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The Relationship Between Small Urban High Schools and Resiliency in At-Risk Students

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SMALL URBAN HIGH SCHOOLS AND

RESILIENCY IN AT-RISK STUDENTS

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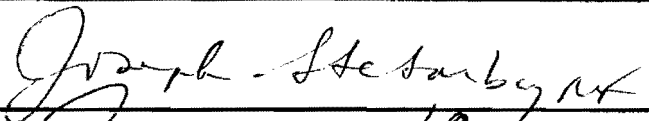
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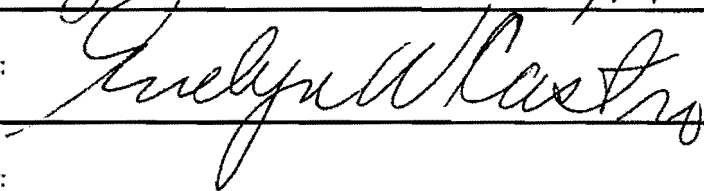
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ABSTRACT

The Relationship Between Small Urban High Schools and Resiliency in At-Risk

Students

The purpose of this research study was to examine what influence, if any, small

schools have on resiliency development in at-risk students. It addressed two research

questions: 1) What makes some "at-risk" students continue to progress in school, and 2)

what school-related structures in particular allow small schools to positively affect

students?

This research focused on a case study of one small high school in New York

City. Subjects involved in this study were students, parents, and staff members from

this one school. Students in their third year of high school were administered the

Resiliency Survey to identify subgroups of more and less resilient students. Fourteen

students, five staff members and three parents were interviewed to collect data on in-

school academic experiences. Data on pre-entry and current academic achievement

was also collected.

The results of this study indicate that at-risk students, both male and female,

more and less resilient, responded positively to an intentional focus on personalization

and a school culture that promotes high expectations for all learners. This school used

advisory groups, counseling services, college planning and teacher teaming to support

students. Students reported feeling cared for, and they performed better as a result. The

study found, however, that students were progressing successfully towards graduation,

irrespective of self-reported resiliency. The study concluded that, while small schools

may not necessarily promote resilience in at-risk youth, they enable students of lower

resilience to be successful. Implications for school policy and future research are identified and discussed.

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DEDICATION

To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I give you all the glory for what you have done in my life. It was your grace and mercy that allowed me to do this. For this, I give you thanks and I dedicate all my efforts to you.

I dedicate this work to my family, the Darrisaws, the Grants and the Greens. I thank you for blessing me with a wonderful heritage. Because of you, I know that I can overcome any obstacles that may come my way. You paved the way and set the example for how it's done.

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doubt, you were there. When I wanted to quit, you were there. When I didn't know

what to do next, you were there. You have been that source of strength I can always

count on. Thank you for sharing this life with me and believing in my dreams. Thank

you for loving me through it all.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In testimony before the House Budget Committee in 2009, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan proposed an education budget that would "...support comprehensive approaches such as Promise Neighborhoods, which would be modeled after the Harlem Children's Zone, that aim to improve college-going rates by combining rigorous k-12 education with a full network of neighborhood-based social services." The Harlem Children's Zone offers its students medical care services, nutrition workshops, support for parents and easily-accessible counseling. Secretary Duncan's proposal was a formal recognition by our current presidential administration that the answer to educational improvement, particularly in inner cities, resides within addressing the social needs of our nation's students. What may seem like a radical idea to some has become a matter of common sense and good practice to others; schools need to integrate social services into their instructional programs if they intend to successfully educate at-risk students. Full-service schools like the Harlem Children's Zone take into account that students not only bring their minds to school, they also bring their needs and their feelings as well. Successful innercity schools address the needs of the whole child by providing students with a plethora of services in addition to effective pedagogy. Geoffrey Canada's Harlem Children's Zone is just one example of a full-service model school that is aimed at fostering achievement for urban students. Other organizations and individuals are calling on society to re-examine the way public schools provide support and services to students. In addition to the old adage of "readin', writin', and 'rithmetic", schools are now also being challenged to foster relationships and affirm students. A schoolwide focus on building resilience in students is one way to respond to that challenge.

In innercity high schools, there continues to be a gap between the achievement of African-American and Latino students and their White peers. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2007 8.4% of African-American students between the ages of 16 and 24 dropped out of high school. There is an even greater cause for alarm with the dropout rate of Latino students; 21.4% of Latinos drop out of school each year, compared to just 5.3% for White students. Innercity students of all ethnic backgrounds experienced even higher dropout rates than the national average. While these statistics reveal a serious societal problem, they do not reveal either the causes of the problem or the combination of the factors that make students raised in high poverty areas more at risk for academic failure. African-American and Latino students who live in high-needs urban areas are adversely affected by social problems such as teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, exposure to violence, gang involvement and weakened family structures. These problems negatively influence students while diminishing the likelihood of success in school. Schools are not equipped to address all of the social issues students bring with them to school; however, emerging research indicates that schools can enhance students' ability to combat those stressors by building the internal assets students need to overcome challenging conditions. The aim of this research was to determine what schools can do to both support students and help them develop the tools they need to rebound from setbacks in school and in life.

Resiliency theory is based on the belief that individuals have the capacity to rebound from unfavorable circumstances in life, given the right conditions. Accordingly, some individuals have experienced pain, loss, poverty and/or trauma, and still have been able to achieve success, or at least lead productive lives. Risk factors for children include

racial discrimination, psychological difficulties, community violence, poverty, disruption, and alcoholism (Condly, 2006). Despite the presence of those factors, resiliency theorists believe that interactions in students' lives can help them defy the odds and experience resilience (Downey, 2008). Researchers of resiliency are interested in identifying the characteristics of resilient individuals, as well as the conditions that existed, either internally or externally, that allowed them to persevere despite initial obstacles. The focus of this research was to understand whether schools, particularly small schools, can contribute to resiliency development in at-risk adolescents.

There have been numerous urban school reform efforts designed to address the achievement gap between White students and students from ethnic minority groups. The creation of small schools is one of the reforms championed by large urban cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Miami and New York City. In New York City, the growth of small schools ballooned from just 32 in 1993 under Chancellor Joseph Fernandez to over 200 in 2010 under the Klein/Bloomberg administration. The theory behind this reform effort is to decrease the anonymity students experience in large schools. By creating schools that function in smaller, more manageable units, students receive more attention from the adults charged with their education. Both small-school advocates and critics agree that the size of the school alone will not in itself increase student outcomes; however, small schools allow for a greater degree of personalization and positive relationships with students, which are the building blocks for student success (Conchas & Rodriguez, 2008). Research shows that students in small schools display lower levels of antisocial behavior, greater degrees of extracurricular participation, higher attendance and a lower dropout rate. More importantly, students in small schools generally report a

greater feeling of belonging (Huguley, 2008). Interpersonal relationships and a sense of community in a school may be the keys to increasing academic success among at-risk students. This study expands upon what we already know about small schools and urban students by closely examining the practices, leadership decisions and structural factors that lead to increased outcomes for high needs students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how small high schools in New York City organize themselves to address the social needs of their students. The study examined the structures that have been implemented in small schools that specifically deal with issues such as adolescent development, stress, conflict, healthy habits, decision-making, and time management. It attempted to determine whether those practices have had an impact on student outcomes and students' feelings of resiliency. Resiliency has been defined as "the capacity to bounce back, withstand hardship and repair oneself" (Wolin & Wolin, as cited in Henderson, 2003, p.7). It can also be described as the ability to achieve positive outcomes despite extremely challenging circumstances. Implicit in resiliency theory is that adversity in life does not necessarily equate to failure and dysfunction, but that there are a variety of outcomes young people can achieve despite initial obstacles. "A key underlying premise is that educational resilience can be fostered through interventions that enhance children's learning, develop their talents and competencies, and protect or buffer them against environmental adversities" (Wang, Haertel & Walberg,1997, p.1). Resiliency theory provides hope by reaffirming the power schools have to affect change in the lives of their students. School environments and personnel can serve as buffers against the adverse conditions some students face.

Research on resiliency in schools is important so educators can understand the school

structures that contribute to increasing student achievement. While there is a great deal

of literature on small schools and student achievement, there is little scholarly research on

the impact of advisory programs, school partnerships with community-based

organizations, or counselor-to-student ratios in small schools. Quantitative research has

been done that has compared graduation rates and student performance in small schools

versus traditional comprehensive schools and the results have been positive. A 2010

study on New York City's small schools conducted by MDRC found that, "By the fourth

year of high school, SSCs (small schools of choice) increase overall graduation rates by

6.8 percentage points, which is roughly one-third the size of the gap in graduation rates

between White students and students of color in New York City" (Bloom, Levy

Thompson & Unterman 2010, p.iii). However, this study looked for indicators of school

effectiveness that are not easily measured by summative assessments. The results of

high-stakes examinations cannot demonstrate change in student attitudes and academic

behaviors, but that does not mean that these factors are not important to measure. This

study looked for the evidence of the impact of socioemotional interventions on students.

Positive attitudes, hope, optimism, and persistence are the characteristics that were

looked for in the study's participants. Do secondary schools have the power to inculcate

or reinforce these traits in their students? Resiliency theory in schools affirmatively

asserts that schools do possess the power to foster these traits in students, but that it is not

a random process. Research shows that small schools that promote stronger relationships

between students and adults engage students more, thus allowing teachers to be better

equipped to respond to both the academic and social needs of their students. These

connections can show, and have been shown, to have a positive impact on student achievement (Bloom, et al, 2010). This research aimed to identify the specific interventions schools use that are associated with these outcomes.

This study was about resiliency. The concept of resiliency was defined, as well as where it can be found, how it is formed and how it can be developed in students. This study also explored the relationship between resiliency and students in small secondary schools. The goal of this research was to connect the theory of resiliency to the practice of small schools that effectively promote it. While we do not assert that a school must be small in order to foster resiliency, it is likely that small schools maximize students' meaningful interactions with adults – thus promoting resiliency. Exploring factors that lead to resiliency is important because resilient students make better choices, stay in school longer and seek out additional tutoring and support when necessary. These habits position students to achieve more in school. Once an understanding of resiliency and its importance among students who are at risk for failure was established, the research focused on the school practices which may foster resiliency in students.

Small secondary schools have shown some initial gains in graduation rates, attendance and test scores, but research has shown that the creation of small learning communities does not necessarily translate to higher student achievement among at-risk students (Hemphill &Nauer, 2009). "Experience and research make very clear that school size does indeed matter but they also make clear that 'small' is no silver bullet" (Fine & Somerville, as quoted in Cotton, 2001, p. 5). Smallness helps in that a small and manageable school size facilitates the effective implementation of good practices. The

remedy is more than just the size of the school, but also the structures and support that these schools have employed to garner success among at-risk student populations.

A brief history of the philosophical foundations of the small-schools movement will be described in the next chapter, with a particular focus on how the common values and beliefs of small schools impact the services they provide to their students. Each small-school network has adopted several principles upon which the schools are founded. For example, Coalition of Essential Schools, an organization founded in 1984 by the late Theodore R. Sizer, has been at the forefront of the small-schools movement. Their organization has established the following set of common principles which their member schools adhere to:

> ...learning to use one's mind well; less is more, depth over coverage; goals apply to all students; personalization; student as worker, teacher as coach; demonstration of mastery; a tone decency and trust; commitment to the entire school; resources dedicated to teaching and learning; democracy and equity (www.essentialschools.org, 2009).

Another organization, New Visions for Public Schools, a New York City-based nonprofit organization which helps to create and support small schools, also has 10 principles of effective schools. Among their 10 principles is "a personalized learning environment". The MDRC study on small schools in New York City also identified three common features of small schools: academic rigor, community partnerships and personalization. Personalization is cited by numerous organizations as a fundamental principle in the formation of small schools. "Opportunity for greater personalization in the learning experience of students has long been seen as one of the primary advantages

of small schools" (Wasley, Fine, Gladden, Holland, King, Mosak & Powell, 2000, p. 9). Consistently, students have cited personalization as one of the major advantages of small schools (Noguera, 2008). Highly personalized school environments tend to assess the needs of each individual student, and then organize programs or services to meet those needs. Personalization and systemic support is fundamental to building resiliency in young people. Resiliency research shows that creating high expectations and supportive relationships are among the essential elements in resiliency building (Steinberg & Allen, 2002).

One common structural element found in small schools as a result of the principle of personalization is family group/advisory. Advisory group is the time during the school day when small groups of students meet with a teacher or school official to discuss relationships, self-esteem, personal goals and other youth issues. Advisory offers students the opportunity to connect with a caring adult on a regularly scheduled basis, and it is also a forum for students to support their peers, work on issues and solve authentic life problems. Other examples of structural elements commonly found in small schools to support personalization are mentoring programs, partnerships with community-based organizations, inquiry-based instruction, service-learning opportunities, and small counselor-to-student ratios. This study examined whether or not these types of school structures promote resiliency in students. Other questions that were explored in the study were: 1) Which structures are more effective in promoting resiliency?, and 2) What role do teachers, counselors and other school adults play in fostering resiliency in at-risk students? This research focused exclusively on one New York City small high school by conducting indepth interviews with a sample of at-risk

students and the staff members who support them. In this study, data was collected on the family size and composition, parental occupations, and the complex social issues these urban adolescents must face while seeking an education. Such social issues include negative peer pressure, low self-esteem, adolescent sex, teenage pregnancy and interactions with the criminal justice system. The goal of this research was to determine whether or not the support services provided by small schools promote student success and serve as mitigating factors in the lives of their students.

While the interest in resiliency is not new, little research has been done connecting resiliency development to the structures and practices in urban small schools. There has been a greater emphasis in school research on interventions for at-risk students. Those studies tend to deal with symptoms of the illness, but hardly provide a plausible cure, or even a strategy for prevention. Remediation, tutoring and academic services may increase student achievement in certain areas, but they do not address the underlying social issues that prevent many students from focusing on learning while in school. Even short-term social skills programs have been shown to have limited long-term effects on student outcomes (Bernard, 2004). As well-intentioned as it may be, a four-week after-school program on self-esteem building probably will not result in meaningful change in student behavior or attitudes. Short-term student intervention programs can be equated to providing a patient with a band-aid when surgery is needed. A strategic organizational approach to preventing student failure is essential to reversing the trend of poor performance among at-risk youth. "Studies have demonstrated that at-risk students with low academic resilience perform poorly in school throughout their academic career"

(Nears, 2007, p.10). Therefore, increasing student resilience can increase academic success for at-risk students by addressing the underlying causes for failure.

Research Questions

The primary research question that framed this study is: How do small schools in New York City organize themselves to address the social and emotional needs of their students? Other research questions that followed are: 1) What impact do small schools have on fostering resiliency in at-risk students?, 2) Are there structures in schools (advisory, mentoring, instructional practices) that are increasing students' feelings of resiliency?, 3) What impact do student relationships with teachers have on the development of student resiliency?, and 4) Is there a relationship between students' self-reported feelings of resiliency and their achievement in school?

Statement of Significance

This study is significant for several reasons. Educators and policy makers alike have long searched for an answer to the problem of persistent failure among at-risk students in large urban cities. Socioeconomic status is still the greatest predictor for student success in school. This statement means that millions of American students are stuck in a perpetual cycle of poverty and failure, unless there is a radical change in how we do school. The national discussion on education cannot center around the few poor students who beat the odds despite all, or even the remarkable few schools that make it happen, but the focus has to remain on the masses of poor and minority students who are consistently lagging behind their peers. Continuing to focus on the few exceptional students who achieve despite all odds fosters a tendency to blame the victim for his or her own condition (Bernard, 2004). Countless conferences and books are dedicated to

addressing the problem of the achievement gap; all in search of the elusive solution. The answers have ranged from increasing accountability on urban schools to providing more funding to raising standards for teachers. All of these strategies have yielded varied results; yet, the problem of achievement disparity among the races remains. Urban schools serve disproportionate numbers of minority and poor students. Poverty, single-parent households, and parents without high school diplomas - all increase the likelihood that students will not complete their high school education. These students present certain challenges to schools before they walk through the classroom door. The socioeconomic status of the home has an impact on student attendance, school performance and, ultimately, graduation rates. The intent of this study was not to lay blame; rather, its intent was to identify practices that some schools have implemented to increase success and retention among this population. One of the initiatives many school districts are using to address the achievement gap is the creation of smaller learning communities or small schools. A primary goal of small schools is to create personalized environments for students and to increase the likelihood that students will build nurturing relationships with caring adults. Small schools are showing small, but steady, gains in student achievement; but in addition to being smaller, there may be practices in place in small urban schools that address the needs of students and foster a greater sense of resilience. By highlighting these practices, we can influence policy makers and educational leaders to replicate them in all schools regardless of the size.

This study is also significant because of its focus on examining successful schools which have addressed the psychosocial needs of students, opposed to focusing solely on academic deficiencies. Many schools provide extensive offerings in tutoring, test

preparation and rigorous coursework, but students must possess some motivation or inner resolve which makes them willing to take advantage of these programs and persevere through them. This study looked at what schools can do to leverage that choice and help students develop the "stick-to-it-iveness" required to handle life's tough challenges. The implications of this study may influence policy in the future, because it may lead school leaders to consider providing strength-based preventive interventions to at-risk students. The choice lies between the cost of remediation, summer school, credit recovery, extended day programs to address student failure versus allocating more resources for counselors, community-based partnerships or teacher advisories to promote student success. Research must provide a compelling reason for educational leaders to abandon the traditional remedies for student failure and disengagement.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that undergirds this study is the ecological theory which states all of the factors in a child's environment, the home, school and community, combined with internal assets influence the development of resiliency (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study is based on the theory that resiliency can be developed in students, and that schools can impact the development of resiliency. The chart that follows demonstrates the factors that influence resiliency in students.
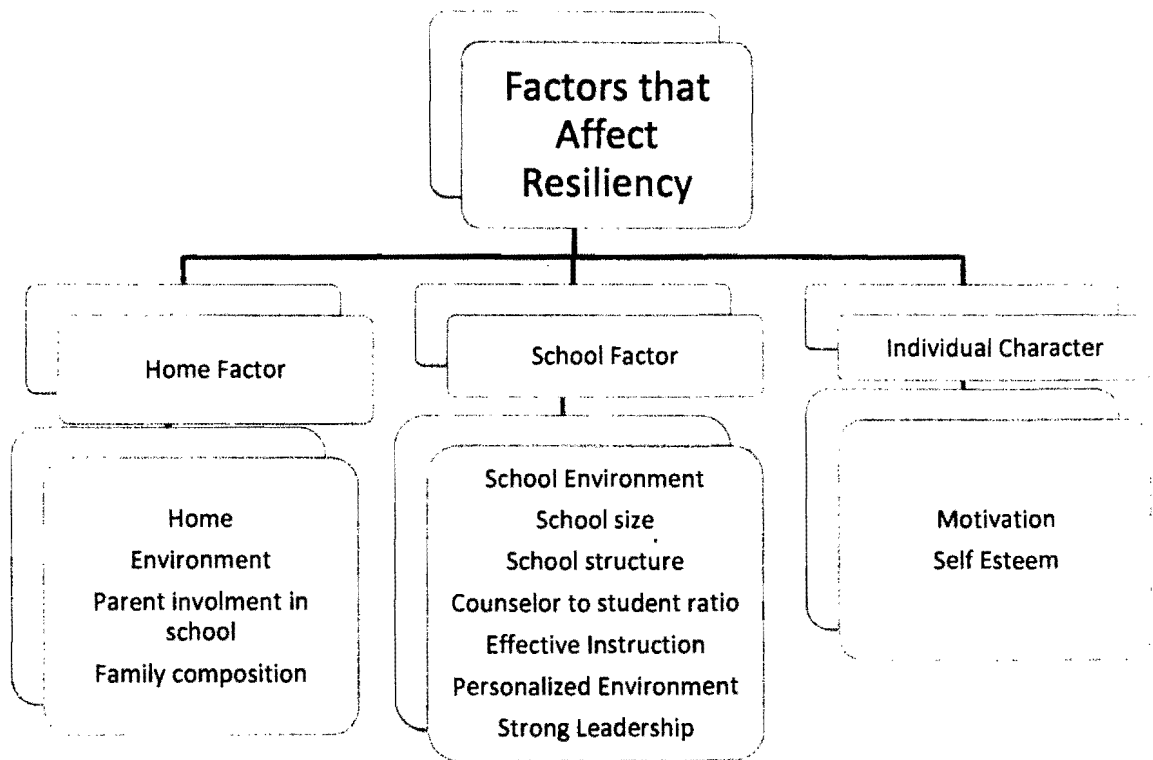
Figure 1. Factors that Affect Resiliency

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative research study was conducted in one small New York City high school, Village Community School. Village Community School has 450 students in grades 9-12, and it is located on a campus that houses three other schools in Brooklyn, New York. Student participants in this research study were recruited through outreach flyers and presentations. Student participants were surveyed and interviewed, along with parents, teachers, counselors and administrators in the school. While some generalizations can be drawn from this sample, it is also likely that the unique conditions present in this school have an impact on the findings of this research. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized across all small schools throughout the United States.

Additionally, this study cannot control for family background. As was established in this study, the family and the school environment are both significant factors in the development of resiliency. While the research process identified each student's family background, it did not seek to determine how much of the student's resilience can be accounted for by the influence of the child's family.

Definition of Terms

Academic Resilience – the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experience (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1994).

Advisory/family group – a counseling model whereby teachers, administrators and other adults in the building serve as "advisors" to small groups of students, with whom they meet as part of the regular schedule to address academic and socioemotional issues (Bloom, 2010).

At-risk students - students who could potentially drop out of school or engage in self-destructive behaviors that interfere with academic success. Behaviors including absenteeism, performing below academic potential or participating in activities that may be harmful to self and/or others such as substance abuse, threats and intimidation, and physical violence are some behaviors that place students at risk (American School Counseling Association, ASCA, 2006-2008)

Ecological Theory - the body of work originating in developmental and community psychology that examines the relationship between varied structures and processes in the social environment and individual thought, feeling and behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1979 and McKown, 2005 as cited in Stewart, 2008).

Distributive Counseling – all adults in the school are responsible for the academic, social and emotional developments of students and the school uses multiple approaches to safeguard students' academic, social and emotional well-being (Ancess &Allen 2006).

Prosocial bonding – connections with persons and activities that are healthy and supportive of positive growth and development (Milstein & Henry, 2000).

Protective Factors – characteristics within the person or within the environment that mitigate the negative impact of stressful situations and conditions (Henderson & Milstein, 2003).

Psychosocial supports – this refers to those that "identify how a student's individual perception and social roles factor into his or her achievement..." (Huguley, 2008, p.7).

Risk Factors – adverse social or environmental conditions that have a negative effect on development and academic success. Such factors include poverty, racism, low family cohesion, mental illness, alcoholism, or parental incarceration.

School Coherence – school outcomes are impacted by how a student perceives and feels about school (Woolley & Grogran-Kaylor, 2006).

Small Schools – for the purpose of this study, small schools were defined as schools that are composed of less than 600 students (Hemphill et al, 2009).

Summary

This study advances the knowledge about the school structures that assist and support students who were not predicted to do well. The research literature on resiliency will be reviewed in Chapter II, along with an analysis of the way in which small-school practices influence the experiences of at-risk students in school. The methods used to conduct the study will be outlined in Chapter III. An analysis and interpretation of the data gathered from surveys and interviews of students, parents, teachers, counselors and administrators used in the study will be presented in Chapter IV. Finally, in Chapter V, the research findings will be presented, followed by a discussion of the conclusions and implications for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The study of resiliency emerges from the fields of psychiatry, sociology and psychology. It is the idea that people can rebound from negative life experiences and become even stronger as a result (Henderson et al, 2003). Resiliency research is an attempt to observe the unique phenomenon that occurs when humans defy expectations, specifically, when individuals have endured harsh life circumstances and yet persevere to attain their goals. During the Holocaust of the 1940's, history witnessed the remarkable ability of some individuals to preserve the human spirit and retain their dignity in the midst of the most inhumane and horrid conditions imaginable. Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel wrote about the atrocities he and others experienced and told about the endurance of the spirit of those who survived: "I marvel at the resilience of the Jewish people. Their best characteristic is their desire to remember..." (Wiesel). These survivors possessed an internal force which enabled them to rebuild their lives, raise and love their children, and even tell their stories to others. This force can be attributed to resiliency. Resiliency can be developed as a response to an adverse familial background, or in response to a single traumatic event; i.e., loss of a parent. There are many questions surrounding the true nature of resiliency. Is it an innate quality that only a select few are born with, or is it possible for all humans to develop the capacity to rebound provided the proper conditions are present? Why do some people seem to have that special remarkable ability to overcome, while others succumb to the cruelties of their surroundings? According to Wolin & Wolin (1993), resiliency is not a fixed attribute in

individuals but a quality that can be nurtured and developed. They also stated that successful negotiations in one part of a person's life does not guarantee that the individual won't react adversely to other stressors when life's situations change. Other researchers claim that resiliency is influenced by both genetics and environmental factors (Lazarus & Monat, 1991; Mrazek & Mrazek, 1987; Rutter, 1985; Zimrin, 1986, as cited in Bennett, 1998). Because of the nature of human development, it is hard to isolate the causes of resiliency in individuals. The home, the family, the community and the school are all significant factors in resiliency development. Accordingly, these researchers believe that resiliency can be developed, whether or not an individual possesses unique characteristics that make them predisposed to resilience. While there are various theories about the nature of resiliency, researchers in this field have agreed that resilience is not a personality trait, but a capacity that exists in all humans that can be developed or enhanced by environmental factors (Bernard, 2004).

The context for exploring resiliency in this research study is the urban high school setting as experienced through the lens of adolescents who are at risk for failure. What does resiliency look like in schools? What behaviors would resilient students exhibit? Can schools influence the choices students make? The theory of resiliency in schools is grounded in the belief that schools can create protective factors for students that make success possible despite initial obstacles. Educational resiliency is defined as "…the heightened likelihood of educational success despite personal vulnerabilities and adversities brought about by environmental conditions and experiences" (Wang, Haertel & Walberg, 1997, p. 1). According to this theory, certain circumstances make youth more at risk of educational failure including poverty, joblessness, poor health, and crime;

a positive academic outcome despite the presence of these risk factors could be accounted for by resiliency. In the educational context, success is largely defined in terms of achievement: performance on tests, social behavior, work habits and attitudes, the willingness to pursue challenging tasks. Schools also define success as the absence of trouble; such as, failing grades, gang affiliation and involvement in fighting or other violent behaviors. From a deficit framework, one only sees the challenges students encounter; but in a resiliency framework, researchers look for students' strengths, internal assets and factors that mitigate negative circumstances.

At-Risk Students

The term "at-risk" has become a part of the education lexicon, but there is no universal understanding of it meaning. It is often used in a context that is synonymous with urban, poor or minority students, but to accept these assumptions is to perpetuate stereotypes, and perhaps lower expectations, for many of our students. In a study conducted by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement for the United States Department of Education, the authors identified a combination of factors that make students at risk of dropping out of high school. Those factors include: a family in the lowest socioeconomic quartile, coming from a single-parent household, a history of low grades, being retained in first-through-eighth grade, having changed schools two or more times in their early school years, or having an older sibling who dropped out of high school. The presence of three or more of these factors in a child's life increased the likelihood that a child would drop out of high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 1992, p. 15). According to the National At-Risk Education Network, "at-risk" refers to young people who are either at risk of dropping out of high school or of having

unfavorable life outcomes. Unfavorable life outcomes can include school failure, death, economic dependency, incarceration or high-risk behavior. Individuals who drop out of high school pay the price in more ways than one. High school dropouts earn less money over the course of a lifetime than students who graduate from high school. High school dropouts are also at greater risk of being incarcerated. According to the Youth Policy Forum, 75% of state prison inmates and 59% of federal inmates are high school dropouts. (Youth Policy Forum, 2005, as cited by the National At-Risk Education Network). The latter definition was adopted for this research, as the focus was on students who are at greater risk of not completing high school.

As stated earlier, one of the primary factors contributing to at-risk status is the socioeconomic status of the family. In *Teaching With Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor does to Kid's Brains and What Schools Can Do About It,* Eric Jensen (2009) discussed the way in which poverty creates an overwhelming stress for children that sets in motion a domino effect of negative social, physical, emotional and academic outcomes. He defined poverty as "the inability to purchase basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing and other basic essentials..." (p.6). According to Jensen, the primary risk factors affecting poor children are emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stress, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues. Poor children are exposed to adverse social and physical environments, including lower quality social and legal services, higher crime rates, more polluted air, crowded households and less cognitively rich environments. Jensen described a scenario in which one problem begets another, and then another; for example, an illness of a poor child which is not addressed due to lack of

adequate healthcare can lead to prolonged absence at school which can lead to grade retention. In summary, poverty's effects on children and families are pervasive.

Resiliency in Students

What does resiliency look like in students? Researchers have identified several characteristics that resilient students share. Some of the characteristics referenced below can contribute to other positive traits, but the collective presence of several of these traits is referred to in the literature as "resiliency". Resilient students tend to have higher self-concepts, possess higher educational aspirations, and have a more internal locus of control. Their self-concept allows them to distance themselves from their problems and envision a future for themselves past those problems. Students who are resilient are found to interact more with their parents, teachers and peers. They are more likely to complete school assignments, and are described by teachers as having someone who cares for them. Another indicator of resiliency development in students is the existence of healthy lines of communication between students and their parents. Resilient students have higher levels of autonomy, independence, empathy, task orientation, curiosity and better problem-solving skills (Werner, 1989; and Werner & Smith, 1982; as cited in Bennett, 1998). These students know how to access resources when needed, but are also capable of being self-reliant when it is appropriate. Resilient students can use negative circumstances and messages as a source for motivation that spurs them to strive harder to achieve. A dictum popular among urban youth is, "Let your haters be your motivators", which speaks to the idea that even unpleasant experiences and interactions with negative people can be used as a source of strength. Bernard (2004) identified four categories of

resilience: social competence, problem solving, autonomy and sense of purpose. In the chart below she listed the characteristics of each resiliency category.

Table 1

Personal Strengths: What Resilience Looks Like (Bernard, 2004)

Social Competence	Problem Solving	Autonomy	Sense of Purpose
Responsiveness	Planning	Positive Identity	Goal Direction
Communication	Flexibility	Internal Locus of	Achievement
Empathy/Caring	Resourcefulness	Control	Motivation
Compassion	Critical Thinking	Initiative	Educational
Altruism	Insight	Self-Efficacy	Aspirations
Forgiveness		Mastery	Special Interest
		Adaptive	Creativity
		Distancing	Imagination
		Resistance	Optimism
		Self-Awareness	Hope
		Mindfulness	Faith
		Humor	Spirituality
			Sense of Meaning

The presence of any combination of these factors is likely to lead to positive academic outcomes for students. The current literature around resiliency states that schools can play a significant role in fostering these characteristics in students.

Factors that Influence Resiliency

All of the major influences in a child's life play can attribute to the development of academic resiliency. The home environment, the school environment and the community, each play a vital role in fostering resiliency in youth. Familial background can significantly impact the development of resiliency. Though schools can also play a significant role in fostering resilience, researchers have found that family stability is the most significant factor in determining which students will exhibit resiliency. The family is the basic unit of socialization for children, and it is within this unit that values are formed and beliefs are shaped. Student attitudes, behaviors and the formation of resilient characteristics are initially molded by the family. However, when studying at-risk student populations, it is important not to assume their families are dysfunctional. It is important to recognize that, even among poor families who experience a variety of social problems, there may exist resources within the family that promote strength, competence and self-esteem in their children. Families of all types and compositions can positively shape and nurture children. Because the family is so critical to child development, researchers have found that educational interventions that are aimed at engaging the entire family are more effective than those solely targeting individual students (Wang et al, 1997). The general push to promote more parental involvement in schools is supported by the research that shows that students achieve more when parents are directly involved in their children's school activities (Wentzel, 1999).

Second to the influence of the family on the development of children's resiliency is the influence of the school. "More than any institution except the family, schools can provide the environment and conditions that foster resiliency in today's youth..."

(Henderson, Miltstein 2003, p. 2) Schools play an enormous role in the socialization and development of children. Schools not only teach students academic skills, but they also reinforce important social norms and promote the values of the mainstream culture.

Wang, Haertel and Walberg conducted a quantitative study on the influence home, school and community have on students (Wang et al, 1997). Their study, "Continuum of Proximal to Distal Learning Influences and the Magnitude of Their Influence on Learning", found that classroom practices have the greatest influence on students, even greater than the influence of the home. Within the category of classroom practice, teacher and student social interaction ranks second highest as a factor that influences learners; classroom management ranks first. This research reaffirms the power teachers have to positively influence student behavior and attitudes. Close relationships with teachers have been shown to promote self-efficacy and resiliency in students. When teachers and other staff members show interest in, and actively listen to, students, students exhibit more resilient behaviors. Bernard (2004) referred to "turnaround people" (p.46); those individuals whose interactions with young people are transformative. They help young people in crisis see themselves differently by constructing alternative possibilities for their futures. Turnaround people are often teachers or counselors in schools. Caring relationships with teachers and other adults can help students apply themselves in school, even when tasks are difficult or boring. At-risk students' interaction with turnaround people can foster an intrinsic motivation to learn.

School Size and its Influence on Resiliency

Since what happens in the classroom can significantly impact student outcomes, it is important for researchers to identify the type of school structures that allow the optimal

classroom environment to exist. Advocates for small schools believe the design and organization of small schools maximizes their ability to support students. The intent of this research study was to determine whether there exists a connection between small school environments and the development of resiliency in students. "In the ecological model, school is conceptualized as a context that directly influences student behavior by contributing to the development of competencies that increase the likelihood of academic success" (Stewart, 2008, p. 4). Is the school entity a factor that influences student behavior and attitudes; and more specifically, what impact, if any, does school size have on how students perform in school? In a research study conducted by Battistich and Hom (1997), they explored the link between students' perception of their school as a community and their involvement in problem behaviors. The "school as a community" concept is perceived by students when they attend a school in which they experience acceptance and support. This type of school environment exhibits a positive school culture, a sense of cohesion and adults that work collaboratively to support students. Though Battistich and Hom could not clearly conclude that a school's sense of community caused fewer problem behaviors, they did find evidence of less drug use and delinquent behavior among students who experienced a greater sense of community in their school. "...this finding indicates that the social context of school is related to a wide range of student attitudes, motives and behaviors and thus merits increased attention in future research as an important determinant of children's developmental outcomes" (Battistich et al, 1997, p.4) Though a causal relationship could not be established, it is clear that schools are a contributing factor in student social and emotional development. In a case study conducted by Rene Antrop-Gonzalez (2006), he explored the notion of

school as an urban sanctuary. His study focused on the idea that, by providing students with positive affirmation and leadership opportunities, schools can become a refuge for young people from the violence and negativity they face in the outside world. He identified four attributes of schools as urban sanctuaries: 1. They ascribe to multiple definitions of caring relationships between students and teachers, 2. the school environment is like a family, 3. the school is psychologically and physically safe for students, and 4. the school provides a forum to affirm racial and ethnic pride (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006). This theory that schools can affect student outcomes leads to an examination of school structures which are organized solely for the purpose of creating greater student outcomes; namely small schools. This inquiry into small schools emerges from the increasing body of literature that says that small schools have a positive impact on student outcomes, particularly for students of color. However, prior to the small-schools movement, there were other educational reform movements that attempted to address the crisis in public education.

School Reform Movements

Perhaps one of the most critical reports on education in recent years is the *A Nation at Risk* report commissioned by the Reagan administration and released by the federal government in 1983. This report sent shockwaves through the government, as well as institutions of learning because of its bold claims that America is in danger of losing our world prominence due to the failures of our educational system. The report warned of the threat posed by foreign countries; even countries that had never been seen as competitors. "If an unfriendly power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an

act of war (p.)." Accordingly, other countries were gaining a competitive edge that once was exclusively America's. The evidence was found in the declining test scores, poor student achievement in math and science, the increasing rates of illiteracy among Americans, and the increasing need for remedial courses in college. The report provided numerous findings that attempted to identify the root causes for this growing problem. Among the report's findings were that curricula used in schools was less rigorous and well-defined than in years past, schools are demanding less of students, students are allowed to opt out of higher-level math and science courses, American students spend less time on school work than students in other industrialized nations, and American teachers are not well-prepared to teach the content of their courses. This report was an indictment on the American public education system. It went beyond being critical of how our schools are teaching its students to suggesting that somehow there was a harmful shift in the American value system. Americans no longer valued hard work, excellence and perseverance and have instead embraced mediocrity. *A Nation at Risk* led to a call to action which resulted in many new reforms and policy recommendations. In 1986, the National Governors' Association released a report, *A Time for Results,* that largely supported the findings of *A Nation at Risk,* and called for international benchmarks for the American educational system. The First National Education Summit was held in 1989, which was a gathering of state governors, White House staff and members of Congress. The outgrowth of this meeting was the creation of a national education strategy and the formulation of six national education goals which included school readiness, a 90% high school graduation rate, student achievement and citizenship, American dominance in math and science, increased adult literacy and safe, drug-free

schools. As the education reform movement gained national attention, more state governments signed on to support the recommendations of the National Governors' Association. By 1992, 48 states and over 2,000 communities had committed to achieving these goals. Each subsequent presidential administration launched its own education initiative. In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed the Educate America Act, also known as Goals 2000, which provided more than 466 million dollars in grants for programs that were designed to achieve the National Education Goals. Another major educational effort that took place in the 1990's was Comprehensive School Reform (CSR). This reform initiative focused on improving outcomes for low-income students in Title I schools. CSR implementation translated into the total overhaul of schools in the areas of curriculum, management, staff development, frequent assessment and parent involvement. Out of all of the reforms introduced as a result of the *A Nation at Risk* report, perhaps the greatest of these was the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Though education is a power reserved to the states in the United States Constitution, the federal government became increasingly involved in education policy during the last 20 years, partly because the *A Nation at Risk* report framed the education as an issue that impacts our national security and interests. Another factor that may have contributed to the federal involvement in education is the amount of money that is allocated towards funding public schools. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, the United States spent approximately 596.6 billion dollars in 2007-2008. With such a huge investment in schools, many lawmakers and citizens are compelled to determine how that money is spent. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, also known as the No Child Left Behind Act, the federal

government established a set of expectations for schools that was accompanied by harsh consequences for those who fail to meet the expectations. This act created increased accountability on schools for student performance. If schools did not meet student performance benchmarks, they would risk losing federal funds. As a result of this legislation, schools tested students more frequently by providing students with annual assessments in math and literacy. The No Child Left Behind legislation evoked the language and discourse of the civil rights movement. It lamented the fact that we as a country have allowed children to be "segregated by low expectations, illiteracy and self-doubt." This legislation also promoted the idea of parent information and choice. The annual student testing allowed parents and the public to know which schools were making progress and which ones were not. Parents of students who attended schools which consistently failed to make progress were given the right to send their children to better-performing schools. This provision supported the notion that the money should follow the students, and if parents are not satisfied with the local public schools they should be given the option to take the education dollars assigned to them to other institutions. This legislation provided funds to charter schools, as well as other school choice options.

Charter schools began in 1991 in the state of Minnesota, which permitted the first charter, but the support for parent-choice options began much earlier. President Ronald Reagan advocated for providing parents with alternatives to traditional public schools.

I believe that parents, not government, have the primary responsibility for the education of their children. Parental authority is not a right conveyed by the state; rather, parents delegate to their elected school board representatives and

State legislators the responsibility for their children's schooling...So, we'll

continue to work in the months ahead for passage of tuition tax credits, vouchers,

educational savings accounts, voluntary school prayer, and abolishing the

Department of Education. Our agenda is to restore quality to education by

increasing competition and by strengthening parental choice and local control

(Reagan, 1983).

The array of options that were advocated for by President Reagan and others

included private school choice, tuition credits, and the creation of more charter schools.

By the year 2009, there were over 4,700 charter schools in over 40 states and in the

District of Columbia. Charter schools are public schools that have been freed from the

bureaucracy of traditional public schools. They do not have to adhere to most state rules

about how to run schools, and they do not have to contend with the collective bargaining

of labor unions. Charter schools have to be authorized by a public institution. Students

gain admission to the schools through lotteries. The issue of charter schools has stirred a

great debate in public education about the effectiveness of traditional public schools, and

whether freedom from local district leadership is the key component in spurring

innovation and successful student outcomes. The charter school movement has

benefitted from support across the political spectrum. Prominent Republicans; such as,

New Jersey's Governor Chris Christie and the current Democratic president, Barack

Obama; support the expansion of charter schools. According to Richard D. Kahlenberg,

senior fellow at the Century Foundation, "...charters offered something for everyone.

Liberals liked providing choice for kids stuck in bad schools that stopped short of private

school vouchers. Conservatives liked the union-free environment found in most charter

schools." (NY Times, 2010) However, there are many educational and community leaders who are stanchly opposed to the charter school movement. Some believe that charter schools serve a significantly smaller percentage of students with disabilities and English language learners than non-charter public schools. Others contend that the results regarding student achievement in charter schools have been mixed. According to the Center for Research on Education Outcomes 2010 report titled, "Charter School Performance in New York City",the typical student in a charter school learns more than their counterpart in ELA and math, but that one-third of the charter schools show no difference in math achievement; and 16% of charter schools were found to have significantly lower learning outcomes. The inconsistencies are mirrored in English language arts as well (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2010). The widely popular documentary, *Waiting for Superman*, furthered the debate on the role charter schools play in reforming education.

Another vital part of the education reform movement of the last 20 years was the movement to create small schools. The creation of small schools occurred in many urban districts across the country as a way to address chronic school failure. Low graduation rates, coupled with high dropout rates and numerous incidences of school violence, signaled the need for reform. The gap in high school graduation rates among White students and African-American students and Latino students also triggered the need for system-wide reform. Over 80% of White students graduate from high school within four years, compared to 60% of African-American students and 62% of Latino students (Schwartz, Stiefel & Wiswall, 2012). The movement to create small schools came about in two major waves. The early phases of this movement began in the 1990's in New

York City, Chicago, Philadelphia and Oakland. The early small schools were marked by small groups of teachers who established high schools that were radically different from traditional schools. In many instances, students called teachers by their first names and helped to design the curriculum. Small schools provided students courses in topics related to oppression, racism, equity and social history (Hemphill & Nauer, 2009). The founders of the early movement were individuals like Deborah Meir who were inspired by the civil rights movement. They saw public education as the next frontier in the fight for social justice. Their new small schools provided an educational alternative for disengaged students who were considering dropping out of school. Inherent in this reform movement was a belief that small schools would provide students the support they need to be successful, and that large schools allow too many students to fall between the cracks. Authors Henderson and Milstein (2003) identified large schools as a barrier to fostering resiliency. "It is more difficult to create climates of caring, form strong webs of relationships, and personalize student education or staff development in large schools. It is also more difficult to set and maintain high behavioral, academic, and professional standards in such schools" (p.20). The education reformers believed large comprehensive high schools did not sufficiently promote student achievement for all students. They believed large schools were impersonal facilities which operated like factories. According to the factory model, schools are organized to teach basics, keep order and socialize students to be good citizens (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Within this model, students' individual identities are not engaged, and too many students remained anonymous. While not all urban large schools fit this description, too many of their students dropped out, failed repeatedly, or otherwise did not reach their full

potential. By the early 2000's, the radical small-schools movement received mainstream attention. Increasingly, instead of being a last resort for at-risk and overaged students, educational leaders in urban centers considered small schools to be a viable option for most of their students. Philanthropic organizations such as the Annenberg Foundation, the Open Society Institute, Carnegie and the Gates Foundation invested millions of dollars in the creation and support of small schools. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation invested over $150 million dollars in small schools. In New York City, by 2007, nearly two-thirds of all small high schools were funded by or received funding from the Gates Foundation (Quint, Smith, Unterman, & Moedano, 2010). What began as a social experiment gained mainstream credibility as well as support from politicians and community groups.

The small-schools reform created two distinct small-school models: the independent small school, and the school-within-a-school or small learning community (SLC) model. The latter is usually a small autonomous school that is housed on a larger site or campus. The small school located on a host site has its own administration, budget and space dedicated for its use. Due to space limitations in large urban cities, many new small schools find themselves co-located in existing buildings, thus sharing space with one or more other schools. Most small schools are dedicated to a theme such as arts or technology that drives its instructional program. Teachers generally work in teams of 8-10 assigned to a select number of students to manage. Selection criteria for admission into small schools vary from school to school, but many small schools in urban areas were created to address the needs of urban students with few optimal school choices; therefore, admissions are unscreened. Some small schools have been criticized for

skewing their achievement results by selecting proportionally fewer special needs students or English language learners; however, many small schools have an unscreened entry process that allows all students to have the same chance for admission. Most of New York City's small schools serve the same proportion of at-risk students, including overaged students, English language learners, special learners and students from low-income families as traditional comprehensive high schools. In a report entitled, *New York City's Changing High School Landscape: High Schools and Their Characteristics, 2002-2008*, the authors reported that small schools in New York City are currently serving more disadvantaged students than the large schools they replaced (Quint, et,al 2010). Additionally, in New York City low-performing students may be more likely than other students to attend small schools (Schwartz et al., 2012)

Detractors of the small-schools movement point to the high cost of creating small schools. Each small learning community has its own principal, administrative staff, operational costs and expenses which ultimately make small schools an expensive reform. Proponents of small schools would compare the operational costs of small schools and large schools by calculating the cost per graduate versus the cost per pupil. From this vantage point, the cost of small schools is cheaper in the long run than large schools. "Related to school environment and drop-out rates the Project on High Performing Learning Communities found that reorganizing high schools into small developmentally supportive communities…reduced school drop-out rates 40 to 50 percent or more" (Bernard, 2004, p.67). Economics professors Henry M. Levin and Cecilia E. Rouse stated that, "If we could reduce the current number of dropouts by just

half, we would yield almost 70,000 new graduates a year..." (Levin & Rouse, 2012, p. A31).

While the small-school population is defined as 400-700 students (Hemphill, 2009), the focus of this study was not on the number of students being served by the school, but on the underlying philosophies, common policies and operating procedures small schools implement to effectuate improved outcomes for at risk youth.

In a study about school size, Kathleen Cotton (2001) looked for evidence of an impact of school size on student outcomes. Her analysis of the existing literature on school size focused on achievement, attitudes, social behavior problems, students' feeling of belonging, and interpersonal relations with students and staff. In comparing school size around these factors she found small schools ahead in most categories. Among the benefits she found were that students in small schools enjoy greater levels of participation in extracurricular activities, attend school more regularly, and exhibit greater positive social behaviors. The research is divided on the impact of school size on student achievement; however, most researchers agree that there is no significant difference in achievement levels between big schools and small schools. This finding can be interpreted to mean that student achievement in small schools is at least as good as student achievement in big schools. Newer research on the impact of New York City's small schools on student achievement has demonstrated a positive impact on student graduation rates. According to a recent study conducted by MDRC, 67.9 % of students who entered small high schools in New York City in the 2005-2006 school year graduated four years later, compared to 59.3% of students who attended large comprehensive high schools. However; there is more agreement on the positive effect

small schools in general have on minority and poor children (Bickel & Howley, 2000). Research shows that poor and minority students exhibit more positive behaviors when attending small schools. Students who move from large schools to small schools always cite the attention they receive from caring staff as the primary reason for their academic or attitudinal improvement.

What is it about small schools that yield the potential for higher achievement among at-risk students? Small schools tend to create learning environments where personalization is a priority. These schools tend to individualize support and provide students with more personal attention. In addition to personal attention, small schools offer students more opportunities to become meaningfully involved in school. "Recent studies have shown that students who experience their school as a community enjoy school more, are more academically motivated, are absent less often, engage in less disruptive behavior, and have higher achievement than students who do not" (Battistch & Hom, 1997, p. 1). Small schools also offer more opportunities for students to be recognized publicly for their talents and achievements. Other common characteristics of small schools are teacher leadership, inquiry-based instruction, service-learning opportunities, college articulation programs, safe school environments, and advisory programs. One of the key recommendations of the National Association of Secondary School Principals in *Breaking Ranks II* is for schools to implement comprehensive advisory programs that allow students opportunities to plan their academic and social progress with a faculty member. Research also shows that effective advisory programs improved student achievement, decreased the number of dropouts and improved teacher feelings of efficacy (NSSP, 2004).

Small Schools' Principles and Purpose

Despite some differences, there are several common principles that unite many small schools. In addition to the emphasis on personal relationships and social justice themes mentioned earlier, there is also an intense focus on college articulation, service projects, developing student voice, and creating effective partnerships with outside organizations. New Visions for Public Schools, an organization that has been in the forefront of new school design and creation, established the 10 principles for effective small schools. Among their principles are: a college-going culture, democracy, teacher leadership, high expectations, social justice, inquiry-based teaching, service learning, community-based partnership and personalization. Many small schools organize themselves around these principles or similar themes.

Personalization and Student Success

The National Association of School Psychologists stated that facilitating social-emotional support for students is a necessary component for at-risk student success because of the link between social-emotional health and academic success (Suldo, Friedrich, White & Farmer, 2009). Accordingly, educational leaders can promote wellness in students through fostering an academic environment which promotes positive relationships among students and staff. One of the key features of small schools that give them an advantage over big schools is the ability of staff to form close relationships with students. Research shows that students, particularly urban students of color, benefit from the social interaction with teachers and staff. These students tend to benefit more from the individualized support and encouragement they receive. Schools which tend to provide increased personalization are schools where teachers and other staff members

take an active role in the holistic development of their students. Instead of narrowly focusing on academic skills, these schools are intentionally involved in the psychosocial issues of their students. They focus on school engagement, goal setting, expectations, peer relationships and the interaction between home, school and the community. Personalization of school for students can occur in two ways: relational personalization and academic personalization. Relational personalization provides students with a sense of being cared for and connectedness. Students in this environment can expect that teachers and other staff members know their names and know something about them. Relational personalization can be demonstrated by teachers' offering advice in an advisory session or celebrating an achievement. Academic personalization is the students' perception of having access to teachers in order to receive additional instructional support when necessary. It is also the degree to which learning is customized around the learner. Examples of academic personalization include teachers' tutoring after school or during lunch periods, one-on-one support with college applications or teachers' e-mailing revisions on papers to student accounts. These two forms of personalization are inextricably linked and both aid in fostering resiliency in students.

> The connection between being known personally and receiving academic
> assistance seems to complete the circle of personalization as a function of school
> size. That is, school size affords possibilities for more personalized attention,
> which directly serves the academic needs of students and relays to students that
> someone cares (Conchas & Rodriguez, 2008).

Small schools can more easily facilitate personalization, but not all small schools promote personalization (Conchas & Rodriguez, 2008). It is possible that a large school can possess the characteristics that promote a caring, personalized environment, and inversely some small schools may promote competition and high achievement in favor of support.

The role of the teacher in promoting resiliency cannot be overemphasized. Personal interactions with teachers make a significant difference for students who are at risk of academic failure. Teachers who focus on student strengths in class can eventually influence the development of resiliency in their students. In schools that foster resiliency, there is a belief that all students can succeed and overcome negative situations. Schools that foster resiliency build in structures to support and challenge students. These schools hold high academic standards, provide incentives, and give students appropriate feedback and praise. Teachers also model positive behavior and allow students to experience responsibility (Downey, 2008).

Summary

The review of the literature shows that there has been a great deal of research on resiliency in schools. There were several themes that kept emerging from the literature. First, resiliency is a characteristic that can be developed in all students. Certain conditions in home and schools can increase the likelihood that students will exhibit resilient behaviors. Another theme is that the school environment can be a significant factor in fostering resiliency in students. The influence of schools on students is largely due to the personal relationships formed between students and staff. Small schools can create the context for fostering personal relationships between teachers and students.

Student relationships with teachers and other staff members are essential to the

development of resiliency. Finally, students in small schools have greater opportunities

to have personal relationships with staff.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of small schools on resiliency in at-risk students. The goal of this research was to determine if the structures, supports and programs of small schools have an impact on the optimism, academic outcomes, and/or social behaviors of at-risk students. The research questions that frame this study are as follows:

1. What impact do small schools have on fostering resiliency in at-risk students?

2. Are there structures in small schools (i.e., counseling, advisory, mentoring, instructional practices) that are effectively increasing students' feelings of resiliency?

3. What impact do student relationships with teachers have on the development of student resiliency?

4. Is there a relationship between students' reported feelings of resiliency and student achievement?

Basic Research Design

In this research study, at-risk third-year students who had attended one small high school since freshman year were identified. All students who met the research criteria (i.e., were "at risk" at entry and were continuously registered over three years) were asked to complete an inventory designed by researchers to identify levels of resilience. After the completion of the survey, a sample of more-resilient and less-resilient students in their third year of school who attended the school since their freshmen year were identified. Student progress to graduation data was collected and analyzed as well.

Additional data that was collected as a part of this study included interviews from students, parents, teachers and staff from the school. Interviews focused on student relationships with teachers, student experiences, advisory, and school-wide practices.

Description of the School Community

Village Community School[1] is currently in its tenth year of existence as a New York City Public School. It was founded by a small group of teacher leaders and community members who submitted a proposal to New Visions for Public Schools. The proposal was accepted by the New York City Department of Education, and the school opened its doors in 2003. The founding team selected and hired its first principal, who opened the school and led it for six years. The school is currently led by Dean Jones[2], one of the school's founding team members. Village Community School is located in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, New York. Bushwick is perhaps best known for the blackout and the fires of 1977 that destroyed the neighborhood. Prior to the blackout, fires ran rampant throughout the neighborhood, and were mostly caused by arsonists. Before the fires, the neighborhood suffered from "White flight"[3], redlining by banks which refused to grant mortgages to potential homeowners, the closing of longstanding local businesses, and a lack of attention from city government. The blackout of 1977 led to rioting and looting in many local neighborhoods and nearly all of the local businesses in Bushwick's commercial strip on Broadway Avenue (Mahler, 2007). These historical events fostered demographic shifts in the neighborhood that resulted in a high concentration of poverty, poor housing and social problems that the Bushwick

[1] This is a pseudonym used to ensure anonymity of students and staff.
[2] This is a pseudonym.
[3] White flight is defined as the departure of whites from places (as urban neighborhoods or schools) increasingly or predominately populated by minorities.(www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary, 2012)

neighborhood still contends with today. According to the New York City Department of Planning records, in 2007 nearly half the residents of Bushwick received some sort of federal assistance to supplement their income. Against this backdrop, Village Community School and the other schools located on its campus teach the students of this community.

Village Community School currently has 435 students on register, including 65 students with Individualized Educational Plans and 63 English language learners. Of the entire student body, 69% are Latino and 30% are African-American. In addition, 86% of its students are eligible for free lunch, according to New York State guidelines. Village Community was founded with three external lead partner organizations; two are educational in nature, and the other is a local community-based organization. All of these organizations played essential roles in the development of Village Community School, although each organization made different contributions to the school. Partnering new schools with business organizations or community-based organizations was a key feature of small-school design under the administration of New York City's schools chancellor Joel Klein. Lead partners work closely with school leaders to implement school visions. Lead partners can support schools in a variety of ways, including providing additional funding and/or staff, participating in advisory council, or conducting staff training. In the case of Village Community, their lead partners include a university partnership which provides support for the school's curriculum and college articulation, a community-based organization which assists in the development and implementation of social justice projects, and an educational support organization which provides professional development and coaching to the school's staff. The community-based organization also

provides after-school programming for youth, grant-writing assistance to fund school programs, and support for the school's advisory program. The educational organization provides the school with coaching for teachers, funding for an additional counselor, leadership coaching, and professional development retreats for teachers. According to the school's principal, Mr. Jones, the work of the external partners does not have a direct impact on every student, but the school's partners have been instrumental in the school's development.

Village Community School currently shares the campus with two other schools. Though all of the schools in the building are autonomous and have their own budgets, all of the schools on the campus share certain facilities, including the gym, auditorium, cafeteria, library, health office, College Access Center, a college partnership office and the LYFE[4] center, which is the onsite child care center for children of campus students. The schools on the campus also collaborate to fund positions and programs that serve the entire campus, such as the campus manager/assistant principal of security, lunch aides, and the campus athletic program.

An essential feature of Village Community School's program is advisory. Students in Village Community School meet in advisory groups several times a week; freshmen and sophomores meet with their advisory groups every day for one period, and juniors and seniors meet in advisory three days a week for one period. All advisories meet in the middle of the school day for a full class period (approximately 43 minutes). Most advisories consist of 15 students and one teacher. Most of Village's teachers serve as advisors. Advisory is designed to address students' development and social needs. In

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[4] LYFE is an acronym for The Living for the Young Family through Education program. It is a centrally funded program that supports pregnant and parenting students enrolled in a NYC Department of Education school by providing childcare and referral services.

their advisory groups, Village Community students discuss topics such as identity, diversity, health, sexuality, AIDS, drugs and goal setting. Every advisory works on a community service project each year to support the school's theme of social action.

Additional social supports are also provided to students through the school's Office of Youth Development, which consists of one social worker, three guidance counselors, a parent coordinator, an attendance teacher and a school aide. This office is unique to Village Community School. While many New York City public schools have a guidance department, this school has created a cross-functional team that is charged with supporting students and their families. Members of this team work with teachers and other staff members to support students academically and socially. Responsibilities of team members consist of attendance outreach, conducting home visits, providing counseling, conducting student or staff workshops, coordinating student events, and organizing college preparation activities. In addition to their other responsibilities within this office, each counselor is assigned to one grade and meets with the teachers of that grade on a weekly basis.

Themes of social justice are integrated into all aspects of the school's curriculum, especially in the English language arts classes. Village Community School has achieved many accolades, including being recognized by the New York City Department of Education for making exemplary gains with overage[5] students, steadily increasing the school's graduation rate and earning the grade "A" for three consecutive years on the New York City Department of Education's School Progress Report.

Study Design

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[5] An overaged student is defined by the New York City Department of Education as being two or more years behind his or her expected age and credit accumulation. (retrieved April 11, 2012 at schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/)

The design of this research was a constant comparative approach using qualitative methods. "…qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases." (Patton, 2002, p.14). Qualitative studies allow us to capture the experiences and perspectives of the subjects by providing rich details. The stories of study participants provide a context for the data that researchers examine. The qualitative method was selected, as it would best serve to illuminate the relationship between resiliency and school structures and staff as experienced by at-risk students. Though the results of this study may not be able to generalize to the general population, they provide valuable information and create opportunities for further research.

Research subjects in this study included students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors and the school's principal, representing a purposive sample. These subjects were selected on the basis of two criteria: 1) The selected participant groups are the ones who can provide the information that best addresses the research question, and 2) the different segments of the school community being interviewed triangulate the data, thus enhancing the trustworthiness of the research study.

The study was designed in a way that allowed the gathering of data from a variety of sources, in order to confirm the findings that emerge from this study. An overview of the research design is as follows:

Table 2

Research Design Process

Step 1:	All eligible students in their third year of school were surveyed using the *Resilience Scale*.
Step 2:	Results of the survey were categorized by academic progress of students: those who were on track for high school graduation within four years and those who were off track for high school graduation within four years and by the resiliency scores of students (ranging from very low to high). Results were further sorted into four groups: students who were on track for graduation and resilient, students who were on track and less resilient, students who were off track and resilient, and students who were off track and less resilient.
Step 3:	A representative sample of subgroups defined by academic progress and resiliency levels; on-track and more/less resilient and off-track and more/less resilient was selected for participation in individual interviews. Parents of selected students were contacted to provide consent, and students were also asked to provide assent.
Step 4:	The parents of the selected students were solicited for interviews.
Step 5:	The teachers and counselors were interviewed.
Step 6:	The school's principal was interviewed.

A more detailed explanation of the study participants and design methodology will be found in the section that follows.

Study Participants

Among the research participants were students in their "third year of school."[6] This term is used to describe students who entered the school in the 2008-2009 school year as ninth-graders. All such students were placed by New York State Department of Education in a cohort of students expected to graduate in the 2011-2012 school year. At the time of research study, there were 114 students at Village Community School in the third-year cohort. Out of the 114 students, 60% were Latino (the majority of whom have family origins in either the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico, though there was a growing segment of students from Central America), and 38% were African-American. About one-seventh (15%) of these students had Individual Educational Plans, and 11% of the students were English language learners (students whose first language is not English). Nine of ten students in this cohort have been identified by New York State Department of Education as being economically disadvantaged, which is a chief indicator of being at risk. Other factors the school uses to categorize students as at risk are poor attendance, a history of substance abuse, and a poor academic record. Of the 114 students in this cohort, 53% (n=60) of them were on track to graduate. Sufficient progress towards graduation for a third-year student was determined by New York City's Department of Education as having successfully passed at least one Regents Examination and having earned a minimum of 20 credits by the end of the second year in high school. It is important to note that progress toward graduation predictions change several times during a school year. Predictive numbers can increase as students take credit recovery

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[6] It is important to distinguish between "students in their third year" and "juniors" or "11th graders." The term "11th graders" refers to the number of credits students have obtained, and students in their third year can have any number of credits.

courses, pass midyear Regents Exams, or increase their daily attendance. Graduation predictions change as student academic behaviors change.

A small sample of more resilient and less resilient students in their third year were selected for interviews after the resiliency survey instrument had been administered to all consenting eligible students. As stated earlier, eligibility for inclusion in this research study was determined by students attending Village Community High School for all three years of their high school career. In this school, 91 of the 114 (79%) students in the cohort have attended Village Community School for all three years. The 23 students who were excluded from eligibility in this study were excluded because they did not attend the school for the entire three years. These students either transferred from other schools at some point during their high school careers or they emigrated from another country after their first year in high school. The number of student interview participants was determined after the survey had been administered and the parents of selected students provided consent. Students in their third year at the school were chosen as a significant group because, at that point in their high school careers, they have already completed two full years of high school, thus having a solid basis to form opinions on school structures and support mechanisms. Additionally, by the third year it is easy to determine which students are on track for meeting graduation requirements and which students are at risk for not graduating within the expected timeframe. Only students who have been enrolled in the Village Community School for their entire high school careers were eligible to participate in the interview portion of the research. It was important to this study that the students chosen to participate in interviews had spent their entire high school careers at this particular school. Transfer students or students who were newly arrived to the

country after the start of their high school careers have already had some type of experience with another high school; and this may have altered their opinions of the high school being studied, making it difficult to determine the impact of the school on student resilience. Student subjects were also selected on the basis of being identified as at risk upon entry to high school. According to the school's principal, Village Community School uses the following criteria to determine student risk: 1) poverty (federal eligibility for reduced lunch), 2) middle-school scores on the citywide English Language Arts and/or Math tests (scoring within levels 1 or 2 in a scale that ranges from Levels 1-4, and level 3 is considered proficient), 3) attendance record (below 80% daily attendance), and/or 4) social history; i.e., student suspension history, family history of substance use, foster care placement, homelessness, death or unknown whereabouts of a parent. Parents of selected students were given both letters of information explaining the study and a letter of consent. Of those whose parents consented, students were given letters of assent, which explained the study and confirmed their voluntary participation.

The next group of research participants included in the study consisted of the parents of the selected students. The parents were selected because they were best able to provide rich data about the home life of the students, including the extent to which these students were at risk. Parents were also able to validate the impact (or lack of impact) of the small school on the social development of their children. All parents of interviewed student participants were given a letter of information explaining the study and a letter of consent for their participation. Parents were given the option of having interviews conducted in Spanish if the parent expressed that Spanish is their preferred language[7]. Spanish language interviews would have been conducted by a research assistant who is a

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[7] Neither of the parents who were interviewed requested an interview conducted in Spanish.

native Spanish speaker and an undergraduate student at John Jay College of the City University of New York.

The remaining subjects in this study were school staff members who play different roles in the school. The purpose of the staff interviews was primarily to gather data about school structures that may or may not contribute to the development of resiliency in their students. I was also interested in collecting multiple sources of data from multiple perspectives, in order to gain rich information about the subject of the research. Three teachers, one guidance counselor and one administrator (the school's principal) were interviewed for this study. Teachers received an informational letter explaining the study and asking for their participation. A similar process was used to get participation from the guidance counselors. An informational letter was given to guidance counselors designated to work with the selected students. At the Village Community School, only one counselor serves the third-year students, so that counselor was asked to participate in the study. While counselors and teachers were not asked about specific students, they were primarily asked about their beliefs about students and the school environment in general. The school principal was asked to participate in the study through a formal letter.

Study Instruments

The primary instruments that were utilized in this study were surveys and interviews. Student participants were administered a 26-item resilience scale developed by Gail M. Wagnild and Heather M. Young (Wagnild & Young, 1987). The authors of this scale have identified five dimensions of resilience. Those dimensions are as follows: self-reliance, purposeful life, equanimity, perseverance and existential aloneness. Each

item in the resilience scale is uniquely associated to one of those dimensions. For example, Item 13, "I can get through difficult times because I've experienced difficulty before," assesses the dimension of self-reliance. "The Resilience Scale" was developed in 1987 as an instrument to measure resiliency in older adult women living in residential care facilities. It has been since used in several other studies, and it has been tested for internal consistency and reliability. Overall, the alpha coefficient exceeds 0.80, which falls within an acceptable range of reliability. Though this particular instrument has not been used with adolescents, I felt this instrument would best accomplish the goal of assessing the degree to which research participants are resilient. I piloted this survey with a small group of recent high school graduate volunteers in order to assess the clarity and understandability of the survey. The Resilience Scale uses a seven-point Likert scale. The purpose of using this survey instrument is to determine which students from the sample group are resilient. The survey was given to all eligible student participants at the same time. Following the completion of the survey, I identified more resilient and less resilient subgroups within the on-track and off-track subgroups. Within each of these subgroups, I selected a one-half random sample and attempted to get parental consent for students to participate in the research study. I conducted semistructured interviews using open-ended questions which I had developed (Appendix B). After all of the data was collected from the student subjects, the interview responses from both subgroups (more resilient and less resilient) were analyzed and compared. The focus of comparison between both groups was on differences between student experiences at the school.

All of the research subjects (the school's principal, students, teachers, parents and counselors) were interviewed using a semistructured interview protocol which I had

developed (Appendices B, C and D). Semistructured interviews allow for probing when issues emerge from the responses that require further clarification. Questions were open-ended to allow me to capture the points of view of subjects without predetermining their points of view through the prior selection of questionnaire categories (Patton, 2002). The question types included knowledge questions and opinion and value questions, as well as experience and behavior questions (Patton, 2002). The Research Questions Matrix that follows illustrates the connection between the research questions that frame this study, the variables that contribute to resiliency, and the interview questions to be asked of research participants. The variables contributing to resiliency were derived from research conducted by the *Search Institute*[8] on resiliency in adolescents.

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[8] The *Search Institute* is a nonprofit organization founded in 1958 to promote healthy lives for children. They conduct research and evaluation about young people and their needs. This organization is credited with creating the *Developmental Assets*, a description of building blocks for positive behavior in young people and the tools to reduce risk behaviors.

Table 3

Research Questions Matrix

Research Questions	Variables Contributing to Resiliency	Interview Questions addressing Research Questions
What impact do small schools have on fostering resiliency in at-risk students?	School size Teacher/student relationships Student/counselor ratio Positive school culture/ sense of community	Do you feel adults in this school care about you? (S)* Do you think your school helps you to be successful? (S) What does your school do to increase student success? (T)
Are there structures in schools (counseling, advisory, mentoring, instructional practices) that are increasing students' feeling of resiliency?	High expectations Sense of community Promotion of goal Orientation	Do you think your child's school helps him or her to be successful? Explain. (P) What are the school-wide practices in place to address student needs? (T) What do you do in your role to address student needs? (T) What types of social supports does your school provide to students? (A) How do you make sure that every student is aware of the supports available to them? (A)
What impact do student relationships with teachers have on the development of student resiliency?	Teacher/student relationships High expectations by school staff Level of student engagement	Are there adults here you can go to when you need help with a personal problem? (S) Do you think teachers and other school staff hold high expectations for you? (S) Do you believe the school has high expectations for your child? (P) Are there people your child can go to in the school if they need help? (P) In what ways do you interact with students outside of instructional time? (T) Do you participate in extra-curricular activities in the school? (S) What types of social supports does your school provide students? (A) What types of social supports does your school provide students? (A) How do you make sure that every student is aware of the supports available to them? (A)
Is there a relationship between students' reported feelings of resiliency and their achievement in school?		Other data sources, i.e. student transcripts, attendance records and disciplinary records

* Letters in parenthesis represent the subject of the interview, S for student interview question, P for parent interview question, T for teacher or counselor question and A for administrator question.

The interview portion of the data collection was significant, because it allowed me to capture the voices of those who were living the experience they described. In these interviews, I learned about school practices, shared beliefs among staff, and student experiences in the school context. The practices that were examined closely during the interviews were the advisory program, student relationships with teachers and staff, teacher accessibility, student involvement in extracurricular activities, and the role of the school counselor. The analysis of these interviews helped to address the research questions, as will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Reliability and Validity

An important goal in qualitative research design is to establish rigor, thereby ensuring that the research findings are both reliable and valid. Research that has achieved both reliability and validity should be able to be replicated with similar outcomes. Among the ways of ensuring reliability and coherence in a study are methodological coherence, appropriate sampling and adequate sampling. The subjects selected for this study were those who have had direct experience with the topic being studied. The lived experience of the students, teachers, counselors and administrators in this study provided rich data that illuminated the research subject.

Research subjects participated in verifying the data by conducting member checks. After each interview was conducted, a copy of the transcript was provided to the participant via e-mail and hard copy. Participants were asked to review the transcript to verify that what was recorded accurately represented their views and responses to the

questions. Participants were given the opportunity to submit an addendum to their original responses, in order to provide further clarification.

An additional measure to ensure reliability and validity is the triangulation of the data sources. Students, teachers, and other staff were interviewed to ensure that the most significant findings were verified by several sources. The research intended to find out whether all of the research participants were experiencing the same phenomenon from their vantage point. Additionally, I wanted to identify common themes that were recurring in the responses of all research subjects. The use of different data sources allowed me to uncover coherence in the data, as well as identify the individual responses that were inconsistent with the majority findings.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with systematic organization of all data collected, including questionnaire responses, student records, and interviews of all subjects. Student survey responses were analyzed using the tool provided by the authors of the resiliency scale. Score values on the *Resilience Scale* items range from 1 (strongly disagree) -7 (strongly agree). Responses from each respondent were added, and the total score was categorized using the scoring rubric provided by the authors on the *Resilience Scale*. Resilience Scale scores range from 25 to 182. A higher score indicates higher resilience (Wagnild, 2010). The results of the questionnaire were used to determine which of the student participants were more or less resilient. The chart that follows illustrates the score ranges of each level of resilience.

Table 4

Resilience Scale Score Range

Resilience Scale						
Scale	Very Low	Low	On the Low End	Moderate	Moderately High	High
RS Score	25-100	101-115	116-130	131-145	145-160	161-182

(Wagnild, 2010)

The other research data was derived from subject interviews. Interview responses were transcribed and stored on a flash drive. Hard copies of all transcripts were printed and copied, in order to facilitate note-writing in the margins. All transcripts were read and re-read thoroughly. Next, I recorded observations from the interviews, in order to describe in detail the context of the interviews. I attempted to create a narrative picture of the participants by providing a context for the interview. This included providing definitions and descriptions of participants when necessary.

The next step in this process was the classification of data. I coded the transcripts, which allowed me to take large amounts of seemingly unrelated data and organize it into more manageable units. During the process of coding, I created categories based on the preliminary themes from the initial readings of the transcripts. I checked the codings often to ensure that they were still relevant to the findings of the

participants. I used code words, sentences and phrases that were related to the codes established. Research transcripts were organized within the following categories: student transcript, teacher transcripts, counselor, and principal transcripts. After the initial coding of each category was conducted, all transcripts were analyzed to discover common and emerging themes across participant groups. The chart that follows illustrates the codes that were used to classify participant interviews.

Table 5

Interview Coding Chart

Interview Coding Chart	
Category	Sample Response
School is like a family	"We're like a family, we're so close that I could go to a teacher, I go to my guidance counselor, I can go to the principal [for help with a personal problem]" "...there's a group of people who love me even though I do the wrong thing occasionally"
Personalization of school	"I like interacting with kids outside of class because it sorts of strips away that teacher-student relationship...I think that allows us to build a stronger relationship."
Advisory is important	"Our advisory is the best period."
Interactions with the guidance counselor	"It's easy to find your guidance counselor if you need help."
School has high expectations for students	"...they always try to push me to go to college, like when I didn't have my personal statement yet, they were on top of me until I had it."
Involvement in extracurricular activities	"All the groups and teams that I'm in, they're like helping me with my leadership abilities."
Students are given extra time to complete assignments"	"...if we need to catch up on extra work, we can"
Teachers are accessible beyond the regular school day	"they take time off their break time to help you"

Students have a plan for the future	"I want to study marine biology and oceanography"

Transcripts were color-coded by these categories. Statements and phrases were organized into these categories if they included key words or expressed a sentiment that was analogous to the code. The completion of this process allowed me to begin the process of data interpretation and reporting on research findings.

Summary

The goal of this research plan was to provide a strategy for identifying and analyzing data on small schools and resilience in at-risk youth. The survey data collected allowed me to categorize the experiences of students with varying degrees of resilience within this small school. It also allowed me to compare the degree of resilience of the interviewed students with that of a larger sample of third-year students in the same school population. Comparing the distribution of each group allowed me to assess how representative the interview sample is of the larger sample of students. The objectives of this research would have been met if the data gathered richly illustrates how the school experience may impact or leverage the choices of at-risk students. Chapter IV presents an analysis and interpretation of the findings.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Findings and results that emerged from this study are reported in this chapter.

The discussion begins with an indepth look at the results of the *Resilience Survey*,

including the survey response rate, the demographic data of survey respondents, and the

interpretation of their scores. Next, the characteristics of the interview sample, which

includes the students, staff and parent participants, will be described. Next, there will be

a discussion of the differences between more resilient and less resilient students. This

chapter concludes with the research findings organized in response to the study's research

questions.

Survey Data

The quantitative data collected for this research study consists of student scores

on the *Resiliency Survey*. This survey was administered during one class period to

students who provided assent to take the survey and whose parents gave consent. A total

of 58 Village Community High School students took the *Resiliency Survey*, (n=58). The

response rate for this survey was 64%; 58 of the 91 eligible third-year students completed

the survey. The results of student responses on the *Resiliency Survey* will be discussed in

this and the next chapter. Also, the demographic and achievement data of other groups of

students relevant to this study will be analyzed. The three groups of students to be

discussed are as follows: "All Students", "Resiliency Survey Students" and "Interviewed

Students". "All students" refers to the 91 students who were eligible to take the survey.

"Resiliency Survey Students" refers to the 58 students who actually took the *Resiliency*

Survey, and "Interviewed Students" refers to the 14 students who participated in the one-on-one interviews. The "Interviewed Students" represent a subset of the "Resiliency Survey Students" group; therefore, their ethnicity, achievement data and survey scores are also included in the aforementioned group.

The chart below depicts the demographic characteristics of the students who participated in the study. This chart represents the ethnicity and gender of each of these three groups of students. This illustration depicts the students of each ethnic and gender category who were represented in each of the research groups.
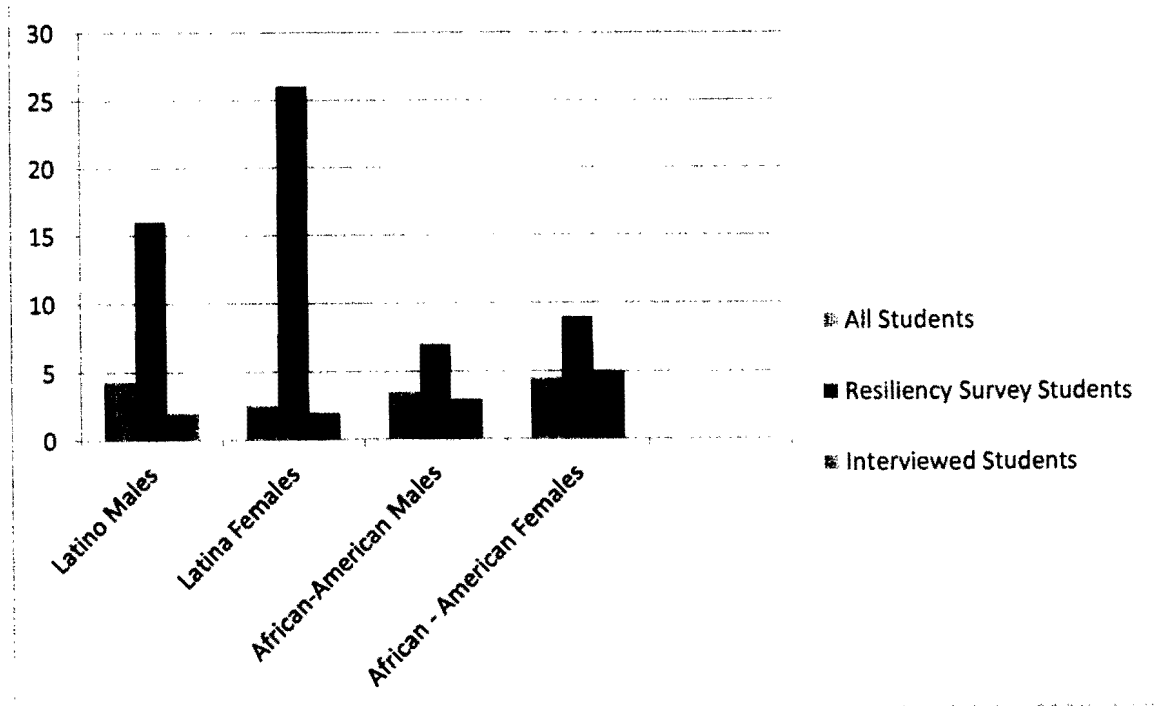
Figure 2. Gender and Ethnicity of Student Groups

The data presented in Figure 2 shows that 73% of all students who took the *Resiliency Survey* were Latino, and the remaining 27% were African-American. Also, 60% of all survey respondents were females. Additionally, Latina females were over-represented in the survey sample, African-American females were slightly over-represented in the interview sample, and Latino males were under-represented in the interview sample. The implications of these observations will be discussed in Chapter V.

The students who participated in the survey had their resilience levels measured according to the guide found in *The Resilience Scale User's Guide* developed by Gail M. Wagnild (2010). The scale responses were recorded into the six categories used in the guide, which are as follows: "very low", "low", "on the low end," "moderate", "moderately high" and "high." The chart below, "Resiliency Scores of Resiliency Survey Students", illustrates the range of scores among "Resiliency Survey Students" who were administered the *Resilience Scale.* These results reveal that a little more than half (54%) of the students who took the survey scored at high or moderately high resilience levels, while 46% scored in the categories that indicates less resilience. The second chart, "Resiliency Scores of Resiliency Survey Students by Ethnicity and Gender" disaggregates the resilience scores of "Resiliency Survey Students" by ethnicity and gender. This research sample included only African-Americans and Latinos because no other ethnic groups were present among third-year students in the school; thus, the research categories for this data set are as follows: "African-American Females",

"African-American Males", "Latina Females" and "Latino Males". An analysis of this chart reveals that students with very low resilience levels were equally represented within each of the four categories. The data also shows that fewer African-American males scored in the "high" resilience level, as compared to other groups. Also, it was found that more Latina females scored in the "moderately high" resilience levels.

High
Moderately High
Moderate
On the Low End
Low
Very Low
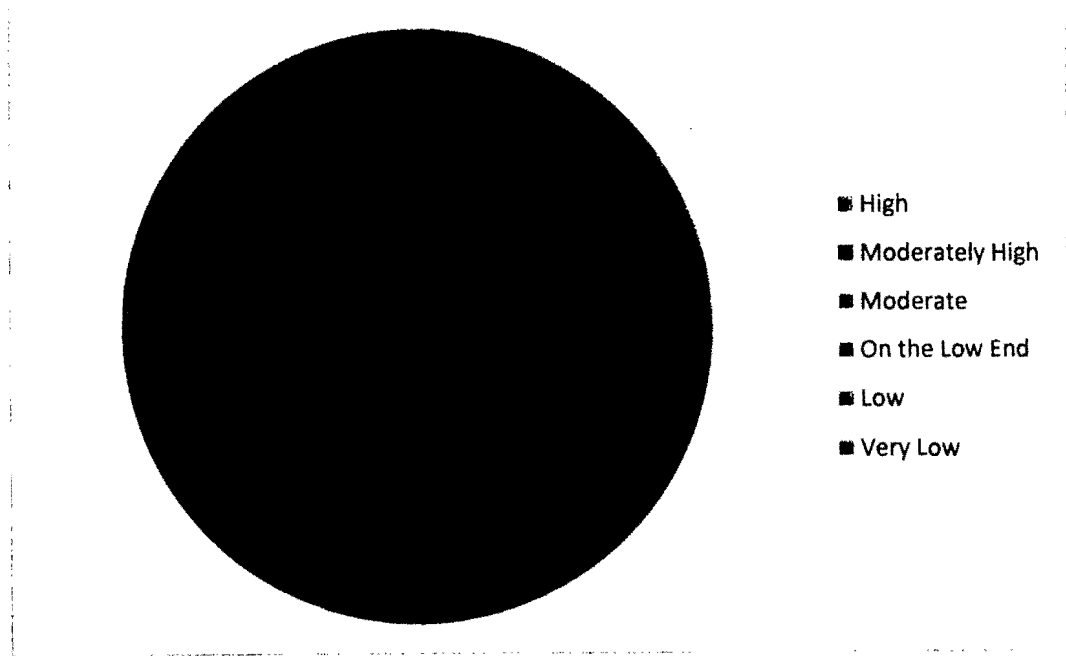
Figure 3. Resiliency Scores of Resiliency Survey Students
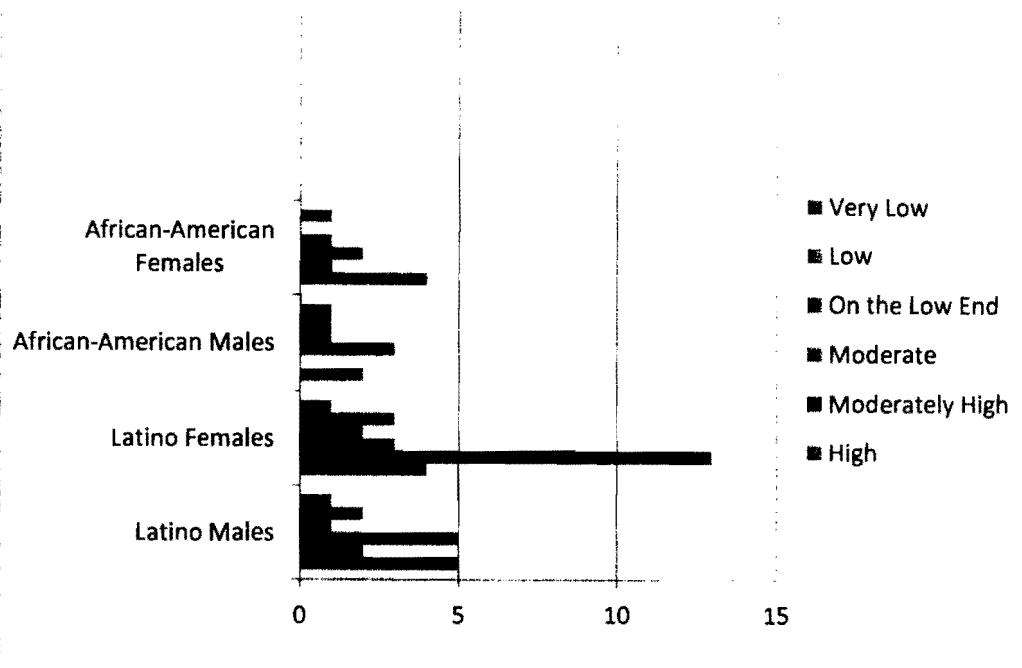
Figure 4. Resiliency Scores of Resiliency Survey Students by Ethnicity and Gender

The charts that follow represent only those students who were interviewed (n=14) as a part of this research study. The data shows that, among both groups, "Resiliency Survey Students" and "Interviewed Students", more than half (57%) of these students scored in either the high or moderately high resilience levels.
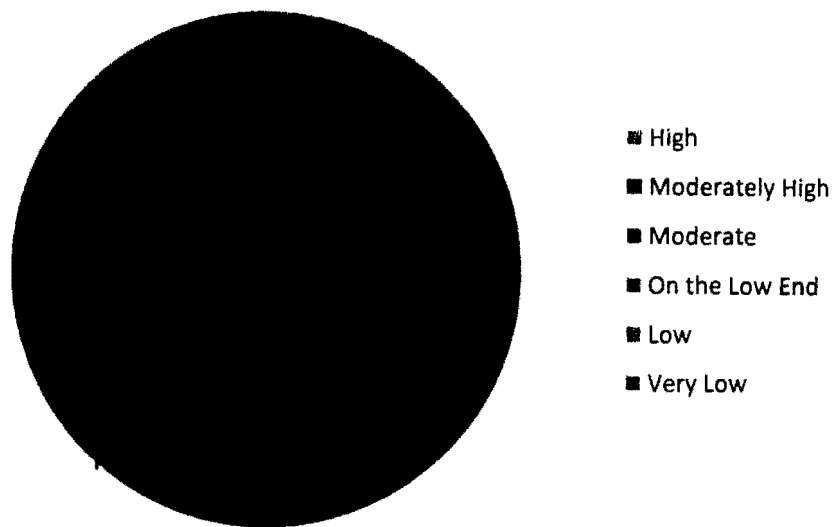
Figure 5. Resiliency Scores of Interviewed Students
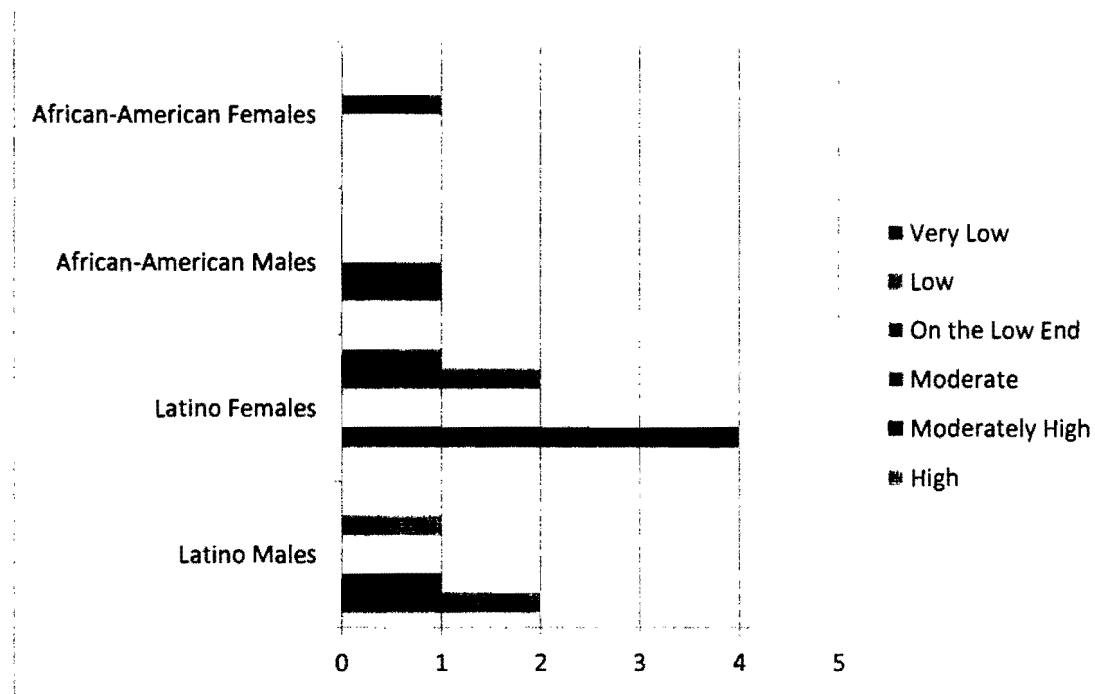
Figure 6. Resiliency Scores of Interviewed Students by Ethnicity and Gender

One of the initial findings based on these charts is that, not only are the majority of participants in both groups, "Resiliency Survey Students" and "Interviewed Students", Latina females, but that Latina females are also overrepresented in the higher resiliency categories. Out of all "Resiliency Survey Students", 65% of all of those in the high or moderately high resilience category were Latinas. Of the "Interviewed Students", Latinas represented 57% of all of the students in the high and moderately high resilience category. While there are no clear implications based on the representation of Latinas in the sample, this observation will be discussed in Chapter V.

Interpreting the Resiliency Scores

The creators of the *Resilience Scale* developed a guide for usage and interpreting the scores. This guide describes some of the characteristics that may be present in individuals who score within each of the scale ranges. Individuals who scored within the "very low" range may report depression and lack of energy. They may also have trouble finding meaning in life. They may also feel overwhelmed, isolated and alone. Individuals who scored within the "low" range may also report feeling depressed and anxious. They may also tend to be pessimistic, have a lot going on in life and feel a little out of control. Those who scored "on the low end" may report some depression and anxiety. They may have problems in life that they are trying to resolve. They may have trouble letting go of things over which they have no control. Individuals with a "moderate" resilience score may be satisfied in general, but there are many areas in life that are unsatisfactory. They may keep moving forward in life, but not with enthusiasm. They may feel tired and emotionally drained at the end of the day. They can see the good

in life, but tend to dwell on the things that are not going well. Those with a "moderately high" resiliency level are doing well, but they believe they could do better. These individuals tend to find life meaningful in general, and are rarely or only sometimes depressed. There may be aspects of their lives that they are not satisfied with, but they probably have a balanced life perspective. Finally, those with a "high" resiliency score reported that they are rarely, if ever, depressed or anxious. They find life to be very purposeful. They tend to be optimistic and upbeat (Wagnild, 2010).

An explanation of the score ranges and categories can help provide an insight into the perspectives of the students who participated in the survey. When applying these descriptions of resiliency scores to students, questions arise about how these characteristics manifest themselves in a school setting. Do students who score low in resiliency have fewer friends and/or positive connections with peers? Do they experience school differently than students who have higher levels of resiliency? Do students who report less resilience have lower academic outcomes than students who report more resilience? Some of those questions may be uncovered by a thorough analysis of the data provided. Others may lead to additional research.

As stated earlier, 58 students took the 26-item *Resiliency Scale* (a table of the student resilience responses can be found in Appendix A). Individual student scores were derived from adding the responses to each question and then obtaining the total score.

Student resilience scores ranged from 25 to 182, with 25 indicating very low resilience and 182 indicating very high resilience. The sample mean of the group was 140.07, which is a score that represents moderate resilience. The median of the scores was 149.5, which means most of the respondents were closest to scoring in the

moderately high resilience level. The standard deviation of the scores was 32.60 with a variance of 1062.77. The distribution of the student scores was skewed to the higher levels of resiliency. The largest amount of students scored between the ranges of 148-160. The normal distribution of this data would be expected to represent a bell curve, meaning there was a more even distribution of student scores on the low end and the high end, with more students scoring average or moderate resiliency in the middle. However, this data set shows that the responses were more tightly grouped around the more resilient scores than what one would normally predict. We would expect a more even spread of frequencies in the categories next to "moderately high," but among this student group more students tended to score in the category of moderately high, as is illustrated in the chart that follows:
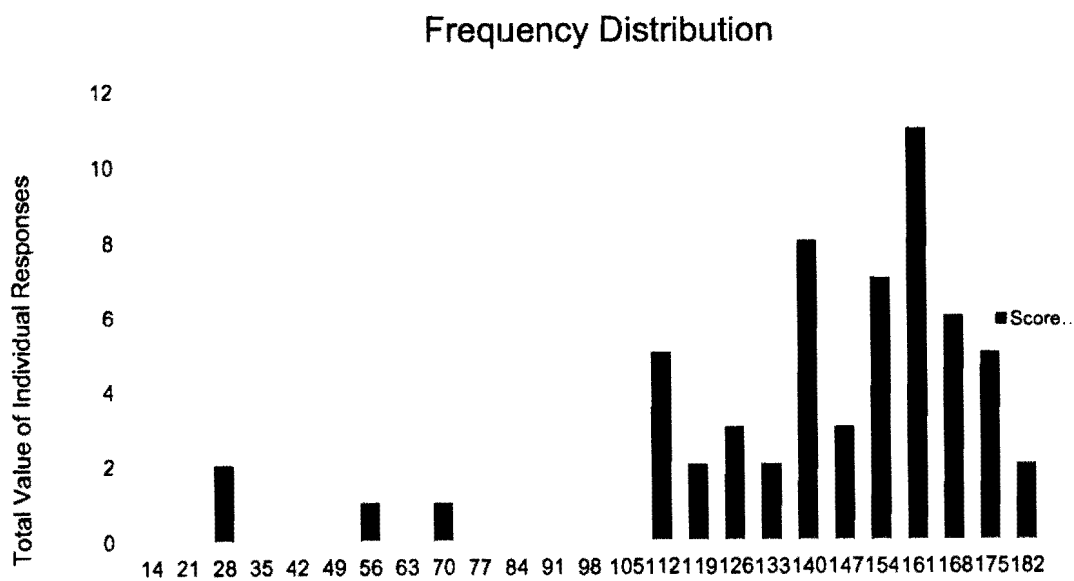
Figure 7. Frequency Distribution of Student *Resilience Scale* Responses

The distribution of student scores on the *Resilience Scale* can have implications for this study. Most importantly, does the distribution of resilience in the study participants unduly influence the findings of this study? This is a question for consideration that will be explored in greater detail in Chapter V. The qualitative data gathered from participant interviews is examined in the next section.

Characteristics of the Interview Sample

I conducted the interview portion of this study in a series of one-on-one interviews with each subject. The interview subjects were comprised of teachers, parents, students, a guidance counselor and the school's principal. The information that follows is a description of each constituency group or individual included in the interviews. These descriptions are meant to provide a context for the interview responses.

The administrator interview was conducted with the principal of the school, Dean Jones. Mr. Jones began his career in education at the age of 30 as a second career. Prior to teaching, he worked for a brief time as a budget analyst in the Department of Energy. He started teaching GED classes for a nonprofit organization in Washington D.C., where his students consisted of formerly incarcerated young adults and high school dropouts. It was in this environment that he found his passion for teaching. After a year of travelling in Africa, Mr. Jones relocated to New York City to seriously pursue a career in teaching. His first public school teaching assignment was in a small school in the East New York section of Brooklyn, where he remained for six years. His assessment of the school was less than positive. "It was kind of a mess...lots of turnover, lots of unhappy kids and adults." That experience taught him that not all small schools create intimate student-

centered learning environments. As a teacher in that school, he felt isolated and unappreciated, but he fell in love with the students. In addition to being inspired by the students at his school, he was also fortunate enough to meet a fellow teacher who would later work with him to write the proposal for his current school. His early teaching experiences helped to shape his vision for his own school. Working collaboratively with the small school design team, he wrote a proposal for a school that included advisory groups, teacher teams and democratic decision-making as core features of the school. His proposal was accepted, and he became a founding teacher at Village Community. Later, he became the school's second principal.

The teachers who participated in this study all taught third-year students at Village Community School. Ms. Salah is an English Language Arts teacher, who has taught at the school for three years. She is the Chair of the English Department, facilitator of the 11th grade teacher team, and the school's yearbook advisor. Another teacher participant, Ms. Horne, is the school's environmental justice teacher. She has taught at the school for two years. She is a member of the 11th grade inquiry team, and also the staff facilitator for student government. The final teacher participant is Mr. Lyles. Mr. Lyles is a third-year American History teacher at Village Community. He transferred to the school from another small high school in Brooklyn.

Another staff perspective provided to this study was the voice of the guidance counselor, Ms. Robles. Ms. Robles has spent 10 years as a school counselor, and has spent the last eight years working at Village Community High School. She is originally from the Dominican Republic, and is a native Spanish speaker. Ms. Robles uses her bilingualism as a tool to assist her in her work with parents and families of the school's

community. Her work responsibilities include programming students for classes, reviewing student transcripts, conducting individual and group sessions with students, meeting with teacher teams, and meeting with parents. Some students are mandated for counseling because they have Individual Education Plans that recommend counseling, and other students are referred for counseling to address emotional issues. In addition to her primary responsibilities, Ms. Robles also conducts home visits, meets with students after regular school hours, and connects families to programs and services. She also tutors students if needed, particularly those who are recent immigrants to the United States.

Two parents participated in this research study. Both of those parents are mothers of female students who participated in the student interviews. One mother, Ms. Lopez, is a single mother of three and the other, Mrs. Contreras, is married with six daughters. Ms. Lopez, Samantha's mother, is a native of Panama; and Mrs. Contreras, Mercedes' mother, was born and raised in Mexico. Ms. Lopez completed high school, but the last grade Mrs. Contreras completed was 7th grade. Both parents who were interviewed were unemployed at the time of the interview. Ms. Lopez was employed as a clerical worker, but she lost her job within the last year. Ms. Contreras is a full-time housewife.

A total of 14 students consented to participate in the research interviews (n=14). Because of the relatively small survey sample size (n=58), I asked all students who provided both assent and consent to participate in the interviews. After several attempts to engage students (both writing and via oral presentation), I was able to obtain assent and parental consent from 14 students, and included each of them in this study. The

names[9] of these students are as follows: Ana, Laura, John, Willie, Samantha, Juan, Darin, Naomi, Lita, Derek, Mercedes, Marcus, Cora, and Joanna. All of these students were in their fourth year at the school at the time of the interviews. Out of the 14 students interviewed, eight were female and six were male. Additionally, 11 of Mr. Jones' students were Latino, and the remaining three students were African-American. Five students indicated that they live with both parents, while all of the others live in single-parent households. Two students indicated that their families are relatively transient; either moving back and forth between states or occasionally living with different relatives. Only one student indicated that she was an only child, while others reported having as many as 12 siblings. The average household size of the students in Mr. Jones' class was five. Only two students out of the 14 interviewed indicated that either one of their parents graduated from a four-year college. All students are from low-income households. Three students specifically stated that their parents are undocumented residents of the United States; other students did not mention their parents' immigration status. Among the parental occupations of the interviewed students were: military personnel, mechanics, homemakers, cooks, domestics, home attendants, retail workers and other service-related positions. In addition, three students from the interview sample indicated that their primary guardian was either unemployed or seasonally employed.

Besides the challenge of poverty, many of the students have faced other adverse life conditions and difficulties. Ana's family lost her home to foreclosure. Financial pressure compounded existing family stress and resulted in her living on her own. She spent most of her high school career alternating between living with friends and family

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[9] These names are actually pseudonyms which I assigned to the students in order to preserve their anonymity.

members. Ana has a habit of cutting school. Laura, despite being on track to graduate, often missed first- and second-period classes, resulting in failing grades. Additionally, Laura has been involved in several physical altercations during the course of her high school career. Prior to becoming pregnant, Samantha also had a tendency to engage in fights with other students. Cora often missed first period, and Joanna was chronically absent and late to school. Other students admitted that they had a rough transition from middle school to high school. Juan was disappointed with his placement at Village Community High School because of the negative reputation the building had. He did not come to school for 14 days in his freshman year while he was attempting to get a transfer to another school. It was not until his guidance counselor convinced him to give the school a try that he attended the school and eventually stayed. Lita talked about the isolation and embarrassment of being a non-English-speaking student in public school, "from 5th grade to 8th grade I got a bilingual class, and you know in a bilingual class everything is in Spanish except English class. So, when I came here [Village Community School] it was, like, totally different. Everything was in English; I remember at the beginning of my freshman year I didn't want to come to school because it was difficult for me that no one (including teachers) was speaking Spanish." Other students experienced other transitional issues, such as excessive tardiness, poor work habits and failing grades. In addition to academic challenges, some students faced difficult personal issues. Cora's mother died when she was younger, and she has been living with her grandparents ever since. John experienced the loss of a close relative during middle school, and in high school he struggled with his mother's recent diagnosis of breast cancer. As a result of her illness, John was forced to live with his 24-year-old brother

while his mother underwent treatment. Another student, Mercedes, was dealing with her own health problems. She battled severe anemia caused by anorexia and hereditary arthritis. Finally, two students, Samantha and Darin, were expectant parents. Samantha was eight months' pregnant at the time of the interview, and Darin's child was expected shortly thereafter. The attendance of both of these students was negatively impacted by their premature transition to parenthood. The pressures of preparing to manage the responsibility of becoming parents made life even more complex for these teenagers.

The graduation prediction[10] for these students was as follows: two were "almost on track" for graduation, and 12 were "on track" for graduation. No "off-track" students were included in this interview sample. The resiliency levels for these students are as follows: Darin and Willie scored in the high resilience level; Ana, Laura, Juan, Mercedes, John and Naomi scored in the moderately high resilience level; Derek scored in the moderate resilience level; Lita, Marcus and Joanna scored at the low resilience level; Cora scored at the low end; and Samantha scored very low on the resiliency scale. The table that follows illustrates the resilience level of each interviewed student, compared to their academic status at the time of entry to high school and their graduation status at the end of three years.

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[10] These graduation predictions are based on the ARIS Progress to Graduation Tracker that is managed by the New York City Department of Education.

Table 6

Resilience and Academic Data of Interviewed Students

Student Name	Pre-Entry Acad. Status	Resilience Scale Score	Academic Progress
Ana	Proficient	Moderately High	On-Track
Cora	Below Proficient	On the Low End	On-Track
Darin	Proficient	High	On-Track
Derek	Below Proficient	Moderate	On-Track
Joanna	N/A[12]	Low	On-Track
John	Below Proficient	Moderately High	Almost On-Track
Juan	Proficient	Moderately High	On-Track
Laura	Below Proficient	Moderately High	On-Track
Lita	Below Proficient	Low	On-Track
Marcus	Below Proficient	Low	On-Track
Mercedes	Below Proficient	Moderately High	On-Track
Naomi	Below Proficient	Moderately High	On-Track
Samantha	Below Proficient	Very Low	On-Track
Willie	Proficient	High	On-Track

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[11] Pre-Entry Academic Status was determined by students' eighth grade English Language Arts scores. Student scores are categorized by Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4. Levels 1 and 2 are below proficiency in reading. Levels 3 and 4 indicate students are reading at or above grade level.

[12] The eighth grade proficiency scores are not available for Joanna because she did not reside in New York State when she attended eighth grade.

The data presented in Table 6, *Resilience and Academic Data of Interviewed Students*, serves to further highlight key characteristics of students who participated in the interview portion of the study. Even though the data shows that the majority (93%) of "Interviewed Students" were on track to graduate, many of them entered high school with skill deficiencies in literacy that would make achieving a high school diploma a significant challenge for them. The following chart depicts the numbers of students who entered high school at proficiency or below proficiency in both the less resilient and more resilient categories.

Resilience and Pre-Entry Academic Status of Interviewed Students

■ Less Resilient
■ More Resilient

Below Proficient   Proficient
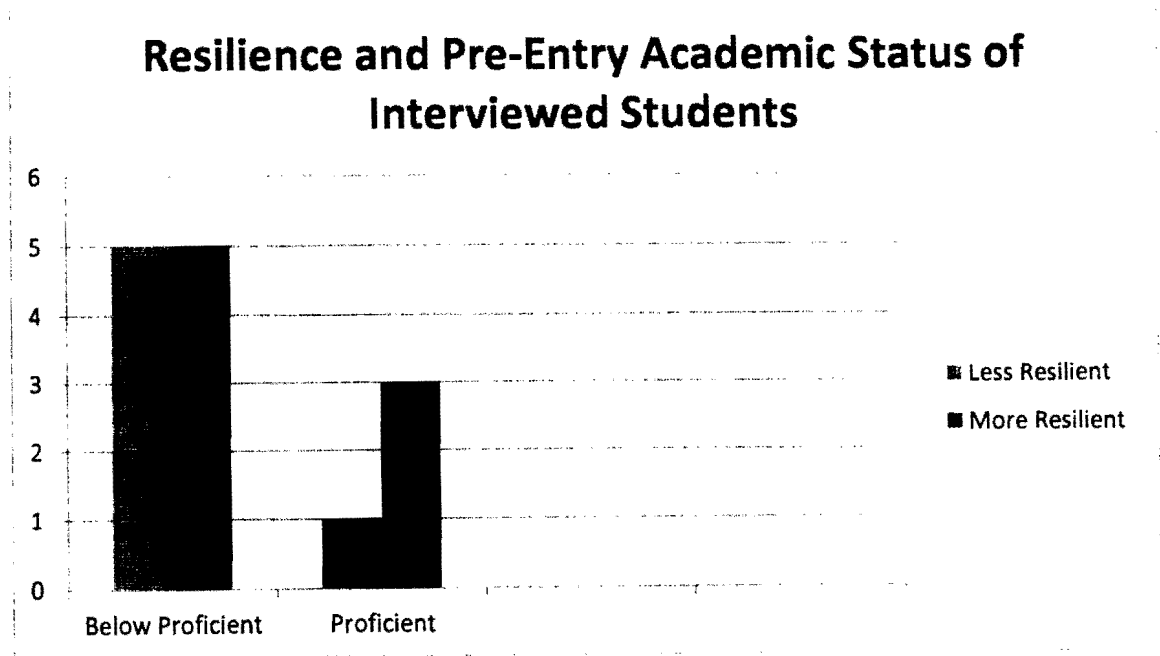
Figure 8. Resilience and Pre-Entry Academic Status of Interviewed Students

This chart shows that the majority of students who entered the school in this sample entered below proficiency, as stated earlier. Additionally, among the students who entered the school below proficiency in English Language Arts, the percentage of students who were less resilient equals that of those who were more resilient. Furthermore, among proficient students the numbers of more resilient students more than doubles the number of less resilient students. Based on the small size of the interview sample, no conclusions can be drawn about a relationship between students' reading proficiency levels and their resilience scores; however, it does raise questions about the possible intersection of these two variables. It is evident from this sample that neither of these variables had an impact on academic progress at all, with the exception of one student who was not predicted to graduate on time. This finding will be discussed further in the next chapter. Differences between the more resilient and less resilient students were explored by analyzing the themes that emerged from the student interviews, as described in the next section.

Examining the Differences Between More and Less Resilient Students

Among the interviewed students, there were both students who demonstrated more resiliency and those who demonstrated less resiliency. An indepth analysis of these interviews was conducted in order to determine if, and how, resiliency levels impacted student experiences at Village Community High School. Initially, it was difficult to find distinct differences between these two groups. The majority of interviewed students had similar school experiences, which they described as overwhelmingly positive. Almost every student had an account of a serious challenge they had faced, and how they were able to overcome it. Some students were able to rebound on their own, while others

relied on the support of the school staff in order to face their challenges. Though most of the students interviewed held similar views about their school, upon closer examination there were some issues that emerged from the interviews that revealed differences in the experiences of more resilient and less resilient students at Village Community High School. Those differences were found in the areas of impressions of school size, perceptions of school staff, belief that school staff holds high expectations for all students, and dealing with difficult situations.

When asked what they liked most about their school, the majority of student respondents said it was their teachers. Among the more resilient students, the staff received accolades and praise for their work. More resilient students, like Mercedes and Juan, stated that school is like a second family to them. Darin and Naomi appreciated how well the staff knows them and the close relationships they have been able to build with their teachers. Among the more resilient students, the praise of the school's staff was unanimous; however; among the less resilient students there were some opposing viewpoints. Some of the less resilient students did not seem to benefit from the close bonds with faculty that the other students enjoyed. Students from the interview sample with the lowest resilience levels were as follows: Lita, Samantha, Marcus, Cora and Joanna. According to the data presented earlier in Table 6, each of these students is on track to graduate, implying that their lower levels of resilience have not prevented them from progressing in school. However, one area in which less resilient students seems to have been negatively impacted is in relationships with staff. Of the five, less resilient students Lita, Samantha and Marcus were very positive about their interactions with teachers. They reinforced the majority view that teachers and staff at Village Community

School were caring and accessible to them. Similar to the other students, Lita expressed appreciation for the extra help her teachers provide to her when she needs it. As an English language learner, she struggled initially in high school because she did not understand English. Her limited English proficiency made her embarrassed, and she lacked self-confidence. She stated that, in the beginning of her high school career, she did not want to come to school. Her fear and isolation from her peers almost made her give up on school, but she decided to stay. According to her, getting help from her teachers made the difference between giving up and staying the course. Samantha also had a difficult time transitioning to high school. She was a troubled young person who fought often and exhibited aggressive behavior towards staff and students. Despite her early challenges, Samantha managed to excel in school and form positive relationships with others in her school community. She said that the constant support and encouragement she received from the staff enabled her to reform her behavior. According to Samantha, "...you might think you can't do it but they've [the staff] known you for so long that, even when you want to give up, they're always there to show up and tell you good things about yourself, so I guess you realize that you can do better..." What seemed really significant to Samantha about her school is their practice of providing students with opportunities to go back and complete their previously incomplete assignments. To Samantha, receiving a second chance was important; it reminded her that all is not lost if she made a mistake. Samantha seemed to have internalized that message, because at the time of her interview she was eight months' pregnant. Though she was pregnant, she had not given up her goals for her future. Samantha earned an 80 average on her last report card, and she planned to attend John

Jay College of the City University of New York in order to study to become a lawyer. With the help of her teachers, Samantha learned how to persevere even in the face of significant obstacles.

In contrast to the others, two of the less resilient students, Cora and Joanna, held very different opinions about the school staff and its structures. In addition to being an outlier in student perceptions of the school, Cora was also unique in that she entered the school below proficiency and was less resilient, though she was on track to graduate. Joanna was also less resilient and on track to graduate, but her eighth grade proficiency data was not available because she had transferred to high school from another state. When asked whether adults in the building cared about them, both Cora and Joanna gave tepid responses. Joanna responded that she thinks most of the adults care about her, while Cora replied, "Most of them don't know who I am." Cora, a shy and reserved student, reported feeling invisible in a school that prides itself on developing close, caring relationships with its students. As a result, Cora seemed indifferent to her school community. She admitted that she did not seek out her counselor for additional support, and she also gave her teachers mixed reviews. She believed some teachers held high expectations for her, while others did not. Similarly, Joanna had reservations about some of the school's staff. While there were staff members she said she could turn to, Joanna perceived a great deal of bias and favoritism among the teaching staff. She did not always feel that teachers were as patient with her as they were with other students. Joanna stated that she had difficulty with writing, and she did not feel that all of her teachers provided her with the help she needed. Joanna also expressed frustration with the guidance counselor, because of what she perceived was preferential treatment given

to some students. Joanna believed honors students were given priority from the counselor, and she really wanted more individualized attention from her counselor. Cora also stated that she did not have regular contact with her counselor. From this, one can infer that Cora did not seek her counselor out, nor did her counselor seek her out. Both Joanna and Cora believed that higher-performing students got more attention from the college counselor, and more support from school staff in general.

Another striking difference between the more resilient students and the less resilient students (specifically Cora and Joanna) is their perception of school size. Both Cora and Joanna stated that their school is too big; thus making it difficult for students to receive individual attention. Cora said, "If you're in class and you need help with a certain thing, the teacher can't focus on you because there are too many kids in the classroom." Joanna's complaint was not about the size of her academic classes, because these teachers were available to provide help. Her complaint was about the size of her physical education classes. Joanna reported that there are up to 60 students in physical education classes, and the classes are comprised of students from different schools located on the campus. It is important to note that Joanna was the only student who complained about her school's being co-located in a building with other schools. Cora and Joanna were the only students in the interview sample who mentioned school size, class size, or an inability to receive personal attention from staff.

A final area of distinction between more and less resilient students was in their response to difficult situations. During the interviews, each student was asked to describe a situation that was difficult to face, and how he or she addressed the situation. What emerged from a critical analysis of student responses to this question was that more

resilient students tended to reach out for the assistance of staff members when they faced a significant challenge, while less resilient students tended to retreat inward or engage in harmful behaviors when faced with difficulties. For example, when Juan, a more resilient student, was frustrated by the poor work habits of his peers on a group project, he discussed his concerns privately with his teacher. Additionally, when Ana's family house went into foreclosure, she initially concealed her problems, but eventually she talked to adults in her school about her problems. Finally, when Darin was depressed and scared about the impact his girlfriend's pregnancy would have on his life, he went and sought counsel from his teachers. He also stated that any time he felt like giving up on school he reached out to teachers for help. In contrast, when Samantha, a less resilient student, was upset about conditions in her home, she lashed out at others at school. She often fought with other students, an account that was verified by her mother, Ms. Lopez. According to Ms. Lopez, Samantha exhibited negative behavior in response to unhappiness or dissatisfaction in life. Samantha was a truant and a chronic cutter in middle school. Her behavior was so severe that the Agency for Child Services was called to intervene on two occasions. It was not until later in her high school career that she learned more positive alternatives to dealing with anger. Lita also handled difficult situations by withdrawing and retreating. Lita's mother, Mrs. Contreras, stated that her daughter gets sad and quiet when things do not go her way. Lita admitted to wanting to give up on school when the process of learning the English language seemed too difficult for her. Finally, Cora was intentional about not sharing her personal problems with school staff, preferring to deal with things on her own.

It is obvious that there were marked differences in the experiences of the more resilient students and those of some of the less resilient students, particularly Cora and Joanna. While there were many instances in which the majority of students were in agreement, there were instances in which there were significant differences between the two groups. Most students believed the school's staff held high expectations for them, and that there are adults in the school who are caring and supportive. However, among the students with lower resilience levels, there were some students who did not feel as supported as the other students. These students acknowledged that the school was organized to support students, but they reported that they did not always get the academic or social support they would have liked or that they believed other students received. It may be difficult to draw any valid conclusions about what these differences mean, but it is clear that that some of the students with lower levels of resilience experienced school differently. A possible explanation for the fact that the school seems to provide better supports for students of higher resilience is that these students are better positioned to receive it. These findings could also be interpreted to mean that students of lower resilience have a more negative life view which influences how they perceive everything including their school community. According to the Gail Wagnild, author of *Resilience Scale: User's Guide*, individuals with low resilience levels "tend to be pessimistic" and those whose level is on the low end "… have trouble letting go of things they have no control over" (Wagnild, 2010, p.). These descriptions may help explain why some students were able to overlook flaws in the school, while others seemed to focus on them. It is also possible that there may be other factors that differentiate the students who are less resilient from other students in this sample that were not uncovered in this research

study. Again, while it may be impossible to determine the root cause of the difference, it is important to acknowledge that there are differences between how students with different resilience levels experience this small school and its interventions. One significant finding was that, even though there were some differences among more and less resilient students in attitudes and experiences at the school, there was relatively no difference in the area of student achievement as measured in this study. Table 6, "Resilience and Academic Data of Interviewed Students", shows that all of five students in the interview sample who were of lower resilience were on track to graduate. These findings, while based on a small sample, indicate that high resilience is not a precondition for successful progress towards graduation from high school. Academic achievement levels of the "Resiliency Survey Students" were compared to their resilience levels, and results will be described later in this chapter. Interview data from all constituents was examined in order to better understand how the school's structures impact student resilience, and will be described in the next section.

Research Questions

Research Question One: Small Schools and Fostering Resiliency in At-Risk Students

The first research question addressed in this study is, "What impact do small schools have on fostering resiliency in at-risk students?" Before addressing this question, the two questions that emanate from it will be discussed: 1) What does resiliency look like in students?; and 2) How do schools promote resiliency? If one subscribes to Wolin and Wolin's (1993) definition of resiliency, then he or she believes that resiliency is a quality that all individuals possess which can be developed over time. According to the research, schools can promote resiliency in students when students experience schools as

community (Battistich el al.; Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006). Schools should seek to develop

resiliency in students, because students who are resilient have higher self-concepts,

educational aspirations, and an internal locus of control (Bernard, 2004). In looking for

evidence in the interview data that this small school is helping students to develop

resilience, I examined the student responses to questions about staff expectations of them

and student plans for the future.

During the interviews, students were asked whether they believed staff held high

expectations for them. In response to that question, students offered a wide range of

anecdotes. For instance, Laura stated that the staff's encouraging students to do the right

things in school was evidence that they believe there is something better for them. Other

students spoke about the college-going culture at Village Community High School.

School staff encourages everyone to consider attending college. According to John, the

staff does more than talk about college; they strategically monitor student progress

towards achieving that goal. "…they always try to push me to go to college. Like when I

didn't have my personal statement done, they were on top of me until I had it." Village

Community High School also regularly brings college representatives to the school to

talk to students. Willie also said that he has felt the persuasive push from his teachers to

help him to actualize his full potential. Willie was a high-achieving student, but his

teachers noticed that he was not challenging himself, so they decided to encourage him to

push himself even further: "…they hold me to a higher standard." Juan shared a similar

experience. He said his teachers pushed him to retake a state Regents Exam; he passed

with a grade of 79. "They want 90's, they don't want 80's", said Juan. Ana believed that

being nominated for a variety of activities was proof that staff held high expectations for

her. Ana was grateful for the nominations, because she believed these activities helped her to grow. "All the groups and teams that I'm in are helping me with my leadership abilities."

Staff members believe the key to developing resiliency in their students is in the personalization their school offers and the supports they provide. They all spoke of the importance of getting to know the students well and addressing their needs. Ms. Horne stated that the fact that students in their school are not anonymous was significant. She said, "You can't run away from us. Until we get you where you need to be, we're going to keep harassing you." This principle of not giving up on students probably contributed to students' not giving up on themselves. When asked to demonstrate how his school fosters resilience, Mr. Jones used the following anecdote to illustrate his point, "As I was reviewing transcripts I noticed a number of kids…that had taken the algebra Regents, like, seven times and their scores crept up, from 23 to 47 to 54 to 57, to all the way up to 65[13]. I don't know if that quite gets to resiliency, but I thought that if they keep taking it and they keep getting better, then that speaks to something. I don't know if it speaks to resiliency, but it speaks to something kind of wonderful, in that this kid is plugging ahead and getting the support he needs and not dropping out." The attention and consistent support given to students in this school may contribute to the development of resiliency in their students.

Research Question Two: Small School Structures and Student Resiliency

The second research question that shaped this study is, "Are there structures in small schools that are increasing students' feelings of resiliency?" The purpose of this question was to identify practices and structures that small schools use to both support

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[13] The minimum passing grade for state Regents Examination is 65.

students and foster resilience. Some of the structures that Village Community School uses to support students are advisory, postsecondary planning, teacher leadership, extracurricular activities, and teacher accessibility.

According to the school's principal, the advisory program is a key component of promoting student success in school. Advisory is one method the school uses to provide personalization of school for students. All of the school staff mentioned that building relationships with students is part of the reason for creating small schools. More specifically, teachers stated that their school's mission is to get to know students better in order to better serve them. Every student in Village Community School is assigned an advisor to support him or her throughout the school year. The school aims to ensure that every staff member develops a close relationship with at least one adult in the building. Ms. Horne described advisory as the place where students and teachers can talk about issues that cannot be discussed in a regular class. Some advisory sessions address standards topics like college readiness and academic progress, but advisors also take on tougher subjects like relationship issues, substance abuse, anger and family violence. Advisors advocate for students, provide guidance, and communicate with students' families on a regular basis. Ideally, the advisor serves as the liaison between the school and home. The advisor is the first point of contact if a student is absent from school, and the advisor is expected to monitor their students' progress in all subjects. Although Mr. Jones would prefer for the same teacher to serve as a student's advisor throughout his high school years, that structure has proved too difficult for the school to sustain. In an effort to maintain the staff composition on the school's grade teams and maximize staffing, students get a new advisor each year.

In addition to advisors, school faculty stated that guidance counselors also play an integral role in the lives of students. The school has four guidance counselors to serve its student body of 425. Each counselor is assigned to one grade of students, creating a ratio of approximately 85 students per counselor. Guidance counselors participate in weekly grade team meetings, advise teachers on student issues, and meet with students. Counselors are required to meet with each student on their grade at least once a semester (every six weeks). The principal has also given them measurable goals related to student performance. Ms. Robles said her responsibilities include programming students for classes, transcript reviews, conducting individual and small group sessions with students, meeting with teacher teams, and meeting with parents. Some students are mandated for counseling because of their individualized educational plans, and others are referred for short- or longer-term counseling based on student need. Outside of her regular responsibilities, Ms. Robles also conducts home visits, meets with students after regular school hours and connects families to programs and services. She also tutors students in her spare time, particularly those who are recent immigrants struggling to learn the English language. Ms. Robles believes it is important to involve and help parents in order to help students succeed. According to Ms. Robles, helping the student also means providing services to the parents and to the community.

Though the school's guidance counselors support student achievement in a variety of ways, the impact of their work is not always transparent to students. Students spoke favorably about their counselors, though many of them stated that they did not receive counseling or advisement from their counselor. An important finding from the student interviews was that, though students depended on their counselor for academic support,

most students relied on their teachers for counseling and emotional support. This is counter to the common perception of the role of guidance counselors in schools. Some students reported rarely seeing their counselor, while others reported meeting with their counselors informally a few times a day. Laura said, "Some kids go to her for personal reasons, but not me. I just go there when I need to add a class to my schedule or when I need the SAT/ACT stuff." Some of the activities which they stated they engaged in with their counselor included working on college applications, completing personal statements, visiting colleges, and doing community service. All students reported that their counselors are their primary contact for information about college planning, although students who were experiencing significant personal problems did report seeing their counselor for support.

Though guidance counselors clearly play a role in college and career planning, it was clear from student and staff interviews that postsecondary planning is a vital component of the school's culture and structure. Staff members discussed the importance of preparing students for life after high school. "I don't want to see our seniors graduating without basic skills, but we want them to have all the skills they need to be successful. They shouldn't leave our school with just a diploma, but the ability to compete against other students from other schools," said Ms. Salah. Students spoke about the constant emphasis on college by their teachers and their counselor. Teachers assist students with completing personal statements and preparing for the college entry exams. Counselors manage the process by monitoring deadlines and applications. In addition to college access, staff members also support the development of life skills. According to Mr. Lyles, a small school has the ability to incorporate life skills into the

curriculum of the school. When asked what he thought were the most important needs that schools should address, he responded, "How to go on a job interview, how to use etiquette at a table, preparing to write a check, things that I believe a lot of our student's families don't teach them." In addition to the school's focus on college and career readiness, some staff members also want to prepare students for the responsibilities of adulthood.

Teacher leadership is another core feature of many small schools. Small schools tend to have smaller administrative teams, so leadership responsibilities have to be shared by teacher leaders in order for the schools to function. This holds true at Village Community School, where teacher leadership is supported and encouraged. Ms. Salah, for example, is an 11th grade English teacher, but she is also the Chair of the English Department, yearbook advisor, and 11th grade team leader. She stated that this type of multitasking is the norm for the majority of the school's faculty. Teaching staff is involved in school plays, sports activities, after-school tutoring, student clubs, or one of Village Community High School's many professional committees. Ms. Salah stated, "It's a small school, so there's not a lot of room for just being independent, coming in and doing your job, and leaving." Teachers who were interviewed discussed their extra responsibilities with a degree of pride. Perhaps they recognize that they have impact, not only on the students they teach, but also on the development of their school.

In tandem with the idea of teacher leadership is the value of teacher collaboration at Village Community High School. Teachers meet often, in a variety of configurations, to plan and assess, as well as to create solutions to authentic school problems. Teachers are organized by department, grade, and by committee assignment. In grade teams,

teachers meet regularly during the work day to plan curriculum, design assessments, and to share student concerns. They also discuss issues such as student attendance, discipline and grading policies. "...it's a great platform to talk with other teachers who are also with those kids on a regular basis...," said Ms. Horne. Grade teams were implemented as a way to decrease the total student load and create small groups of teachers organized around a single cohort of teachers. All of the teachers involved in this study spoke favorably about grade teams and believed that this structure contributed to student success. One of the school's counselors, Ms. Robles, also commented on the importance of teacher collaboration in her school. She said she sees teachers working together all the time. "It's like they work together more than anything else to see the success of each student, and it doesn't stop at the end of the school day." Ms. Salah told a story about how her grade team worked together to address a group of students who were often involved in mischief. After an occasion when this group was suspended for a lengthy period of time for a serious infraction, the entire grade team met with the students in one setting. The teachers shared their concerns with the students about the impact of their behavior on their achievement. The teachers offered them alternatives to acting out, and made a contract with them for re-entry into the learning community. Instead of individual teachers' attempting to deal with behavior issues, all of the teachers united to develop a strategy for dealing with these students and then collectively reinforced the expected behavior. Ms. Salah believes this action had a positive impact on the students, and the students eventually came to understand: "there's a group of people here who love me even though I do wrong occasionally."

Extracurricular activities are another important part of the student experience at Village Community High School. The school's principal hopes the clubs and activities students are engaged in will help them develop leadership skills and keep them actively engaged in school. Many of the school's activities are aligned to the school's theme of social justice. "...the whole theme of our school is meant to empower students, to educate them on some of the injustices that might exist especially for minority kids...," said Ms. Salah. Students are involved in a combination of sports, social and civic activities, such as the basketball team, the boxing team, National Honor Society, System of Freedom club, the school's sustainability team, the yearbook committee, school leadership team and Queer Student Alliance (QSA), a student support club for gay, lesbian, transgender, and bisexual youth. The culminating activity for QSA is "Pride Week". Some teachers believe the existence of this club at their school is a great source of support for some students. "QSA is a great space for kids who are probably feeling a little out of place to be able to speak to other kids who feel the same way, and build their confidence inside and outside of the classroom", said Ms. Salah. Other student activities include presenting school productions or tutoring younger students. Students also said that they can start their own club if something that interests them does not exist yet. Student participants in this study valued the variety of extracurricular activities offered at their school. In fact, all of the students who were interviewed were participants in at least one extracurricular activity. Laura said, "It makes me feel good because I like to help other people. I feel like I'm doing something for someone else, but it's also helping me." Others recognized the value of club participation as it relates to their personal development. "They [the activities] opened doors for me and I got to meet people,

network, and I guess I can say grow up and mature", said Willie. Other students connected their school community involvement with working through their own life issues. According to Darin, "Recently I was asked to go to a freshman class and speak to them because I've been through a lot and 1 made it through..." He also said that serving as a mentor to younger students has made him feel better about his issues and has motivated him to continue to push himself to succeed.

Teacher accessibility is a structure that was mentioned by study participants to have a significant impact on students. Though it is problematic to categorize teacher accessibility as a school structure, because it seems to be something that happens organically, it is mentioned here because it is characteristic that was affirmed by each interview group. The school's administration does not mandate that teachers make themselves available to students before, during and after school, but it seems that within this school culture, teachers engage in this practice. Parents were also appreciative for the accessibility of school staff. Ms. Lopes said that the school is in frequent contact with her family. She receives frequent calls and e-mails, as well as prompt service when she visits the school. According to her, the communication is bilateral. She can call staff members, including the principal, to discuss her child's progress and any concerns she has.

Village Community High School students reported that they were especially grateful for the lack of strict boundaries between teacher time and student time. Students said they depend on their teachers' being available during lunch periods, before school and after school. Laura affirmed that teachers make themselves available to students: "Like their lunch or free time, they clear it so they could help you with your work if you

need help." Juan said, "You see teachers here until 6:00 tutoring students, helping students." According to parents and students, teacher and staff accessibility is not just confined to the school day. Students stated that teachers were available to them during weekends and holidays, largely through e-mails and text. When one of John's teachers found out that John's mother was battling breast cancer, he gave John his cell phone number and told him he could call if he needed to talk.

Teachers also discussed the importance of being accessible and visible to students. They believed it was important for them to become a consistent presence in students' lives so the students know they can count on them. Some teachers shared that they stay after school so students can have a safe place to congregate and to do homework. Ms. Salah said that she devotes a lot of time after school in her classroom, so that her advisees or other students can talk to her. She also acknowledged that some of her students do not have access to the Internet or a computer at home, so the extra time in the classroom gives them the access they need to complete their work. "...my classroom is a place where a lot of kids would come and sit, whether it's during lunch or after school. I like them to feel like it's a safe place that they can hang out if that needs to be available", said Ms. Salah. Mr. Lyles believes that teachers can convey concern for students just by being present at games and after school. He makes it a point to attend student games regularly, in order to convey interest and support for his students. In addition to staying after school with students, Village Community teachers also plan a variety of trips and retreats for their students. Some teachers take their advisory groups out to lunch periodically. Ms. Horne has chaperoned students on overnight trips and college trips. According to Ms. Salah, "Interacting with kids outside of the classroom

strips away at the traditional teacher-student relationship so we can see a different side of each other."

Another recurring theme among students was appreciation for extra help. Students perceived being provided with additional opportunities to complete work as being cared for by their teachers. Students appreciated teachers' willingness to help them succeed. Many said Village Community gives them opportunities to catch up if they "messed up". This seemed to be quite significant for many of these students, since many of them had experienced a rough transition to high school. Something as simple as extending a deadline or offering additional tutoring seemed like a lifeline to students who had experienced school failure in the past. Only one student, Naomi, expressed a different view on the numerous options for extra time. She felt that sometimes the extensions did not teach students to manage their time effectively. "...I feel sometimes that this school might baby us a little bit..." She believes making students adhere to firm deadlines would actually make the school even better. Overall, the consensus from the other students was that being granted extra time to submit work was a benefit to students.

Research Question Three: Student and Teacher Relationships and Resiliency

The third of the research questions was, "What impact do student relationships with teachers have on the development of student resiliency?" The importance of the strong relationships among students, teachers and other adults at Village Community was a recurrent theme in most of the student interviews. When students were asked what they liked most about their school, several students responded that it was their teachers. Most students expressed warm feelings toward their teachers, in that they felt very close to them, even viewing them as extensions of their families. Referring to her teachers, Ana

said, "I tell them about my family problems, when something's wrong with me, and they're understanding; they do whatever they can to help." Attending this small school afforded students the opportunity to know staff well, and to be known well by staff. Students indicated that the teachers played a pivotal role in their academic lives, attributing their success to teacher involvement in their lives. "The teachers don't doubt us; they motivate us and help us realize we can do better." Naomi shared that one of her teachers encouraged her to apply for *SummerSearch*, a summer program that takes low-income innercity youth to participate in experiential programs throughout the country, followed by year-round mentoring. Naomi did not think she would be accepted, so she did not want to apply; however, with her teacher's encouragement she eventually applied and gained acceptance to the program. Some students said the teachers reach out to students to help, especially to students who are experiencing illness or adverse situations. "Because sometimes you just need somebody to talk to...", said Samantha. For students like Darin, who had a lot of family issues, the support from his teachers kept him in school. "I had multiple problems in my household and my teachers came and helped me the best way they could. Sometimes my desire to want to go to school was dropping...but my teachers were there for me, they were pushing me, they were my parents; my parents that actually cared."

In addition to the emotional support the students received from their teachers, they also spoke of the academic assistance their teachers provide. Students described their teachers as relentless when it comes to student success. "They push me and give me time to complete my projects. Teachers text me if I am absent and celebrate when I make the effort." John said, "...the teachers really get into you. It's not like they teach you

one day and the next day it's whatever. It's not like you go home not knowing what's going in class. They plant the work in your head." Students appreciated the attention they received from their teachers, especially in the area of increasing student understanding. Lita spoke of the academic support she gets from her teachers. Her teachers make the effort to ensure that students understand class work as well as homework. She said, "When you need help with homework they stay with us". Many of the students referenced the personalized attention they received from their teachers. Derek told of a teacher calling his parents to make sure he attended Regents prep classes. Students also stated that they believed they could get help from any teacher in the building, even those they did not have close relationships with.

Research Question Four: Resiliency and Academic Achievement

The final research question that grounds this study is, "Is there a relationship between students' reported feelings of resiliency and their achievement in school?" Academic achievement in this study is very narrowly defined as whether or not students are on track to graduate by the end of their third year of high school. This scope of academic achievement was selected because of the study's focus on students persisting in school. Steady movement of students over the course of their high school careers towards graduation is a good indicator of student resilience in a school setting. As mentioned earlier, the terms "on track", "almost on track" and "off track" refer to student progress towards high school graduation. These values derive from the ARIS system that is a data system that is used by the New York City Department of Education to track student progress in grades 9-12. Students who are "on track" to graduation at the end of their third year would have earned at least 33 of 44 credits required for a high school

diploma in New York State, and would have passed at least three of the five required regents examinations. Students who are "almost on track" for graduation at the end of their third year would have earned 30 out of 44 credits and passed a minimum of two Regents examinations. Students who are "off track" have earned less than the minimum requirements stated in the last category. The chart that follows addresses this question by providing a comparison of student resiliency levels to their relative academic progress for all students who took the Resiliency Survey.
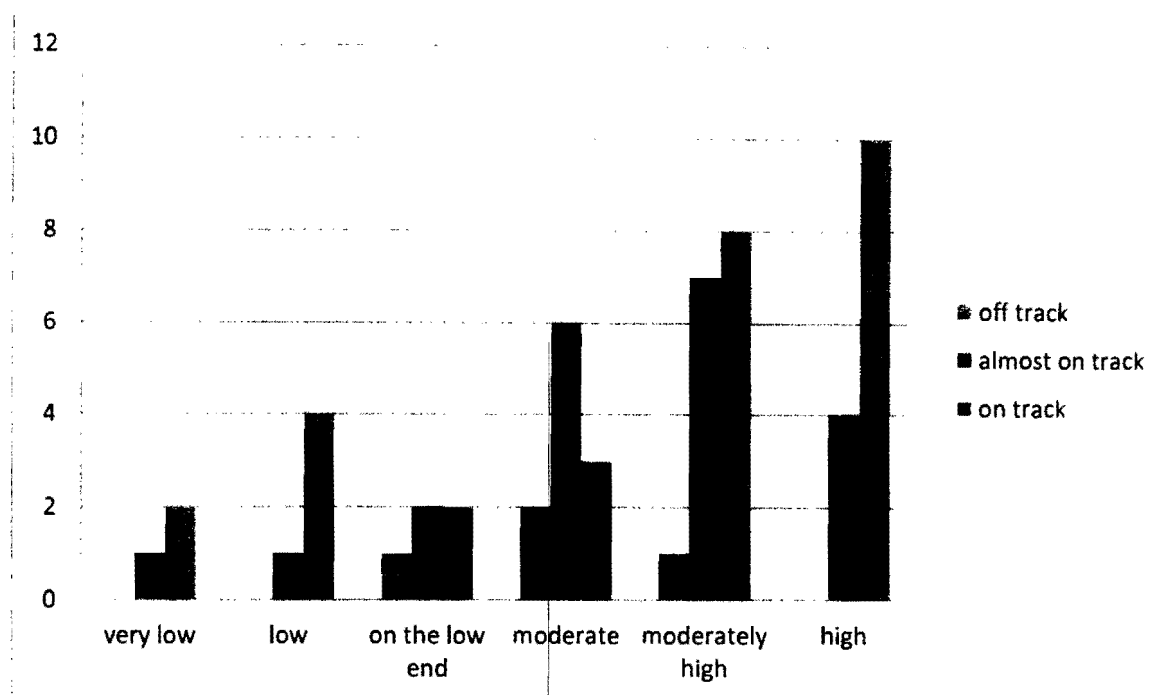
Figure 9. Resiliency Scores Compared to Student Academic Performance -Resiliency Survey Students

The data presented in the chart above leads to some conclusions. It is evident that there are fewer off-track students in this sample. Additionally, there are no off-track students who have high resilience levels in this sample. However, within this sample there are students of all resiliency levels, from very low to high, who have achieved "on

track" to graduation status. One hypothesis based on this data is that being less resilient does not necessarily mean that students are not likely to succeed in school; however it is also possible that the school-specific characteristics discussed earlier in this chapter allowed students of lower resilience the supports necessary for them to progress in school. The data also shows that students who are more resilient in this group are more likely to be "on track" towards graduating from high school. Finally, it can be concluded that students who were categorized as "off track" tended to have lower resiliency scores. The data presented in Table 6 compares the resiliency scores and student academic progress for students in the interview sample. As stated earlier, these student results are also represented in the larger sample. The findings in the smaller interview sample were congruent with the larger student sample on the basis that there is no evidence of a relationship between student resilience levels and academic progress in school. In this study we found that resilience does not determine student performance in school. While we cannot determine whether or not this is true for all students in all small schools, we can conclude that less resilient students can be successful in Village Community School.

Summary

The purpose of conducting interviews with different constituencies in the school community was to identify school beliefs and practices that may impact on resiliency development in students. One of the research goals was to discover whether or not the student and parent experiences in the school were congruent with the vision of, and the stated actions, of the school staff.

Within each group (students and staff), there were some emerging themes, as well as themes that were shared across all of the interviewed groups. The belief in student

personalization was a topic that was reinforced in each constituency group. The principal expressed that one of the primary purposes of small schools is to provide opportunities for staff to get to know students better. Teachers spoke about the importance of the relationships with students, and students reaffirmed that they experienced close special bonds with their teachers. These relationships helped students to manage difficult times, as well as to succeed academically. Teacher accessibility was another common theme among respondents. The school's principal talked about the importance of providing emotional support and scaffolding difficult tasks for students. Teachers discussed their practice of spending time in their classrooms during lunch and after class so that students can have access to them. The counselor affirmed that teachers make themselves available to meet with students and parents. Parents attested to the fact that their children had strong bonds and access to teachers in the school. All respondents believed that the school holds high expectations for all students. Students saw the college-going culture as evidence that staff believed they were able to be successful in college. Finally, the incessant encouragement of students not to give up is something that all interview respondents stated was a characteristic of the Village Community School culture. In the concluding chapter, the themes that emerged from the interviews, the survey data, and the research questions will be discussed. The study findings are presented, as well as recommendations for further study and implications for policy and practice.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to identify possible school-related factors that foster resiliency in our most challenged students – those deemed by poverty, family composition or skill proficiency to be at risk of failure. Success in this context is defined as students' continuing their studies in high school until graduation and not dropping out. In many schools, at-risk students meet the fate that was predicted for them - failure to complete high school. However, there are some schools where these students are remaining in school and exceeding expectations. Many of those "beat-the-odds" schools are small schools. This study attempted to investigate what small schools might do differently in order to foster resiliency and to effectuate better student outcomes.

In order to address the research questions, the study was designed to gather data from various constituent groups within one small school community. These constituencies were comprised of students, parents, teachers, counselors and the school's principal. Students in their third year were asked to participate in a survey that would measure their level of resilience. Out of the 91 students who met the research criteria, 58 students participated in the study as a result of providing both student assent and parent consent to participate in the study. Participating students were administered the *Resilience Scale*, which is a 26 item survey that uses a seven-point Likert scale for each item. At the completion of the survey, survey results were scored in accordance with *The Resilience Scale User's Guide*, in order to determine which students in the survey were more resilient and which were less resilient. In addition to completing the *Resilience Scale*, a sample of students who took the survey participated in one-on-one interviews

with me, utilizing interview questions which I had developed. I also conducted interviews with parents, teachers, a guidance counselor and the school's principal. Each interview was approximately 15-20 minutes in length. The data gathered from these interviews provided rich information which, in conjunction with the research, formed the basis for the study's findings.

Summary of Results

Research Question One: Small Schools and Fostering Resiliency in At-Risk Students

The primary research question that frames this study is, "What impact do small schools have on fostering resiliency in at-risk students?"

For the purpose of this research study, "at-risk students" was defined as those at risk of dropping out of school (The National At-Risk Education Network, 2012). In this study, all of the student subjects were categorized as at-risk, due to their socioeconomic status, family mobility, poor academic history, or having been raised in a single-family household. All of the student subjects in this study met at least two of the above criteria. The interview questions that were used to address this research questions were as follows:

Student question: Do you feel adults in this school care about you?

Student question: Do you think your school helps you to be successful?

Parent question: Do you think your child's school helps him/her to be successful? Explain.

Teacher/Counselor question: What does your school do to increase student success?

These questions were selected because of their connection to the research on resiliency in students. The literature says that resiliency is fostered when teachers and staff develop close relationships with students (Bernard, 2004). Other research suggests that small schools foster a sense of belonging in students that positively influences their behaviors (Cotton, 2001). Finally, in looking for evidence of resiliency in students, the research says that resilient students have higher self-concepts, goal direction and educational aspirations (Bernard, 2004).

When asked what the school does to foster resiliency in students, all of the staff stated that they try to create caring relationships with students, so that each student is well known by at least one adult in the building. Mr. Jones, the school's principal, believes that his school fosters resiliency by providing a safe, supportive environment for students. He also stated that staff encourages students to keep trying even when they fail, and that his school provides students with multiple opportunities to be successful. All of the teacher and the counselor participants stated that the accessibility of staff to students helps to foster resiliency. All of the staff participants stated that personalization for students fosters resiliency. One teacher, Ms. Salah, stated that the school's theme of social justice empowers students, and that fosters resiliency. Two of the three teachers stated that they utilize different instructional strategies to support struggling learners. Such strategies include using a push-in model, differentiated instruction and purposeful grouping[14]. One of the teachers, Mr. Lyles, did not discuss instructional strategies to

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[14] Push-in model refers an intervention that provides students with additional support inside a general education classroom inside of pulling students out of class for support services.
Differentiated instruction is providing multiple assignments within each unit, tailored for the students at different levels of achievement (www.differentiatedinstruction.net)
Purposeful grouping is the the effective grouping of students according to their skills and learning needs in a classroom setting.

support students. Mr. Lyles is the newest member of the faculty among the participants in this study sample. In light of this, Village Community High School may want to consider how new staff members are inducted into the school community in order to ensure that the overall schoolwide beliefs and practices are transmitted to all members of the faculty.

When asked whether they feel like adults in the school care about them, student responses were overwhelmingly positive; 12 of the 14 respondents answered unequivocally yes. The other two respondents indicated that sometimes they think school staff members care about them. Students believed that evidence of caring was found in the constant teacher outreach. Both parents also stated that teachers and other school staff push their children to succeed. Out of the 14 respondents, three stated that being pushed to do better in school was evidence that the staff cared for them. Additionally, the majority of the students said they turn to school staff when faced with difficulties. Students said that school staff members, including teachers, administrators and counselors, provide them with guidance and advice. Other examples of caring that students provided were the availability of additional academic help from teachers, the accessibility of teachers outside of instructional time, and the consistent focus on postsecondary planning for every student. When asked if the school helps them to be successful, two respondents stated that being nominated for participation in groups or teams developed their leadership ability. Other respondents stated that teachers' giving up their free time to work with them helped them to be successful. Another response shared by two students is that information on colleges and scholarships helped them to be

successful, and other students stated that extended deadlines on school projects helped to make them successful.

An important finding that emerged from this study is Village Community High School's emphasis on creating a college-going culture. This study found that 100% of the students interviewed mentioned the school's focus on students attending college. Many students perceived the school's college focus as evidence that staff held high expectations for them. Some of the college-related activities students engaged in with their teachers or counselors were working on personal statements, preparing for SATs, ACTs, applying for scholarships or attending college trips. While these activities are typical of what one would expect high school juniors and seniors to be engaged in, the fact that all students, irrespective of their progress to graduation status, resiliency level or academic achievement, stated that they were being strongly encouraged to apply for college is quite significant. Even the two students who were less enthusiastic about the school acknowledged that the school was supporting them through the college admissions process. It was evident that Village Community High School does not track students based on achievement when preparing them for the college admissions process, but encourages all students to go to college. College planning is essential in every school, but in a school community where the majority of students are first-generation college students, it is critical. The impact of the college emphasis on these students is that it reaffirmed that all staff held high expectations for them. The school consistently messages to students that, despite their academic, social and economic challenges, they are "college material." This constant reinforcement from successful adults has made a huge impact on these students' lives.

Research Question Two: Small School Structures and Student Resiliency

The second question that framed this study is, "Are there structures in small schools that are increasing students' feelings of resiliency?" The interview questions that were used to address this research question were as follows:

Student question: How often do you see your counselor? What kinds of activities do you do with your counselor?

Student question: What kinds of extracurricular activities are offered in your school? Do you participate in any of them?

Administrator/Teacher/Counselor question: What are the schoolwide practices in place to address student needs?

Teacher/Counselor question: What do you do in your role to address student needs?

Administrator question: What types of social supports does your school provide students?

The related research shows that, when students experience school as a community, their behaviors improve (Battistich et al., 1997). Therefore, any structure that the school puts in place to create a sense of community can contribute to increasing students' feelings of resiliency. The research also shows that advisory, a common feature in many small schools, improves student outcomes. Data shows that an effective advisory program can decrease the high school dropout rate and improve student achievement (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004).

After analyzing the interview data from all of the constituent groups, it was evident that there are some school structures that contribute to students' feeling of

wellbeing and resilience. When asked what the school does to help students be successful, two of the three teachers stated that teacher collaboration is significant to increasing student resilience. These teachers stated that teachers in this school participate in a variety of committees that work to support students. All of the teachers and the participating counselor also cited the Saturday school and Regents tutoring as important layers of support for students. When asked to identify schoolwide structures that support students, all of the faculty; teachers, counselor and the school's principal, referred to advisory as being an essential structure that is used to foster personalization for students. Village Community's use of distributive counseling through advisory is a schoolwide structure that effectively decreases the total student load for counselors. In a school with a student-counselor ratio of approximately 70:1, it is impossible for counselors to meet regularly with all students. Through the school's advisory program every student gets to be known well by an adult. Each student is assigned an advisor every year to meet with four times a week in small groups. Advisors serve as both academic and emotional support coaches for students. Advisors get to know students and their families well. Of the 14 students interviewed, four students discussed the importance of advisory by either discussing the role their advisor has played in their lives or detailing the type of activities they do in advisory.

Another school structure in place to support students and foster resilience is the school's youth development team. The youth development team consists of counselors, social workers, attendance teachers, school aides, teacher leaders and the school's parent coordinator, who work collaboratively to monitor student progress and plan for interventions. This team takes referrals from teacher teams on which students need

additional intervention. This team addresses issues of absenteeism, abuse, substance use, gang involvement and harmful behaviors. One of the teacher respondents, the school counselor and the principal discussed the work of the youth development team. They believe that the youth development team drives the work of supporting students and families to ensure that all students in the school community are successful. This structure was less visible to students, but they clearly benefitted from it. It was not a theme that was mentioned by students explicitly, but students discussed members of the youth development team, mainly guidance counselors and the school's parent coordinator.

Teacher teams and teacher collaboration are other schoolwide structures for supporting students that staff attested to. Of the staff respondents, two teachers, the guidance counselor, and the principal discussed the importance of teacher collaboration in supporting their students. Teacher collaboration occurs both informally and formally. There are established times for teachers to meet by grade, by department and by committee. Those meeting times are scheduled during the work day, after school, and on days when students are released early from school. Teachers believe this culture of constant communication in their school allows them to share concerns about students and create timely interventions for them.

Another school structure that increased students' feelings of resiliency was extended learning opportunities such as credit recovery, tutoring and Saturday school. Though the school offers extensive offerings to students in this area, only the guidance counselor discussed the importance of these opportunities for students in her interview.

Another significant finding was the impact of extracurricular activities on students in this school. All of the student respondents indicated that they were involved in some

type of extracurricular activity at school. This involvement allowed students to channel their energy, engage with peers in positive ways, and develop leadership skills.

One of the surprising findings in response to this question is that one of the most effective schoolwide practices in fostering resiliency is its informal culture of accessibility. Both staff and students discussed the importance of teacher accessibility. All of the teachers stated that they give up their free time to work with students. The counselor stated that the school has an open door policy for students and parents. The lack of structural barriers between the school staff and the people they are charged with serving, namely students and parents, has led to increased resilience among students.

Research Question Three: Student and Teacher Relationships and Resiliency

The third question of this research study was, "What impact do student relationships with teachers have on the development of student resiliency?" The interview questions that were used to address this question were as follows:

Student: Are there adults here you can go to when you need help with a personal problem?

Student: Do you think teachers and other school staff hold high expectations for you?

Parent: Do you believe the school has high expectations for your child?

Parent: Are there people your child can go to in the school if they need help?

Teacher: In what ways do you interact with students outside of instructional time?

As mentioned earlier, there is strong evidence that students in this sample developed strong relationships with staff. It has also been mentioned that the school staff was very purposeful in creating and nurturing relationships with their students. When

asked to consider what they do in their roles to address student needs, the teacher and counselor responses were similar. All three of the teachers stated that they call students and parents and conduct outreach. The counselor said that she works closely with parents and students. Two of the teachers said that, by teaching students the skills they need to be successful, they are addressing student needs. Another teacher stated that he is addressing student needs by being present and visible.

Both parents agreed that the school staff holds high expectations for their children. One parent mentioned that she sees staff consistently trying to help students who are struggling. Additionally, both parents identified key staff members, such as the guidance counselor, assistant principal, parent coordinator and the dean, as individuals their children can turn to for help. One parent, Samantha's mother, believes the support from the school's teachers, especially the school's dean, helped to transform her daughter's behavior.

Student responses to these questions confirmed that the relationships with teachers had a positive impact on them. Six of the students interviewed stated that closeness with teachers had helped them to be successful in school. Five students said that they go to teachers for advisement on personal issues. Additionally, 11 students mentioned that there are staff members they can go to for help; those individuals included teachers, deans, advisors, guidance counselors, the parent coordinator, assistant principals and the principal.

A significant finding in this area was that all of the students interviewed had postsecondary plans, although with different degrees of specificity. All of the students mentioned college in their plans, but only five students mentioned the names of the

colleges they planned to attend. In contrast, 11 of the 14 students mentioned a specific career that they intended to pursue.

Student relationships with teachers were found to be very significant. Parents, students, teachers and administrators all cited the importance of these relationships. The strong relationships with staff encouraged students to attend school regularly, even when their prior pattern of behavior suggested they were not inclined to do so. Through their relationships with caring adults, students gained another layer of support in their lives. Many students mentioned that they confided in their teachers about their personal problems. There was a trusting relationship among the school's students and teachers. These relationships may have prevented students from giving up or dropping out. The majority of students agreed that teachers provide a strong source of encouragement for them. Some students mentioned that the support they received from their teachers was more consistent than the support they received from parents and family members. It should be noted that only one staff member, the school's counselor, mentioned the need to reach out to parents as essential to the work of fostering resilience in students. Perhaps the school may need to re-examine its involvement with parents, so that supporting student success represents a true partnership between the school and families.

Research Question Four: Resiliency and Academic Achievement

The fourth and final question in this study is: "Is there a relationship between students' reported feelings of resiliency and their achievement in school?" In order to respond to this question, graduation status of the students was compared with their resilience levels, in an attempt to uncover any findings that might lead to conclusions about a relationship between these two variables. In the area of student achievement, it

was found that the majority of the students in the study were either on track or almost on track to graduate. Of all eligible students, 63% participated in this study by either survey or interview. Of all students who participated, 50% were on track to graduate; and by adding those who are almost on track to graduate, 86% of the students in the study were predicted to most likely graduate on time. This finding was especially noteworthy, in light of the fact that many of these students faced considerable social and academic challenges upon entry to high school. According to the data presented earlier, more than half of the interviewed students entered high school reading below grade level. The fact that the majority of students were on track, or almost on track, to graduate high school despite their skill deficits or social issues could be interpreted to mean that at small schools that foster resiliency more at-risk students can be successful.

The best data source for analyzing the relationship between resiliency and student achievement can be found in Figure 9, "Resiliency Scores Compared to Student Academic Performance for Resiliency Survey Students". This chart indicates that more than half (58%) of all on-track students had either moderately high, or high, resilience scores, while the majority (75%) of all off-track students were either on the low end or moderate level of resilience. One might deduce from this data that students with high resilience levels are more likely to achieve in school, and students with lower resilience levels are less likely to achieve in school. However, there are findings that must be considered before accepting this conclusion. The "Resiliency Scores Compared to Student Academic Performance for Resiliency Survey Students" illustrates that students of all resilience levels were represented in the "on-track-to-graduation" category. Furthermore, in the chart, "Resiliency Scores Compared to Student Academic

Performance for Interviewed Students", the data showed that just as many on-track students were represented in the low resiliency category as in the moderately high category. The findings represented in these data sets show that no valid conclusions can be made about the relationship of resiliency with student achievement. While there may be some relationship between these two variables, the ability to draw strong conclusions about this relationship is beyond the scope of this study.

Connections to the Literature

The findings presented in this study are aligned to previous research on resiliency and young people in schools. The literature on resilience has established that resilience is a process that can be fostered in individuals, as opposed to a distinct character trait (Wolin & Wolin, 1993). It has also been established that schools can play a critical role in resiliency development in students by serving as a protective factor that buffers students, thus reducing the likelihood of negative outcomes (Henderson & Milstein, 2003). Additionally, the literature states that schools have the potential to mitigate risk factors by offering positive supports for students, which reinforce self-esteem and self-efficacy (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2006). Additionally, one of the findings in this study supported by prior research is that teachers and schools have the power to transform students. According to Bernard (2004), schools can increase resiliency by providing students with three protective factors: caring relationships, positive and high expectations for students and opportunities to participate and contribute. In this study, the importance of student engagement in extracurricular activities was confirmed by the student respondents, as well as the fact that all student respondents in the study were involved in at least one extracurricular activity.

An area where this study contributes to and expands the research on at-risk youth and resilience in schools is in the discussion on the impact of resilience on academic achievement. Though, as stated earlier in this chapter, this research was not conclusive in establishing a relationship between these two variables, this research does support the need for additional research in this area.

A significant potential gap in this research study and previous research on resiliency and at-risk youth is the influence of the home environment on resiliency development. Other authors have addressed home environment as a factor in this process, but it was not a variable addressed in this study. Other gaps not addressed in this study will be addressed in the section that follows.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations to this study that must be considered when reviewing its findings. The first limitation is that this study was conducted at one small high school as a case study. Though the case study allowed for an indepth look at the school's structures and constituencies, these findings may not be generalized for all small urban high schools. If the research had included other small urban high schools, then the study would have been able to compare findings among broader groups of students and staff. It would also have been possible to determine whether the practices, beliefs and structures present in Village Community High School could be found in other small schools.

Another limitation of the study was that there were no large high schools or midsized schools included in this study. Including large or midsized high schools would have allowed for comparisons to be drawn between the practices in other schools and those in small schools. The inclusion of other types of schools in this research study

would have also helped to determine whether the practices discussed in the findings are unique to small schools.

Additionally, within this study there were insufficient numbers of students who were off track to graduate. Of the 114 students in this cohort, 53% of them were on track to graduate within four years, 24.5% (n=28) of cohort members of the cohort members were off track to graduate, and 16.4% (n=15) of the 91 eligible potential student participants were off track to graduate. Though the study included some students who were off track (n=4) in the survey sample, none of these students were included in the interview sample. The limited participation of off-track students could be attributed to poor attendance, decreased school involvement or attachment to school or lack of interest in participation. The inclusion of more off-track students in this study would have enhanced our understanding of how students of all achievement levels progress in this small school. Additionally, students who are off track to graduation are those students who were not successful, despite all of the personalization and interventions the school provided. This research study would have been enhanced by a discussion of what aspects of the school structure or environment did not work for these students, and what prevented them from making satisfactory progress towards graduation like the majority of their peers. Were those factors related to the school, or were there external factors or individual characteristics inherent in these students that interfered with their progress in school? The perspectives of these off-track students on the school and its ability to support its most vulnerable students may have added another dimension to the study that no other group offered.

A further challenge of the student sample was that students with higher levels of resilience were overrepresented in both the survey and the interview samples. The distribution of student responses on the *Resilience Scale* was skewed to the higher levels of resilience. Although the initial student outreach was conducted to all students randomly, the sample did not provide an even distribution of students of varying levels of resilience particularly in the interview sample. The resiliency distribution cannot be easily explained, but it was apparent from the student responses to participating in this study that, the more involved the commitment to the study (an in-class survey versus a one-on-one interview), the more resilient the group tended to be. Whatever the reason for the overrepresentation of more resilient students, this is a critical limitation in the study. The overall sense of optimism that individuals with higher resilience possess may have contributed to the overwhelmingly positive student view of the school. Including more students of lower resilience levels may have provided a more balanced student view of the school, as was evidenced by the perspectives of two of the less resilient students, Cora and Joanna. These students seemed to be the outliers in the research study, as they were the only students who were critical of the school and its staff. These unique students also discussed their perception that preferential treatment was given to higher-performing students by the school's staff. This is a topic that deserves further discussion. Perhaps the inclusion of more students with resilience scores similar to these students may have contributed to different findings.

Another study limitation was the length of the study. This study examined a cohort of students over the course of one school year. If this had been a longitudinal study that took place over a longer period time, there may have been more rich data to

gather, particularly from students. If the study had analyzed performance data of a cohort of at-risk freshmen and tracked their performance over a four-year period, the progress of students could have been more effectively tracked.

The selection of an indicator of student progress in school was a further limitation. In this study, I used the categories of "on track", "almost on track" and "off track" as indicators of student progress. These categories were defined by the New York City Department of Education and tracked in an online data system called ARIS. Though these categories did create distinctions among the students in the study sample, the majority of the students in this study were identified as "on track" for graduation. Perhaps if the study included a more sensitive indicator of student performance; for example, grade point average or SAT scores, there might have have been more variation in academic outcomes among the sample of students.

A further limitation was in the design of the study. Staff participants were not cognizant of which students were participating in the interviews. This study design did not allow staff participants to discuss the individual students, thereby foregoing a valuable opportunity to gather anecdotal evidence about the students and verify aspects of student accounts. This aspect of the study was designed for two distinct reasons: to protect the anonymity of the students, and to maintain the focus on patterns in small schools, instead of focusing on the narratives of individual students. However; if the research had allowed for staff to share information about individual students in the study, more information about individual student experiences at the school may have been obtained.

The final limitation was that this study included only two parents. I had attempted to get more parents to participate by making announcements at Parent Association meetings, and by reaching out to parents at open school evening meetings. Despite these efforts, only two parents agreed to participate in the interviews. The low participation rate of parents could be due to several factors, including conflicting work schedules, lack of child care, fear of an unknown "authority figure," or even a language barrier. It is also possible that parents of lower socioeconomic status who are facing other more pressing life issues might be less inclined to volunteer to participate in a study that offers no direct benefit to themselves or their children. Additionally, both of these parents were Latino, meaning that no African-American parents were included in the interview portion of the study. The absence of more parents in this study is unfortunate. This small sample of parents made it difficult to authentically present the parent voice.

Recommendations for Further Research

Some of the recommendations for further research are as follows:

1. A longitudinal study of one cohort of students from freshman year to graduation to determine the impact of small schools on at-risk students. Such a study design could identify a group of students in their third or fourth years of high school and analyze their academic performance from their incoming freshman year to the present. This study could use achievement data such as summative assessments, grade point average, credit accumulation and attendance to inform student progress in school.

2. A study that replicates this one but involves more than one small school. A researcher might identify three or more small schools with similar student

demographics to study. The study could compare the student experiences and academic outcomes at each of the small schools. The benefit of doing this would be to determine if there would be similar findings in all of the schools involved in the study.

3. A study that compares student resiliency in students who attend small schools to resiliency in students who attend big schools. A comparison of student experiences in small schools and those in big schools could determine whether or not student experiences in small schools are significantly different from those in larger schools.

4. A study that looks more closely at the impact of teacher beliefs and practices on fostering student resiliency. A new study that examines how teachers' beliefs about supporting students impacts on resiliency development would add new insights to this field. It would allow researchers to identify which teacher actions and/or instructional practices are most effective in fostering resiliency in at-risk youth.

5. A study that examines the impact of school partnerships on fostering resiliency in students. As stated earlier in the research, an essential design element of the small school movement in New York City that began under the Klein/Bloomberg administration was the collaboration of community-based organizations with schools. It would be beneficial to the field to assess the impact of these partnerships on students.

6. A study that examines the impact of gender and race on resiliency development. The limited data that was gathered in the interview portion of the study suggested

that Latina female students in this sample were more likely to have higher resilience levels. Though this study disaggregated the data by race and gender, there was no indepth analysis of the differences in how resilience manifests in African-Americans and Latinos or in girls versus boys. It may be possible that there are some different cultural factors that influence resiliency among these groups. This discussion deserves a further exploration into the role that gender and ethnicity might play in the development of resiliency.

7. A study that explores the relationship between academic proficiency and resiliency levels. In this study, the discussion around the pre-entry status of students and their resilience levels contributed to the findings on the impact of small schools. A study that focuses on exploring the relationship between these two variables would add to the discussion of whether resilience in students affects their academic outcomes.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Some of the implications for school policy from this study are as follows:

1. Provide explicit professional development for teachers, counselors and others on resilience-building and creating personalized school cultures. If schools want to support the development of resilience in their students, staff should be familiar with the literature and equipped with strategies that foster resilience.

2. Schools should organize themselves in a way that provides a personalized environment for all students. In this case, Village Community High School implemented an advisory program that allowed teachers to work with a small group of students over the course of a year. Other schools may consider

implementing advisory or other systems of support for students such as mentoring programs, peer support programs, or a house system that allows the same teachers to work with a cohort of students. Irrespective of the program, it is imperative that schools find ways to address the social and emotional needs of their students.

3. Promote college access to all students, regardless of race, ethnicity or performance level. It was evident from this study that students appreciated the support they received in the college articulation process. Schools (particularly those with at-risk populations) should implement strategic plans to assist students in the college articulation process from 9th through 12th grades.

4. Provide extracurricular opportunities for students. In this study, all of the students in the interview sample were involved in at least one extracurricular activity. These types of activities provide leadership opportunities for young people, and serve to engage them in school. In schools that serve poorer students, it is especially important to offer clubs and activities for students, since their parents generally do not have the resources to pay for enrichment activities outside of school. This recommendation has funding implications because, in order to implement it, schools must devote human and capital resources to support extracurricular activities.

5. Implement school policies that allow students multiple opportunities to succeed. This may include revising grading policies in order to allow students to complete missing or incomplete assignments, or credit-recovery programs to assist students who have fallen behind in school. This may serve as a point of tension in some school communities in which staff believe that requiring students to adhere to

strict deadlines fosters responsibility; but this research demonstrated that having some flexibility in this area was a great source of support for some struggling students. Schools should explore standards-based grading policies which are based on demonstration of mastery, rather than grading policies that address student behaviors. Schools may want to consider the implications of their academic policies for struggling students; do they encourage students to continue to persevere, or do they subtly push struggling learners out of the door?

6. Provide more opportunities for teacher leadership. In the school that was featured in this study, teachers took on a variety of leadership roles within the school community. Involving teachers in key leadership increases their level of engagement in the school, but it also allows the best thinking in the school community to emerge.

7. Expand the creation of new small-school options for students and their families. It was clear from the evidence presented in this study that the majority of students felt supported in this small school. The literature also suggested that at-risk students tend to fare better in small schools. Providing more opportunities for students to choose a small school environment could increase overall academic outcomes for at-risk students.

Conclusion

Does student resilience really matter in schools? Is resilience a characteristic we should try to develop in our students? The overall findings of this study are mixed in response to these questions. It was found that at-risk students of all levels of resilience were successful in the small school in this study, which could lead us to conclude that

resilience is not a significant factor in determining student achievement. In fact, this study concluded that there is not necessarily a connection between resilience and academic achievement. However; this conclusion does not mean that we should discount the importance of resiliency and its impact on at-risk students. Another one of the findings in this study suggests that a school culture that promotes high expectations for all learners has a positive impact on all of its students. This finding can lead to the conclusion that schools that offer the recommended supports can increase the likelihood of success for all students. Through the use of structures such as advisory, teacher collaboration, teacher leadership and accessibility, students who are at risk for academic failure can get the support they need to persevere in school. Indeed, this study found that high resilience is not a precondition to academic success for at-risk youth; however, students of lower resilience levels were found to be more reliant on the supports provided by the school. So, perhaps small schools do not necessarily promote resilience in at-risk youth, but they do enable students of lower resilience to be successful in school; whereas, students in schools that do not provide the personalized supports of small schools would not have completed high school on time. Therefore, the final conclusion of this study is that resilience does matter. The literature and the data have demonstrated that resilience in students is a critical element that allows students to rebound from difficult situations in life and take advantage of the supports that are offered. Though in this study we could not necessarily discern the difference between more resilient and less resilient students in a small school that supports them all, in other school environments resilience might be the deciding factor that determines whether or not at-risk students graduate from high school on time.

It is important for schools that serve at-risk students to recognize the factors that lead to student success. Social-emotional supports and a schoolwide focus on getting to know the learners are essential to creating schools where at-risk students experience success. A focus on resilience is a part of this. Schools need to support and encourage resilience development in their students, not just for student success in high school but also for success in life.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: RESILIENCY SCALE

Please read the following statements. To the right of each you will find seven numbers, ranging from "1" (Strongly Disagree) on the left to "7" (Strongly Agree) on the right. Circle the number which best indicates your feelings about that statement. For example, if you strongly disagree with a statement, circle "1". If you are neutral, circle "4", and if you strongly agree, circle "7", etc.

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree			
1. When I make plans, I follow through with them.	1	2	3		5	6	7
2. I usually manage one way or another.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I am able to depend on myself more than anyone else.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Keeping interested in things is important to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I can be on my own if I have to.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I feel proud that I have accomplished things in life.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. I usually take things in stride.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. I am friends with myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I feel that I can handle many things at a time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. I am determined.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. I seldom wonder what the point of it all is.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I take things one day at a time.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. I can get through difficult times because I've experienced difficulty before.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
14. I have self-discipline.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. I keep interested in things.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. I can usually find something to laugh about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. My belief in myself gets me through hard times.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. In an emergency, I'm someone people can generally rely on.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. I can usually look at a situation in a number of ways.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Sometimes I make myself do things whether I want to or not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. My life has meaning.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. I do not dwell on things that I can't do anything about.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. When I'm in a difficult situation, I can usually find my way out of it.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. I have enough energy to do what I have to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. It's okay if there are people who don't like me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. I am resilient.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

APPENDIX B: STUDENT QUESTIONS

1. Tell me a little bit about your family background, including a description of who you currently live with.

2. Is your family supportive of each other? Give an example.

3. Are there rules or limits on freedom for children in your household?

4. What do you like most about your school?

5. Do you feel like adults in this school care about you? Give an example.

6. Are there adults in your school you can go to when you need help with a personal problem? Who are they?

7. How often do you see your counselor? What kinds of activities do you do with your counselor?

8. Do you think teachers and other school staff hold high expectations for you? If yes, how do you know?

9. Do you think your school helps you to be successful? Explain.

10. What kinds of extracurricular activities are offered in school? Do you participate in any?

11. Give an example of a situation that was difficult for you to handle. How did you handle it?

12. What are your future aspirations?

APPENDIX C: PARENT QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your family and your background.

2. What is the highest level of education you have achieved? What is your current occupation?

3. Describe some of the positive qualities your child possesses.

4. What lessons or values have you tried to instill in your child?

5. When things are not going your child's way how does he or she address the issue?

6. Why did you select this high school for your child? Are you pleased with the selection?

7. Do you think your child's school helps him or her be successful? Explain.

8. Do you believe the school has high expectations for your child?

9. Are there people your child can go to in the school if they need help? If yes, who are those people?

10. What are your goals for your child?

APPENDIX D: COUNSELOR/TRAINER QUESTIONS

1. What position do you hold at this school? How long have you worked here?

2. What are your beliefs about the purpose of small schools?

3. What are the most important student needs you believe schools must address?

4. What are the schoolwide practices in place to address student needs?

5. What do you do in your role to address student needs?

6. In what ways do you interact with students outside of instructional time?

7. What does your school do to increase student success?

8. What role, if any, does your school play in fostering resiliency?

APPENDIX E: ADMINISTRATOR QUESTIONS

1. Tell me a little bit about your career background.

2. What are your beliefs about the mission of small schools?

3. What are the most important student needs you believe schools must address?

4. How do you convey those beliefs to your faculty?

5. How does your school identify at-risk students?

6. What types of social supports does your school provide students?

7. How do you make sure that every student is aware of the supports available to them?

8. What role do counselors in your school play in addressing student needs?

9. What role, if any, does your school play in fostering resiliency?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Teacher Interview 1 - Ms. Salah

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. Can you tell me what position you hold at this school and how long you've worked here?

Ms. Salah: I've worked here. This is my third year here. I'm an English teacher. I'm currently the junior teacher, junior level teacher. I'm also head of the English Department, yearbook advisor, facilitator, 11th grade team meeting and on a couple other things.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Is it typical for most teachers at your school to have all these different jobs?

Ms. Salah: I think most of us wear more than one hat. I think a couple of us wear maybe too many hats to fit in one closet. Yeah, most people do more than one thing. It's a small school; there's not a lot of room for, not a lot of room for being just independent and just coming in and doing your job and leaving.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are your beliefs about the purpose of small schools?

Ms. Salah: I think small schools....The major purpose is to get individualized instruction for more students and to support students academically every single year. It gives them this chance to know, for every student to know pretty much every teacher in the building. There's always someone there they can go to, to turn to, they are not anonymous anymore. Whereas in a large school each student is anonymous, they don't know anyone. They don't know who to turn to if they go to ask one person for help; they're like, I don't know go ask this person, and here we all kind of know what's going on. It also allows for

collaboration, which is great. You can work on teams; you kind of know what's going on in all grades.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are the most important student needs that you believe schools must address?

Ms. Salah: Most important...wait, the question?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are the most important student needs that you think schools must address?

Ms. Salah: I think all schools need to address very simply the education issue, but I think for small schools, for ours, it's staff. It's about getting to a proficient skill level for their grades. I think secondary needs as in supporting them emotionally aren't really secondary, because if they're not emotionally supported they can't deliver academically. So, I think it's about the students' well being in order to succeed academically.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, the students' well being is really important?

Ms. Salah: It is really important if the students, if there are problems around at home, then they can't learn properly in the building; or they don't have a place to go and do homework, so that stuff has to be addressed as well. But I think the core is that we need to figure out a way to teach every kid that comes into these, into this building, in a way that helps them reach their level by the time they're graduating. I don't want to see seniors are graduating without basic skills, but with all the skills they need to be successful. They shouldn't leave our school with a diploma but without the ability to compete against other students in other schools. And to get there we have to do the emotional needs and make sure that they're, and make sure they have a place to live, that

they're not homeless, that they're being fed every day, and all that's connected, but it's sort of basic skills that need to be addressed.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are some of the schoolwide practices in place to address student needs?

Ms. Salah: Grade teams.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me about it.

Ms. Salah: So, our grade teams are, um, every teacher teaches only one grade level, and then they're on a grade level team with other teachers of the same, so I'm on the 11th grade team. All the teachers teach the 11th graders, so we all know them. Um, we're all part of their lives. We can sit down and we can have conversations about what skills they're lacking. What emotional needs they're lacking, are they cutting classes or missing first period, and we start to address those things as a team, instead of just me saying, "This kid doesn't come to my first period class, I wonder why." I just sit and have the conversation and say ok, where is he, does he come to yours...um, is he doing well, what's going on? So, just the ability to collaborate together and know these kids so well.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok....What, what do you do in your role to address student needs?

Ms. Salah: I never leave my classroom. I live here. Outside of the classroom, I have academic needs, I do lunch tutoring, after school tutoring, Saturday tutoring. I have a couple of kids who have new access to Internet, which is, like, my preferred method of communication, who became such a struggle because of the Regents prep class that I gave them my phone number and would get the Sunday night phone call...How do I do this?, how do I do that? That's academic, and then outside of academic I know that I spend a lot of time after school when my advisees come in... They'll sit and talk to me,

and we'll just have a conversation, whether it's about themselves or just other things. It gives them, it gives them someone to talk to. Also, not just advisees – other students as well - but it tends to be advisees who come to us the most or to me often where I'll be, like, "Oh, I'm leaving at 3:00 today" and here I am at 4:00 having a conversation and finding out what's going on. I talk to families, I talk to parents, and I send letters home...all of your everyday teacher stuff.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, you kind of answered this question already, but, just what ways do you interact with students outside of just your regular instructional time. You kinda like answered it...Just being available and tutoring.

Ms. Salah: We're available...yeah, we give up, I try every month or so to take my advisees out to lunch so we just kind of, we go for two periods, or once a month we celebrate for two periods where it's not, we're not doing anything other than sitting and eating, and it's such a basic thing, but it's also one of the times where you are able to have a conversation with a big group of kids in a very comfortable situation because it's food and food makes everyone happy. So we go out once in a while, yeah, phone calls, um, lots of e-mail and then a lot of interactions during the day. I tend to be in my classroom most of the day so kids can come in and out. I don't usually go anywhere else.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, this idea, like private teacher space, is it so important for you?

Ms. Salah: It is. I have every couple of days there's a moment where I'm like, I need to leave my classroom for a half an hour and I go upstairs and have lunch but that's, for me personally it's something that I can do. I know when I need it. A day like today where I gave up lunch to work with yearbook kids, and then I'll sit here with you now, and then 8th period I'll have a facilitators meeting, and then after school I run out right away to

finish yearbooks. So it's some days that doesn't happen and other days it's like, you know what, I've done three days in a row where I haven't left my classroom. I have to go upstairs and speak to other teachers and have an adult conversation which I'm really, after 3:00 is personal time. Or 5:00 is the case in this building.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: In what ways does your school work to increase student success?

Ms. Salah: We have a team or a committee for everything that needs to be covered, from attendance issues to grade teams to department teams, um, to school leadership teams to, even just, we have groups of teachers collaborating for all, for that. Just constant groups of teachers so that no one's doing anything alone.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that that helps students be successful?

Ms. Salah: It helps them because there's…It's not just, their success isn't one person's problem. It isn't just the student's problem; we all work together to make sure they're successful. Um, so, an example, um, we had a group of kids suspended for a period of time, when they came back in an entire team, a grade team work together to come up with a contract with them, and then each teacher was on them, so it wasn't as if it was one teacher taking, being like, ok you're late for a class, you're not behaving properly, you're not completing your assignments...It was an entire team of teachers working together constantly until it was a point where it's, like, if I don't do this they're just gonna drive me crazy, so it ensures their success and it also gives them the feeling of, hey, there's a group of people here who love me even though I do the wrong thing occasionally.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what role, if any, does your school play in fostering resiliency?

Ms. Salah: Explain what you mean by "fostering resiliency"?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, do you think that there are things your school does that help students stick to it, help students decide not to give up, to keep, you know, pushing away at school and taking tests, keep coming, like do you think there's something? That your school does that might be unique that helps move kids in that direction?

Ms. Salah: I think there's in this building, I've worked in other buildings, I've worked in a lot; like, I've done summer school in other places and I worked four years in another school. This building's really good about, I said it before, a student not being anonymous. So, every one student is known by almost every teacher, and high risk students are known by teachers whether they've taught them or not. Because we have conversations, lots of conversations where it's like oh, hey, I know you, you're so and so. Um, so, because of that culture of the school to stop every student, to walk down the street and send an e-mail...hey, you know who I just saw not in school today, and send that e-mail back to the building so people can get on it. It's almost like you can't run away from us. Until we get you where you need to be we're going keep harassing you...we're going to keep pulling you back in. Um, and the other thing is for kids, the other problem is that kids who are academically weak or struggling academically, we have support services, um, we have someone come in, like I have someone; I have two people in my classrooms who help those kids to reach their academic needs and they're given the support that they need.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you do in your role to address student needs?

Ms. Salah: I think it varies. Whether it's having a conversation with the student individually; talking to parents on the phone; talking with other teachers, or talking with teachers they've had previously to find out methods that worked. I mean, in the past I've

[addressed] specific language needs, and I would meet with the Spanish teacher to work with that student periodically, so that they feel like they're not completely lost or have information that's in their language so it's more comfortable. In the classroom, I try to sit kids in a way that's going to help them. I know that they're next to someone that's going to assist them, sort of, if it's impossible for me to always be with them.

M. Darrisaw: So, pairing students, being thoughtful about.

Ms. Salah: So, heterogeneous pairing

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok

Ms. Salah: Especially with my ELL's (English language-learners), someone who I feel is strong and they're not going to miss information by explaining it to that student. With kids that are, where a need is maybe a behavioral and emotional; I mean we've worked on putting together contracts, sort of conduct sheets trying to highlight when they have really good days and they can have a paper, like a hard copy or something saying this is a good day. I mean, with those kids it's a lot of one-on-one conversations, daily, weekly, to sort of touch base.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, you might've answered this a little bit, but how do you interact with students outside of the classroom? What kinds of things do you do?

Ms. Salah: I mean, I think it depends on the kids. I've gone to lunch with kids. I've taken kids out, like, for trips. We're going to have an upstate trip, actually. Taking kids upstate to look at where their water comes from. We just recently took them over to the park to do some tree care at Maria Hernandez Park. I like interacting with kids outside of class, because it sort of strips away that teacher-student relationship and we can all see a different side of each other, and I think that allows us to build a stronger relationship.

Then I wouldn't say it's like outside of the classroom but my classroom is a place where a lot of kids would come and sit, whether it's lunch or after school. I like them to feel like it's a safe place that they can hang out if that needs to be available.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Again, this might be redundant, but what do you think your school does to increase student success?

Ms. Salah: I think they do a ton. I think our work in advisories, our work in grade teams, we have morning meetings to, like, touch base. We are really trying to establish a better system to assess our students. Not to say like formal assessments but sort of, are they reaching these basics, these skills that we want them to be at. I think on a more academic level like having winter programs (credit recovery), being brave, to make sure students are catching up on stuff that maybe they didn't get the first time around. Even having Regents prep classes or Saturday school. So, I think because we recognize a lot of our kids maybe don't come here with the level that, like your typical high school student would enter high school at, but we try to put things in place to help them get to graduation.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And the last question is, what role if any do you think your school plays in fostering resiliency?

Ms. Salah: So, resiliency to, like the challenges that they might continually face?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: In their life. Is there anything you think your school does that addresses, that helps students?

Ms. Salah: Yeah, the whole theme of our school is sort of meant to empower students, to educate them on sort of some of the injustices that might exist especially for minority kids, especially kids coming from, like, more low-income neighborhoods, and kind of

help them or guide them into, like, how do we go about addressing these issues, and advisory is a great place where that happens. Kids will pick topics that, or issues that, are facing them directly in their community. I mean, we try to develop a way to research it and address it. I think some of the clubs we have, like QSA (Queer Student Alliance) is a great space for kids who are probably feeling a little out of place to be able to speak with other kids that feel that same way, and build confidence inside and outside of the classroom. When they are outside of this school and they graduate, we expect them to know how to go about interacting with someone who's going to say awful things to me because I'm different, whatever that means? We work with Make The Road. We have a workshop coming up on "stop and frisks" for kids that might be targeted because of their race, because of where they live. We've given them information about what their rights are so that they they're knowledgeable about it so that hopefully they face the challenges a little better.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Okay, thank you

Ms. Salah: No problem.

Teacher Interview 2 - Ms. Horne

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What position do you hold at this school, and how long have you worked here?

Ms. Horne: I teach 11th grade Environmental Justice. I've been here since last fall, so that would have been 2009. So, I'm going on my second year, more than halfway through my second year. I also co-facilitate the 11th grade Inquiry Team, and I co-facilitate 12th grade government.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are your beliefs about the purpose of small schools?

Ms. Horne: I think it's [my views] probably changed since I started teaching. I think the idea is that it's easier to manage a smaller number. I think it's easier to form relationships, better relationships, that don't just take place in a classroom. I think there are closer relationships between administrators, and teachers and staff, and I've never taught in a big school, but I went to a big school and I have a better idea of my students as a person verses just a student. I think that's the benefit of a small school.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are the most important student needs that you think schools should address?

Ms. Horne: I mean, academic, or...

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You tell me, what do you think are the most important student needs?

Ms. Horne: My number one is always academic, in the sense that I want to feel like my students come in with a certain level, skill, a whole understanding of the topic, and leave with a much broader, like, deep understanding, um, with more confidence in that subject. So, that's always first goal, and that I think they need, I think that's my job. I think it's very individual-based; so, if one student has a need that's more pressing, then that's the need that I have to meet between that. If it's behavioral, if it's emotional, then I have to figure a way to meet that need first in order to reach the academic thing or whatever their academic goal is. My experience is that it's difficult to get straight to the skill to like, the class work, if there's something much bigger challenging that student.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, in some ways, you think that some of the other issues do need to be addressed in order for kids to learn academically

Ms. Horne: Yes, absolutely.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are the schoolwide practices in place at this school that address student needs?

Ms. Horne: Well, one thing, I mean easy off the top of my head, having advisory in place. So, each teacher has a smaller advisory, half normal class size, that address the more outside of the classroom needs that are tough to address, in a normal classroom. So, sort of getting to know a student more closely. College readiness, like are they on track for graduation, an easier platform to know if there's something else going on at home that maybe needs to be addressed. I think advisory is something really strong. Then I think, our guidance of our youth, guidance center is what was set up to help, to carry much support if kids aren't coming in. So, if we have attendance issues with them, if they're coming in late, if they're coming in and we suspect abuse, maybe abuse like substance abuse or whatever, I think that support system as well, established and is really helpful in reaching all those other things. What else do we have, can you repeat the question again?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Yeah, what kind of practices does the school have to address student needs?

Ms. Horne: Oh, ok, the other main thing I would say would be our grade teams. So, grades meet weekly and the focus is essentially the student, so right now we're trying to develop cross curriculum, grade level curriculum, and in addition to that sort of meeting, like what are the immediate needs of our kids and how do we address them whether it's like mandatory study hall, peer tutoring system or one-on-one help during lunch or after school or during advisory. So that's a great sort of platform to talk with other teachers who are also with those kids on a regular basis to see if there's consistency.

Teacher Interview 3 - Mr. Lyles

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What position do you hold at this school, and how long have you worked here?

Mr. Lyles: I am an American History teacher; this is my first year at this school.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you believe is the purpose of small schools?

Mr. Lyles: The purpose of small schools, I would say, would be to have a more intimate relationship with the students to decrease the factory feeling of the school and make it more to develop more of a feeling of a community.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you think are the most important needs that schools should address?

Mr. Lyles: I think that our schools need to, or really need to, develop or focus on life skills a lot more. I think at a small school like this is able to do that.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you tell me more about life skills?

Mr. Lyles: Well, like, things like, how to go on a job interview, things like etiquette at a table, things like preparing to write a check, things that I believe that a lot of our student's families don't teach them. Things that previous generations kind of just picked up from seeing adults in their life do it, and I think that the fact that the adults in many of our children's lives are either absent or unable to provide them with those skills, the school has to then take on that role, along with obviously, just constant knowledge and development

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You've been here for one year, what are the schoolwide practices that are in place in this school that address student needs?

Mr. Lyles: I think the advisory setting; having students basically have a class where they become, or they develop a strong relationship with one particular teacher. I think really does address a lot of the problems; we as teachers are able to address those problems that we see on a more individual basis. The other school that I was at did not have an advisory setting. So while you are able to develop a relationship maybe after school or even in the classroom, advisory really puts it in place where it's almost like a forced relationship has to happen, and I think it's, I think has been for the better.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me about what do you do in your role as a teacher to address student needs.

Mr. Lyles: Well, I think the same things that every teacher does, which is, you know, to call home and make contact with parents as much as possible. I'm sure I don't do it as much as I should because of time constraints and just being generally tired, but contacting the parents, trying to be as involved as possible, trying to talk to the students about, you know, noticing things that they may be wearing, or how they're looking and just trying to, you know, talk to them and ask them. You know, are they ok? I find a lot of times that if you do that it will kind of open up the flood gates and they'll speak on some of the issues that they may be having. So, I guess it's trying to be as attentive to the student as possible; making observations, you know, just to see, like you know if they are ok, if they need anything outside of, you know, learning about the American Revolution.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that helps them understand the American Revolution?

Mr. Lyles: I think that opens them up to the teacher a little bit more. I think that people in general if they know or if they believe that you care about them they're more receptive to the content that you're trying to give to them. Whereas, if you are the robot in the

front of the classroom then they have no reason to tell you anything outside of the classroom.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. Can you tell me, how do you interact with students outside of your regular instructional time? Tell me, you know, are there any ways, anything you do outside of class with kids?

Mr. Lyles: This year 1 haven't done as much because I'm still just trying to get used to the school. In previous years I've had clubs that 1 run, like, newsletter club. I've been involved with some students, you know, work with them as far as sports and stuff, not as an official coach but like, you know, some students I work with, you know, in sports individually. Even going to big games, trying to be a presence there, let them see you at their game, 1 think that again opens them up to you know the fact that you care about them. Staying after school working with them; being available after school 1 think is important. I've heard students, and I've noticed as a student myself seeing teachers, you know, when the last bell rings they're out the door. 1 try to be here so that, and let them know, like, you know, I'm here; if you need me you can come after school; I'll stay until a certain time, and just, you know, making myself available to them if they need me.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What does your school do to increase student success?

Mr. Lyles: I think that most of the teachers here and the administration also kind of supports this. They do try to be around the students as much as possible in various ways. A lot of teachers are involved in the plays, and the sports and things like that and I think that that does help the students. 1 also think that the teachers really are trying to dedicate themselves as much to, like, things like professional development as they possibly can. I'm constantly hearing teachers talking about, you know PD (professional development).

And the administration really provides those things and allows things like per session (overtime pay) and stuff like that. So our teachers can go and I see a lot of teachers trying to improve themselves as far as their practice and also trying to relay that information in different ways to the students.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, and this is the last question. What role, if any, does your school play in fostering resiliency?

Mr. Lyles: So, when you say fostering resiliency you're talking about how the students are able to deal with the outside world.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Outside world, life challenges, disappointments, setbacks. Do you think the school does anything to explicitly help kids in that way?

Mr. Lyles: Well, I think that there are a lot of informal conversations with the students. And a lot of the teachers here I know have spoken to students, and again in an advisory setting, have spoken to students about their own life experiences. And, like I said, I think that that, as a young person that's probably the most important thing to help you address your own issues. It's being able to speak to someone who's been through it that's not preaching to you. So, when I speak to my students about issues with trying to apply to college or what happened when I got to college I think that allows them to see, particularly for me, as a person who went through public school, as a person of color they can see like, you know, he's someone who is like us even though he's an old man, I guess, 'cause teachers are old. But, you know, he has been through similar things, he's from a similar neighborhood, he understands that these types, he understands the types of issues that were going through and he's explained to us how he got through it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So that transparency you think....

Mr. Lyles: Yeah, definitely.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So there may not be that wall that maybe a lot of people kind of hide behind, like this teacher wall here you can't cross where you don't admit your mistakes or the past

Mr. Lyles: Right. I definitely think that that wall is gone, for the most part. Now there are obviously things that I wouldn't go into detail about in the personal life, but, it's not like how, you know, when we went to school your teacher was, again, this person and from the front of the room who was just there and they got plugged in the wall at 3:00 and just got, turned themselves on and went in front of the classroom; so, I guess I really like the whole concept of advisory. And that does allow us to speak to them and have conversations with them in an informal way. And even if they're not immediately receptive to it, well, I think that over the course of time they are more open to the ideas that you're giving them and understanding that you have done it and you're trying to help me get through it. And if I see something that I'm able to say something to them then not be like, well, who are you, you're just American History teacher. You're also like my advisor, you know, it's like a protection.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Alright, thank you.

Mr. Lyles: No problem.

Principal Interview

M.Darrisaw-Akil: Can you tell me a little bit about your career background?

Mr. Jones: I entered teaching when I was about 30. I'd had a career after college in the Government in [Washington] D.C. I worked in the Department of Energy as a Budget

Analyst and I hated it. I went back to school and got my degree in English Literature and I thought I wanted to be an English professor at a university somewhere. But sort of grew disillusioned with that, because my program was a kind of a mess and I started teaching GED at a little nonprofit in Washington D.C., and I was working with guys just out of prison and dropouts and loved it, and, that's when I decided I wasn't going to get my PhD; I wanted to do something else. I traveled in Africa for a year to sort of clear my head, and then I came back to NYC and started looking into teaching. In a couple of years I had to go to Brooklyn College, get my certification and started teaching years later. Then, I was at [school name redacted] for about six or seven years as a teacher. It was kind of a mess of a place, lots of turnover, lots of unhappy kids and adults. I was totally isolated on my own in the classroom, but fell in love with the kids there and that's where I met folks from ISA [Institute for Student Achievement], I met Matt Ritter and learned about the small school process; they were opening small schools...

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Was your former school a small school at that time?

Mr. Jones: It was. It was a small school, that I learned a lot there about how small schools should work, and when we wrote the plan for our school we included things like advisory and teacher teams and lots of sort of democratic decision-making practices that weren't in place at our current school.

M. Darrisaw Akil: So, another question. ISA was a partner with EBC?

Mr. Jones: ISA was. This was ISA's early model, where they would come in and take a lot of kids and give them all these amazing things and measure them against the kids next door that didn't get the computers, and it was a terrible model; but that's where I met Gherri House and Sylvia and Jackie and all those folks. Then, so we got excited about

this idea that we could start our own school and thought it was just this amazing

proposition and almost unbelievable and started attending those meetings and wrote a

plan and, low and behold, there was a school. And so then there was, I was a teacher

there for a year and what do you call it, Administrative Assistant, for a year or so as I got

my AP license, been an AP for a few years and now a Principal.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, what are your beliefs about the mission of small schools?

Mr. Jones: I think, I mean I just think of the mission as getting to know kids well, and I

think that's hard to achieve in big schools. I have my own sort of personal beliefs that

are sometimes difficult to translate into a schoolwide visionary mission. I love kids. I

think they're funny, I think they're inspiring, and I have, like, sincere empathy for some

of their situations; that's hard sometimes to translate in talking to teachers about the work

of teaching and learning. But I think that that can happen in small schools, and it's much

more difficult to foster in big schools. So, I think small schools offer educators a

platform to do unique and, sort of, tailored, personalized things with kids. That may be,

you know, like Brooklyn Latin or a Beacon* or Bard* or it's like us and [another school

in the building] where we work with some of the [most] struggling kids in the city, and

we're able to do special things with them. I think, small schools, you know, are able to

do some things that big schools just can't do, and it has to do with the relationships and

personal attention.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are the most important student needs you believe schools must

address?

Mr. Jones: That's difficult, I mean there's obviously a mix between very tangible and

realistic practical things like reading and writing when we get kids who are way below

level and can't write an essay. If they're going to do well in college, they need those things, and it's our job to give them those skills. Then there's certainly less tangible things like resilience, like confidence, self confidence, sense of self; but we believe that they should have some sense of their community and their role in improving their community and their contributing to the social justice mission. How a school provides that to kids is hard to measure. For me, I think about how I was as a teacher, and I don't think I could've talked about how I did those things, but it probably goes back to that first question around personal relationships and personalization like you nurture kids and you provide them all the support you can, while trying so hard not to coddle them and enable them but provide them support while your building up the skills. And I think that's what we try to do here. We realized early on that if they [students] are coming to us with such deficiencies and if you are going to hold them to really high standards, there has to be the safety net and all kinds of social, emotional supports in place. Otherwise, you're just raising the bar and saying jump and you're not helping them get there. So, I think I went off track there....

M. Darrisaw-Akil: No, not all. How do you convey those beliefs to your faculty?

Mr. Jones: That's something I've struggled with, to be honest with you. Actually, when I became principal, one of the things me and my mentor coach agreed to work on is making known my vision and the mission of this school. And so, I've actually, over the last two years, tried to actually articulate that and voice it. It's not rocket science that if you want people to know it you should talk about it, so, I didn't talk about it. I had very strong beliefs that I didn't talk about, so I've been trying to be explicit about my beliefs, and I use morning meeting to do that. Not every day, but I try to do it at least once a

week to say something about what I believe about kids, about small schools, about teaching, and I've gotten better at that and I've gotten more comfortable with doing that. But I find it difficult, to be honest with you. And I hope that over time that people see it in what I do, how I act and how I behave. Even if I'm not doing a great job articulating it, you know. I mean I feel it's important that I'm here every day, I feel like it's important that I talk to kids that I have an open door policy, that I'm willing to, you know, roll up my sleeves. All of those things I hope are sending messages, I don't know that they are, but I think they are.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Okay..., switching a little bit, how does your school identify at-risk students?

Mr. Jones: I think we start with an assumption that they're all at risk, and then work through gradations of that. There, again I think it goes back to small schools and personalization. We have an amazing YD (youth development) staff that identifies things that classroom teachers might not see or know about. Whether it be the fire on Putnam Avenue which affected some of our kids or, abuse, whatever those situations are that we don't always see...we hope advisors see those things, but that doesn't always happen. There are those sorts of risks, and then in terms of the classroom or academic at-risk attributes, I'm hoping that it's in teams. I'm hoping that we get better and better at our teams identifying our most at-risk students through formative assessment, and then trying to diagnose what the problems are. We are working on that. The goal is to get to a place where we have a really sort of clear idea of what everyone is teaching so we can do assessments that make sense. If you start planning backwards, you end up with years and years of work ahead of you before you can get to the assessment piece. I think your

teams have to be responsible for serving those kids...your YD department. And then those administrators have to be constantly looking at data, and I pushed for the last two years for us to develop a school goal around chronically failing kids that are bottom third kids, because as much success as we've had, you'll still see this subset of kids that do terribly here. They fail class after class, they're kicked out, they don't pass the Regents, and they drop out. And I've told the staff repeatedly that if those kids can't do well at our school, then we're not yet a great school. You know, we're a good school, but we're not a great school until those kids can find success here, and we have to figure out how to do that. If they can't make it in this school like ours, then they are probably not going to make it, I mean, they might...who knows? That's what I tell the staff. Like, we have to figure out how to help those kids that no one seems to be able to deal with.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What types of social support does your school provide?

Mr. Jones: Social supports...Well, I'm not sure I'm answering the question, but I think advisory, and I think some of the far partnerships help with that. They don't always touch every kid. Um I think advisory is...

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you offer counseling?

Mr. Jones: Let me start at advisory. Advisory is essential. Every kid has an advisor and the hope is those kids always have at least one deep relationship with an adult in the building who they can go to when they have trouble who advocates for them and they can get advice from, the parent can speak to, who knows the family, the stories...that's the role the advisor can help with attendance, all those things.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Does the advisor follow the child?

Mr. Jones: We don't have that, they have that adult for one year; and so the argument is that they form these relationships with four adults so it's like a little bit of a randomization. We weren't able to sustain the advisor for more than one year, and two years sort of messed up our team structure so we went to one year and had mixed results. Another piece, though, is that we have the team structure in place so that every teacher on a team is teaching all the same kids and those teams meet weekly and talk about kids and their progress and we have a sort of robust enough YD department so that there's a counselor for every team and that counselor meets on that team every week, too, so there's guidance, support on the team meeting every week. So, those supports are in place for kids. Then we have a number of partners who do great work with kids but, like I said, they don't touch everyone, but Make the Road works with us and they help us in our 9th grade where all the kids do social action projects, and that's a wonderful partnership. They help us stay true to our social justice mission, but it also has kids doing presentations in the 9th grade and spending time and getting exposed to the sort of community issues. We have kids who've gone to the Mountain School, Summer Search, and some of those programs get smaller.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How do you make sure that every student is aware of the supports available to them?

Mr. Jones: There's a dependence on advisors to do that. I think, in that, in this case it's probably the role of the counselors to do that. The counselors are required to meet with every kid every semester, and so they log those meetings with kids every semester, and then they start over and see them again. Obviously they see some kids more than twice, but they are mandated to see every kid at least once a semester, and that would be the

opportunity to make sure they know about the services. Our parent coordinator is also phenomenal, and so things like goals that we were talking about yesterday, she makes sure parents know about goals, and then the YD staff meets weekly also so they're constantly talking about services that are available to students or reaching out to folks to have them come in and then that gets out to the grade teams. A good example is the health fair in which the parent coordinator went out and got all these health providers to come in, and then we had that available at a parent-teacher night. Of course, mailings go out to inform everyone. Teachers know, kids know.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Um, you might have touched on this a little bit or a lot probably...but what role do counselors play in addressing student needs?

Mr. Jones: Well, so they're on grade teams, like I said. They have goals that we meet and talk about. They have some sort of personal professional goals, but they also have a goal related to attendance, one related to credit accumulation, which they have sort of an indirect impact on, but I hold them to those anyway. Like I said, they meet weekly with the grade team. They do workshops and visits to advisories; they also meet with kids every semester.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And, last question. What role, if any, does your school play in fostering resiliency?

Mr. Jones: I hope we do. I hope it's such a supportive safe culture that that's happening. I don't know; I mean, I really don't know that we do anything explicitly or deliberately to foster resiliency. I hope it's that we have such a supportive nurturing environment and we have advisory and we have this investment in youth development and we're a small school that were doing that. I was going through transcripts the other night and I noticed

a number of kids, for example, I don't even know if this gets to resiliency, but a number of kids that had taken the algebra Regents, like, seven times and their grades crept up from, like, 23 to 47 to 54 to 57 to, you know, all the way up to 65. I don't know if that quite gets to resiliency, but I thought that if they keep taking it and they keep getting better and they are graduating with a Regents diploma and I saw that type of trend on a few of our students...It wasn't a rare thing. That speaks to something. I don't know that it speaks to resiliency, but it speaks to something kind of wonderful in that a kid is plugging ahead and getting the support he needs and not dropping out, obviously. It could go a different way; not that that doesn't happen, but I noted that and was happy to see that. I don't know, like I said, that we do anything explicit about resiliency, but I would say that if we do build resiliency in kids it's happening because of advisory and our youth development office and our, and being the students center, you know. Giving kids second chances, giving them that sort of philosophy that you're about kids.

Counselor Interview

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What position do you hold at this school, and how long have you worked here?

Ms. Robles: I worked as a guidance counselor in the 11th graders guidance counselor, and I've been working eight years since they opened school.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And, what are your beliefs about the purpose of small schools?

Ms. Robles: I believe that it helps students a little bit more, because it's a small setting and teachers have more chances to serve the student better as much as the guidance counselors because it's a small setting and small students, so we can know by names and

faces all the students that we have. Big schools it's impossible for you to know all the thousands names.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Have you ever worked in a big school?

Ms. Robles: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So you know the difference?

Ms. Robles: I know the difference, a big difference.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How is it working in a small school?

Ms. Robles: Well, in a small school you have the chance to know all your students. In a big school, you see them, but you barely know them. Sometimes you cannot put a name to a face because it's so many, it's so big, it's so many students that you know the face but you can't remember the names; it's so many students that you can't remember. But in a small school, because it's a small school setting, you know all of your students and you have a better relationship with your students.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are the most important student needs you believe schools must address?

Ms. Robles: I believe that we should, as much as we can, focus on the education, but we also have to help in the need of, like with the parents. Sometimes parents have their needs, and whatever is happening at home reflects in school. So, we should, really need to work with the parents and also the student.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Anything else?

Ms. Robles: I believe that if we focus on helping. If you work with the community, we will have better students and better communities and I believe that parents will, you

know, well, it reflects on the student, you know, when they graduate. It will reflect together if we work with them.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are the schoolwide practices in place that address student needs?

Ms. Robles: We have several things that we work with the students. We have parents that we communicate better with. We have an open door policy that, any time parents want to come and work with us, then we could just work with them. And also the teachers don't have a specific time to work with them. They can stay after school, during their lunch. It's like they work together more than anything else to see the success of each student. And it doesn't stop at the end of the school day. They continue; if they have to call their home and call the parents and work with them, they will do it, or we will do it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you do in your role to address student needs?

Ms. Robles: ...At the beginning of the school year I call the students and we discuss their education because by looking at the transcript. I have meetings with the team or the other teachers where we also discuss the needs of each one of the students. If I see that it's something that the student is not doing well because of some personal issues, then I can just discuss a little bit with the teachers, and, you know, like what are the needs that specifically each one of the student has. So, I don't only work with the students, but I also work with teachers and the parents.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: In what ways do you interact with students outside of instructional time?

Ms. Robles: We have the after school program, if you know, like, they have some club or some other program that they have. If I have to meet them I meet them and if I have to,

like after school, if I have to ask a question for the parents or see them, you know, like, this how after school usually we meet with any other program that they have. Or Saturdays if I see them you know.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What does your school do to increase student success?

Ms. Robles: We do a lot of stuff. Our school has a credit recovery program. We have now, recently we have this program called Aventa. That is where they work with the student, will work with computers like work study or something like that. And then we have the Saturday school. Uh, we have the tutoring, tutoring programs that they have either during the school days or after school. Um, we have, we have a couple of things that we do and also, you know, like, we work with the teachers, you know, whenever we see their students doing poorly we especially, you know like, the ESL students that we have that the language is really barely, we try to help them and I myself, you know, if I have to tutor them and help them with anything, and I know that most of the teachers and anyone else in the building, we work together just to, to make the student succeed.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: This is the last question. What roles, if any, does your school play in fostering resiliency?

Ms. Robles: No, we don't, force...you know, any student to you know back off from school or (inaudible). We enforce all the time, we have, we look out for other programs. If we see a student that we know for fact that the student here cannot succeed or that for any reason is not really...we try to look for other programs or alternative school that they might be, you know, it would be better, it would serve them better. We also try to get him programs that they can just, that we know that they're going to help them. Also with the student that some of them, you know, because they get to a point where the work is

kind of hard. So we also look for other programs for them, any alternative program that can help them. That could just, you know, like, put them in a way that they will feel comfortable and they will continue until they graduate.

Darrisaw-Akil: But are there things that you think your school does that helps kids not give up?

Ms. Robles: Yes, because when the student, that's what we have, that's when we have the home visit. Even though I'm a guidance counselor I'm going to do the home visit, make meetings with the parents and offer any help to the parents, and if it's because of environment at home that is not really helping. We work also with the parents; see how we could help them. We have several programs that also help the parents to see if, you know like, could just help the kids or the student to come to school to you know like make them feel comfortable and make them feel good.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, do you have anything you want to add on this topic?

Ms. Robles: No, not really, I think I said all the things I wanted to say.

Parent Interview 1- Ms. Lopez

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So tell me a little bit about your family and your background.

Ms. Lopez: Ok, I'm originally from Panama. I came to the US when I was 14. I went to Franklin K. High School and I had my daughter, got married, and had my other kids. So now I'm a single mother of three. So the older one, my son, is out the house, my daughter, she's on her own so that leaves me and the little one together. And she wanted to be a criminal lawyer, so I told her ok we'll find a school that she would like to go to and so forth. She went to a school in Queens and that didn't work out. It was her first

time out and about and she went crazy, so she came here. I like the setting of this school. They are more in touch with the family, with the parent, I get calls, I get e-mails and I get to come in. I get to call the teachers, I get to call the counselors, I get to call the principal when there's anything going on with her and so forth. I get to call, I get to speak to someone, I get to come in, we have a meeting, we have a one-on-one. It's been great for her to come to this school. I've seen a difference from the other school she was in.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You don't have to tell me the name, but can you tell me a little bit about the school?

Ms. Lopez: It was supposed to be a social justice school also, but it was huge. But they did break it up in pieces, but it was so much. It was just too crazy out there. So I prefer for her to be here. To me it's more close-knit. I feel more comfortable with her coming here than when she was going out in queens.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you tell me what's the highest level of education you achieved?

Ms. Lopez: To the twelfth.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you do now for a living?

Ms. Lopez: Well, now I'm a clerical associate, but now I'm laid off so I'm home.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me about some of the positive qualities your daughter possesses.

Ms. Lopez: She's very intelligent, she's a go-getter. Whatever she sets her mind to do she will get it done and get it done to her best ability and above that. She's very outgoing, very friendly, she's sociable. She's a social butterfly, we call her. And I know she's going to do whatever she sets her mind to do; she's going to get it done.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What lessons or values have you tried to instill in your daughter?

Ms. Lopez: In all of them I tell them the same thing: life is all about choices. The choices that you make now are the ones that are going to follow you in life. So when I build that ground level of that house, they are the ones that's got to finish building that house, which means they have to build themselves up. First and foremost, you have to love yourself before you can love anyone else or anything else. So, always take that in mind. First and foremost, you, and from there you work. If you don't love yourself, you're not going to be able to love no one else and you're not going to take pride in whatever it is you want to do or accomplish in life. So everything is all about starting with you as a person and be the best person that you can be. That's all I ask. And that's what I…all three of them, from beginning to now, the same thing.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So when things are not going your child's way, how does she address the issue?

Ms. Lopez: Well, she was acting out a lot. From the 8th grade straight into the 10th grade, she was acting up. I had an ACS case; two ACS cases with her because she wasn't attending school, she'd go to school and leave whenever she feel like and so forth. So we had to go to counseling. They sent us to Big Brother Big Sister to get therapy. She had a big brother, you know, they tried to work with her but as soon as the city started with the cuts they said we weren't really qualified because really wasn't nothing wrong with my daughter or my household. It was just her doing whatever she felt like doing. So, that was done.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So when she wasn't happy she acted out?

Ms. Lopez: Yes, yes, very much so.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, we talked a little bit about this, but why did you select this school for your daughter?

Ms. Lopez: To me it was the closest school to our house. And, it was the closest school for me to get to in no time. Jump on a train and I'm here in no time whenever she acts out, whenever the teachers call me, whatever is going on I'll be able to get here in record time. That other school in Queens I had to take the bus to the train, get off the train and then I would have to take a bus to...I don't even know what part of Queens that was called, but it was far, and I was like, that school is too far for her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that this school helps your daughter be successful?

Ms. Lopez: Yes, it sure did.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about that.

Ms. Lopez: It sure did because the teachers are excellent. They pushed her and pushed her and talked to her and explained to her, they got her into programs and so forth. That's why now she's doing so great. They helped me a lot, especially Ms. Wade. Ms. Wade was wonderful and so was her guidance counselor, her 11th grade guidance counselor...great. They push and talk and talk and talk to her. And she did pretty good in school in her classes, they were so happy, they were so ecstatic. Her first marking period and this marking period, they could not believe it. She could have been doing this from the time she got here until now. She would've been graduating at the top of her class. But no, she wanted to do whatever she wanted to do.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that this school has high expectations for your daughter?

Ms. Lopez: Yes they do, yes, yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And we talked about this. Are there people in this school that she can go to if she needs help?

Ms. Lopez: Yes there are.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me, who are those people that she would go to?

Ms. Lopez: She goes to Ms. Mohammed, her English teacher. She goes to her guidance counselor also. She talks to Mr. Cooper and, of course, Ms. Wade.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: This is the last question. What are your goals for your daughter?

Ms. Lopez: I want her to be successful. I want her to love and have a passion for what she wants to do. Because that is the only way for you to actually enjoy your job is because it's what you want to do. Not because I want her to do that, no. I want her to do whatever it is that she wants to do, and for her to do it to her best ability. And for her to love it when you have a passion, it's because you love that work, and you're going to do your best. You're going to go beyond and above to get it done the right way. That's what I want for her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Alright, thank you.

Ms. Lopez: You're welcome.

Parent Interview 2 -Mrs. Contreras' Interview

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family and your background.

Mrs. Contreras: Ok, my family is composed of eight people. My husband, my six girls and I are from Mexico.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How far did you go in school?

Mrs. Contreras: Only to 7th grade

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what do you do for a living?

Mrs. Contreras: I take care of my kids.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You're a homemaker?

Mrs. Contreras: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. Describe some positive qualities about your daughter?

Mrs. Contreras: She's a very kind girl and she helps people when they need it. She's a very good daughter. I am so proud of her.

M. Darrisaw-AKil: What order in the family is she? Is she the oldest?

Mrs. Contreras: Oldest girl.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. What lessons or values have you tried to instill in your daughter?

Mrs. Contreras: Like, I don't understand.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. Lessons, like values...virtues that you've tried to teach your daughter.

Mrs. Contreras: The values is to, I try to teach her in the right way; to have respect for herself first because I believe that if she respects herself she's going to respect others.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Anything else?

Mrs. Contreras: I don't know what else to say.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. When things are not going her way, like if she has trouble...how does she react if things don't go well for her?

Mrs. Contreras: She just gets, like, a little bit sad and that's when I see that something is not going ok with her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Does she try to do anything? Like if there's a problem how does she try to solve it?

Mrs. Contreras: No, she just stays quiet.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. Why did you pick this high school for your daughter?

Mrs. Contreras: I picked this high school because it's nearby my house, and I can be able to help in the school to be involved with her. I just want to be involved if something goes wrong.

(At this point, I attempted try to ask Mrs. Contreras in Spanish whether she would like an interpreter. I am not sure she understood.)

Mrs. Contreras: Yeah, you know because I feel more comfortable that the school is nearby me just in case she needs something I can walk around and be part of her life. It's cool knowing what happening in the school. I just care about my daughter's education. I want her to reach the world.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think this school helps your child to be successful?

Mrs. Contreras: They've been trying to help my daughter. But I've been proud of how the administrators work, because I see they are making an effort and they are working hard. This is my fourth year, and since the beginning I see how they are improving little by little.

M. Darrrisaw-Akil: Are there things that you wished they would do different?

Mrs. Contreras: Maybe, like be more in contact with the parents to let them know exactly and which level their kids are. Sometimes as a parent I think that we don't understand what level they need to be in order to go to college. So, that's something that they can do more.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: That they can do better?

Mrs. Contreras: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Yes, I understand. Do you think the school has high expectations for your daughter?

Mrs. Contreras: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How do you know?

Mrs. Contreras: Because, as I'm telling you that I've been working in the school and we always try to think what can the school do to help the kids that are struggling. That's why I think they have high expectations, in general, for all the students in general.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are their people your child can go to in the school if she has a problem or needs help?

Mrs. Contreras: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Who are those people?

Mrs. Contreras: The parent coordinator. She feels very comfortable with her. And also like she say because I ask her she said if she really needs to come to principal she would and she knows he would answer her question or try to help her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, and this is the last question. What are your goals for your daughter?

Mrs. Contreras: I want my daughter to go to college and get the highest degree that she can have. I want my daughter to have a better life than us and to be proud of herself.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you.

Student Interviews

Student Interview 1- Ana

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family background, including whom you live with.

Ana: I live with my mom, my sister, my brother, and it's basically been the three of us and, ok, this is gonna sound really wrong...It's basically the three of us and whoever my mom was with at the time. Yeah, and that's it. We lived in New Jersey, we lived in Florida, we've lived in New York. Mostly we bounce between New Jersey and New York. Now I guess were in New York to stay.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: But you've been in Florida before?

Ana: Uh huh, my brother was born there.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. What is it that you like most about your school?

Ana: The closeness that I have with the teachers and the principals. Our advisory is like the best period. Like, of course I'm not going to say class, the best period, but advisory, like if we need to catch up on work we catch up on work. And if we need to speak with our teacher because we're having a hard time, we can speak with our teacher. But I have that connection with our principal too because it's such a small school. I can walk into Mr. Dean's office, eat some candy and talk to him about anything. Mr. Paul and Mr. Patterson too. Mr. Patterson always has food.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel the adults in this school care about you?

Ana: Yes, very much. Like every time I tell them about my family problems, when something's wrong with me and they're understanding and they do whatever they can to help.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, this is redundant. Are there adults here you can go to when you need help with a personal problem?

Ana: Yes. Mostly, all my past teachers and Mr. Paul and Mr. Patterson.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your counselor?

Ana: Oh, rarely. I'm supposed to see her a lot because, you know, it's my 12th grade year and I'm supposed to go over there for my college stuff and stuff, but I don't really see her. She's busy. Like you have to schedule an appointment with her, and I don't really schedule my appointments.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: When you do see your counselor, what do you do with her?

Ana: College. Plus, I'm in the National Honor Society and she's like the teacher liaison, or like the facilitator, so, that's when I really see her is if I have an NHS meeting, or if I have to get my college essays in and stuff and e-mail her some things and I just needed to get her e-mail address.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, do you think that the teachers and other staff hold high expectations for you?

Ana: Yes, very high expectations. I get like nominated for everything. Like, If there's a group and it's going to help the school and it's going to help us, they're like, "Ana, do you want do it?"

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think this school helps you to be successful, and tell me why or why not.

Ana: Yes, very much so. All the groups and teams that I'm in, they're like helping me with my leadership abilities. I was in Coro, that helped me with my public speaking ability, I'm in the school leadership team that helps me like, try to figure out problems at my school and what we can do to help. And yesterday I just got chosen to be in my

school (I always forget this word) Sustainability team and, I don't know, it's just...really helpful.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. So again, this is redundant. Do you participate in extracurricular activities?

Ana: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You have a lot. Any teams, or sports?

Ana: No sports, Just leadership. Just leadership, academic.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, can you give me an example of a situation that was difficult for you to handle and how did you handle it?

Ana: Sure. Well, recently, I could no longer live in my home. It was going into foreclosure and also family problems. It was really hard for me to get through because I'm sensitive about those things, I'm so sensitive...and, I came to school and I was putting up a huge front and my teachers noticed and they pulled me to the side and when I finally broke down about it, it really helped to, like, talk about and just get over it basically and become independent even though I don't really want to be, but I have to be.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So you're not living with your mom?

Ana: I'm not living with my mom right now.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So you handled it by talking it out with staff here?

Ana: Yeah, uh huh.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And tell me, what are your future plans?

Ana: I want to go to Syracuse for my four years and then go to Harvard for my three years of law school, and then I want to become Assistant District Attorney for New York, but I want to become District Attorney for Massachusetts. Yeah, that's it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Why Massachusetts?

Ana: Because my aunt lives there, no, I just like Massachusetts. It's a nice state. And then maybe if I retire, I'll open my own law firm.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Please give me a discount on a retainer for my will.

Student 2 - Laura

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family background, including whom you live with.

Laura: I live with my mother, my father, my sister and myself.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Anything else about your family?

Laura: Like background how? Like, where we originated from?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Sure, anything.

Laura: Like my father, he was born in Puerto Rico, and he came here when he was nine. My mother was born in Puerto Rico; she came here when she was nine months. I was born here and my sister.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. What do like most about your school?

Laura: It has a lot of extracurricular activities for us and the clubs. They help us a lot to get into college. Because the things that they are helping me to do my senior year, my sister didn't have that at her school, they didn't have that, they didn't help her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel like the adults in this school care about you?

Laura: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How do you know? Give me an example.

Laura: They always, like, provoke you to go to class, like, they're like, go to class, be on time, get your work done. And even if you lose some marking periods they give us extra time to hand in work so we don't have to fail, so we can be, so we can do better and move on.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are there adults here that you go to when you need help with a personal problem?

Laura: I talk to my dean.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And has that been helpful to you?

Laura: Yeah, she's a good listener.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And, how often do you see your counselor?

Laura: Not that often. I don't have a reason to unless they give, like for college things, then I go to her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So you only do college and applications with your counselor?

Laura: Like I don't, like some kids go to her, like, for personal reasons and stuff, but not me. I just go to her, like, when I needed to add a class to my schedule, when I needed the SAT/ACT stuff.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think the teachers and other school staff hold high expectations for you?

Laura: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How do you know?

Laura: Like, the way they act with us, they, everybody encourages us to do good things. They don't, like, if they see us in the hall during class, they're like "if you're cutting go to class" or they do sweeps so we don't get caught and stuff.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that this school helps you to be successful?

Laura: Yeah, a lot.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me about that

Laura: Like, I was always messing up my grades in junior high school and then like, when I came here I don't know, like, it changed. Like, they're on top of you to do your stuff, to do good, they just help you. Like they're there. Like, their lunch time or free time; they clear it so they could help you with your work if you need help.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you participate in any extracurricular activities in school?

Laura: Yeah, I am the manager of the basketball team, I'm in the QSA club, that's Queer Straight Alliance, and I'm in the SOF, System of Freedom.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Say that again?

Laura: S-O-F, System of Freedom

M. Darrisaw-Akil: System of Freedom?

Laura: Uh huh.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me about that.

Laura: Um, well so far we go, we like went to a rally, we do bake sales and to send the money to Darfur and countries that, like they have child soldiers over there. And we do workshops around the school and to different classes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How does it make you feel being a part of those activities?

Laura: It makes me feel good because I like to help other people, like, I'm very nice, I'm helpful. And I feel like I'm doing something for someone else, but it's also helping me, like, be a better person and it's helping them in the situation they're in. It makes them, like, it helps them be better than what they are doing. Like do better things like get better

clothes, food, especially food and school. Like, the money we earn we send to them so they can do things in school, get books, and laptops and stuff.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me an example of a situation that was difficult to handle and how you handled it in your personal life, school, anything?

Laura: I'm not really going through a difficult situation like that.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. And what are your future aspirations?

Laura: Like, what do I want do with my future? I want to go to community college, and then – well, at first I wanted to go to a trade school, but if I go to a community college I want to be a x-ray technician and an ultrasound technician.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And that's it, thank you.

Student Interview 3 – John

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, tell me a little bit about your family background, including whom you live with.

John: Right now I'm living with my brother because of an issue my mom has been going through lately. Like, developing possible breast cancer, like, she doesn't tell me or anything, so I really don't know that much about it. So, I mean, it's kind of hard to think about in class so, that's where I'm at right now.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So tell me a little bit about your school and what you like most about your school.

John: The staff. Mostly, the staff. Like, the teachers, they really get into you. It's not like they teach you one day and then the next day it's whatever. It's not like you go home not knowing what's going on in class. It's like they plant the work in your head.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel like the adults in this school care about you?

John: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me an example?

John: Like Mr. Paul gave me his number one day and he told me if there's anything I need I can call him because he knows the situation that's going on in my life. Also Mr. Patterson and Mr. Silver.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So they gave you their home numbers?

John: Cell. They said if it's anything I need I can call them.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, there are adults you go to if you need help with a personal problem.

John: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, so it's Mr. Paul and Mr. Patterson. How often do you see your counselor?

John: Every day. Because I have six periods, I probably go there between classes or after like 7th and 8th period.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what do you do when you see her?

John: I work on my college stuff like personal statements. Or if I don't have anything to do, I'll just hang out with them and just talk to them about how things are going in my life and how I can make things better or how bad things are getting.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel that staff here holds high expectations for you?

John: Yeah, very much, because they always try to push me to go to college. Like, things like when I didn't have my personal statement yet, they were on top of me until I had it,

Like until I got it done, like until I read it over, until I got everything right on it. They

called the colleges about me, they was just on top of me about everything.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that your school helps you to be successful?

John: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me more.

John: Like, let me see how I can put this. Like, same thing they tell me to go to colleges,

they tell me what I need like as far as work, and stuff like that.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you participate in extracurricular activities?

John: Not really. I play on the basketball team and the yearbook committee, that's it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: That's good. So I know we talked a little bit about what's going on

with your mom. But, can you give me an example of a situation that's difficult for you to

handle like that one or another one and how did you handle it.

John: It's the same like, before I came to this school - it was like between 8th and 9th

grade this summer – I remember my aunt passed away. I was a straight 55 student. Like,

everything in my class was 55 in junior high school. But after that, like, that really

opened my eyes to see how short life was because she passed away when she was 49. So,

when I came to high school I'm like, I can't do this no more, I can't play around in class,

I can't. That's when I started playing basketball. And when I got that first 86 average I

was like, wow, I could really do this, and it just felt good after that and I just continued to

do it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, tell me what your future aspirations are.

John: First, I set certain goals for myself that leads to a dream. Like my goals are to

finish school first, like graduate, go to college, and I'm going to study writing because I

love to write, but if that don't work I would love to play basketball because that's my dream right there. But if that don't work I'm not just going to stop. I want to do broadcasting or be a writer.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you very much.

John: You're welcome.

Student Interview 4- Willie

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, tell me a little bit about your family background and a little description of whom you live with.

Willie: My mother graduated from Long Island University with her Bachelors Degree. She's now going into teaching. She's a paraprofessional. My father is in the military. He just came back from serving a year in Iraq. And I live with both of my parents and my little brother.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you like most about your school?

Willie: I like the fact that the teachers pay us a lot of attention. We get a lot of one-on-one with teachers. I get to build a lot of close relationships. Um, there's a very open environment, you know. You work directly with the school community. Let's say there's something you want to build like a club or whatever. You can start it on your own, you know, even if it's not there already. If you have an idea you can bring it past the administration and the teachers and get the club that you want, or work with something. Things like that.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel like adults in this school care about you?

Willie: Yes, I do feel like the adults in the school care about me. A lot of the times that I need help, I need a little assistance with, you know, my college applications, even throughout the four years when I needed help with anything I could come to almost any teacher and get assistance whether I had the teacher, whether I didn't have the teacher, whether me and the teacher had a strong relationship or not, the teacher just being the teacher and helping me.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are there any adults here that you can go to when you need help with a personal problem?

Willie: Um, we have guidance counselors. My guidance counselor is Tanisha. She's one of my, I guess I can consider her a friend. She helps me out a lot with all kinds of issues.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your counselor?

Willie: Every day. I stop by her office every day.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What are some of the activities you do with your counselor outside of your visits? What else would you do with her?

Willie: We are in the NHS so we do a whole bunch of community service, all kinds of things. We go different places and we've worked in parks and we've done college days and things like that together.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think the teachers and other school staff hold high expectations for you?

Willie: Yes, the teachers here do hold high expectations for me. I used to get really easy, like, grades really easily and, you know, and then they started boosting it up "Oh, Willie, you know, I've seen better work from you. Even though this is good, I want you to push yourself further." You know, things like that. So they do hold me to a higher standard.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think this school helps you to be successful?

Willie: Yes, the school has helped me to be successful. It offers different programs like Coro leadership, National Honor Society, the study of the youth court with me (inaudible)

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Court? Sorry, I thought you said youth court.

Willie: We're starting up a youth court and our school just offers a lot of different things that will open doors, you know. When you come into high school, you know, once you get into high school there's a realization that there's stuff that I can do. Like I remember coming from 9th grade to, coming from 8th to 9th grade, like coming into this school and seeing that they had Queer Straight alliance, they had the National Honor Society, they were doing things with an organization called Coro. You know I did Coro and I did NHS, you know, and they opened doors for me and I got to meet people and network myself and, I guess I can say grow up and mature, you know, everything I was thinking I could do they opened doors for me to do it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me an example of a situation whether it's personal or in school that was difficult for you to handle and how you handled it?

Willie: A situation that was hard for me to handle. Hmm, I could say right now working with this college application and things like that. It's just really hard, and I haven't had a lot of time because you have to worry about writing two 500-word essays to get this scholarship, and another two 500-word essays to get this scholarship, and then you got the other three-page essays for class, for history, and then you got this three-page essay for English all at the same time, and it's just overlapping, and it's just over and over again, and it's hard to get out of a cycle.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So how do you deal with it?

Willie: I'm dealing with it right now. Um, time management, getting assistance from teachers, things like that. A lot of focus, setting priorities, meeting deadlines.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, a lot of growing-up characteristics, and it doesn't stop either. What are your future aspirations?

Willie: Right now, I'm not sure what college I want to go to. I just applied for Macaulay Honors and I also applied for another one. So, one of those two things hopefully works out for me. After that I want go to...I'm not sure what college I want to go to yet. It's a hard choice, but possibly John Jay if I don't go to Macaulay, but if I do, if I don't get into Macaulay I'll probably do (?) and then I want to apply for big time schools like--- things like that. I'm going to apply this year, though. So, we'll see how that works.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So after college what do you wanna do?

Willie: FBI. I want to be an FBI or CIA, or any type of big law enforcement organization. ICE or anything.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What was that?

Willie: ICE.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What's that?

Willie: Immigration

M. Darrisaw-Akil: INS?

Willie: No, it's ICE; there's something called ICE.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: ICE. I learned something today. ICE?

Willie: Yeah

M. Darrisaw-Akil: ICE, ICE, baby? Ok, thank you. Do you want to add anything else?

Willie: No.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok.

Student Interview 5 - Samantha

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, tell me a little bit about your family background

Samantha: My mom was born in Panama. She wasn't born here. She came here in high school, her high school year, what is it 9th grade-10th grade she came here. And her and my aunt, they came here. My mother she went to Franklin K. Lane. Before it was split up she went there, her and my aunt, and they graduated. But my mom was pregnant when she was in school with my sister. My father had been living here ,and then he met my mom when she was like 20 or 21 and my father was like 30-something. He's older; he's like 10 years older than my mother. Then they got married, they had my brother, then like two-three years later – no, six years later - they had me.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So do all of you live in the house together now?

Samantha: No.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Who lives in the house?

Samantha: They separated...my mom and my dad. It's just me, my mother and my sister and my niece.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, tell me what do you like most about your school.

Samantha: I like that it gives you a lot of opportunities. Like if you mess up, they try to help you as much as they can, but it's up to you in the end if you're going try to help your own self.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel like the adults in this school care about you?

Samantha: Yeah, I know they care about me because they want me to do better and, you know, graduate and get a good life and stuff like that. They care, I think they care. I hope they care.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You hope they care? Can you give me an example?

Samantha: Of a teacher?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Or any, you know, just, how do you know the people care about you? Give me an example.

Samantha: Like the teachers like if you don't, like, if they see you slacking off or if you're not coming to school, cause they know you well enough and so when you, like, start falling off, they talk...they sit down and talk you and stuff like that, or it could be all of them that talk to you or one of them. And they ask you, like, what's going on and how they can help you and stuff like that. Because sometimes you just need somebody to talk to and they be there to help you and stuff like that and tell you everything's going to be alright.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are there adults here in this school that you go to when you have a personal problem?

Samantha: Yeah, I can go to my guidance counselor. It could be any guidance counselor because you know each grade you get a different one, but you're still close to the other ones too. So you can go to them or you can go to the teachers. I go to my teachers, yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your guidance counselor?

Samantha: Like every other day when I go down there to bother her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what kinds of things do you do with your counselor?

Samantha: We talk about my grades, my credits, um, what I could do, like stuff I could do like jobs...stuff like that, like college...and, what else do we talk about...We talk about a lot of stuff. Um, like what classes we could get like next semester and stuff like that to help our transcript look better. Like academic things and personal things we talk about. They're good with advice.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think the teachers and other school staff hold high expectations for you?

Samantha: Yeah, they want all of us to graduate. They don't doubt none of us...they know we all could do it, and so that's motivation right there because you might think that you can't do it but they know you can do it because they knew you for so long. So, I think that's good that, even when you want to give up, they're always there to, like, show you and tell you good things about yourself so I guess you realize that you can do better.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think your school helps you to be successful?

Samantha: In life or period?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Any way...life.

Samantha: Yeah, they help you be successful like pushing us with the college stuff. They all want us to go to college, and hand in good, like, better stuff on our transcripts so when we get there we just not like everybody else that tried to apply. We different, we stand out. They want to make sure we stand out like academically and stuff like that, so we can get into the college that we really, really want to go to and stuff. They want our number one choice should be our pick, like, where we go. They want it to be like that.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you participate in any extracurricular activities?

Samantha: Just like, my club, health and nutrition. I do that and we talk about, like, healthy foods and how to prevent certain sicknesses like diabetes and high blood pressure, and how you can take care of your body better, and we look for like, um, fruits and stuff like that. We have...sometimes we cook or go to the garden. We do a lot of stuff like that...yeah, that's what we do.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me an example of a situation that you faced in life that's difficult for you to handle, and how did you handle it?

Samantha: Um, a situation? I don't ...being pregnant and going to school is a difficult situation but you have to do it...I have to, I know I have to do it. Like I don't give up because I know it's just going to help me in the long run, so I just come to school every day. Well, I been doing good in school, so why start not doing good in school now? Yeah, I know I have to...If I don't do nothing with my life, how am I going to support my child. I know I have to go to school and finish and go to college and stuff to support my child and get a good job and, you know...things like that.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, what made you think that way – like, can you point to something that made you feel like...you know, what reminds you, what reinforces to you that you have to keep going?

Samantha: The baby. 'Cause I have to take care of somebody else that I can't take care of. Like, it's not all about me no more, it's about them. Like I have to be secure too if I have to provide for somebody else. So, if I'm not doing the right thing, how can I show them how to do the right thing if I'm not doing it. I don't know, I just think that if they look at a good role model then they want to do good too. Like if you don't go to school and you never went to school and have a child and they grow up and you be like "go to

school" and they be like "what, you didn't go to school" and it's just like, it's just a vicious cycle.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, what are your aspirations? What do you want be?

Samantha: I want to be a lawyer. I always wanted to be a lawyer. I want be a lawyer and then a judge when I get old. Yeah, that's what I want to do. I want to go to John J, yeah since I can't go away, so, that's the college I'm going to go to. Then I'll go to law school after that. I don't know which one though. That's what I want to do.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you.

Student Interview 6- Juan

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family background.

Juan: My mother's Columbian and my dad's Puerto Rican.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Anything else? Like, what do they do?

Juan: My mother, she's a factory worker and my dad's a mechanic.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And who do you live with?

Juan: Both of them.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Anybody else?

Juan: No, I'm an only child.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Wow, that's great. What do you like most about your school?

Juan: What I like most about my school is like, we're like a family. It's easy to find your guidance counselor if you need help. You can, like, count on your peers, count on your teachers and like, it's like having a second home...a second family to come to. We're all, like, close together.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So this is redundant...do you feel like the adults in this school care about you?

Juan: Yeah, I think they care too much about students here. They go all out to help you. You see teachers here until 6:00 tutoring students, helping students. Our guidance counselors go all out for us. Like my guidance counselor, she's always sending me e-mails about scholarships for college next year. They, like, care about you a lot.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Now, if you have a personal problem, who here would you go to... is there someone here you would go to?

Juan: I'll go to a teacher. That's like how...were like a family, we're so close that I could go to a teacher, I go to my guidance counselor, I can go to Mr. Dean...

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your counselor?

Juan: I be in her office too often, I think. I see her every day. And since I'm a part of National Honor Society and she runs NHS, every day I'm there helping her out and she's always telling us about scholarships; we do projects in NHS and we're always working together. We have to go talk every day.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do the teachers and staff hold high expectations for you?

Juan: Yeah, they like, like now, for college, you have to get like an 80 for your Regents and I take Algebra so I got a 79...by one point. And now they're, like, you have to take your Regents, you have to take it again. And they want 90's, they don't want 80's, they want 90's, so they put like high expectations for you.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think your school is helping you to be successful?

Juan: Yeah, they are always bring people, like we have college fairs that talk about us, they talk to us about scholarships and they brought SUNY [State University of NY],

CUNY [City University of New York], and they also brought City College here to talk about their program. So they like gearing for people to come to the school to inspire us, make us go through the right path.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you participate in extracurricular activities in school?

Juan: Yeah, I'm actually the stage manager of the theatre club, and NHS is like an extracurricular activity. And sometimes, like, since the 10th grade I tutor living environment students with their living environment work.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give an example of a situation in life that was difficult for you to handle and tell me how you handled it.

Juan: Like something that I failed...Like a group work that failed?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Anything.

Juan: Last year our teacher, Ms. Rogers, she put us into groups for our book club, and like, what was the problem was that I read the part that had to be read, I did my homework. But members of the group didn't. So every time when we had book club work, they didn't have nothing to talk about. Like, only one or two of us had something to talk about and that made us as a group fail, but as an individual I passed and like another individual passed.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, how did you handle the situation with the...

Juan: We talked to Ms. Rogers and she told them this is part of your grade, but some of them didn't listen, so they took that bad grade.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you think of anything else in your life that may have been a challenge that you faced?

Juan: Oh, when I got accepted to this school, in middle school, they told me, "Oh, it's the Village Community School", the bad school. Colleges won't want to accept you if they see Village Community School but I wanted to transfer, and I went to different transfer places and I never got a transfer. It's like I was destined to come to this school. So then, I missed, like, 14 days of my freshman year trying to look for a transfer, and then my guidance counselor at the time convinced me to come. She was, like, try out this school, see if you like it and then, I think it's like 10th grade you can transfer. So, then I took the challenge of come here and I actually love and enjoy this small school and this is my fourth year.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And, what are your future aspirations?

Juan: I want to be, like, what I want to study in college? I want to be a filmmaker. Like make documentaries about our community, things in life. And I'm also interested in college, I think its public affairs. That's interesting.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you.

Student Interview 7 – Darin

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family background.

Darin: My mother is Puerto Rican, born in Springfield Massachusetts, didn't graduate from high school. My dad is from Puerto Rico, graduated from high school and did some college. They're both divorced, so I live with my mother.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Anyone else in the house?

Darin: Yes, my siblings, five of us in total. Two brothers, I mean two sisters and three brothers. But, in Massachusetts I have two other brothers.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Two sisters and three brothers?

Darin: Yes, and a dog.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, what do you like most about your school?

Darin: Well, first of all, I like that it's small. It's not big and you have to travel everywhere...Go like five steps in order to go to your next class. You know everybody; you get to know the teachers pretty well. You get to know your friends pretty well, because you mostly have the classes together. You get to know who's real and who's there for you, things like that.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel like the adults in this school care about you?

Darin: Yeah. I mean every situation...if you have a sad face they go up to you and speak to you, like, what is going on with you, do you want to speak to them. They try to find different opportunities. Like I had plenty...I had multiple problems, like, in my household, and my teachers came and helped me as best as they can. They did as many things as they could to keep me in school because I was struggling. Sometimes my desire to want to go to school was dropping and I was a very high student and after all of the problems it just brought me down and my teachers were there for me. They were pushing me; they were helping me out; they were giving me advice; they were, like, they were like my parents, my parents that actually cared.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are there adults here that you go to when you need help with a personal problem?

Darin: Yes, my advisory teacher. She was there for me the first two years. And she's...I had a class with her the first two years of my school life, and I still go to her for my problems. She helps me out, she gives me, she searches up all the jobs I can get,

internships I can get, anything to help me out, take my mind off stress. She speaks to me...The principal as well...I have a close relationship with him. I go to him for everything. That's what I like about small schools.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your counselor?

Darin: Counselor? Well my guidance counselor...I'm part of the NHS so I go see her whenever I want.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what kinds of things do you do with your counselor?

Darin: College. Right now it's basically college, all college now. That's right now what I do with her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What about before your 12th grade...what kinds of things did you do with your counselor?

Darin: We spoke about problems, issues I had. They, like, see what kind of student I was and checked how they could help me with my grades, bring them up. They gave me opportunities in school, so I could work with other students, so I could at least have my resume better looking for college and for getting a future job.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that the teachers hold high expectations for you, and how do you know?

Darin: Yeah, I do think the teachers hold high expectations for me. The way they push me, the way they look at me. They look at me in a positive way, and never think anything negative. Even though I miss certain classes, they're still there, like, "Come on, Darin. you can do it." They give me time; they...I don't know, it's like you could feel the love.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are you involved in any extracurricular activities?

Darin: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Besides NHS...what you told me.

Darin: I'm part of the drama club, and recently, a guidance counselor when I was in the 11th grade, she offered me a new position to go to a class with new freshmen and speak to them and be a good role model to them because she says I've been through a lot and I made it through, so she at least wants me to speak to them about problems and change their mind on certain things.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Have you started that activity?

Darin: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How does it make you feel?

Darin: It makes me feel like, like I have to push myself even more, but in a more positive way. It makes me feel better that they actually see me as someone that could get somewhere, you know, because I don't have motivation in my house so at least I have motivation in school and people who actually observe me.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, give me an example of a situation in your life that was difficult for you to handle, and tell me how you dealt with it.

Darin: Well, right now I'm having a child, so, that's difficult for me. You know, sometimes my mind goes out of it. Like, I have so many things on my mind, like what I'm going do in the future – can I support my own child? Like, am I going to be able to live with the woman that I'm with and, I'm like, would I marry her...And it's all those things going on in my mind. It's like it's just pounding and pounding and it distracts me sometimes. Sometimes I can't concentrate on my work at school, but I actually push myself and I speak to the teachers about it – how can they help me? I don't keep

anything to myself, like, if I feel like my desire to school is going down I will speak to my teachers; I will speak to anyone I can so they can at least help me and give me motivation to keep pushing. I'm trying to find different opportunities, even the school has given me new opportunities, so I can get a job in the future...get somewhere.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, what is your future? What are your goals for the future?

Darin: My future, like everyone, I want to be successful but I want to do it the right way, you know? I want to sweat, I want hard work, and I want to be able to support myself and my family. Probably become a physical therapist or a doctor...something that can get you somewhere.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you.

Student Interview 8 – Naomi

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family background.

Naomi: Well, my parents are from the Dominican Republic. I live with my mom; not very close with my dad. It's me, my mom, my two sisters and me, and sometimes my grandma comes, like seasonal time. Like, she left this morning to go to DR because she hates the winter.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what does your mom do?

Naomi: My mom used to be a home attendant for 15 years, but then she got laid off because of the whole, the economic stuff. And she, like, does taxes seasonally, like, during the tax season in her house but that's only good until August, and that's when the money takes to missing. So, right now we're looking at a tough situation because, yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you like most about your school?

Naomi: 1 guess, knowing everyone. I feel like, yeah, knowing everyone. I guess you have the freedom to do what you want to do because the teachers here are very supportive. And, yeah, just like, the freedom to start anything.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel like the adults in this school care about you?

Naomi: Oh definitely, yes. Like, when I miss school, teachers text me and e-mail me like, "Why didn't you come?," and like, and they give you so many opportunities; they take off their break time to help you. Like, one of my friends would miss every day of class because she had it first period, like, he went looking after her saying come to me to finish this. She didn't take the opportunity so that was her loss, but the teacher tried really hard to try to make her achieve but... I love the teachers here. I feel like that's one of the reasons why I want to go to a small college because I feel like with a big university I might feel lost because I'm used to having a relationship with my teachers outside, just outside the economics side like the teachers talk about music, the newest shows and movies. 1 feel like, a class of 100 your teacher won't even really know if you're there.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are there adults here you can go to when you have a personal problem?

Naomi: Definitely, yeah. 1 feel like you...you have your favorite teachers but you have that one teacher who knows everything about you, and 1 feel the comfort there, like it's safe to be here. Even teachers you don't have, like, throughout the year, you still get to know them.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your counselor?

Naomi: Like every minute. I have her, like, number and I text her all the time. She tells me, "Don't text me over Thanksgiving break." I text her when I don't know what to put down for certain questions on applications, and she tries the hardest to help me out.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, mostly you talk about college applications?

Naomi: Yeah, but we also talk about if I have any problems with other students, which is not really occasionally. She always asks me what's going on.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think the teachers and other staff hold high expectations for you?

Naomi: Oh yes, definitely. Because I'm doing this program called *SummerSearch;* I didn't want to do it at all, like, no. And that was, like, my insecurity. That was my 10th grade year and I wasn't really coming to school, but I had this English teacher who forced me to apply, who made me stay after school to apply and I was like "UGH". And I think because of her I am the type of person I am today. So, because of her I got to travel to, like, Greece, I got to go that far in camp because of her, so it was pretty...I think if it wasn't because of that teacher I wouldn't be able to do anything.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, do you think the school helps you to be successful?

Naomi: Definitely. It's just the way they set up everything. They give you opportunities to try harder. And even though it's people who don't hand in things on time, they give them so much time, like 10 days into the marking period they're still like taking work in that's supposed to be handed in like a month ago. But if you're, like, sometimes there's a problem too because, even me because I do good in school but I always wait for the last minute to do stuff and I feel that's with everything, and I feel like sometimes this school might baby us a little bit but it's for our best interest but I feel like it's...I feel like if the

school would give us, like, deadlines and the teachers won't hand in anything I feel like yeah, it would be a better school.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you participate in extracurricular activities in school?

Naomi: Yeah, I do. I'm in the National Honors Society in this school, SummerSearch program I told you about, the System of Freedom. I was in the stage crew for just one...doing one play; I was in the environmental club...the garden club, we started the garden in the back.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me an example of a situation that you faced that was difficult for you to handle?

Naomi: Coming into school on time. Yeah, that was very...Like, if you've seen my transcript you're like...if you see the 9th grade you're like, "Whoa." You would be, like, this kid probably dropped out of school because my grades were pretty bad. Then like, I used to come in like fifth period, which is like super late. I just like, it was just really hard for me to come to school on time, and then, like, teachers would talk to me all the time telling me that I need to come in to school and they were annoying me very much. So, they put pressure on me all the time. They used fear for me to come to class all the time, and that's when my grades starting improving, when I started to come in early. Like, it's still a problem today but I feel like it's less like I might come to school 10-20 minutes late, not like half a day, which is like a big improvement cause my grades reflected on it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: I can imagine and last question...what are your future goals, your aspirations?

Naomi: I want to do things that impact the environment. Like, I have perfect ideas of what I want to study, but I don't know what to do with that yet. But I feel like...yeah, I just want to make an impact on the world.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So you're not sure exactly what you want to study?

Naomi: Yeah, I want to study like Marine Biology and like Oceanography...only environmental like. Yeah, but it's like people asking me, like someone asked me what do you want to do with that job, and I thought about it and I was like I don't really want to work in an aquarium. It's like, but I want to do some field work like rescue some animals and stuff like that, but still I'm like, uh, like I know what I want to study, but I don't know what I want to work at.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you.

Student Interview 9 – Lita

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family background?

Lita: My mom was born in Mexico, the same as my father. They're from a part of Mexico called Puebla and I was born here in Brooklyn.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what do your parents do for a living?

Lita: My mom works at a company where she cooks, and my father, I don't know because I don't live with him.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. So who lives in your house?

Lita: Um, just my mom, uncle and me.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you like most about your school?

Lita: The teachers. They always take their time with us, to help us understand the

classwork and when you need help with homework they stay with us.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you feel like the adults in this school care about you?

Lita: Yeah, I do.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How do you know?

Lita: Um, because they're always asking us if we have our work, they're asking us

always helping others if they need it and I think that's it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are there adults you can go to when you have a personal problem?

Lita: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Who do you go to?

Lita: My counselor or the teacher that I had last year.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your counselor?

Lita: I'm always in the office; I'm the volunteer doing the files, so I'm always with her.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are there any other things you do with your counselor or you talk to

her about?

Lita: No, just, I think most of the things are about college, how getting scholarships and

getting, maybe, what college.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think teachers and other school staff hold high expectations

for you?

Lita: Yeah, I think. I mean, they think they expect everything from everyone. Like us

getting to college to have a career.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you participate in any extracurricular activities?

Lita: Is that like clubs or something?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Yes

Lita: Just in school…boxing club.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Boxing?

Lita: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me about that.

Lita: It's fun. I like it. I learn new moves every day. But it's difficult, because we have to do exercise.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: When does the club meet?

Lita: Um, Tuesdays and Thursdays twice a week.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: After school or during school?

Lita: During school, like third period.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me an example of a situation that was difficult for you to handle?

Lita: Um, I think when I came to New York, when I moved from Mexico to here.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Did you come in high school?

Lita: No, I came when I, when I was going to be in fifth grade. I was missing my family from there, friends, everyone. It was difficult to get new friends, and I was scared of not knowing English and talking with others. I mean, I knew the teacher spoke Spanish but I felt like everyone was speaking English and I didn't.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, how did you deal with that?

Lita: I always used to cry, but the teacher said that if I believe in myself I will do better and learn a lot, I mean the students, the classmates…all of them spoke Spanish because it was a bilingual class, but I was the only one who didn't speak English. I mean, it wasn't

that hard to get friends, but I felt sad that I couldn't do other stuff that other people could do.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, how'd you learn English?

Lita: I think I did the big step of learning English when I came here. Because I, since 5th grade to 8th grade, I got a bilingual class, and you know in a bilingual class everything is in Spanish except English class. So when I came here it was, like, totally different. Everything was in English; I remember at the beginning of my freshman year I didn't want to come to school because it was difficult for me that no one, no teachers were speaking Spanish. But I did learn. I had a good teacher that helped me to read, speak, write.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what are your goals for your future?

Lita: My goals? I know I want a good career. I don't know what, but I want something related to environment, and I think that's my major goal. And then, after that I want to see if there's a way that I could make my mom a citizen of United States.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Say that again?

Lita: A resident in the United States.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You want to be a wrestler?

Lita: No, my, my mom be a resident

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Oh, help your mother become a legal resident?

Lita: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So that's your goal?

Lita: Yeah, that's my other goal.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you.

Lita: You're welcome.

Student Interview 10- Derek

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family background.

Derek: Well, I have six brothers and six sisters altogether.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Is that 12 altogether?

Derek: Uh huh.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok.

Derek: And my brother graduated high school last year already, and I'm next in line, and my sister is graduating with me because they skipped her a grade so we'll both graduate this year, but she's in Virginia. She'll graduate in Virginia because she lives with my grandmother. And my mother finished high school, but she's going back to school when I graduate. She said she's going to wait until at least two of her kids graduate high school before she goes back.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what does she do?

Derek: She's like a home attendant, but she wants to be a nurse.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And your father?

Derek: Oh, he doesn't live with me, but I know where he is.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: He's in Virginia with my grandmother too.

Derek: Ok.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, who lives in your house?

Derek: All of the kids except for one. All the brothers and sisters, except for one kid, and that's my sister who graduates this year, and my mother.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, so there's 11 children in the house and one mom?

Derek: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Got it. What do you like most about your school?

Derek: Like, how the teachers help. Like my personal statement, when I wrote it...I got it in here [pulls a paper from a folder]. On my personal statement, I had wrote it and the thing I had wrote about, my English teacher, she told me that I could change my statement because I had wrote about, my personal statement was about some lady in here with a apple because it was over a food fight. And then, I always talked about the band, and she told me to change my personal statement to be more about the band because I could relate more with it and I related more with it and the words I used is way better.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, a teacher helped you provide your personal statement?

Derek: Uh huh.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And when she made me change my statement, that's how I was able to, like, come up with a better clue, because if I would've typed what I had before it wouldn't have been that much. But when I talked about the band, it was so much to talk about. I had to take away a paragraph still because it was more than one page.

Derek: Do you feel like adults in this school care about you?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Yes, because they're always telling kids to go to class. From last year, my 11th grade year, I used to have math first period with Mr. Patterson, and every time I came late he made sure my mother knew. He called my mother, made sure she came to the school; she had to take off just to come to the school to talk about why I'm late every day. If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't have passed the math test or the math Regents because it was a Regent prep class.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So you passed the Regents?

Derek: Uh huh.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Congratulations!

Derek: Thanks.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: It's a hard job.

Derek: And I hate math.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Are there adults here that you go to when you need help with a

personal problem?

Derek: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Who do you go to?

Derek: I go to Mr. Paul, my Student Government teacher or my advisory teacher, Mr.

Wyse, because I had him for two years in advisory.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your counselor?

Derek: Like, at least once or twice a week or when I can stop by.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what do you do with the counselor?

Derek: She'll go over my transcript and tell me if I need to take a Regents over to try to

get higher grade, or she'll tell me to look at colleges I want to go to.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think teachers and other staff hold high expectations for you?

Derek: Yes. They want everybody to graduate and move on with education, because

every time somebody says they're not going to college they say, "at least try."

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that your school helps you to be successful?

Derek: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, are you involved in any extracurricular activities?

Derek: I'm in the drum line, but it's not at this school. That's in my old middle school. I started when I was in the 8th grade. I started the band. I was in the Royal Knights marching band inside George Gershwin middle school. I started the band there and I'm the Vice President of Student Government in this school.

Derek: Yeah, for the 12th grade. We had to run last year and say speeches.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what kind of things do you do in Student Government?

Derek: We fundraise, we get votes in for the senior trip because we're the voice of our senior class, so before we run anything by the teacher, we must run it by our class first. Like our senior trip, we're going to Anna's Haven. We made them vote on, we picked four trips and had a suggestion box just in case nobody didn't like the trips, and if you wrote a suggestion, we'll look up the trip and see how much it costs. And now we're working on putting together the battle of the schools for the fundraiser we're having.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me an example of a situation you faced in life that was difficult for you to handle?

Derek: When I was in the band I became the drum major. We had to get rid of one kid because in our band we had this rule: our third year was nobody in the band couldn't date each other because it always comes around with something. So they said one of them had to go, and they told me to pick one of them since I was the lead and I was the drum major. I didn't know who to pick because both of them were my friends, and then I didn't want to say, like, you can stay but you can't stay. And they said you got to pick one of them, because both of them can't stay because they're going out with each other. So I had to let both of them go, because if I let one go the other one was going to be mad mad at me.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, how did you make that decision?

Derek: So, he said, "Take both of them into a room," and then he said, "Let everybody see," and then he said pick one. And then I kept on thinking, if I let them go but he's a good drummer but she's a dancer and she was the lead dancer. And then I said both of them had to go because if I pick one everybody's going to be mad. And he let me do it because he didn't want to kick nobody out, but his same thought was to kick both of them out too, but he didn't want to do it. He wanted one of the kids to do it that was in charge.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: A big responsibility. So what are your future goals?

Derek: I want to be a detective or a social worker.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, do you know what school or college you're going to?

Derek: I'm still looking at that. If I go to CUNY, I might go to Medgar Evers or BMCC, but the ones for upstate, I'm researching those.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok, thank you...that's it.

Derek: You're welcome.

Student Interview 11- Mercedes

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little bit about your family background.

Mercedes: Ok. Well, my parents are immigrants, so both my parents are Mexican from the same state but different cities. So, I don't know what else I can say. I have family members over here from my mother's side here in NY and I have family members in California. Most of them are in California, Michigan, Chicago and I think Houston.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, what do your parents do for a living?

Mercedes: Um, well my mom has different jobs. She cleans apartments for people who live out of the country and they come here just for vacation and like they go back to their country; and she cleans those apartments for exchange students, people from, like, South America that come over here to study. And my father works in a Brooklyn Terminal market.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: In Canarsie?

Mercedes: Yes.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And, who lives in your house with you?

Mercedes: Um, my mother, my father and my five other sisters.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: No boys?

Mercedes: Uh, Uh...all girls

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you like most about your school?

Mercedes: I think that it's the teachers and, like, the students and how we became very close. They have become like my second family. Well, to me they became my second family. So, um, during, like, my problems and, like, my family problems and things like that. They help me out and with my health too; the teachers have asked me very concerned about how I've been and all the things that have happened to me.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You have a health issue?

Mercedes: Um, about two years ago, I became anemic because - well, three years ago, I think – yeah, three years ago, my sister was hospitalized and because of that I suffered. I don't know how it's called, but it was sort of like a depression and I stopped eating for like a while, and that has paid a toll on my body and I became anemic. Now, when I don't eat, I get nauseous. I get headaches, and it sometimes affects my mood. And, about two

years, like a year ago, they were testing me for arthritis because they think it's something genetic, and what happens to be that I'm still not at the border of having arthritis but my levels of arthritis are very high compared to a person my age. Like, they told me, they gave me an example that said, like, around my age the levels should be at 13, but I'm like somewhere around the 40's. So it's something that, yeah, it sometimes affects my mood and how I act and interact with certain people.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, do you feel like there are adults in this school that care about you?

Mercedes: Yeah, a lot.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How do you know?

Mercedes: Um, it's not just like if they speak to me, it's their looks...how they look at me, how they see me without speaking to me. I can tell that they are concerned about me. Like it's, I don't really know how to explain it, it's just the way they look at me, like their eyes ask me all the questions.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Who are the adults in this school that you go to when you need help with a personal problem?

Mercedes: Um, yes. I've gone to my counselor and to the parent coordinator. And to my teachers, one of my teachers left, um, well she's not here this year but last year and the other years she was here and with her I would tell her, because she was very close to my family, I would tell her all my personal problems. And I do have other teachers that I do tell them my personal problems and they help me out with them.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How often do you see your counselor?

Mercedes: Now, because I'm a senior and part of the National Honor Society, I see her, like, I think, about every day. And it's not only about personal problems, it's just things

I have to do for the school and applying for college and things like that.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think the teachers and other staff hold high expectations for you?

Mercedes: Yes, a lot of times. And like a lot of times in 10th grade I was doing real bad, and I could tell that the teachers was, like, "you can do better than this" and "why are you slacking, you can bring those grades up higher, you have so much potential," like, "you're wasting it, and stop being lazy, bring it up."

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that the school – this is redundant - do you think the school helps you be successful?

Mercedes: In like a great way, in a way I think, yes, because, like, the school to me is like the staff, the principal, the assistant principal and the students, and I know for a fact that the principal and the assistant principal, they're always there with me. They're always telling me "you can do better" when they see my report card. They're like, "you can do a lot better, a lot better." And the teachers also tell me, and the students are like, "what are you doing?" The students are like, "what are you doing, you're slacking." You know, like, if I were to go down a couple of points they're like, "what are you doing, you can do higher than this," like, "you're always higher," like, "you're in National Honor Society, what are you doing…stop slacking."

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you participate in any extracurricular activities?

Mercedes: I don't know if you can count this, but I attend College Now. I do College Now on Saturdays, and I do community service on Saturdays by helping out here at the school. On Sundays, I give classes to kids just to help them out sometimes, and in the

past I've sometimes helped out other teachers with younger students in, like, other schools with my sisters.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, we talked a little bit about your health earlier, give me an example of a situation that was difficult for you to handle that you've faced in life and how did you handle it. So, whether it's your health or something else you want to talk about?

Mercedes: Right now I'm kinda like going through something difficult, because right now I'm starting to apply for colleges and I'm starting to realize that most of the colleges that I want to go to and what I want to study costs a lot of money. I want to apply for Pace University and that's like a super, super private school and it's a lot of money; and compared to what my parents make, it's going be a huge gap between the money my parents make and the amount of money I have to pay for the school. So, that's something challenging right now. And now I'm applying and I'm hoping, I'm applying for a scholarship for the National Honor Society. Also, other scholarships, I forgot the name of them...I was just seeing them a few minutes ago, I'm going to apply for different scholarships, but I can't remember their names.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So even though it might be difficult for you thinking about paying for college, you're still applying?

Mercedes: Yeah, I'm still applying even though. And then a couple of months ago, no, a couple of weeks ago, I had a little worry because, we had to show the taxes and I have a different last name than my father and I had to go ask my counselor, "is this a problem" cause my parents for a long time, they wanted to change my last name to my father's, so for a long time my mom was rushing me and I was starting to think if it was going to be a problem for me going to college with, like, a different last name than what my father has.

My counselor, actually, she told me it wasn't a problem as long as my name was on my father's taxes and after that I felt a huge relief.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Last question; what are your goals for the future?

Mercedes: Uh, my God, I have so many things. Well, my primary goal is to get to college and be able to pay for it or find a scholarship for all four years. And, to be able to graduate and do what I want to do. Um, I've been thinking a long time about becoming a forensic scientist, but now as I'm getting older and learning more things my ideas of becoming what I wanted have sort of changed. So, I'm still in that sort of midstream whether or not I want to go for forensics or do I want to become more of like a research scientist and research and find out more about certain diseases and illnesses that we have. And, like, for the long run, I think just be able to maintain a job and be able to raise a family.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you.

Student Interview 12 – Marcus

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Tell me a little about your background, including a description of who you currently live with.

Marcus: Well, I live with my parents and two brothers.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And where do you fall in there. Are you the oldest?

Marcus: I'm the oldest.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. And you said you live with both parents?

Marcus: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you like most about your school?

Marcus: What's the thing I like most?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Yes

Marcus: Everything.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me any details?

Marcus: Like, there's people that actually care about you. When you have a problem they help you solve it.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: So, uh, do you feel like adults in this school care about you?

Marcus: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Can you give me an example?

Marcus: Because, um, the advisors always telling you to look good in school or stay in school and the counselors always help me out, like, if I have any problems.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Um, how often do you see your counselor?

Marcus: Um, for the past three months I've seen him times.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: And what do you do when you see your counselor?

Marcus: Um, we talk about my grades, or if I have any problems at home.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think teachers and other staff members hold high expectations for you?

Marcus: Yeah, because they always asking you how you're doing in school, if you come to school early.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Do you think that your school helps you to be successful?

Marcus: Yeah

M. Darrisaw-Akil: How?

Marcus: Because it offers more things (inaudible) than other schools to attend college.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What kinds of extracurricular activities are you involved in?

Marcus: Nothing.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Have you been in any clubs or sports?

Marcus: Boxing.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: You're in the Boxing Club?

Marcus: Yeah.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Um, can you give me an example of a situation that was difficult for you to handle, and how you handled it?

Marcus: Like with school?

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Any situation.

Marcus: Um, I can't think of one right now.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Ok. And what are your future goals.

Marcus: Go to college, graduate.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: What do you want to do?

Marcus: I want to be a mechanic.

M. Darrisaw-Akil: Thank you very much. That's it.