school size or alternative school characteristics served as a more significant factor (see Limitations and Future Research section).

### **Environmental Factors**

The previous themes were placed under the category of institutional factors, because the concepts related to factors that might be potentially addressed within the institution of school. The following section includes themes that are less within the purview of school reform. Nevertheless, participants identified some of these factors as significant supports and barriers in their school experiences. Table 3 depicts the number of participants commenting on the environmental themes.

Table 3

*Environmental Themes*

Themes	Number of Participants Commenting (out of 10)
Economics and Contributing to Family	6
Parental Support and Academic Expectations	6

**Economics and contributing to family.** Six of the participants felt a responsibility to support family members as a factor in disengaging from school and dropping out. Five of the participants identified the draw of making money as a motivating factor for dropping out. Whether providing domestic help or money, the responsibility of contributing to family at times became a priority over becoming educated for five of the participants. Alejandro dropped out to support his mother and himself financially. He valued the opportunity to attend school and wanted to get his diploma. Yet, with working six nights a week until midnight, he struggled to go to school in the morning and pay attention in class all day. As well as being sleep deprived, he struggled to find time to complete homework. If his mother had earned more money or if he had two parents supporting him, he would have stayed in school.

Christian also needed to financially support his mother and himself. Two of the three times he dropped out of school were because of financial hardship and he returned for financial reasons. His mother struggled to find reliable employment as an undocumented worker. He felt torn between supporting the household immediately or staying in school, even though he knew they would both be in a better financial situation

were he to receive a diploma. Even though Christian had grown up in the United States since he was six years old, he lacked documentation to work legally in this country. He thought, if he graduated, he could obtain documentation to work and then perhaps do the same for his mother's documentation. However, at each dropout event, the immediate needs took precedent, ". . . we had no food for us. We didn't have money . . . to pay rent or the bills. . . . (if it weren't for that), I would have been done with school." He watched his older friends who had dropped out struggle to survive financially and that was the reason he returned to school. He saw them struggle to support their families and he did not want the same for his family. So, he went back to school.

Stefán also dropped out and reentered school both for financial reasons. Although he admittedly did not want to go to school at times because he "did not like the people," he credited his decision to dropout solely to finances. He started working and began to like the money. He liked that he could buy things for himself and help his family. Yet his wages as a high school dropout was also the reason he returned to school. He did not like the work or the pay. He debated between working two jobs and helping his family or going back to school. Once he turned 18, he realized more responsibilities and with that came more expenses. At one point, he had applied for a well-paying job that he really wanted. They told him that, if he got his diploma, they would give him the job. He recalled this as a turning point. "I was . . . sad. . . . Damn. Just cause I don't have the diploma, I couldn't get the job. . . . So, I was like, you know what? I'm gonna get the diploma."

Stefán had been told in school that more education leads to more money and better jobs, so he decided to go back to school to graduate. At the point of our initial

interview, he was both working and going to school. The thought made him laugh, “I should have done that, work and go to high school.”

David attributed both dropping out and reentering school to the lure of making money. Even though now he is a college graduate, he chose some troubled friends in high school. He starting ditching with them and got into trouble. His father had struggled in school and presented David with the idea of working instead of school. David had done some construction work with his father before during the summer for \$20 an hour. David’s plan of “making good money” and working construction with his father did not happen, because construction workers legally need to be 18 years or older to be on a construction site. So he got a job as a cashier at a fast food restaurant making seven dollars an hour. Soon, he moved to another fast food restaurant. He portrayed his fast food experience as a “huge wake-up call:”

I think working those crappy jobs was actually a good thing for me . . . I think if I would have started working for my dad, I would have started getting really good money, probably might have been harder to go back to school . . . I think working those crappy jobs for a crappy wage, really opened up my eyes (and made me) think, yeah, I need to at least get a high school diploma so I can . . . get a better job or do something better than what I’m doing now.

Although Aurora dropped out because of a gap in academic skills, she remained out of school for two years to help support her family. After dropping out, her mother was injured and could not work. She helped her mom physically and also financially: “I had to help out . . . and that took all the focus out of school.” Eventually the financial reality of living as a high school dropout brought Aurora back to school. She saw that it would be difficult to independently support herself. Aurora began to realize how hard her life was without a diploma and the extent to which it limited her salary and employment

options. She elaborated, “Doing without school is the hardest thing on Earth. . . . you don’t get paid good at all, especially if you don’t have papers. . . . This sucks.”

Although Flora did not directly attribute finances to her dropping out, the situation created by her immigrant and socioeconomic status created numerous barriers to academic success and led to poor attendance. She watched her family members struggle around her. Her mother was not consistently present to raise her because she worked a lot and had other issues. Her situation reflected a challenge in poverty of childcare and healthcare expenses. Flora would often stay home to care for her sister’s child, an ailing family member, or take care of the house. She felt a strong desire to be able to help her family members (close and extended), “I want to be able to succeed and like, help them with everything they need.”

**Parental support and academic expectations.** The following six out of the ten participants portrayed varying levels of support from parents with regard to education. Aurora’s parents were her biggest support system in the area of academics. They would transport her and happily pay any additional costs that were school related. Aurora recalled, “I don’t even know where they would get the money, but they would pay anything that I want.” Her parents encouraged her to get involved in everything possible, but she chose not to follow their advice. When she decided to drop out, they clarified that it was not according to their wishes.

Even though Alejandro dropped out to support his family financially, his family preferred him to graduate. His mother would always tell him, “El trabajo siempre va estar allí disponible (Work will always be there).” In fact, he returned to school to please his family. His mother had wanted him to become as educated as possible and he wanted to

make her proud. He also knew that with a diploma, he would have more opportunities and thus, be better able to provide for his family.

After developing a pattern of making poor choices and beginning to get into legal trouble, David talked to his parents about his future. He confessed to me that his choices had affected his academic progress. His father admitted that, even though he had graduated from high school, he had not been a successful student. In an attempt to be supportive, he gave him the option of dropping out. If he was going to drop out though, he expected him to work and said he would help him find employment.

Flora's unstable upbringing contributed to emotional struggles and extreme truancy. As she was growing up, she was frequently unsupervised, moved among relatives, and at times homeless. She had no consistent support system and rarely lived with her mother. There was no one to care for her, to tell her what to do, and discipline her. She and her sister were left to their own decision-making. Yet, in spite of the lack of parental support, her mother was part of the reason she reentered school. Her mother would tell her that she did not want to see Flora struggle like she had. She explained, "She had to work . . . and she didn't even make it to middle school. . . . I want something better for me." Her mother would tell her, "If you don't go to school, you're going to be working your ass off and all the time. I can't even spend time with you guys." So, Flora went back to school.

Natalie felt that many parents needed to have higher expectations of success in school for their children. She said that her mother pushed her to go to school but was not concerned with her grades. She saw a lack of concern for grades among her friends' families as well. Natalie was doing well academically in an alternative school when her

family had to move. Her mother would not permit her to stay in that school, because it would involve driving a car without documentation. Natalie did not want to move to the closer alternative school, so she dropped out. In the end, she reentered and attended the closer alternative school, but failed, because of negative peer influences. She identified her father as a support for her. She had not seen him in 11 years, but he had continually told her to do well in school and that she could visit him in Mexico after graduation. Natalie felt very motivated to graduate partially because of that encouragement provided by her father.

Sara's mother greatly influenced her desire to graduate and do well in school. When Sara dropped out, her mother repeatedly told her, "Tienes que ir a la escuela (You have to go to school)." She wanted Sara to graduate because she was never able to because she married young. Sara saw her mother struggle to find work based on her limited education. She also recognized that this lack of education meant Sara lacked someone who could guide her toward becoming educated. In the end, she wanted to go back to school and succeed to fulfill her family's wishes and provide a good model for her siblings.

### **Individual Factors**

Of the three categories, participants had the least to say about individual factors. See Table 4 for a depiction of the number of participants who commented on this category. Although self-blame is not a factor for dropping out, it emerged as a theme as linked to individual choice, so I have placed it in this category.

Table 4

*Individual Themes*

Themes	Number of Participants Commenting (out of 10)
Self-blame	6
Peer Influence	7

**Self-blame.** The theme of self-blame surfaced as a common theme in the dropout and reentry experience. Six participants ultimately blamed themselves for the individual choices they made that led to dropping out. Three of them expressed the theme of regret very clearly.

Aurora expressed deep regret for dropping out and lamented the time lost. Even though she experienced a skills gap in math and needed additional support, she ultimately blamed herself.

I never got to do anything. I never got to be a senior. . . . It was horrible to see my class graduate and me just stay behind, because I just felt retarded, when I know how smart I am. Like, I can do way better. It was very painful to watch them graduate, to watch them be better than me. . . . It was just me being immature.

After working continuously for a year, Stefán learned the harsh reality of employment without a diploma--the limited opportunities, hard work, and low pay. He realized he needed to go back to school and get a diploma, because he didn't like what he did for work. Stefán expressed significant regret for doing "stupid shit" and dropping out. He lamented, "I would've been in college by now" or "I would've had a better job." He wanted to warn others about the consequences of dropping out and let them know the importance of staying in school and doing well.

Given that David is the oldest participant, he might possess the greater benefit of hindsight. Even though he realized he was heavily influenced by peers and did not feel cared for by teachers, he ultimately blamed himself with disengaging from school. He recalled, “I could either blame myself or I could blame my friends, but I’d probably just blame myself, because I hung out with them.” David regretted having dropped out with the assumption that he would make a decent wage only to discover that he hated the low-paying jobs he was able to obtain as a high school dropout.

**Peer influence.** The theme of peer influence was placed in the category of individual factors, because it appears to be a personal choice. However, one could argue that it is an environmental factor, because the quality of the social setting can vary. Nevertheless, seven students identified peers as having an influence on negative and/or positive choices pertaining to school. Six specifically described how peers had negatively influenced their success.

Although David pointed to the desire to work as a reason for dropping out, he clearly attributed his disengagement from school and downfall to his choice of friends. Given that David is a college graduate who did well in the subject of mathematics, he did not initially struggle academically. He was very socially driven and was an engaged student until the seventh grade when he started spending “a lot of time doing dumb things” with the “wrong crowd.” By the time he was a freshman, he was already in “big trouble.”

I mean, all my friends were ditching and . . . I wanted to be around my friends. Anyway, I didn't want to do homework at home. I'd rather be partying and (laughed nervously) doing all kinds of dumb stuff.

He remembered it seeming normal to dropout because he had friends dropping out. So he followed suit.

In considering returning to school, he was concerned with going back to the same school with similar social groups. He was afraid of falling back into the same pattern and he wanted to focus on academics and successfully graduate. To avoid a similar social setting, he chose to attend an alternative school.

According to Natalie, her level of success was directly related to the behaviors of her social group in school. She had attended two different alternative schools and had significantly different achievement in each setting. She portrayed her friends from her first alternative school as engaged and nice. While there, she accomplished the work and achieved good grades, as did her friends. After moving to a nearby community, she attended a different alternative school. There she had friends and a relative who were negative influences on her achievement. In fact, she described these influences as the biggest hindrance to her success. In class, they would chat about life and not accomplish the work. They regularly talked her into ditching school and in her sophomore year, she began failing.

Aurora initially disengaged from school in her junior year because of a perceived gap in academic skills and the feeling that she did not fit in with those who were smarter. She felt judged and got tired of feeling the pressure to live up to higher expectations. "It was the people that, who think they are too smart for me." She started ditching with her friends and falling further behind until she soon dropped out.

Aurora credited a roommate with convincing her to go back to school. Even though people had told her that she needed to return, her roommate's message was more effective because she was a peer, "It makes more sense when it comes from a younger person, than from an older person . . ." Her roommate agreed to go back to high school as well, so Aurora reentered. She described feeling more comfortable in her alternative school, "I actually get time to think about it and give out my answer and nobody is gonna laugh about it . . . That's my comfort zone, where no answer is stupid. It is valuable whatever you say." Along with feeling comfortable, she also benefited from the support of her husband in her academic pursuits, "he literally encourages me so much to go to school. . . . he helps me a lot."

Liliana attributed her dropping out to a combination of drugs, alcohol, and peer relationships. She had also struggled socially, "I had a lot of drama. . . . I got in fights with a lot of girls. I couldn't stand a lot of girls. That's part of the reason why I didn't go to school, too." By the 10th grade, she had stopped caring about school. She had a boyfriend who would tell her not to go to school and she would comply. She dropped out and got pregnant that year.

Liliana's pregnancy and breakup with her boyfriend brought her back to school. She enrolled in an alternative school. She compared the marked difference in culture between her traditional and her alternative schools. She portrayed the culture in her traditional school as dominated by cliques. "This person doesn't like me. Those people don't like me." Then she lit up when describing her alternative school, "You come here and . . . you don't have to care about that, because everybody likes everybody. You got your hippies, which everybody loves hippies, you don't have that clique everywhere."

Liliana claimed that, for the most part, the issue of cliques, bullying, and gossiping did not exist at this school. She admitted that there was occasional drama but that it received little attention. “That’s why people come to this school, cause less drama, less bullying.”

Erik, who attended the same alternative school as Liliana, had the same glowing report about the culture in the building.

I feel like I can walk into the school and talk to absolutely anybody. There are no cliques, there are no posses. There's no, "She's popular and he's not," or "He's a loser, and he isn't." Like, everybody here loves everybody equally. It doesn't matter who you are, doesn't matter what part of the valley you came from. Everybody here is a family because that's what this school is. Because that's what our teachers like to reflect on us, that it's a thing about togetherness.

Christian also preferred the social aspect at his alternative school over that of his traditional school. He accredited one of his three dropout events to “not getting along with some people” in his former school. Yet in his alternative school, he felt like he belonged, “just because there’s (*sic*) . . . people that have been through the same stuff as I’ve been.” He described it as a relief from stress, because he could be with other students who were in a similar situation, “It sucks to be 21 and trying to graduate.” He felt understood and accepted at his current school.

Although Stefán’s primary reason for dropping out was financial, he admitted to succumbing to negative peer influences. Beginning in his freshman year in a traditional high school, he was influenced by his older friends, typically seniors, who would invite him to ditch school. With this group, he took drugs and drank alcohol. He started to enjoy ditching. It was an escape from the stress of school that was a result of personality conflicts with teachers, the social drama among peers, and the physical altercations between students. He portrayed the social conflicts among students as ever present at his

previous school. “But I just wanna concentrate in school, but you can’t ‘cause of all those kids or the shit that’s happening around you.” He was experiencing some of the same stressful situations in his alternative school as well.

The stress of social conflicts and feeling unsafe led Natalie to ditch regularly at her alternative school. Interestingly, Natalie attended the same alternative school that Erik and Liliana portrayed as possessing a warm, loving, welcoming culture. Natalie said there were female students who did not like her, but one in particular she was afraid of. Because of the fear she felt for that student, she would not attend her science class. Her science teacher did not question it, but her advisor did. However, she never felt comfortable telling an adult.

### **Primary Motivations for Reentry**

The previous themes that emerged surrounding the dropout and reentry process were multi-faceted and often complicated. The same held true for the factors that led more specifically to the reentry event of these participants. Table 5 depicts the number of participants who commented on each factor. Nine participants alluded to a sense of hope and/or seeking opportunity as the primary motivating factor for returning to school. One participant came back because of a truancy call, but was ultimately seeking opportunity. Only one participant returned simply to avoid legal issues with regard to truancy.

Seven participants specifically identified the desire to seek greater opportunities as the reason for coming back to school. As previously described, Aurora, Stefán, and David all learned how hard life could be without a diploma. Aurora and David spoke of working in jobs they disliked. All three talked about working a lot for little pay and saw high school graduation as key for a path to a better future.

Table 5

*Primary Motivations for Reentry*

Factors	Number of Participants Commenting (out of 10)
Opportunity and Hope	9
Truancy	2

Christian and Alejandro viewed a high school diploma as key to access to opportunity. Although Alejandro talked about that opportunity in broad terms, Christian had a more specific vision of how high school graduation might serve him. He perceived the diploma as able to help him acquire legal documentation to work thereby eliminating the stress and vulnerability of living as an undocumented worker. He also viewed high school graduation as the path to college, then a career as a contractor and engineer.

Although Liliana's pregnancy served as the catalyst for the reentry event, she was drawn back to school because of the opportunity an education provided. She recalled, "I had to do something with my life (laughed). I couldn't just stay home and have a baby and not have my education." The pregnancy elicited the realization that the responsibility for her child would require greater opportunity to be able to raise her child.

After dropping out, Flora began getting into trouble that included the threat of legal issues regarding truancy. However, she identified the desire for greater opportunity possessed by her mother and herself as the primary reason for returning to school. Her childhood had been tough and chaotic. Both she and her mother wanted something better than the difficult life her mother experienced as an uneducated, undocumented worker who could not afford to raise her own children. They both saw education as the path to a

better life for her and Flora wanted to set an example for her niece so that she may have an even better life.

Two of the participants referred to a broader motivation of hope that brought them back to school. When Erik was asked what led him to return to school, he determined, “This school . . . they gave me the sense of hope I was looking for.” Erik was impressed by the positive reports he had heard of an alternative school in the area. From the first day of enrollment, the school was different than what he had experienced in a traditional school. The teachers supported and inspired him at a level not previously experienced by him.

Sara also referred to a broader sense of hope that motivated her to reenter school. Both she and her mother possessed this sense of hope for a brighter future for Sara. Neither of them wanted Sara to quit school and struggle to survive like her mother had. Moreover, Sara wanted to serve as a good role model for her siblings and in turn provide hope for them.

Natalie was the only participant to reenter school because of the threat of legal issues related to truancy. Given that her mother was an undocumented worker and single mother, she struggled to survive and care for her family. Natalie did not want to risk providing her family with legal issues and additional hardship. Although she did not want to go back to school, she returned. Of the 10 participants, Natalie was the only one to identify a motivating factor other than opportunity or hope. Nevertheless she spoke of her perception developed later in her school career of a diploma as key to future opportunities.

### **Summary**

The 10 participants who agreed to be in this study all appeared to give thoughtful, candid answers. From their responses, the various and multi-faceted themes related to dropping out and reentering school emerged. With regard to the factors that created a barrier to or a support for academic success, the widest range of themes surfaced within the category of institutional factors. The themes included individual support, instruction and relevance, and caring relationships with educators. Given that the supports that led to success were experienced in a small school setting, school size also emerged as a significant topic. Two themes emerged under the category of environmental factors: economics and contributing to family, and parental support and their academic expectations. Two themes materialized under the category of individual factors: self-blame and peer influence. With regard to reentry, participants overwhelmingly attributed opportunity and hope for a better life as the motivating factors for reentry into school. The following chapter provided an analysis of the themes and findings as well as recommendations for reform.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

“We can all do it,” affirmed a participant as she addressed the topic of Latino underachievement. This statement directly linked to the critical theory addressing the achievement gap. The scope of this dissertation focused on Latino students who dropped out and reentered school. The literature review highlighted an abundance of research on students who disengaged and dropped out of school. Chapter II also included research that focused on underlying factors and provided recommendations for reform. Given that my research focused solely on Latino reentry students, the participants were able to describe specific supports that helped them succeed. Their reentry perspectives validated many recommendations made by previous researchers who focused on dropping out and are examined further in this chapter.

#### **Reflection on Themes**

Of the three categories--institutional factors, environmental factors, and individual factors, participants provided the most abundant data under the category of institutional. The widest range of themes also emerged under this category. The institutional factors of which participants spoke addressed underlying factors for disengaging and/or reengaging, while the environmental and individual factors included more specific reasons for the actual dropout event. Because of the abundant data and wider range of themes, this chapter begins by focusing on institutional factors.

## **Institutional Factors**

The literature review included numerous recommendations for school reform aimed at decreasing the dropout rate and increasing achievement. Many of the recommendations made by participants who had dropped out in Bridgeland et al.'s (2006) study aligned with the lived experiences and perspectives of the reentry Latino participants in this dissertation. Bridgeland et al.'s (2006) participants experienced a skills gap and advocated for additional individualized academic support for struggling students. Dynarski et al. (2008), Iachini et al. (2013), and Lowder (2013) reiterated the importance of providing academic support for those in need.

In this dissertation study, four of the ten participants experienced in their traditional school a skills gap and one participant described a language gap. Yet, most of the participants in this study flourished in the environment of an alternative school where they received more individual academic support while their skills increased. Recall Sara's words from Chapter IV on finding the support she needed at Snowy Ridge High School, "I felt better support here . . . more attention." Natalie described the support she received at Snowy Ridge High School as a sign of a good school, "I started doing bad . . . and that's when teachers started to push me and that's why I think . . . (it's) a really good school."

Dynarski et al. (2008) and Bridgeland et al. (2006) recommended that struggling students be matched with a trained adult advocate in school who ensures that students receive any necessary support. The perspectives of my participants supported that proposal. Bridgeland et al. (2006), Iachini et al. (2013), and Lowder (2013) advocated for individual monitoring to ensure that students are on track to graduate. Recall that four

participants felt the likelihood of graduating from their traditional high school with age-level peers was hopeless. That hopeless sense echoed Lowder's (2013) findings of the lack of safety nets for content and credit recovery. Participants in this study confirmed the value of individual monitoring and advocate/advisory services, as they felt they benefitted from these services that served as a safety net toward graduation.

At Pleasant Mountain High School, the principal provided advocacy and monitoring services. He appeared to know each student well and was continually aware of their progress. Aurora identified the support and monitoring she received from the principal as key to her success,

I need him a lot, like every . . . week. . . . If I have any questions, I can go to him and be like, "Give me this or lend me that." He'll weigh if I need some time and he actually remembers to come back to me.

Snowy Ridge High School provided an advisory program for each student. The advisor is assigned to follow each students' progress until graduation. Students identified this service as instrumental to their success in school. David expressed gratitude for this service and how his advisor had motivated him over time, "I think it was good, especially towards the last couple years of school when I really (needed) . . . that push to get all my credits to graduate on time."

The next theme of caring relationships with a teacher may overlap with the theme of advocacy/advisory services, but that caring relationship may or may not be an assigned advisor. Either way, the importance of a caring relationship was a theme that emerged in the study. Similarly, the participants in Iachini et al. (2013) highlighted the importance of relationships with teachers in a student's educational trajectory. Bridgeland et al. (2006) proposed ensuring that each student has a strong relationship with at least one school staff

member with whom they could consult on academic and/or personal problems. Eight of the nine students from alternative schools in this study spoke of how the care and additional monitoring from a trusted educator helped them to succeed. A common theme was they felt cared for, welcomed, and understood at a level not previously felt in their traditional school. In fact, many participants spoke glowingly of the care provided and the school culture they attributed to that care on the part of educators.

Both Erik and Sara described their teachers at Snowy Ridge High School as more available and supportive than in a traditional high school. Eric portrayed them as:

They care. They ask. They wonder, they're curious. They like to know if we're all right and they, they can tell when we're not. Like, they look into our eyes and they just know. . . . it's a beautiful place to be.

Moreover Sara felt welcomed at Snowy Ridge High School at a level not felt at her previous schools, "Aquí me hicieron sentir bien. . . . Me ayudaron. (Here they made me feel good. . . . They helped me)." Flora also expressed immense gratitude for her teachers and her advisor in particular. She portrayed the teachers at Snowy Ridge High School as very different than a traditional school. She talked about the surprising extent to which her teachers had gone to support her. For the first time, she felt a connection to teachers, felt understood by them, and began to attend more regularly. She specified, "They don't just tell you "Oh you have to . . ." but they help you through everything and they push you."

Similarly, Liliana stated that she became more engaged because her school felt like home and her teachers felt like family. She explained, "I think the difference is that these teachers, they don't just love one student. They love all of us and they try to do their best." David also appreciated the relationship he had with an advisor. He felt

understood and respected by him, “I felt like he was more of a friend talking to me, rather than an advisor telling me what he’s supposed to be telling me.”

Aurora, Stefán, and Christian reiterated the difference caring relationships with teachers made for them at Pleasant Mountain High School. Aurora portrayed the difference as, “They are very friendly with you. They’ll actually try to talk to you and see how you’re doing.” Stefán portrayed a recently found appreciation for teachers, “I want to go to college, and this school helps me. Like (my teacher is) helping me so much. He’s been so good to me . . . all the teachers here have been good.” Christian viewed the teachers as more understanding and approachable, “You feel confident to talk to them about anything, and other schools, you don’t.”

Participants in Bridgeland et al. (2006) felt that school needed to be more interesting and recommended improved instructional practices and curricula in order to increase relevance and engagement. The feedback from participants in this dissertation echoed Bridgeland et al.’s (2006) findings. Four of the ten participants in this study described a marked difference in instruction between their alternative school and traditional school. They described the lessons at the alternative schools as more fun, interactive, relevant, and engaging.

Christian described the instruction at Pleasant Mountain High School as more “real world.” Erik confirmed the value for him in the hands-on, interactive approach to learning at Snowy Ridge High School when he stated, “They make you feel like learning is fun and it really is.” Neither did Liliana view the lessons there as work. Recall in Chapter IV that she seemed surprised that school could be fun, “Instead of doing

schoolwork, we do, like, fun projects that are actually fun to listen to and learn about.”

Flora described the instruction as:

Just like the things they do here are so much different than other schools, like the activities, outings. We go on interims every three months. . . . You get to pick where you want to go: California, Portland, Washington, or Utah, rafting trips, climbing, you know, just different things.

Flora attributed these experiences with inspiring her to want to make the world a better place.

Given the themes of individual support, caring relationships with educators, and instructional relevance, it must be noted that these were positive supports as experienced by all of the nine participants in a small alternative school setting. School size was not identified in Chapter IV as a theme, because only three students emphasized a smaller school size as a factor in their success. Sara, Flora, and Stefán did not do well in a larger, traditional school. They were all attracted to an alternative school because of the smaller size. Sara recalled her experience in a traditional high school, “No sentía apoyo y estaba muy grande la escuela para mí (I did not feel supported and the school was very big for me).” She felt that a smaller setting helped her to be successful:

As soon as I came to (Snowy Ridge High School), since it’s a smaller school . . . they were always asking me, “Have you done this?” or “Look, we can do this to help you.” I felt better support here.

Stefán felt his traditional school was simply too large for a sense of community to exist. The experiences of these three supported the recommendations of small school communities as found in Bridgeland et al. (2006), Dynarski et al. (2008), Finn and Zimmer (2012), and Iachini et al. (2013). Given that the nine alternative high school students benefited from supports and services provided in that setting, it was unclear at

the completion of this study the extent to which school size or characteristics of an alternative school played a factor (see Limitations and Future Research section).

Finally, two tangential topics that appeared significant in the literature review yet were not discussed by enough participants or with enough clarity to establish as themes were retention and minority status. According to Rumberger (1995) and Lowder (2013), retention plays a significant factor in dropping out and Rumberger (1995) identified it as the most significant of the school-related factors in leaving school. The topic was not included in the open-ended interview questions and only two students mentioned it. The second tangential topic not designated as a theme was that of minority status in school. Luna and Tijerina Revilla (2013) found racism and discrimination to be the most prominent theme in the experience of their Latino dropout participants. In my research, four of the ten participants mentioned issues of discrimination and minority status as a hindrance to success. Even though four participants mentioned it, I did not include it as a theme, because participant responses were vague. It appeared difficult for participants to articulate and produce examples. Only two had clear descriptions of this topic.

### **Environmental Factors**

In this category, two themes emerged as influential. The first was that of economics and the desire to contribute to one's family. The second was that of parental support and their expectations for educational attainment.

The first theme follows research that established a link between higher dropout rates and lower SES (Rumberger, 1995, 2011; Swanson, 2004). Swanson (2004) highlighted the link between increased dropout rates and the environmental conditions of poverty. All participants came from Latin American immigrant families who came to the

United States seeking work. Six out of ten participants identified the responsibility of contributing to family as a factor in interrupting education. The contributions tended to be financial ones or the need to provide care for relatives. The six who felt the need to contribute provided possible explanations for the link between higher dropout rates and lower SES.

Alejandro's and Christian's dropout events were linked to socioeconomic status. They both would have remained in school had they not needed to make money to support themselves and family members. Alejandro explained, "Necesitaba dinero. . . . Trabajaba seis noches (I needed money. . . . I was working six nights (a week)." When asked what might have kept him in school, he answered, "Probablemente si mi mamá hubiera ganado más dinero en el trabajo (Probably if my mom had earned more money at her job)." Christian also discussed the difficulty of finding employment without legal documentation.

Although Stefán's economic situation did not seem as dire, he dropped out because of the allure of making money and helping family. He explained, "I started . . . making money. . . . I started (to) like work. . . . I need to help my family." David was also drawn to make money instead of attend school. He lamented, "I just made the dumb decision of thinking that school wasn't important and that money was."

Christian, Stefán, David, and Aurora all returned to school after realizing they could earn more with a diploma. Aurora portrayed the difficulty in finding a job as an undocumented worker without a diploma, "I'm not gonna be here at (the pizza restaurant) my whole life. I do not wanna be a housekeeper. I have no papers. I cannot get a better job than this. I need to go back to school." Even though Flora did not identify economics

as a barrier to success, the poverty and chaos in which she was raised contributed to her truancy and created barriers to academic success. In the end, she also recognized the importance of her education in increasing her financial opportunities.

The second theme was that of parental support and expectations. Rumberger (1995) found parental support and educational expectations for their children to be reliable predictors of dropout rates. Given the higher dropout rate of Latino students, one might conclude that Latino parental support and expectations are lacking. However, recall Lopez's (2009) findings from Chapter I on the high value Latinos place on education. Given that a deep examination of parental support was outside the purview of this dissertation, the participants in this study were not directly asked about parental support and expectations. However, half of them mentioned that their parents expected them to graduate from high school and were supportive of their education. Four of the participants attributed their decision to go back to school to their parents' support and encouragement. As an example, Alejandro mentioned that he wanted to do well in school in part for his mother, "Yo la quería que ella sentiera . . . orgullosa (I wanted her to feel proud)." Sara also attributed her desire to do well in school to her mother's support:

Mi mamá siempre me está empujando a que siguiera, a que no terminara como ella. . . . Ella siempre quiso que me graduara (My mom is always pushing me to continue, to not quit like she did. . . . She always wanted me to graduate).

### **Individual Factors**

The two themes that emerged under this category were that of self-blame and peer influence. Luna and Tijerina Revilla (2013) and Tavitian Méndez (2013) discussed the theme of self-blame in their studies of Latinos who dropped out. Six of the participants in this study echoed this theme as they ultimately blamed themselves for their individual

choices. Participants also included a sentiment of deep regret. Given that this study focused on reentry students, the feeling of regret seemed intensified by the experience of reentering school with the notion of time lost in comparison to age-level peers. For example, Aurora expressed her deep sense of regret when she explained:

It was my fault because of me not going. . . . You don't know how much I regret those two years that I lost. I could have graduated . . . I'd be in college. . . . I lost a lot of time.

David accepted full responsibility for dropping out as well, "I was just ignorant at the time. I could have asked for help. I could have done my homework, but I didn't (laughs). . . . school just wasn't really a priority for me."

The second theme that emerged was that of peer influence. Bridgeland et al. (2006) discussed a link between dropping out and peer influence. Participants in this study echoed those findings. Eight of the participants recognized peers as either negatively or positively influencing choices with regard to education. Six of them portrayed negative influences in various ways. The resulting choices that five of those participants made as a result of peer influences varied from ditching, abusing substances, not turning in classwork, and/or not paying attention in class. David experienced all of these negative peer influences including that of dropping out:

I think seeing a lot of my friends drop out kind of made it seem like . . . I guess I didn't feel like it was such a huge deal to drop out, since . . . they had already dropped out before me.

When he reentered school, David intentionally chose a school with a different social group, so that he would not be negatively influenced by the same group of friends.

Natalie also found peers to be a powerful influence. She did better academically in her previous alternative school, because her peer group typically made positive choices. She

explained, “They weren’t a bad influence over there. . . . We had good grades, all my friends, and I had good grades and I think they’re a big support too.” However, at Snowy Ridge High School, she found that her peer group had a more negative influence on her. It had led her to make poor choices such as ditching and not completing her schoolwork. She explained, “My friends (would say) . . . all the time, “Let’s ditch, let’s ditch.” . . . That’s why I started failing school my sophomore year.” She regretted the time lost.

The negative peer influences that Liliana experienced were compounded by substance abuse and social issues. Those three factors combined along with her lack of engagement in high school contributed to her truancy. She would ditch to comply with a boyfriend who discouraged her attending school and to avoid social conflicts or the “drama” as she called it. She appeared relieved to be in a school where “everybody here gets along with everybody.” Christian reiterated the relief he felt from fewer social conflicts in a smaller alternative school. He felt comfortable in this environment because there were so many students with similar experiences of disengagement from school. In his traditional school, Stefán abused substances and ditched with friends to avoid the stress and social conflicts he experienced at school. Unfortunately, both Stefán and Natalie were experiencing the stress of social conflicts in their current schools. It had recently affected Natalie’s attendance as she did not feel safe in school.

To clarify, the theme of peer influence arguably blurred the distinction among the three categories of institutional, environmental, and individual. Peer influence could be within the range of social context and, therefore, could be an environmental factor. It could also fall within the topic of community in a school and be within the category of institutional. However, this was assigned to the category of individual factors, because it

honored the aspect of personal choice that each participant had in this process. It also honored their tendency to accept responsibility for the peers they chose.

Recall that Finn and Zimmer (2012) recommended not focusing school reform efforts on more difficult to control aspects such as peer influence. Yet because six participants in this study mentioned the environmental factor of social context as impacting their success in school, it seemed pertinent to include this section. Five of those noted the cultural differences between their traditional schools and alternative schools. They talked about cliques, not fitting in, and/or an abundance of “drama” in their traditional schools. (The term “drama” encompassed social conflicts as well as physical altercations.) Their experiences may align with the recommendations in Bridgeland et al. (2006) of increased discipline, safety, and supervision in schools. However, to some extent, they attributed their success to the culture of community in the school. They enjoyed the relief they felt from the lack of cliques and the acceptance among peers of a similar experience. Participants mentioned that they did not experience the individual pressure of choosing a specific clique in their alternative schools. The agenda that would be required to establish a culture of community would likely need to encompass more than just increased discipline and supervision. This theme might be more closely linked to the institutional factor of smaller school size or smaller communities within a traditional setting.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Overall the interview questions elicited thoughtful and reflective responses that produced lengthy answers. This researcher’s background in Cognitive Coaching provided the skills in paraphrasing which were particularly helpful when a participant was

struggling to articulate a thought and/or lacked the vocabulary to do so. It also provided the questioning skills to facilitate deeper thinking and reflection beyond the initial interview question.

However, there are a few changes that might be made before replicating this study. One might be to separate the first question into two: “Tell me a little about yourself.” And “Tell me about your school experience.” Participants all tended to elaborate on their school experience instead of their personal life. That made it necessary to follow-up with participants and obtain more personal history and information. In the interview questions, one phrase needed more explanation in every interview and that was “a sense of belonging.” For more clarity, this question was added: “Was there ever a time when you felt like this is the place for me?” Another interview question that required clarification was: “What were some of the factors that supported or hindered any success you had in school?” The question often required repeating so the word “hindered” was substituted with “hurt” which proved successful. It would have been helpful to have a final count of the number of participants who struggled academically and experienced a lack of necessary skills. It would be helpful to add a question such as, “Was school ever hard for you?”

The design of the study included open-ended questions for participants to determine the course of the conversation. That meant that participants were not asked directly about immigrant documentation status. Four chose to talk about the topic and six did not. A potential limitation of the design could be the lack of information regarding documentation status and its potential affect on one’s socioeconomic status and financial

opportunities. It might have proven informative to have consistent data on all participants with regard to documentation and any potential barriers it may present.

Finally, the take-away question, “What else might be done to increase the success of Latino students?” did not prove very fruitful because participants were left with the option to contact the researcher if they had any additional responses. A more productive approach might have been to say: “I will contact you on (a given day) to follow up with additional ideas you have about this topic.”

With regard to geography, this study was limited to a specific region. A study including a multi-state or national representative sampling could provide themes more applicable to a wider variety of school and student contexts. In addition, only one student in this study reentered a traditional high school. A study involving a larger number of students who reentered a traditional school setting could provide greater insights as to potential supports that could be instituted in traditional high schools.

A possible limitation could have been a language barrier. However my bachelor’s degree is in Spanish and I have a high level of fluency in the language. As a public school teacher for over twenty years, I taught primarily in bilingual education and language teaching positions. My background has provided me with experience in working with students and families from many Spanish-speaking countries. All participants, except for Alejandro and Sara, had a high level of English fluency. Both chose interviews conducted primarily in Spanish with Sara choosing to shift into English occasionally when talking about school experiences. At times, Alejandro mumbled when interviewed, so I had a native speaker from El Salvador compare the transcripts with the audio recording. Given

my background and fluency level, the limitation of a language barrier is possible but unlikely.

The participants in this study identified supports that helped them succeed such as individual support, monitoring, relevant instruction, and caring relationships with teachers. They were provided after reentering. It is difficult to determine if these supports would have prevented dropping out if they had been provided beforehand. Some of that success might be attributed to more maturity, brain-development, or the experience of life as a dropout. More studies conducted with students whose absences indicate a risk for dropping out could help identify effective supports in dropout prevention.

With regard to the topic of alternative schools, future research could examine alternative school characteristics and their affect on the progress of students who reentered school. All of the participants who attended an alternative school attributed their success to factors that included individual support and monitoring, engaging instruction, and caring relationships with educators. These services were all provided within a smaller school setting. Future studies could examine the extent to which school characteristics such as school size, school culture, and peers with similar experiences play a role in increasing success in reentry students.

### **Recommendations for Reform**

The literature review included Finn and Zimmer's (2012) description of the characteristics of a school that supports student engagement as follows: "teacher warmth and supportiveness, instructional approaches that encourage student participation, small school size, and a safe environment with fair and effective disciplinary practices--and there are more" (p. 125). They claimed these characteristics could potentially be used in

recommendations for school reform (Finn & Zimmer, 2012). Numerous aspects of what the participants in this study shared about their lived experiences confirmed the importance of teacher supportiveness and engaging instructional practices. While only three participants directly addressed the value of a small school size, every theme under the category of institutional factors identified as creating success were all provided in an small school setting. This smaller setting can, according to Bridgeland et al. (2006), also be accomplished by organizing larger schools into smaller learning communities.

With regard to support, participants confirmed the recommendations by Bridgeland et al. (2006) and Lowder (2013) of individual academic support as safety nets to prevent skill and content gaps. The individual academic support from which this study's participants benefited as reentry students could have prevented their dropout event had it been offered earlier. Participants also confirmed Lowder's (2013) recommendation of providing a safety net for credit recovery. The participants in this study experienced hopelessness around the options for credit recovery before dropping out. As reentry students, they benefited from the individual monitoring provided by advisors and administrators. As a result, one recommendation is to establish a system for identification of at-risk students as well as an intervention system that provides individualized instruction to bridge skill and content gaps. This system would also need to have a component of continual individual monitoring and advocacy that ensures that at-risk students are on track to graduate.

A third recommendation is to establish an advisory/advocacy program. Participants talked about feeling welcomed and cared for in their alternative school. So, ideally this service would overlap with the recommendation of ensuring that each student

has at least one trusting, caring relationship with a trained adult in the school. The advisor/advocate would be assigned to each student for multiple years and would ensure that each student receives the services and support necessary for success. Also under the theme of feeling cared for would be the recommendation that attention be paid to the school climate and culture to ensure that it is a welcoming, caring place for all students.

Fourth, it is recommended to provide students with an engaging and relevant curriculum. Participants reflected on how the curriculum seemed more relevant than what they had experienced in a traditional high school. They claimed to have responded better to a curriculum that was hands-on, project-based, and interactive with real-world applications. Trips and outings also left a lasting impression on participants who spoke about the difference in teaching approaches.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) also recommended creating a better awareness among students of the role of school in getting a good job. From their experiences of dropping out and reentering school, the participants in this dissertation reiterated that recommendation. Aurora, David and Christian advocated for motivational speakers and programs for students on the benefits of getting an education. They suggested teaching students about the risks of dropping out as compared to the financial rewards of staying in school. Aurora said, “Somebody needs to warn them about how important school really is for later on.”

Christian suggested speakers who could not only educate students on the realities of an adult life, but also relate to students and share first-hand experiences of dropping out. Moreover, Stefán also wanted others to know how hard the life of a dropout can be: “Dropping out wasn’t . . . good for me . . . Just go to school . . . Just think of doing good

and knowing that you're gonna have a better future . . ." They all wanted to be able to prevent others from making the same mistake.

A final recommendation is to involve community and stakeholders more in school reform efforts. Some examples are: encourage PTOs to raise funds to pay for additional tutors for struggling students; involve the local Chambers of Commerce and local foundations in developing business support for after school educational programs for low-income students; ask the Chambers of Commerce and/or local foundations to develop a speakers bureau that will provide presenters to disseminate information to parents on the link between educational attainment and financial opportunity; enlist local foundations to support Pre-Collegiate programs that include the dissemination of information for parents and students on the path to college (including financial assistance); through a mentoring program, ensure that all at-risk students are matched with an adult from the community.

### **Conclusions**

The perspectives and actual experiences of these reentry Latino students validated recommendations from previous studies on dropping out. These findings addressed a gap in the literature between recommendations for decreasing dropout rates and what actually proves to be effective as in the cases of these Latino participants. Of the themes that emerged under the categories of institutional factors, environmental factors, and individual factors, the category that best falls within the scope of school reform is that of institutional. Therefore, more attention was focused on institutional factors.

The results of this study reinforced the potential of the following supports in decreasing Latino dropout rates: individual support/monitoring, engaging and relevant

instruction, and caring relationships with educators. Note that all these supports were experienced in a small, alternative school setting. The participants' voices echoed the findings and recommendations of previous studies on dropping out and identified changes educational leaders could make that would support students at risk of dropping out.

Given the critical theory assertion that the Latino achievement gap must be addressed, this study provided educational leaders recommendations for potential reform. Their lived experiences confirmed what worked for these participants as reentry students. Future research could focus on the effectiveness of these approaches in Latino dropout prevention and also include wider geographic regions to address a wider range of school contexts.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: April 13, 2015  
TO: Shawn Rios, Ed.S.  
FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB  
PROJECT TITLE: [721195-2] Latino Students: On Dropping Out and Reentering School  
SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision  
ACTION: APPROVED  
APPROVAL DATE: April 13, 2015  
EXPIRATION DATE: April 13, 2016  
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of April 13, 2016.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Shawn -

Hello and thank you for your patience with the UNC IRB process. Dr. Roehrs, the first reviewer, has provided her approval based on the revisions/amendments that you submitted. I've subsequently reviewed both your original and revised materials.

Please make the following small additions and corrections to your consent forms:

- 1) modify the initial spot at the bottom of page 1 to read Page 1 of 2 rather than Page 1 of 1; and
- 2) please add your research advisor's name and contact information to the heading.

These amendments do not need to be submitted for subsequent review but need to be completed before these forms are used in your participant recruitment and data collection.

Best wishes with your very interesting and worthwhile research. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

**APPENDIX B**  
**REQUEST LETTERS**



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Dear (Administrator/Superintendent):

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of Northern Colorado. I am seeking participants for my dissertation study on the experience of Latino students who have dropped out and reentered school. With a minimal investment of your time, you could potentially help to provide new information on serving Latino students.

**If you provide consent, I will then ask that you direct me to educators in your district that might know of potential participants. They then extend an invitation to participate to current Latino students and Latino graduates who have previously dropped out then reentered. The educators then provide me with contact information.** Consenting participants will be interviewed once **at school** with the possibility of a follow-up interview. They will have the option to be interviewed in English or Spanish. Participants will be asked about their educational experience as well as factors that influenced their dropping out and reentering school.

The UNC Institutional Review Board has approved this study and its procedures. Every attempt will be made to maximize confidentiality. I will use pseudonyms when referring to the area, schools and participants. Data will be collected and stored in a secure place. After the data collection and analysis process, feel free to contact me to learn the results of the study.

Whether you are able or unable to participate, please let me know by email: rios\_shawn@yahoo.com. I have attached a consent form for you to sign in the case of your consent. I appreciate your time and attention in the matter. With your support, I hope to gain valuable insight into the experience of the participants, as well as discover new information that could potentially inform agendas focused on closing the Latino achievement gap.

Sincerely,

Shawn Ríos  
P.O. Box xxxx  
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX  
rios\_shawn@yahoo.com  
xxx-xxx-xxxx

UNIVERSITY *of*  
NORTHERN COLORADO



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Dear (Principal):

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of Northern Colorado. I am seeking participants for my dissertation study on the experience of Latino students who have dropped out and reentered school. With a minimal investment of your time, you could potentially help to provide new information on serving Latino students.

**If you provide consent, I will then ask that you direct me to educators in your school that might know of potential participants. They then extend an invitation to participate to current Latino students and Latino graduates who have previously dropped out then reentered. The educator then provides me with contact information.** Consenting participants will be interviewed once **at school** with the possibility of a follow-up interview. They will have the option to be interviewed in English or Spanish. Participants will be asked about their educational experience as well as factors that influenced their dropping out and reentering school.

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Whether you are able or unable to participate, please let me know by email: rios\_shawn@yahoo.com. I have attached a consent form for you to sign in the case of your consent. I appreciate your time and attention in the matter. With your support, I hope to gain valuable insight into the experience of the participants, as well as discover new information that could potentially inform agendas focused on closing the Latino achievement gap.

Sincerely,

Shawn Ríos  
P.O. Box xxxx  
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx  
rios\_shawn@yahoo.com  
xxx-xxx-xxxx

**APPENDIX C**  
**CONSENT AND ASSENT FORMS**

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Latino Students: On Dropping Out and Reentering School

Researcher: Shawn Rios, Ed.S.  
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx  
E-mail: rios1154@bears.unco.edu  
rios\_shawn@yahoo.com (preferred)

Research Advisor: Linda Vogel, Ph.D.  
Phone Number: 970-351-2119  
E-mail: linda.vogel@unco.edu

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). I am seeking participants for my dissertation study on the experience of Latino students who have dropped out and reentered school. With your permission, you could potentially help to provide new information to inform agendas on increasing Latino student achievement.

If you provide consent, I will interview you once with the possibility of a follow-up interview. The interview will be at school at a time that is convenient for you. You will not miss class time, because we will do the interview after school or during a free period. You will have the option to be interviewed in English or Spanish. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. I will ask you about your educational experience as well as factors for dropping out and reentering school. Any follow-up interviews or contact would be a chance to clarify remaining questions and verify the data collected. You may also be asked to verify any emerging themes from the data. Verbal and non-verbal responses will be recorded. Another researcher may be asked to observe the interview and/or reflect afterward with me.

The UNC Institutional Review Board has approved this study and its' procedures. Every attempt will be made to maximize confidentiality and I will not use your real name. I will use pseudonyms when referring to the area, schools and participants. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's home office on a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet. After the interview responses are transcribed, the recordings will be

destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the University of Northern Colorado advisor and after three years, will be destroyed. The risks inherent in the study are no greater than those normally encountered during everyday life. However, you may experience some emotional discomfort if reflecting on past negative experiences. You may be reimbursed for minimal transportation costs associated with traveling to and from the interview if not in attendance or already at school. Depending on the time of day, you may receive refreshments during the interview. You will receive no other benefits for participating. It is unlikely that you, as the participant, will directly benefit from this study. Benefits of this study may include a better understanding of the dropout and reentry process, as well as new knowledge surrounding Latino student achievement. New information could potentially benefit the field of education and future generations of Latino students. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns or for the results of this study. Please know that I speak both Spanish and English.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Thank you for helping me with my research.

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Participant Signature

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Date

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Researcher's Signature

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Date

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



ACUERDO DE CONSENTIMIENTO DE PARTICIPACIÓN EN EL ESTUDIO  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Título del Proyecto: Estudiantes Latinos: Sobre desertar la escuela y reingresar

Investigador: Shawn Ríos, Ed.S.  
Número de teléfono: xxx-xxx-xxxx  
E-mail: rios1154@bears.unco.edu  
rios\_shawn@yahoo.com (preferido)

Consejero Investigador: Linda Vogel, Ph.D.  
Numero telefónico: 970-351-2119  
E-mail: linda.vogel@unco.edu

Soy candidata doctoral en la University of Northern Colorado (UNC) y estoy seleccionando participantes para mi tesis doctoral sobre las experiencias de estudiantes Latinos que desertaron la escuela preparatoria pero que han reingresado. Con su permiso, posiblemente usted podría ayudarme a proveer nueva información que nos permita aumentar el éxito académico de Latinos.

Si usted está de acuerdo, tendrá una entrevista conmigo con la posibilidad de una segunda entrevista. La/s entrevista/s será/n en su escuela, a un tiempo que sea conveniente para usted. No perderá clases académicas, porque haremos la entrevista después de la escuela o durante un período libre. Tendrá la opción de hacer la entrevista en inglés o en español. Todas entrevistas serán grabadas en audio y transcritas. Le preguntaré acerca de sus experiencias académicas así como los factores que influyeron a su deserción de la escuela y a su reingreso. Una entrevista de seguimiento sería para clarificar algunas preguntas y también verificar los datos adquiridos y los temas interpretados. Todas las respuestas e interpretaciones, tanto orales como las que de lenguaje corporal serán observadas y anotadas. Es posible que durante le entrevista tendremos otro investigador observando para después poder comparar las interpretaciones conmigo.

El Comité de Revisión Institucional (IRB) de UNC ha autorizado este estudio y su procedimiento. Cada participante será protegido a su máxima confidencialidad y no usaré su nombre verdadero. Usaré seudónimos para identificar la región, las escuelas y los nombres de los participantes. Los datos se guardarán en la oficina de mi casa en un

computador protegido por contraseña o en un archivo bajo llave. Después de transcribir las respuestas de entrevista, los datos de audio se borrarán. Las formas de permiso se mantendrán en un archivo bajo llave en la oficina de la consejera académica de la Universidad de Northern Colorado y serán destruidas después de tres años. Su participación no representa ningún daño previsible más allá de lo que pueda ocurrir en una conversación en la vida cotidiana. Sin embargo, es posible que usted se sienta incómodo si está reflexionando en las experiencias negativas de su educación. Si usted no está en la escuela y tiene que transportarse a la entrevista, le devolveré el costo del transporte de viajar a la entrevista. Dependiendo de la hora, usted podría recibir refrigerios durante la entrevista. Usted no recibirá otros beneficios por su participación. Es poco probable que usted se beneficie directamente por su participación. Los beneficios preVISIBLES del estudio podrían incluir un entendimiento mejor del proceso de la deserción de la escuela y el reingreso, así como conocimientos nuevos acerca del logro académico de los alumnos Latinos. Alguna información nueva podría beneficiar el área de la educación y las generaciones del futuro de estudiantes Latinos.

Por favor, no dude en ponerse en contacto conmigo por teléfono o correo electrónico si usted tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud o para recibir los resultados del estudio. Por favor, tenga en cuenta que yo hablo inglés y español también.

La participación es voluntaria. Usted puede decidir no participar en este estudio aún después de empezar su participación y retirarse en cualquier momento. Su decisión será respetada y no le repercutirá en los beneficios a que tiene derecho. Habiendo leído lo anterior y habiendo tenido la oportunidad de formular preguntas, por favor firme abajo si le gustaría participar en esta investigación. Se le dará una copia de este documento para futuras referencias. Si usted tiene alguna preocupación acerca de la selección o el tratamiento de los participantes en la investigación, por favor comuníquese con Sherry May, Administradora de IRB, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Gracias por ayudarme en esta investigación.

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Firma del participante

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Fecha

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Firma del investigador

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Fecha

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



PARENT CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Latino Students: On Dropping Out and Reentering School  
 Researcher: Shawn Rios, Ed.S.  
 Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx  
 E-mail: rios1154@bears.unco.edu  
 rios\_shawn@yahoo.com (preferred)

Research Advisor: Linda Vogel, Ph.D.  
 Phone Number: 970-351-2119  
 E-mail: linda.vogel@unco.edu

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). I am seeking participants for my dissertation study on the experience of Latino students who have dropped out and reentered school. With your permission and the interest of your child, you could potentially help to provide new information to inform agendas on increasing Latino student achievement.

If you grant permission and if your child is willing to participate, I will interview your child once with the possibility of a follow-up interview. The interview will be at school at a time that is convenient for your child. Your child will not miss class time, because we will do the interview after school or during a free period. He/she will have the option to be interviewed in English or Spanish. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. I will ask your child about his/her educational experience as well as factors for dropping out and reentering school. Any follow-up interviews or contact would be a chance to clarify remaining questions and verify the data collected. Your child may also be asked to verify any emerging themes from the data. Verbal and non-verbal responses will be recorded. Another researcher may be asked to observe the interview and/or reflect afterward with the researcher.

The UNC Institutional Review Board has approved this study and its' procedures. Every attempt will be made to maximize confidentiality. I will use pseudonyms when referring to the area, schools and participants. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's home office on a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet. After the interview responses are transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the University of Northern Colorado advisor and after three years, will be destroyed. The risks inherent in the study are no greater than those normally encountered during everyday life. However, your child may experience some emotional discomfort if reflecting on negative experiences. Your child may be reimbursed for minimal transportation costs associated with traveling to and from the interview if not already at school. Depending on the time of day,

your child may receive refreshments during the interview. You, nor your child, will receive other benefits for participating. It is unlikely that your child will directly benefit from this study. Benefits of this study may include a better understanding of the dropout and reentry process, as well as new knowledge surrounding Latino student achievement. New information could potentially benefit the field of education and future generations of Latino students.

Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns or for the results of this study. Know that I speak both Spanish and English. Thank you for helping me with my research.

Sincerely,

Shawn Ríos

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Full Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Birth Date (month/day/year)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

(Ages 16-17 only – participants under 15 years of age sign an assent form)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



ACUERDO DE CONSENTIMIENTO DEL PADRE  
DE PARTICIPACIÓN EN EL ESTUDIO

Título del Proyecto: Estudiantes Latinos: Sobre desertar la escuela y reingresar

Investigador: Shawn Ríos, Ed.S.  
Número de teléfono: (xxx) xxx-xxxx  
E-mail: rios1154@bears.unco.edu  
rios\_shawn@yahoo.com (preferido)

Consejero Investigador: Linda Vogel, Ph.D.  
Numero telefónico: 970-351-2119  
E-mail: linda.vogel@unco.edu

Soy candidata doctoral en la University of Northern Colorado (UNC) y estoy seleccionando participantes para mi tesis doctoral sobre las experiencias de estudiantes Latinos que desertaron la escuela preparatoria pero que han reingresado. Con su permiso y el interés de su hijo/a, posiblemente ustedes podrían ayudarme a proveer nueva información que nos permita aumentar el éxito académico de Latinos.

Si usted está dispuesto a dejar que él o ella participe, él o ella tendrá una entrevista conmigo con la posibilidad de una segunda entrevista. La/s entrevista/s será/n en su escuela, a un tiempo que sea conveniente para él o ella. Su hijo/a no perderá clases académicas, porque haremos la entrevista después de la escuela o durante un período libre. Tendrá la opción de hacer la entrevista en inglés o en español. Todas entrevistas serán grabadas en audio y transcritas. Le preguntaré acerca de sus experiencias académicas así como los factores que influyeron a su deserción de la escuela y a su reingreso. Una entrevista de seguimiento sería para clarificar algunas preguntas y también verificar los datos adquiridos y los temas interpretados. Todas las respuestas e interpretaciones, tanto orales como las que de lenguaje corporal serán observadas y anotadas. Es posible que durante le entrevista tendremos otro investigador observando para después poder comparar las interpretaciones conmigo.

El Comité de Revisión Institucional (IRB) de UNC ha autorizado este estudio y su procedimiento. Cada participante será protegido a su máxima confidencialidad. Usaré seudónimos para identificar la región, las escuelas y los nombres de los participantes. Los datos se guardarán en la oficina de mi casa en un computador protegido por contraseña o en un archivo bajo llave. Después de transcribir las respuestas de entrevista, los datos de audio se borrarán. Las formas de permiso se mantendrán en un archivo bajo llave en la oficina de la consejera académica de la Universidad de Northern Colorado y serán destruidas después de tres años. La participación de su hijo/a no representa ningún daño previsible más allá de lo que pueda ocurrir en una conversación en la vida cotidiana. Sin embargo, es posible que su hijo/a se sienta incómodo si está reflexionando en las experiencias negativas de su educación. Si su hijo/a no está en la escuela y tiene que transportarse a la entrevista, le devolveré el costo del transporte de viajar a la entrevista.

Dependiendo de la hora, su hijo/a podría recibir refrigerios durante la entrevista. Ni usted ni su hijo/a recibirán otros beneficios por su participación. Es poco probable que su hijo/a se beneficie directamente por su participación. Los beneficios previsibles del estudio podrían incluir un entendimiento mejor del proceso de la deserción de la escuela y el reingreso, así como conocimientos nuevos acerca del logro académico de los alumnos Latinos. Alguna información nueva podría beneficiar el área de la educación y las generaciones del futuro de estudiantes Latinos.

Por favor, no dude en ponerse en contacto conmigo por teléfono o correo electrónico si usted tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud o para recibir los resultados del estudio. Por favor, tenga en cuenta que yo hablo inglés y español también. Gracias por ayudarme en esta investigación.

Atentamente,

Shawn Ríos

La participación es voluntaria. Usted puede decidir no participar en este estudio aún después de empezar su participación y retirarse en cualquier momento. Su decisión será respetada y no le repercutirá en los beneficios a que tiene derecho. Habiendo leído lo anterior y habiendo tenido la oportunidad de formular preguntas, por favor firme abajo si le gustaría participar en esta investigación. Se le dará una copia de este documento para futuras referencias. Si usted tiene alguna preocupación acerca de la selección o el tratamiento de los participantes en la investigación, por favor comuníquese con Sherry May, Administradora de IRB, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre completo del estudiante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha de nacimiento del estudiante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del estudiante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

(Edades de 16-17 años—participantes menor que 15 años firman una forma diferente)

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Firma del padre o tutor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del investigador

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS (AGES 10-15) IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Latino Students: On Dropping Out and Reentering School

Researcher: Shawn Rios, Ed.S.  
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx  
E-mail: rios1154@bears.unco.edu  
rios\_shawn@yahoo.com (preferred)

Research Advisor: Linda Vogel, Ph.D.  
Phone Number: 970-351-2119  
E-mail: linda.vogel@unco.edu

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Program at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). I am seeking participants for my dissertation study on the experience of Latino students who have dropped out and reentered school. With your permission, you could potentially help to provide new information to inform agendas on increasing Latino student achievement.

If you agree to participate, and your parent gives permission, I will interview you once with the possibility of a follow-up interview. You will not miss class time, because we will do the interview after school or during a free period. You have the option to be interviewed in English or Spanish. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. I will ask you about your school experience as well as your process of dropping out and reentering school. Any follow-up interviews would be a chance for me to ask remaining questions. You may also be asked to give your opinions of any themes I find. Verbal and non-verbal responses will be recorded. Another researcher may be in the interview(s) and/or may help me to reflect after the interview.

To protect your identity, I will not use real names when referring to the area, schools and participants. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's home office on a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet. After the interview responses are transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the University of Northern Colorado advisor and after three years, will be destroyed. The risks of this study are nothing more than what you

might find in an everyday conversation. However, you may feel some emotional discomfort if remembering negative experiences. You may be reimbursed for minimal transportation costs associated with traveling to and from the interview if not already at school. Depending on the time of day, you may receive refreshments during the interview. You will receive no other benefits for participating. It is unlikely that you, as the participant, will directly benefit from this study. Benefits of this study may include a better understanding of the dropout and reentry process, as well as new information about Latino student achievement. New information could help to better serve Latino students. Please feel free to contact me if you have questions or concerns or for the results of this study. Please know that I speak both Spanish and English.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

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Participant Signature

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Date

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Researcher's Signature

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Date

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



CONSENTIMIENTO DE PARTICIPACIÓN EN EL ESTUDIO  
PARA MENORES DE EDAD (10-15 AÑOS)  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Título del Proyecto: Estudiantes Latinos: Sobre desertar la escuela y reingresar

Investigador: Shawn Ríos, Ed.S.  
Número de teléfono: (xxx) xxx-xxxx  
E-mail: rios1154@bears.unco.edu  
rios\_shawn@yahoo.com (preferido)

Consejero Investigador: Linda Vogel, Ph.D.  
Numero telefónico: 970-351-2119  
E-mail: linda.vogel@unco.edu

Soy candidata doctoral en la University of Northern Colorado (UNC) y estoy seleccionando participantes para mi tesis doctoral sobre las experiencias de estudiantes Latinos que desertaron la escuela preparatoria pero que han reingresado. Con tu permiso, posiblemente tú podrías ayudarme a proveer nueva información que nos permita mejorar el éxito académico de Latinos.

Si tú y tus padres están de acuerdo, tú tendrás una entrevista conmigo con la posibilidad de una segunda entrevista. La/s entrevista/s será/n en tu escuela, a un tiempo que sea conveniente para ti. No perderás clases académicas, porque haremos la entrevista después de la escuela o durante un período libre. Tendrás la opción de hacer la entrevista en inglés o en español. Todas entrevistas serán grabadas en audio y transcritas. Te preguntaré acerca de sus experiencias académicas así como los factores que influyeron a tu deserción de la escuela y a tu reingreso. Una entrevista de seguimiento sería para clarificar algunas preguntas y también verificar los datos adquiridos y los temas descubiertos. Todas las respuestas e interpretaciones, tanto orales como las que de lenguaje corporal serán observadas y anotadas. Es posible que durante le entrevista tendremos otro investigador observando para después poder comparar las interpretaciones conmigo.

Para proteger tu identidad, no usaré nombres verdaderos para el área, las escuelas, y los participantes. Los datos se guardarán en la oficina de mi casa en un computador protegido por contraseña o en un archivo bajo llave. Después de transcribir las respuestas de entrevista, los datos de audio se borrarán. Las formas de permiso se mantendrán en un archivo bajo llave en la oficina de la consejera académica de la Universidad de Northern Colorado y serán destruidas después de tres años. Tu participación no representa ningún daño previsible más allá de lo que pueda pasar en una conversación en la vida cotidiana. Sin embargo, es posible que tú te sientas incómodo si estás recordando algunas experiencias negativas de tu educación. Si tú no estás en la escuela y tienes que transportarte a la entrevista, te devolveré el costo del transporte de viajar a la entrevista. Dependiendo de la hora, tú podrías recibir refrigerios durante la entrevista. Tú no recibirás otros beneficios por tu participación. Es poco probable que te beneficie directamente por tu participación. Los beneficios preVISIBLES del estudio podrían incluir un entendimiento mejor del proceso de la deserción de la escuela y el reingreso, así como conocimientos nuevos acerca del logro académico de los alumnos Latinos. Alguna información nueva podría beneficiar el área de la educación y las generaciones del futuro de estudiantes Latinos.

Por favor, no dudes en ponerte en contacto conmigo por teléfono o correo electrónico si tienes alguna pregunta o inquietud o para recibir los resultados del estudio. Por favor, ten en cuenta que yo hablo inglés y español también.

La participación es voluntaria. Usted puede decidir no participar en este estudio aún después de empezar su participación y retirarse en cualquier momento. Su decisión será respetada y no le repercutirá en los beneficios a que tiene derecho. Habiendo leído lo anterior y habiendo tenido la oportunidad de formular preguntas, por favor firme abajo si le gustaría participar en esta investigación. Se le dará una copia de este documento para futuras referencias. Si usted tiene alguna preocupación acerca de la selección o el tratamiento de los participantes en la investigación, por favor comuníquese con Sherry May, Administradora de IRB, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Gracias por ayudarme en esta investigación.

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Firma del participante

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Fecha

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Firma del investigador

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Fecha

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



ADMINISTRATOR CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Latino Students: On Dropping Out and Reentering School

Researcher: Shawn Rios, Ed.S.  
Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx  
E-mail: rios1154@bears.unco.edu  
rios\_shawn@yahoo.com (preferred)

Research Advisor: Linda Vogel, Ph.D.  
Phone Number: 970-351-2119  
E-mail: linda.vogel@unco.edu

Purpose and Description: The purpose of this dissertation study is to describe the experience of Latinos who reentered school after having dropped out. A goal is also to discover ways to decrease the Latino dropout rate and increase Latino student achievement. The overarching research question is, "According to participants, what factors contribute to Latino student reentry in school after dropping out?"

**If you provide consent, I will then ask that you direct me to educators in your school or district that might know of potential participants. They then extend an invitation to participate to current Latino students and Latino graduates who have previously dropped out then reentered. The educators then provide me with contact information.** All emancipated participants who are 18 years of age or older, sign a consent form while those who are not, sign an assent form with parents signing a parent consent form for the participant. Consenting participants will be interviewed once **at school** with the possibility of a follow-up interview. They will have the option to be interviewed by me in English or Spanish. All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Verbal and non-verbal responses will be recorded. Participants will be asked about their educational experience as well as factors that influenced their dropping out and reentering school. The UNC Institutional Review Board has approved this study and its' procedures. Every attempt will be made to maximize confidentiality. I will use pseudonyms when referring to the area, schools and participants. Data will be stored securely in the researcher's home office on a password-protected computer or in a locked file cabinet. The participants' names and contact information will be destroyed upon

project completion. After the interview responses are transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the University of Northern Colorado advisor and destroyed after three years. When reporting the information, the demographics of the school will be vague and a pseudonym will be used when describing the school and its data. Another researcher may be asked to observe interviews and/or reflect afterward with the researcher.

The risks inherent in the study are no greater than those normally encountered during everyday life. However, participants may experience some emotional discomfort if reflecting on negative experiences. Participants may be reimbursed for minimal transportation costs associated with traveling to and from the interview if not already at school. Depending on the time of day, participants may receive refreshments during the interview. They will receive no other benefits for participating. It is unlikely that they will directly benefit from this study. Benefits of this study may include a better understanding of the dropout and reentry process, as well as new knowledge surrounding Latino student achievement. New information could potentially benefit the field of education and future generations of Latino students. Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have questions or concerns or for the results of this study. The expected completion date of this dissertation is December 2015.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Thank you for helping me with my research.

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 Administrator's Signature

---

 Title

---

 Date

---

 Researcher's Signature

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 Date

**APPENDIX D**  
**INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCRIPT**

## INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCRIPT

**English.** “Thank you for agreeing to be part of this study. The purpose is to learn about your school experiences and your reasons for dropping out, then reentering school. When the Latino population in this country is compared with other ethnic/racial groups, they have lower academic achievement and, in fact, the highest dropout rate. And given that Latinos are the largest and fastest growing minority group, something needs to be done. So, another goal of this study is to inform school reform efforts for lowering the dropout rate and increasing Latino student success in school.”

**Interview Questions:**

1. Tell me a little about yourself and your school experience.
2. How would you describe your relationships with teachers?
3. What led you to drop out of school?
4. Before dropping out, were you ever an engaged and involved student (as in good attendance, active and focused participation, accomplished the work, valued the content)? Tell me about that.
5. Before dropping out, did you ever have a sense of belonging at school? Tell me about that.
6. How much time was there between dropping out and reentering school? What were you doing during that time?
7. What led you to return to school?
8. What were some of the factors that supported or hindered any success you had in school?
9. What could have made a difference to keep you in school?
10. Do you consider yourself an engaged and involved student now(as in good attendance, active and focused participation, accomplishing the work, valuing the content)? In what ways?
11. Do you have a sense of belonging at school now? Tell me about that?
12. What might be done to increase the success of Latino students? In an ideal world/school?
13. What else would you like to share about your experience?

“I have one take-away question to think about, “What else might be done to increase the success of Latino students?” You have my contact information. Let me know if you have other thoughts or ideas about what we’ve discussed. Please know that I really appreciate the time you have given. Thank you for participating.” (This method of concluding is designed to provide additional think-time for the participants if needed.)

**Spanish.** <<Gracias por acceder a participar en este estudio. El propósito es aprender acerca de tus experiencias académicas así como los factores que influyeron a tu deserción de la escuela y a tu reingreso. A comparar la población de Latinos con otros grupos étnicos/raciales, tienen menos éxito académico y el índice más alto de deserción. Desde que la población de Latinos está aumentando más rápido, algo necesita cambiar. Otra meta del estudio es informar los esfuerzos de reforma académica que enfocan en reducir el índice de deserción y aumentar el éxito académico de los Latinos.>>

**Preguntas de entrevista:**

1. Dime acerca de ti y de tus experiencias escolares.
2. ¿Cómo describirías tu relación con tus maestros?
3. ¿Qué eran los factores que influyeron a tu deserción de la escuela?
4. Antes de tu deserción, ¿había un tiempo en que eras un alumno dedicado e involucrado (así como la asistencia buena, la participación activa y concentrada, el cumplimiento del trabajo y valorar el contenido)? Dime acerca de eso.
5. Antes de tu deserción, ¿había un tiempo en que tenías un sentido de ser parte de la escuela? Dime acerca de eso.
6. ¿Cuánto tiempo había entre la deserción de la escuela y el reingreso? ¿Qué hacías durante este tiempo?
7. ¿Qué eran los factores que influyeron a tu reingreso?
8. ¿Qué eran algunos factores que apoyaban o dificultaban el éxito que tenías en la escuela?
9. ¿Qué habría podido marcar una diferencia para que te quedaras en la escuela?
10. ¿Tú te consideras un alumno dedicado e involucrado ahora (así como la asistencia buena, la participación activa y concentrada, el cumplimiento del trabajo y valorar el contenido)? ¿En qué maneras?
11. ¿Ahora tienes un sentido de ser parte de la escuela? Dime acerca de eso.
12. ¿Qué son algunas posibilidades para aumentar el éxito académico de los alumnos Latinos? En un mundo ideal/escuela ideal?
13. ¿Qué más te gustaría compartir acerca de tus experiencias?

<<Tengo una pregunta de despedida, <<Qué más podemos hacer para aumentar el éxito de los estudiantes Latinos?>> Tú tienes mi información de contacto. Avísame si tienes otros pensamientos o ideas acerca de lo que hemos platicado. Aprecio tu tiempo y ayuda que me has dado. Gracias por participar.>>