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An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Urban Early College High School Teachers' Experiences

Tamika Vanessa Taylor Young
tvy20a@acu.edu

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.

Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of the College of Graduate and Professional Studies

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Dissertation Committee:

S Baily

Dr. Scott Bailey, Chair

Melinda Carver

Dr. Melinda Carver

Jamie Petrilla

Dr. Jamie Petrilla

Abilene Christian University

School of Educational Leadership

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by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends. We have come a long way and we continue to rise from the ashes. You support, encourage, and inspire me to strive for greatness daily. Thank you for your love.

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I want to thank my family for allowing me the space and opportunity to pursue this dream of achieving the highest level of academia. To my mother, Dr. Claudia Shakespeare, my favorite girl, you are a constant source of inspiration and direction throughout my life. Thank you for setting such an exceptional example of a phenomenal woman, mother, scholar, and friend. You are amazing, and I am so blessed to have you. To my husband, Richard, thank you for your enduring love and support during life's adventures. Thank you for being my best cheerleader and confidant when I needed motivation and encouragement the most. God ordained us as purpose mates for a divine intention, and I am grateful and excited to see what is next. To our children, Madison and Richard Jr., aka my little classmate, thank you for being a wellspring of joy, a reminder of what perseverance looks like, and for giving me the strength to continue to work hard. Remember to embrace your individuality and that with grit and dedication, you can achieve greatly. To my sisterhood and friends, thank you for all the words of affirmation, love, and friendship you showered upon me. You all have helped me beyond measure and expectation.

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Abstract

Teachers are fundamental to students' performance by fostering relationships and imparting knowledge in the classroom. Dual-credit teachers work for Early College High School (ECHS) programs to assist historically underrepresented students in accelerating their path toward earning college credits and associate degrees while attending high school. Hard-to-staff ECHS programs with underrepresented pupils in lower socioeconomic urban areas suffer high teacher attrition. How urban ECHS teachers define their professional experiences is still being determined, which affects organizational outcomes. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative exploratory study was to investigate and understand the lived experiences of urban ECHS teachers in Texas. This study used phenomenological semistructured interviews and self-administered questionnaires to collect data from the 14 early college high school teacher participants. The exploratory study used interpretative phenomenological analysis as a qualitative research method to identify meaningful themes from patterns found within the data. Four central themes emerged from the investigation: (a) commitment to students, (b) motivation to retain position, (c) commitment to self, and (d) challenges. Participants' accounts of their experiences as ECHS teachers contribute to recognizing and comprehending their values and beliefs. The results indicated that ECHS teachers showed compassion and understanding as they helped students navigate the intricacies of dual enrollment in high school and college. Research demonstrated that an environment conducive to learning enhances students' cognitive, social, and emotional development. Sustaining an all-around favorable school culture affected ECHS instructors' opinions of their jobs and the educational system. Results discussions included new perspectives on the actual experiences of ECHS teachers, the limitations of the study, and implications for ECHS teachers, ECHS supervision, and ECHS environment studies and

programs in the future. Preserving a generally positive school climate affected ECHS instructors' opinions of their positions and the educational system. Lastly, the study suggested that improving employee resources for urban ECHS teachers could improve well-being and workforce sustainability in ECHS contexts.

Keywords: early college high school, teacher attrition, teacher perspectives, urban contexts

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite initiatives designed to transform schools by tackling the achievement gap, improving college and career readiness, and increasing postsecondary completion, teachers remain the most influential aspect of student learning, achievement, and outcomes (Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018; Fauth et al., 2020). For the diversified populations in urban educational environments, there is a distinctive necessity for highly competent and knowledgeable teachers to facilitate students' unique educational needs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Students from all socioeconomic backgrounds possess ambitious college goals; however, there remain gaps in academic achievement and completion rates by ethnicity, income, and parent education for urban students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). Consequently, these issues have resulted in the expansion of laws like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) that encompasses the early college high school (ECHS) model as a pathway for districts to support college and career readiness (College & Career Readiness & Success Center [CCRSC], 2017). The ECHS model used in the study represents a successful hybrid to traditional high school, enabling comprehensive support, preparation, high school completion, and college credit accumulation for historically underrepresented students (Mollet et al., 2020). Programs like ECHS have resulted in an unprecedented evolution in the teachers' role in accountability and student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2019). Research consistently demonstrates that students' academic preparation, with teachers as the cornerstone of ECHS programs, is substantial in determining how probable they are to persist and succeed in education.

Background of the Study

In 2002, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Ford Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation instigated and funded the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) concept to lessen the enduring disparities in economic well-being, racial and cultural diversity, and social conditions that persist within underrepresented groups (Haxton et al., 2016; Zeiser et al., 2021). Underrepresented student populations are identified as at-risk, first-time generation collegegoers, and socioeconomically disadvantaged (Zeiser et al., 2021). ECHS models are open-enrollment high schools that partner with postsecondary institutions to target historically underrepresented students enabling the pursuit of dual enrollment through accelerated coursework at no cost (Berger et al., 2010; Mollet et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021). In 2021, over 280 ECHS campuses nationwide were servicing approximately 80,000 students in 31 states (Song et al., 2021). Through dual enrollment, students complete immersive college-level courses taught by professors or credentialled high school teachers for secondary and postsecondary course credits (Zeiser et al., 2021).

Systemic discrepancies in funding for education, outdated buildings, lack of access to excellent curricula, and ineffective teachers and school administrators result in less access and college preparation for underrepresented populations (Mollet et al., 2020). The underperformance trends of underrepresented students begin during the formative middle school years and persist with students to high school, demonstrating a disproportionate dropout rate and other negative markers. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicated that a greater density of minority students produced a more significant Black-White achievement gap than peers in schools with fewer minorities (NCES, 2015). In addition, the 2018 NCES report on ethnic trends highlighted that the Hispanic population accounts for the second largest ethnic

group in the United States (de Brey et al., 2019). Despite improvements in reading and mathematics, the Hispanic-White achievement gap remains wide after two decades of research.

With adequate preparation in secondary school, students have more pathways to their future (Zeiser et al., 2021). Longitudinal studies found that with enhanced academic advising and social support, ECHS students excel beyond their traditional high school counterparts who do not take college courses (Song et al., 2021; Zeiser et al., 2021). Consequently, the ECHS framework enables students to access rigorous college material earlier than peers, demonstrating higher achievement than the national average (Mollet et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021). ECHS students have consistently demonstrated higher high school graduation rates, college credit attainment, postsecondary enrollment, degree attainment, and retention than peers who attended traditional high schools (Song et al., 2021; Zeiser et al., 2021). Within 6 years of expected high school graduation, ECHS students enrolled in and completed 2-year degrees, certifications, and bachelor's degrees, representing a shorter period than traditional students (Edmunds et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021; Zeiser et al., 2021). As a result, individuals with postsecondary degrees or credentials improve their earning potential by at least $250,000 throughout a lifetime, gain opportunities for good jobs that account for 56% of available positions, and demonstrate resiliency during economic recessions (Song et al., 2021).

Subsequent research from the National Education Longitudinal Study data showed that teachers are a foundational ingredient within the school system that aids in shaping students' success as they formulate relationships and impart content knowledge within the classroom (Bui, 2005; Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019). However, one of the most complex problems in educational institutions is the attrition of teachers identified as those who exit the field or change schools. In the January 2021 report from RAND's American Teacher Panel, about one-fourth of teachers

who answered the survey declared they were likely to resign before concluding the 2020–2021 academic year (Steiner & Woo, 2021). Among those, African American teachers represented the most elevated rate of potential leavers. Steiner and Woo's (2021) findings also reported that teachers conveyed experiencing more stress and depression due to unfavorable working conditions and responsibility than in years past. Additionally, in the PDK poll on public opinions concerning public schools, only 37% of survey respondents reported that they would advocate the teaching profession for their child, signifying the lowest response since the poll's inception in 1969 (PDK International, 2022).

The implications of teacher attrition are far-reaching and seriously threaten the education system. First, teacher dependability and expertise are required to deliver a top-notch education to every student (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). Underqualified teachers are frequently employed in schools with large populations of minority and low-income pupils, which can adversely affect student progress (Mollet et al., 2020). Second, recruiting and preparing new teachers to replace those who vacate positions is expensive, especially mid-year (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). It is more challenging for underachieving schools to attract and retain highly qualified educators, further exacerbating disparities (Mollet et al., 2020). Third, schools serving economically underprivileged youth experience more significant teacher attrition than campuses with more appealing environments (Sutcher et al., 2019). Students within less desirable circumstances depend more heavily on education to raise their standard of living. Finally, students revealed that supportive relationships with teachers influenced their self-assuredness and desire for achievement (Bui, 2005; Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

Educational research has sought to address theories and practices to improve teaching and learning. While several studies concentrated on the ECHS effect on students' college and career readiness (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019; Mollet et al., 2020; Schaefer & Rivera, 2020), others have emphasized the demand for more teachers and retention (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019; Seelig & McCabe, 2021; Steiner & Woo, 2021). All researchers agree that highly qualified secondary teachers are vital to the preparation and success of students as well as their desire to pursue and achieve academic outcomes. Every student success act (ESSA) required states to develop equitable programs like early college high schools (ECHS) to enhance college and career preparedness (CCRSC, 2017), which address achievement gaps and increased postsecondary matriculation (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Schaefer & Rivera, 2020). In Texas, ECHS programs utilize dually credentialed teachers who can educate historically underrepresented populations at risk of non-graduation from college while providing an avenue to accelerate students learning to earn at least 12 college credits while completing high school.

Although research literature is limited, the media has portrayed the systemic problems concerning teacher shortages in urban ECHS environments. Meanwhile, the United States is experiencing a staggering rise in teacher shortages nationwide (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). According to the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) survey, hard-to-staff schools with disenfranchised pupils in lower socioeconomic urban areas suffer higher teacher shortages resulting in unprepared new hires and, subsequently, more turnover (Sutcher et al., 2019). Research revealed that attrition represents approximately 90% of new teacher hires, with an estimated 8% annual loss due to preretirement resignations and retirement (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). Aside from the budgetary expenses attributed to reduced human capital,

interruption of operations, job enrichment, recruitment, hiring, and new training from teacher attrition negatively affect student achievement.

The problem is that hard-to-staff early college high schools (ECHS) with underrepresented pupils in lower socioeconomic urban areas suffer high teacher attrition. How urban ECHS teachers define their professional experiences is still being determined, which affects organizational outcomes. Conducting additional research enabled ECHS teachers to describe their experiences to understand better the perspectives on the various aspects of the environment (Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018). The research informs institutions' considerations regarding teachers' influence on ECHSs and students' success. Additionally, since limited qualitative research exist about the lived experiences of ECHS teachers, this study contributes to the knowledge available to comprehend how ECHS teachers' experiences and perceptions holistically impact organizations (Knight & Duncheon, 2020).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative exploratory study was to investigate and understand the lived experiences of urban Early College High Schools (ECHS) teachers in Texas. While existing research literature concentrated on examining the ECHS program from the perspectives of administrators and college professors (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019), minimal information has been published addressing the phenomena from the ECHS teachers' purview. The population was in-service secondary teachers who work in the ECHS environment in urban school systems or contexts in Texas. There was a purposeful sampling of 14 ECHS teachers with relevant experience within the program in urban settings. Since the study did not focus on a specific school or district, individual teachers were recruited via online social media

advertisements, direct email contact to ECHS campus administrators to participate voluntarily in the research, and through snowballing when participants are asked to suggest other participants.

Semistructured interviews with individual participants to obtain stories to derive meaning related to the problem, purpose, and research questions while leaving the opportunity to follow up intuitively was conducted via video-conferencing technology (Durdella, 2020). The interview questions focused on educators' experiences, the meanings they placed on experiences, and how those experiences have shaped their career decisions. Comparative data review of the transcribed interviews were analyzed to discover common themes. Before data analysis, participants were invited to complete member checking of their data to confirm the interview summary's accuracy and assess the key components and my interpretations, boosting credibility (Seidman, 2019). The main goal of this study was to compile detailed data from individuals with relevant and in-depth experience with the urban ECHS system.

Research Question

RQ1: How do early college high school teachers describe and perceive their professional experiences working in urban settings in Texas?

Significance of the Study

Teachers in urban Texas ECHS programs work to alleviate the pervasive problem of underrepresented populations' lower secondary and postsecondary graduation rates and other outcomes. The ECHS model was designed to afford opportunities for underrepresented students to earn college credits at no cost savings families considerable resources, while attending high school (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019; Song et al., 2021). With yearly increases in ECHS campuses nationwide (Song et al., 2021), the program increases college admission, enrollment, and retention (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019). Since minimal literature on teacher perspectives within

urban ECHS programs exists conducting, such research enhanced the understanding of the current climate and developing environments that encourage teacher retention (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019). The information gained contributed to data utilized to enhance teacher experiences and programs, ultimately impacting underrepresented secondary level students and organizational outcomes.

Definitions of Key Terms

Definitions of key terms and phrases used throughout the study are provided:

At-risk student. At-risk students are younger than 25 and in danger of dropping out of school (Muñoz et al., 2014).

Attrition. Teacher attrition represents those who exit the field or change schools through retirement, resignation, or early retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

College and career readiness. According to the American College Testing Association (ACT; 2018), students who are college and career ready possess the knowledge and skills necessary for enrollment within a first-year course level at a 2- or 4-year college or university or technical or trade school or training aligned with certification programs for a career (Green et al., 2023).

Dual credit. Dual credit is an instructional environment that enables students who have yet to graduate from high school to concurrently enroll in college and high school (Zeiser et al., 2021). Students complete immersive college-level classes taught in partnership with at least one higher education institution and at least one secondary agency by professors or credentialed high school teachers for secondary and postsecondary course credits.

Early college high school (ECHS). According to Song et al. (2021), an early college high school is an open-enrollment high school that collaborates with postsecondary institutions

to target historically underrepresented students, allowing them to pursue dual enrollment through free accelerated college coursework to complete at least 12 college credit hours.

First-generation college student. First-generation college students are undergraduates whose parents did not complete a college degree (Cataldi et al., 2018).

Open enrollment. Schooling option within the public school system that allows students and parents/guardians to choose or transfer from one public school to another instead of a school they are zoned to attend are open enrollment or schools of choice (Herrmann et al., 2009).

Postsecondary. Postsecondary refers to an institution of higher education that provides education as a 2- or 4-year college, university, technical, or trade school (Green et al., 2023).

Underrepresented student populations. Historically underrepresented populations in college identified as at-risk of non-graduation, first-time generation collegegoers, socioeconomically disadvantaged, English language learners, and students of color (Duncheon, 2020).

Urban schools. In the United States, urban schools are typically in large, densely populated metropolitan areas (Milner, 2012; Schaffer et al., 2018; Welsh & Swain, 2020). Milner (2012) expanded the definition to consider the surrounding population, race, academic, economic, and social framework that affects the school.

Summary

This qualitative research aims to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers working in urban ECHS environments. Chapter 1 introduced the research providing background information, problem statement, purpose, research questions, significance, and critical terminology of the study. The implications of such research could draw parallels between urban ECHS environments that transform underrepresented students' college-going mindset and

teacher interpretation of their work. The literature review in Chapter 2 offers a thorough understanding of ECHSs.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This phenomenological qualitative study was designed to investigate and understand teachers' lived experiences working in an urban early college high school (ECHS) environment. Research demonstrated that high schools are integral to students' preparation and transition into higher education (Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018). The purpose of this chapter is to review empirical literary studies concerning the evolution and development of ECHSs. This chapter entails the literature search methods, theoretical framework, an outline of ECHS history, educational legislation, and a discussion of significant contributions to secondary education.

Literature Search Methods

An extensive search was made to find previous research studies that have significantly contributed to our understanding of the ECHS model. I reviewed publications found within a variety of sources, including the Guba (1981) and Lent and Brown (2008) literary works, past U.S. Department of Education legislation, Texas Education Agency legislation, the Brown Library at Abilene Christian University (ACU), ResearchGate, and ProQuest Digital Dissertation and Thesis databases. *Early college high schools*, *urban high schools*, *urban education*, *teacher perspectives*, *teacher motivation*, *teacher attrition*, and *education reform* were among the key terms and phrases utilized during the inquiry. These search terms were selected specially to stimulate the identification of research which would elaborate on the broad topic of ECHSs, urban settings, teacher perspectives, and implementation of the program environments.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research employs theoretical frameworks as the lenses through which all facets of the study are considered (Anfara & Mertz, 2014). Valid theories explain a phenomenon in a way that offers new insight while expanding the understanding of previous research. The

social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and self-determination theory were used for this study to explore and understand urban ECHS teachers' experiences and perspectives.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Developed in 1994 by Lent et al., social cognitive career theory (SCCT) is based on Badura's general social cognitive theory, which is the dynamic relationship between individuals, their actions, and the environment (Brown & Lent, 2019; Lent & Brown, 2008; Lent et al., 1994). SCCT used that foundation to examine self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and objectives to assess individual motivations. Since SCCT was developed, it has undergone several iterations to encompass the impacts of career development, job satisfaction, and well-being (Brown & Lent, 2019). The three interdependent components of career development assess how fundamental career (a) interests emerge, (b) choices are made, and (c) performance achievement is attained (Brown & Lent, 2019). SCCT illuminated how urban ECHS teachers' belief in their ability to accomplish and influence their goals and perceived environmental support affects the meaning associated with experiences and occupational interests (Brown & Lent, 2019; Lent & Brown, 2008).

Exposure to environments that encourage experiences involving personal interests enhances self-efficacy and positive outcomes (Brown & Lent, 2019). Meanwhile, people naturally avoid adverse outcomes to reach positive results that influence behavior. For instance, SCCT research showed that individuals with high levels of occupational self-efficacy and learning interest are better equipped to devote more time and effort to work-related pursuits (Shang et al., 2022). Experiencing success or failure evolves crucial personal knowledge to transform or sustain self-efficacy attitudes and outcome expectations, developing an abiding interest or disinterest in future similar activities (Brown & Lent, 2019; Lent et al., 1994).

SCCT highlights the influence of cultural and social factors on self-awareness and decision-making (Brown & Lent, 2019). Personally chosen goals increase the possibility that people will execute actions to reach their objectives, particularly if they are distinct, apparent, tightly held, expressed in society, and backed by close friends and family (Shang et al., 2022). SCCT was employed to examine experiences to explain participants' self-efficacy related to their approach to the effort exerted in activities and persistence to overcome challenges of teaching environments (Brown & Lent, 2019). Developing substantial goal- and task-specific self-efficacy beliefs with sufficient support might assist teachers in setting demanding job-related goals associated with working within an urban ECHS setting, indicating an essential component to teachers' perseverance and subsequent success (Lent & Brown, 2008).

Through SCCT, the study's progress was chronicled, and an understanding of the urban ECHS teacher's experiences and perceptions of the environment was analyzed (Lent et al., 1994). The primary determinant in forming efficacy beliefs is how individuals perceive, encode, and recollect their performances or setting, not just the objective degree of the specific performance solely (Bandura, 1986). With continued exposure to certain stimuli or activities, teachers are predisposed to hone their skills, develop performance standards, establish efficacy within tasks, and foster expectations (Brown & Lent, 2019). Since mastery experiences are mentally prominent and embedded in individuals' memory (Bandura, 1997), teachers' internal performance appraisal will glimpse the perceived sense of their quality of work (Lent & Brown, 2008).

SCCT acknowledges a correlation between environmental factors and the meanings people associate with job satisfaction, well-being, and self-management (Brown & Lent, 2019). Teachers' engagement, energy, commitment, and acceptance of their work are indicators of job

satisfaction and self-efficacy. SCCT theory could explain how teachers fostered their vocational interests, determined career choice, and why they chose to stay in the profession to work with urban ECHS students. The core elements of SCCT will develop a framework that helps generate a meaningful understanding of the participants and their experiences and perceptions.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT) holds that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are the three fundamental innate and universal psychological needs that drive human growth (Deci et al., 2017; Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021; Kaplan, 2021). The three factors facilitate beliefs that individuals have control and ownership in their abilities to perform and experience meaningful interpersonal relationships with others (Deci, 2008; Gagne & Deci, 2005). When the conditions are met, the highest levels of intrinsic motivation and goals are promoted, supporting well-being and beneficial interaction for the system (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Gagne & Deci, 2005). Deci et al. (2017) postulated that in self-determination theory, individuals are more driven to engage when they believe their actions will influence the outcome. The premise is that when teachers feel more accomplished, they dedicate more energy towards job-related tasks (Deci, 2008).

Organizations that foster individual perceptions of respect, autonomy to make choices, competence in work, and relatedness with others increase self-efficacy, motivation, and job satisfaction (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). The desire for effectiveness and the belief that one can expedite intent, plans, and objectives is referred to as the need for competence. To build a work identity, people should deliberately and intrepidly establish goals, attitudes, beliefs, and genuine interests that reflect their strengths and preferences (Kaplan, 2021). The conception of relatedness is developing relationships or attachments with individuals is an aspect of one's sense of community in an organization (Deci, 2009). An individual's drive to preserve intimate, stable,

and gratifying connections with individuals in social situations is the need for relatedness (Deci et al., 2017; Kaplan, 2021). Relatedness in a school setting could encompass teachers' connections with colleagues, leaders, students, and other stakeholders (Deci, 2009).

Further, self-determination theory differentiates intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for engaging in tasks or responsibilities (Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 1985). Intrinsic motivation is the internal desire to pursue something based on personal interest or enjoyment. In contrast, extrinsic motivations are external factors that compel individuals to complete a task. Self-determined or intrinsic motivation is positively correlated with positive outcomes on job performance, satisfaction, initiative, and commitment (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). The idea is to reward and motivate employees by providing opportunities to utilize autonomous self-determination to achieve aspirations (Deci et al., 2017).

The study will consider how experiences are influenced by the nature of the urban ECHS environment and how self-determination theory can impact attitudes and performance at work. Notably, ECHS teachers' responsibilities may demand advanced cognitive and emotional competencies, which are more probable to be created, applied, and maintained when supported by self-determined motivation. Therefore, ECHS teachers should understand how future work may satisfy or fall short of the psychological needs suggested by self-determination theory to increase career effectiveness. To forecast these effects, self-determination theory provides an insightful multidimensional conception of motivation.

College and Career Readiness Education Innovation

College and career readiness is a crucial component of state educational policies with multifaceted definitions supported by critical components like curricula, learning environments, accountability frameworks, and assessments. College-ready students are more equipped for

whatever postsecondary route they choose following high school, whether enrolling in higher education, obtaining a job, learning a trade, or joining the military (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019). According to the American College Testing Association (ACT), students who are college and career ready possess the knowledge and skills necessary for enrollment within a first-year course level at a 2- or 4-year college or university or technical or trade school or training aligned with certification programs for a career (Green et al., 2023). Students' academic performance in English and Mathematics has been the barometer for measuring college and career readiness. Green et al. (2023) noted that based on this definition, roughly one-quarter of students identified as first-generation college goers, African American, and lower socioeconomic demonstrated college readiness, which is lower than their peers.

The ACT college readiness rate highlighted a problem within the United States in preparing all students for postsecondary endeavors (ACT, 2018). State adopted college and career readiness definitions were developed based on research encompassing nonacademic factors such as "cognitive strategies, content knowledge, learning skills and techniques, and transition knowledge and skills" (Green et al., 2023, p. 222). For example, with over 900,000 students within 32 school districts, the New York City Department of Education is the largest in the country and defines college and career readiness as:

> A student who: (1) can successfully meet DOE's criteria for graduation from high school and obtain the highest possible diploma/credential; (2) can make an informed decision about immediate next steps after high school; (3) is able to enter a postsecondary pathway without the need for remedial instruction/training; and (4) persists through a postsecondary pathway that leads to a degree, credential, and/or employment providing family-sustaining wages. (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022, para. 6)

Additionally, the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) developed the Career Readiness Initiative in 2015 with an inventory of critical competencies to further expand readiness to include professionalism, communication, problem-solving, collaboration, leadership, and global fluency (Green et al., 2023; NACE, 2018).

Researchers suggest that collegegoer cultures in high schools can bolster students' aspirations and preparation for postsecondary education (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). According to the former Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, Arne Duncan, "Improving education is…the civil rights issue of our generation—the only sure path out of poverty and the only way to achieve the vision of equality spelled out by our founders" (Duncan, 2009; State Fiscal Stabilization Update). An analysis of the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 to 2006 demonstrated that school climate, safety, and extracurricular possibilities enhance the collegegoers culture, college enrollment, and persistence (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). Dual enrollment programs were recognized as an aspect in college and career readiness by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (Green et al., 2023). Transferring to different high schools and finishing the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), used to prepare students for the college admissions exams, was critical to college success. Positive collegegoer school climates incorporating intervention programs that support students' social, emotional, and learning through regular academic advising (Green et al., 2023), college preparatory classes, and college counseling produce more significant success (Knight & Duncheon, 2020).

College and career readiness preparation have been undertaken through federal, state, community, college, and K-12 initiatives (Green et al., 2023). Establishing a skilled workforce is a basis for school reform and all student achievement (Podolsky et al., 2019). This review

focuses on federal laws, No Child Left Behind, Every Student Succeeds Act, and state legislation that have facilitated the development of ECHS models.

No Child Left Behind

President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act into law on January 8, 2002, to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, previously reauthorized in 1994 (Bell & Meinelt, 2011; Usher, 2011). As a component of the Great Society initiative, led by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the ESEA established an explicit function for the federal government in K–12 policy. The perception that the American educational system was incapable of competing worldwide led to a significant expansion in the federal government's role in holding schools accountable for the academic advancement of all students (Hackmann et al., 2019; Walk, 2020; Ydesen & Dorn, 2022). According to Bell and Meinelt (2011), "Bush decried the 'soft bigotry of low expectations' of African American, Hispanic, and disabled students and gave the law its name*: No Child Left Behind*" (p. 11). As possibly the most significant component of educational legislation in U.S. history, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) altered how schools were organized and operated, realigned authority relationships, and established a new framework for thinking about and discussing teachers' expectations and student learning (Bell & Meinelt, 2011; Ydesen & Dorn, 2022).

NCLB established a unique precedent for highly qualified educators. Bachelor's degrees and content-specific certification became prerequisites for teaching their subjects (Hackmann et al., 2019; Walk, 2020). Under NCLB, states were granted Title I funding to provide more resources for underfunded schools to establish research-based teaching initiatives and professional development in schools to support socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Initially, the Title I statutory section of ESEA provided districts with over $1 billion in financial

support annually to assist with the expenses associated with teaching low-income students (Ydesen & Dorn, 2022).

NCLB measured all students' progress and promoted the necessity of highly qualified teachers and research-driven instructional practices (Bell & Meinelt, 2011). Components of the law also addressed the achievement gap, bolstered state accountability for student achievement, and required data desegregation for tracking student subgroups, particularly those at-risk. Standardized state tests were mandated to assess student performance to determine the school's yearly progress goals toward proficiency (Bell & Meinelt, 2011; Usher, 2011). The expectation was that all students would have been 100% proficient in reading and mathematics by 2014. NCLB required states to develop avenues for schools to desegregate data by race and ethnicity, economic status, disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and English proficiency. Report cards accounting for student progress publicly documented adequate yearly progress (AYP) determined by subgroup and all students meeting benchmarks for the school's good standing (Hackmann et al., 2019; Walk, 2020). Schools considered failing received intervention followed by restructuring, including staff replacements if unable to meet AYP standards. However, schools with outstanding performance measured by AYP were granted financial incentives.

According to the requirements outlined by NCLB state testing, 48% of public schools nationwide did not meet AYP during the 2010–2011 school year, as reported by the Center for Education Policy (CEP; Bell & Meinelt, 2011; Usher, 2011). Among the schools that reported AYP in 24 states and the District of Columbia, about 50% of the public schools did not meet the standards (Usher, 2011). Failures by the state in 2011 ranged from approximately 11% of schools in Wisconsin to 89% of schools in Florida despite meeting AYP standards trending upward from

29% in 2006 to 48% in 2011. Even though many state governors supported the establishment of NCLB, the dispute over the legislation's rigorous requirements still developed (Schneider, 2022). The mounting drive for states to require standardized assessment scores for advancement resulted in a decline in minority students' percentages of graduates (Benson & Owens, 2022). Many argued that students who did not identify with the syntax on standardized examinations, representing social and cultural standards for middle-class racially specific identities, were fundamentally at a distinct advantage over other learners, especially nonnative English speakers and those who engaged in an alternative conversational language outside of school.

In 2011, President Barack Obama publicized that the Department of Education would allow states to submit ESEA Flexibility waivers to NCLB stipulations to enable states to develop common core education reforms (Bell & Meinelt, 2011). The waiver required states to develop more assertive teacher and administrator evaluation systems and detailed intervention for underperforming locations (Bell & Meinelt, 2011), and a definition of college and career readiness (Hackmann et al., 2019). States were required to embrace the Common Core State Standards or request higher education organizations certify academic rigor in exchange for facilitating college and workplace preparedness for students (Hackmann et al., 2019; Pak & Desimone, 2019). More flexibility was projected to mark a decline in NCLB stringent stipulations for AYP (Usher, 2011) rather than a focus on student growth and progress.

Every Student Succeeds Act

In 2015, President Obama reauthorized the ESEA as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to reform NCLB, enabling states to regain the authority to develop accountability systems and reduce the federal Department of Education (DOE) authority (Hackmann et al., 2019). ESSA changed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act's broad guidelines to eliminate the

lockstep effects from NCLB, relax the stringent requirements of AYP that were enshrined in federal law 13 years earlier, and limit the federal department's capacity to disapprove state legislation for deviation (Ydesen & Dorn, 2022). ESSA still mandated annual assessments, but the purpose of the federal law changed from enforcing penalties to a more intricate structure involving primary and secondary education monitoring strategies. Meaningful academic and nonacademic focus on the achievement gap through measures that ensure all graduates possess college and career readiness was incorporated (Schneider, 2022). Some tensions regarding NCLB policies between the federal and state governments were resolved with ESSA (Ydesen & Dorn, 2022).

States were encouraged to design college and career readiness strategies that provided a comprehensive education for all students, an accountability process to measure readiness from preschool to career, and a meaningful assessment system with summative, interim, and formative evaluations taking into account student demographics embedded within ESSA statutory sections Title I, II, III, and IV (Hackmann et al., 2019; Walk, 2020). ESSA stipulated Title I guidelines at the state, district, and school levels must identify numerous educational conditions, in addition to requirements for Titles II and IV to convey a variety of support options. ESSA's Title I, "Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged" seeks to narrow achievement disparities by supporting ECHS to ensure equity for all (Walk, 2020). With Title II, one objective is recruiting and developing highly qualified teachers to obtain credentialling for teaching college courses in ECHS (Hackmann et al., 2019; Walk, 2020). Title III was designated for English-language learners and Title IV for engaging and supportive curriculum during and after regular school hours funds could be diverted to high schools for college coursework for students (Hackmann et al., 2019; Walk, 2020). Finally, in 2016 the U.S. DOE adjusted legislation to

permit high school students to receive Pell Grants and Perkins V funds to finance college courses.

The two fundamental elements of a comprehensive education are included in the academic and nonacademic aspects of states' college and career readiness definitions and were supported by ESSA. The first was enriched, advanced courses beyond targeted state testing areas that align with postsecondary experiences (Hackmann et al., 2019). Academic standards were required to meet the nonremedial core class levels at a public state postsecondary institution and establish career and technical education standards. Secondly, learning environments were required to expand beyond NCLB safe and drug free schools to support social-emotional learning to enhance intrapersonal and employability skills (Hackmann et al., 2019). ESSA allowed states to employ important readiness metrics for accountability along the educational P-20 trajectory instead of concentrating solely on concluding criteria like high school graduation. Significant early interventions can be triggered by processes of accountability that structure vital educational benchmarks to maintain students on pace for college and career readiness.

However, the extensive ESSA guidelines developed to direct state-level application of the law were abolished in maneuvers by President Donald Trump and the Former Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, in March 2017 (McGuinn, 2019). Several civil rights and anti-poverty organizations applauded both administrations' zealous use of federal authority simultaneously since many believed it was vital to compel states to confront persistent racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps. The ESSA changes offered states more latitude in creating accountability plans (McGuinn, 2019). After 1 year into the state ESSA planning process, legislators discovered that the ambiguity in the regulatory revision language needed more specificity to enable state legislation to be authorized. Notably, language regarding college and career readiness was

removed, thereby diminishing the attempt to address student readiness through college preparation (Hackmann et al., 2019).

State Legislation Regarding College and Career Readiness

The literature indicated that early college high schools are typically schools of choice in charters and districts; therefore, parents and students accept the prospect of obtaining college credits while completing high school. College in high school programs was incorporated into the vision of 47 states and the District of Columbia plans, 37 state accountability systems, and 36 states and the District of Columbia in sections beyond accountability (Walk, 2020). Hackmann et al. (2019) suggested that "some states expanded beyond the minimum expectations in the ESSA template in their submissions…to provide compelling college and career readiness visions that may translate into action" (p. 21). State pledges for college and career readiness, like those in Texas, North Carolina, and Michigan, were critical to continuing efforts towards preparing students for college when the Gates Foundation funding ended (Walk, 2020).

States promoted collaborations among K-12 districts or charters and institutes of higher education and nonprofit organizations to facilitate pathways for students' exposure to college coursework (Green et al., 2023). The Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2022) developed College and Career Readiness School Models (CCRSM), which reported that the network had 214 ECHS campuses in Texas, with more in the planning phase. Administrative support, professional development, and teacher autonomy are aspects outlined in the CCRSM blueprint design documents by the Texas Education Agency (Knight et al., 2022). CCRSM schools are allocated additional funding allowing teacher professional development and other retention-related teacher services (TEA, 2022). Pennsylvania expressed that districts could utilize federal funds, such as Title II funds, for professional development for teachers to gain the expertise and credentials

essential to provide instruction as a component of a dual/concurrent enrollment program and to enhance schools' recognition of students for involvement in college-level coursework (Knight et al., 2022). Through the Innovative Education Initiatives Act of 2003, the collaborations among the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina Community College system, and the University of North Carolina system, the state launched over 70 ECHSs between 2004 and 2010 (Walk, 2020). The act provided subsequent funding to assist with financing college tuition as well as the necessary exemptions on attendance policies and calendar changes. Five ECHS programs were established in Massachusetts in 2018 (Charlestown Patriot-Bridge, 2018), and a new BHSEC was established in Washington, D.C., in 2019 (Walk, 2020).

Even though innovative programs are constantly emerging, several early college programs collapsed or ceased to operate in their initial configuration due to budgetary constraints (Alvarado, 2018; Rice, 2019; Walk, 2020). Coherent college course sequences and pathways were established by the Early College Expansion Partnership between Jobs for the Future and three school districts in Colorado and Texas (Walk, 2020). The federal Investing in Innovation (i3) grant from 2012-2018 supported the partner’s work and uncovered staffing issues for dual credit classes.

Evolution of ECHS

The ESSA described early college high schools as partnerships with secondary and postsecondary education settings in which students dually enroll in a structured academic program to complete high school and at least 12 free college credit hours (Adams et al., 2020; Duncheon, 2020; Walk, 2020). In 2002, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other contributors provided hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars in funding to increase readiness and promote college and university attendance for underrepresented students, named the Early

College High Schools Initiative (ECHSI; Calhoun et al., 2019; Walk, 2020). Beginning with Guilford College in North Carolina, the foundation provided funding for establishing over 200 early college institutions as part of the ECHSI between 2002 and 2009, specifically serving students from historically underrepresented groups in higher education (Zelnicker, 2018). The ECHSI's tenets of conduct were:

> (a) a commitment to serve underrepresented students; (b) the local district, the institute of higher education, and the surrounding community all sustain and account for student success; (c) all students should be able to earn up to 2 years of transferable college credit as a part of the academic program; (d) support systems must be in place to ensure students develop the comprehensive skillsets needed for college completion; and (e) all partners work to advocate for policies that support the progression of the E.C. movement. (Adams et al., 2020, p. 15)

Many ECHS program blueprints emulate Bard High School Early College (BHSEC) in New York City, which opened in 2001 (D'Orio, 2022; Walk, 2020). Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, published *Jefferson's Children: Education and the Promise of American Culture,* reasoning that the "American high school is obsolete. It can no longer fulfill the expectations we legitimately place on it" (Botstein, 1997, p. 79). In the early college programs offered by Bard, which include full-day programs in New Orleans and Harlem as well as half-day programs in Cleveland, Newark, and Baltimore, the student demographic consists of 40% Black, 25% White, 16% Latino, and 15% Asian and more than 60% of students were entitled to free or reduced lunch (Walk, 2020). Since campuses vary in how they offer college courses, some mainly assigned high school teachers to conduct college classes, others maintain separation of high school teachers and college professors (Berger et al., 2010; Walk, 2020). BHSEC maintains it is

an all-inclusive institution offering high school as a full-fledged department of Bard College, where all grades are taught by professors (Walk, 2020).

Strong instructional leadership, lofty expectations, and whole student support enabled students to succeed at ECHS campuses and increased their desire to continue their education (Burns et al., 2018). The results of Song et al.'s (2021) longitudinal study showed that the effects of ECHS were not significantly different for differing student demographics; instead, some effects were noticeably stronger for students with past accomplishments. ECHS students typically exhibit better attendance, fewer suspension, and higher graduation rates as well as equivalent or marginally higher college grade point averages compared to similar high school students in traditional settings (Song et al., 2021; Walk, 2020). ECHS significantly increased the probability that students will matriculate to college, earn credits, and complete an undergraduate degree (Burns et al., 2018; Song et al., 2021; Walk, 2020). According to an impact study, students who attend ECHS model schools were more likely than their peers to enroll in and complete their college degrees within 4 to 6 years of graduating from high school, with overall degree attainment rates of 45.4% versus 33.5% (Song et al., 2021).

The National Student Clearinghouse (2022) reported that among the schools and students who submitted data (57% and 46% of public high schools in 2020 and 2021, respectively), high poverty (46%), low income (49%), high minority (51%), and urban (56%) public non-charter schools continue to report significantly lower percentages of students who enroll in postsecondary institutions during the fall semester after high school graduation. Students from schools that reported low poverty (72%), higher income (64%), low minority (64%), and suburban (62%) demonstrated higher percentages of immediate enrollment. High poverty (73%), low income (76%), high minority (78%), and urban (81%) students also persist into the second

year of postsecondary at a lower rate compared to low poverty (90%), higher income (86%), low minority (86%), and suburban (85%; NSC, 2022). Non-Hispanic White students reported a more significant percentage of earning at least a high school diploma, and Asian students reported the highest rate of obtaining a bachelor's degree or higher than other groups. Again, these rates showed that they outperformed their African American counterparts. These findings highlighted the importance of models like ECHS that target underrepresented populations to help facilitate interest in transitioning from high school to college (Burns et al., 2018).

Dual Credit Versus ECHS

Dual credit programs were created in 1955 for high-achieving high school pupils who were anticipated to be sought after by colleges and universities (Faught et al., 2022). Nationwide, the program has expanded to incorporate all students who meet the requirements of the institutions offering the opportunity. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) describes dual credit as an instructional environment that enables high school students to concurrently enroll in college and high school to receive academic credits (TEA, 2022). TEA (2018) House Bill 1638: Statewide Dual Credit Goals established that collaborations through a memorandum of understanding between an independent school district and institution of higher education would ensure that dual credit programs help students progress efficiently from secondary school to higher education. Further, to effectively transition into completing college courses, dual credit students are provided with academic and college readiness coaching as well as student support resources (TEA, 2018).

Unlike the Texas ECHS model that begins in the students' ninth-grade year of high school, dual credit is typically offered to students in their junior and senior years (Faught et al., 2022). A significant percentage of these students' education does not consist of dual credit

courses, nor do they always directly contribute to a certain degree of study. With a select few well-chosen courses, dual credit allows students to experience college and generate a smoother transition into higher education (Faught et al., 2022; TEA, 2022). Beyond the statutory minimum assurance, students or families may be required to assume monetary responsibility for dual credit participation (Faught et al., 2022). Meanwhile, an early college high school is an open-enrollment high school that collaborates with postsecondary institutions to target historically underrepresented students (Berger et al., 2010; Mollet et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021). ECHS combines the academic programs of high school and college through a variety of free accelerated college courses on a specific degree track, such as Liberal Arts, to earn at least 12 credit hours (Zeiser et al., 2021) or complete the first 2 years of college (Song et al., 2021).

In both models, students complete immersive college-level classes taught in partnership with at least one higher education institution and at least one secondary agency by professors or credentialed high school teachers for secondary and postsecondary course credits (Zeiser et al., 2021). Rigorous college coursework is designed to institution of higher education (IHE) standards, and difficulty level helps to guarantee student success in succeeding courses. Through independent school district (ISD) and IHE partnerships, students can transfer college credits toward a degree (TEA, 2018).

Texas ECHS Policy

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) represents the governing body responsible for Texas ECHS models, regulating resources for students' academic and social support for public education for the state (TEA, 2023). Within the Texas Administrative Code (TAC) 102.1091 (Early College High Schools, 2007) and Texas Education Code (TEC) 29.908(b) (Early College Education Program, 2002), the parameters and conditions needed for a high school to be labeled

an ECHS in the state of Texas are outlined. TEA characterizes ECHSs as “open-enrollment high schools that allow students least likely to attend college an opportunity to receive both a high school diploma and either an associate degree or at least 60 credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree” (TEA, 2022, para. 1). The College and Career Readiness School Models (CCRSM), created by the Texas Education Agency (TEA; 2022), has 214 ECHS locations and are increasing.

Before the ECHS design, Texas' ECHSs were assessed using identical criteria as a regular high school. Since the 2018–2019 academic year, the system transitioned to the outcomes-based measures (OBM) provided in the CCRSM ECHS blueprint to guarantee standards for all schools to strive toward achieving postsecondary academic advancements (TEA, 2023). The OBM evaluative criteria are (a) Targeted Population, (b) Partnership Agreement, (c) P-16 Leadership Initiatives, (d) Curriculum and Support, (e) Academic Rigor and Readiness, and (f) School Design to determine access, attainment, and achievement (TEA, 2023). Accomplishment OBM examines rates related to the Texas Success Initiative Assessment (TSIA) college preparedness standards and summative examination results for Algebra I and English II. These measures are assessed to distinguish schools as provisional early colleges, early colleges, or distinguished early colleges. Student retention, English and Math college course completion, college credit accumulation, postsecondary credential attainment, and high school graduation proportion are the factors that indicate whether OBM's goals were attained.

Although Texas ECHS's main objective is to encourage underrepresented students to enroll in ECHSs after high school (Berger et al., 2010), blueprint resources include sections on administrative support, professional development, and leadership autonomy (Knight et al., 2022). Funding is provided to the CCRSM schools to support teacher professional growth and other

teacher engagement-related services (TEA, 2023). ECHS teachers must meet state requirements to teach college courses through a regional community college or university accrediting association (TEA, 2023). The data-driven identification of students' needs should guide the yearly teacher and staff professional development which emphasizes college and career readiness. Ongoing formative observation, peer feedback, social and emotional training for advisors, and novice teacher mentorship and induction program are examples of professional development.

Student Support System

ECHS students attributed perceived increased academic rigorousness, supportive relationships with teachers, a collegiate atmosphere, and earning credits to their success (Edmunds et al., 2020; Song et al., 2021; Walk, 2020). In an impact study, students who attend ECHS model schools have shown more success in college enrollment and completion within 4 to 6 years after high school than their counterparts, with 45.4% compared to 33.5% degree attainment (Song et al., 2021). These data are partly due to the intense individualized support each student receives from school leadership, teachers, counselors, and other staff (Calhoun et al., 2019). ECHS programs are designed to help students who typically struggle in school, making preparation and support more vital. Students typically start an ECHS at ages 14 and 15, making the transition into collegegoers' mindset essential (Duncheon, 2020). These students receive emotional, social, and academic resources (Calhoun et al., 2019; Duncheon, 2020) to nurture study skills, college readiness, technical skills, and adaptability incorporated into the everyday curriculum (Calhoun et al., 2019; Villarreal et al., 2018).

Empirical research demonstrated that teachers are the most integral part of student success fostering engagement and learning (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Viac &

Fraser, 2020). The vision to promote a nurturing environment originates from the administration and trickles down to the teachers who buy into the idea of whole student instructional, emotional, and physical support. Students reported that staff support created a feeling of safety, belonging, and genuine care amongst students (Adams et al., 2020; Brooms, 2018; Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018). African American male students reported that the ECHS learning environment felt familial in their peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher relationships. The literature highlighted how ECHS students regarded teachers' support and how the school environment fostered academic success (Adams et al., 2020).

Effective school leadership begins with effectively managing internal processes that generate favorable conditions for developing curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018; Villarreal et al., 2018). School administrators are crucial to student's academic success or failure as they lead the entire campus (Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018). ECHS model leaders who utilize transformational leadership strategies establish atmospheres conducive to evolving positive school culture and motivate their followers (i.e., teachers and students) to exceed aspirations (Adams et al., 2020; Villarreal et al., 2018). Through intentional, thoughtful design and implementation of school policies and procedures, leaders provide access to the necessary resources to foster student achievement (Brooms, 2018).

High Expectations for Student Performance

Studies have shown that administrators working with students of color, such as African American males, must develop a culture centered on lofty expectations for students and staff (Adams et al., 2020; Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018). During the ninth-grade year, the onset of the ECHS experience, students are exposed to a rigorous curriculum through enrollment in pre-advanced placement, advanced placement, and dual enrollment courses (Duncheon &

DeMatthews, 2018). Instruction is often provided on the high school campus with teachers credentialed to teach high school and college-level courses and at the institution of higher education (IHE) partner campus amongst the general college student population. According to Villarreal et al.'s (2018) study, "dual enrollment emerged as a significant predictor of basic skills, thinking skills, and interpersonal skills" (p. 487). The study also suggested a correlation between the number of dual credits earned with increased college readiness (Burns et al., 2018; Villarreal et al., 2018). Moreover, the opportunity to take courses at the IHE improved the socialization of students in the college culture and the desire to persist in college (Duncheon, 2020).

Students stated that positive relationships with teachers with high expectations for student output contributed to their success (Adams et al., 2020). Specifically, students in ECHS and collegiate Black Male Initiative programs revealed the importance of staff members who could relate to their perspectives and culture while holding them accountable to do their best work (Adams et al., 2020; Brooms, 2018). To ensure ECHS teachers were held to a high standard, Duncheon (2020) shared that some campuses engage in professional learning communities and receive professional development through content experts, mentorship programs, and instructional rounds with peers and administrators to teach these skills. Students who attend ECHS models perform better academically and transition to postsecondary more frequently than students at traditional high schools (Duncheon, 2020; Song et al., 2021).

Impact of Teachers' Influence

Staffing and retaining highly skilled teachers are vital to students' success in underrepresented communities (Podolsky et al., 2019). With the nationwide teacher shortage, little attention is directed at the ECHS teachers' prospects and views beyond general comments. Although there is proof of beneficial effects, limited quantitative research has been done on the

internal operations of these institutions, and policymakers need to gain more understanding of the potential drivers of their effectiveness (Knight et al., 2022). Students cited supportive relationships with teachers as positive motivation for achieving success and striving toward future endeavors (Mollet et al., 2020). Teachers influence students' perceptions of hope, self-efficacy, and self-confidence to make positive decisions for the future. Teaching cognitive skills coupled with cultural familiarity enables students to navigate the expectations of ECHS learning environments more effectively (Duncheon, 2020).

Often new teachers need to be made aware of the nuances that develop an effective classroom environment where teaching and learning can thrive (Mollet et al., 2020). One study demonstrated that professors with dual roles as ECHS teachers struggled to impact students. Primarily, these individuals maintained unrealistic expectations of ECHS students and were unwilling to embrace the ECHS mission. According to Mollet et al. (2020), understanding the teachers' role in students' experiences and the student's perception that teachers are conduits to daily support is critical to successful classroom management.

Urban School Culture and Climate

Although each urban school represents a unique social context, urban schools in the United States are typically in large, densely populated metropolitan areas (Milner, 2012; Schaffer et al., 2018; Welsh & Swain, 2020). When strictly basing urban schools on the surrounding population, examples of urban cities include Atlanta, Houston, and New York. However, Milner's (2012), a pioneer in urban education research, model challenged researchers, legislators, and educators' perceptions by expanding the definition to consider the surrounding population, race, academic, economic, and social framework that affect the school.

Milner (2012) argued that urban schools should be grouped as urban intensive, urban emergent, and urban characteristic to consider the unique circumstances that urban schools and urban districts encounter. Urban intensive are large schools located in large metropolitan cities with over one million people where outside factors such as housing and poverty affect the school (Milner, 2012). Demographic data indicated that there are a considerable number of students from minorities and immigrants living in poverty in these heavily populated schools (Schaffer et al., 2018). Urban emergent schools are locales with less than one million population that experience similar characteristics outside of school as the urban intensive. In comparison, urban characteristics are typically in areas that are not considered urban, such as rural or suburban schools that experience similar contexts as urban intensive and emergent (Milner, 2012; Schaffer et al., 2018). These educational organizations are experiencing a rise in racial, linguistic, cultural, and low-socioeconomic diversity among their student population (Schaffer et al., 2018). For this research, Milner's characterizations of urban schools were the guidepost throughout the exploration of ECHS teachers' experiences working in urban ECHS environments.

Students and educators in urban settings have been documented as having more substantial challenges to being competitive than in nonurban schools (Benson & Owens, 2022; Milner, 2012; Schaffer et al., 2018; Welsh & Swain, 2020). Characteristically urban school populations are often disproportionately students of color, with higher concentrations of English language learners often living in impoverished communities (Benson & Owens, 2022; Milner, 2012). For example, while "the New York City public school district is comprised of 41% Latinx, 26% African American, and 16% Asian students, the Los Angeles Unified School District is 73% Latinx, 8% African American, and 6% Asian students (NCES, 2019)" (Ghavami et al., 2020, p. 2). At the primary and secondary levels, urban schools typically have more

children from low-income families living in deteriorating neighborhoods with more violent crime and few resources (Milner, 2012; NCES, 2013; Walcott, 2019).

Academic attainment and results among students in urban and suburban educational settings have frequently been shown to differ in empirical investigations (Morgan et al., 2019). Often termed high-poverty schools, typically over 40% of students receive free or reduced-price lunches (Walcott, 2019). Lower achievement scores are documented in reading/English language arts, mathematics, and science. Academic discrepancies are correlated with an elevated risk of academic, social, and behavioral problems at school and in the long term (Morgan et al., 2019). Urban students have higher incidents of risky behavior, such as absenteeism, school discipline problems, weapon possession, and teen pregnancy. These students are typically categorized as at risk of abandoning high school and having less postsecondary matriculation to university (Morgan et al., 2019; Muñoz et al., 2014). Students in high-poverty schools typically are more distracted by television, spend less time on homework, and feel less safe at school than those in low-poverty school environments (Morgan et al., 2019).

Commonly, urban instructors have much fewer resources, less classroom experience, and less influence over their curriculum than teachers in other settings (Morgan et al., 2019; Schaffer et al., 2018). According to Knight & Duncheon (2020), "Research has shown that a positive school climate is beneficial for students' academic, social, and emotional development…Yet creating and sustaining a positive school climate can be difficult, particularly in under-resourced, low-performing schools" (p. 315). Although teacher turnover rates differ significantly, high-poverty schools disproportionately develop chronic attrition at rates above 30 percent average in some regions (Knight et al., 2022; Viac & Fraser, 2020). Teacher turnover in high-need schools like urban environments often results in vacancies filled by inexperienced teachers, with school

administrators scrambling to accommodate the loss (Mitani et al., 2022). Multiple reauthorizations of the significant educational initiative funded by the federal government have kept teacher quality, equity, and distribution at the top of the agenda through ongoing discussions between the federal and state governments (Sykes & Martin, 2019, p. 3).

While the distribution of instructors in low-income schools and historically marginalized student populations was unequal (Sykes & Martin, 2019), in several qualitative studies, educators tend to favor working with students who have historically not had equal opportunities for learning in U.S. institutions of higher learning, such as low-income pupils and minority pupils (Knight et al., 2022). If ECHS teachers had a restricted understanding of urban, whether intensive, emergent, or characteristic, they might not have been adequately prepared to work in various urban ECHS environments. Consequently, they might downplay the significance of comprehending social context and concentrate solely on teaching content knowledge and pedagogical techniques. ECHS teachers might also be susceptible to preconceived notions about ECHS urban schools and disregard initiatives to learn about instructing pupils from various racial, social, cultural, linguistic, or economic backgrounds.

Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction

Teacher occupational motivation is an abstract concept for why individuals become teachers (Tang et al., 2020). Their job satisfaction significantly influences teachers' keenness to stay in the profession and persuade others to pursue educational careers (Baluyos et al., 2019). Perceptions associated with working conditions significantly influence individuals' self-efficacy, wellness, commitment, and stress levels (Farmer, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Viac & Fraser, 2020). The necessity of learning more about the relationship between teachers' workplace circumstances, motivation, and the effectiveness of teaching on student learning has been

recognized as a critical area for research by various countries (Baluyos et al., 2019; Viac & Fraser, 2020). District, state, and national policy literature highlight improved pay, benefits, loan forgiveness, management practices, mentoring, coaching, and professional development that affect teachers' resolve to continue teaching (Podolsky et al., 2019). These have been subjects of research into local, state, and national policy efforts.

The existing literature has a variety of essential variables that may aid in identifying employment resources for teachers that promote motivation and job satisfaction. According to Hakanen et al. (2006), significant motivators to improve commitment or engagement are autonomy, access to information, supportive leaders, a creative school environment, and social culture. Bakker et al. (2007) proposed that in addition to those qualities, teacher motivation stemmed from appreciation and organizational climate rather than social culture. Later research reported feedback, administrative and colleague support, professional development, and autonomy as indicators (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) discovered that teacher autonomy is linked to self-efficacy, and each positively influenced work motivation and emotional well-being and "predictors of engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion" (p. 523). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Job Quality Framework specified that teacher motivation springs from autonomy, learning, and support as resources that positively affect teachers' well-being (Viac & Fraser, 2020).

Teacher Autonomy

Teacher professional autonomy related to the free will to select colleague relationships, instructional methodologies, resource materials, and delivery techniques within the constraints of the curriculum (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). According to self-determination theory, human development is driven by the basic psychological needs for autonomy in addition to competence

and relatedness (Deci et al., 2017; Kaplan, 2021). In this framework, autonomy refers to feeling empowered or taking responsibility, whereas competence refers to how confident an individual is in their abilities to perform a function (Deci, 2008). When the requirements are satisfied, the best motivational qualities and intrinsic goals are encouraged, which supports psychological well-being and productive interaction benefiting the entire system. Strong intrinsic motivation allows teachers to devote considerable time and energy to instruction, propelling professional growth (Liu et al., 2019). All teachers are impacted by external circumstances, which can either be internalized and viewed positively or may discourage and negatively affect teacher motivation. Organizations thrive when they allow employees to exert autonomy about their job duties.

In surveys conducted by the NCES of over 37,000 American public-school teachers throughout three intervals between 2003 and 2011, teachers revealed that they perceive their level of autonomy has decreased over time (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). Organizational learning cultures are developed and maintained by leaders who uphold an inclusive leadership style that enables teachers to participate in decision-making, collaborate on school improvement, and practice their professional autonomy. Positive outcomes such as increased ownership behavior and competence develop individual purpose at work (Deci et al., 2017; Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021; Kaplan, 2021). Understanding how autonomy impacts teachers increases the opportunity for stakeholders at all levels to develop a greater awareness of how this factor impacts ECHS urban teachers' perceptions of their experiences.

Professional Learning

The teacher education process is enduring, beginning with crucial teacher training and extending professional development possibilities throughout a teacher's career. Whether through formal professional development, feedback, or informal collaboration, the opportunity to engage

in professional learning is a positive motivator for educators. According to the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), professional development includes "activities that develop an individual's skills, knowledge, expertise and other characteristics as a teacher" (OECD, 2009, p. 49). Delivery may be provided externally through classes, seminars, or programs leading to formal qualifications, collaborative efforts between campuses or instructors, or school-based learning. The educational framework of professional learning allows teachers to work collaboratively to develop new instruction methods and personal learning.

Highly trained teaching staff contributes to efficiently developing students' learning (Baluyos et al., 2019). Further, the principle affects teachers' well-being regarding being equipped to work productively in the profession. In a study regarding teachers' job satisfaction concerning work performance, Baluyos et al. (2019) discovered that competence levels were the most prevalent factor that impacted teachers' effectiveness and inventiveness. Teachers' opportunities to gain experience and increase competencies are significant job resources that can increase job satisfaction (Viac & Fraser, 2020).

Administrative and Social Support

Administrative support from the leadership team and social support from colleagues directly affects teachers' well-being, job satisfaction, and burnout (Baluyos et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009; Viac & Fraser, 2020). School principals' support and effectiveness significantly influence job satisfaction (Viac & Fraser, 2020) and are the strongest predictor of teacher turnover values among all the workplace considerations (Farmer, 2020). Any communication teachers receive regarding their work, such as observation data, curriculum development, or student performance, is considered feedback. Several studies have recognized appraisal and positive feedback provided by leadership as motivating effects on teachers' job

satisfaction (Viac & Fraser, 2020). Employees reported high job satisfaction and dedication to their craft when they received quality positive communication and adequate performance justification and guidance.

Supervisors determine the working conditions through leadership decisions that contribute to a positive work culture and colleague support (Baluyos et al., 2019). Administrators had a more significant impact on teachers' stress than the proportion of pupils who received free or reduced-price lunches or were from ethnic minorities (Farmer, 2020). When new teachers must improve in time management, classroom management, or parent relations, for example, they need help in the first year (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). These deficits and perceived lack of leadership support and training often lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, which prevail among teachers. Whereas administrative assistance, resources, and group decision-making encouraged buy-in and fostered a congenial workplace atmosphere (Podolsky et al., 2019). Leaders' engagement and favorable working conditions generated job satisfaction, which inspired teachers to provide pupils with high-quality instruction (Baluyos et al., 2019).

Teacher Well-Being

There has been a growing consensus surrounding the significance of teacher well-being and its impact on student success. In the educational context, occupational well-being is a multidimensional concept of "teachers' responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession" (Viac & Fraser, 2020, p. 18). Teachers who rated school climate and job crafting high expressed the most contentment and well-being at work (Dreer, 2022). The research findings emphasize the value of work design and school atmosphere in promoting teacher well-being. Countries at the 2018 International Summit on the Teaching Profession identified (a) time during the school day for professional collaboration

among themselves, (b) reaffirming the ability of educators to manage student misbehavior, (c) establishing a meaningful performance assessment system aimed at encouraging teacher daily life, and (d) empowering teacher leaders to participate in schoolwide decisions as positive motivating factors that could enhance teachers' well-being (Viac & Fraser, 2020). Leadership styles, professional development, and working conditions that do not align with expectations are the primary impetus for new teachers to leave the profession (Knight et al., 2022; Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). Research demonstrated that teachers with great professional dedication deliver higher-quality instruction and more successful student results (Low et al., 2022).

Teachers have self-reported suffering from psychological, emotional, and physical compassion fatigue at work at a rate higher than ever documented in the past (Farmer, 2020). The professional responsibilities of 21st-century teachers entail ensuring students' mental, physical, emotional, and academic well-being are managed, along with incorporating technology, administrative tasks, collaboration, and preparation of curriculum, instruction, and assessments (Viac & Fraser, 2020). Additionally, teachers are asked to manage more diverse students from varied demographics, needs, and abilities in increasingly bureaucratic school environments, often offering less teaching autonomy. High affective, continuance, normative commitments, and burnout negatively influenced teacher turnover and retention rates (Low et al., 2022). Based on the 2015 Stress in America survey, the mental health and stress management level needed to address the number of teachers reporting adverse well-being is available within 25% of schools (Farmer, 2020).

Compensation was identified throughout literature as a crucial dimension of job attribute that defines teachers' well-being throughout the literature (Baluyos et al., 2019; Viac & Fraser, 2020). Showing respect to the profession through careful consideration of the compensation

package and benefits compared to other professions plays a role in attracting and retaining employees (Tran & Smith, 2019). Low salaries and reduced funding for education due to economic downturns have been perceived as indicators of an overall absence of appreciation for the teaching vocation, which has led to a decline in enthusiasm for the field. Tran and Smith (2019) found that compensation research determined that if university students were offered 20% above their salary, their interest in teaching would increase by 53%, and a 50% salary increase would render an additional 15% interest. Teachers execute duties more effectively and express greater job satisfaction due to feeling more secure about adequate compensation to meet their needs (Baluyos et al., 2019).

Conditions that foster the long-term commitment of teachers in the profession vary depending on their career stage (Low et al., 2022). Preservice or early career teachers have typically been the focus of earlier studies, whereas teacher perceptions at various career stages have minimum exposure. Comparative studies have focused on teacher recruitment and retention, which impact decisions to join, remain, quit, and return to the profession (Podolsky et al., 2019). Life experience and individual agency have enhanced, sustained, and diminished professional teaching commitment (Low et al., 2022). Compared to individuals whose highest educational qualification is a bachelor's, teachers with a doctorate or master's degree exhibit greater exit probabilities (Knight et al., 2022). If attention were dedicated to improving urban ECHS teacher well-being, the potential for workforce sustainability in these environments would be increased.

Teacher Retention Crisis

The unprecedented increase in the teacher shortage has been a systemic problem affecting K-12 education at all levels (Dos Santos, 2021; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019)

intermittently in the U.S. since the 1930s (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). Teacher turnover has been the leading cause of teacher shortages during the past 20 years of studies (Mitani et al., 2022). Additionally, shortages are associated with less lucrative salaries, adverse workplace conditions, an absence of administrative encouragement, and constraints linked to assessment and accountability. Due to the stress COVID-19 inflicted on the world, the teaching profession is at an even more critical juncture concerning teacher retention and education degrees pursued and earned at the collegiate level (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Pressley, 2021). Yearly, K-12 preservice student teachers, beginning teachers, and veteran teachers decide to leave the teaching field due to retirements, burnout, negative experiences, and an excessive workload (Dos Santos, 2021).

Few academic studies exist on the state or scope of teacher shortages, which is problematic given the need for more consensus on what exactly qualifies as a shortage in an incredibly localized employment market (Sutcher et al., 2019). Although teacher retention presents a more profound threat to successful student outcomes than teacher recruitment, both are acknowledged problems for school districts (Holmes et al., 2019). Per the American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE) survey in 2017, over 40 states reported teacher shortages, with more than 30 reporting shortages in subjects from career technology education to bilingual education (Sutcher et al., 2019). Between 2015 and 2025, school-age students were expected to increase by three million in the United States, resulting in a demand of 316,000 or 20% more teachers (Tran & Smith, 2019). The critical question is not if there are enough people to staff the classrooms but whether enough sufficiently qualified individuals, according to state licensing requirements, are prepared to provide their expertise in specific sectors and places with a labor shortage. Finally, it is also essential to consider whether an

adequate supply can be achieved solely through market forces or whether government interventions are necessary (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019).

Even though school administrators and legislators frequently look to teacher recruiting strategies to address teacher shortages, the influence of teacher attrition on generating deficits requires more attention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Moreover, only some studies comprehensively examine the teacher shortage nationally, by state, and by district. Preventable teacher attrition accounts for one of the most substantial strains on school districts and states' budgets, characterizing the leading cause of teacher shortages (Deever et al., 2020). The United States Labor Department reported that between January and October of 2018, teachers in public schools resigned at an average rate of 83 per 10,000, the highest statistic since data collection began in 2001 (Farmer, 2020). In national spending, attrition among teachers costs roughly $20,000 per teacher or $8.5 billion yearly (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2019). Attrition accounts for approximately 90% of new hires (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). About 8% of teachers leave annually, with about two-thirds vacating positions before retirement (Sutcher et al., 2019; Tran & Smith, 2019).

The probability of teacher attrition is strongly correlated with administrative climate, wages, and opportunities for teacher development (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Low et al., 2022). Teacher attrition increased by 3.3% or over 125,000 employees, between 1992 (5.1%) and 2008 (8.4%; Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). However, comparatively attrition rates in nations like Singapore and Finland average around 3-4% yearly (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Viac & Fraser, 2020). There would be a significant decrease in the nationwide gap if demand in the United States were to move to comparable levels (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Attrition rates are the highest for early career teachers and those approaching retirement (Knight et al., 2022; Mitani et al., 2022). The NCES disclosed that 10% of novice teachers exited before their second year, 12% left before their third year, 15% did not resume teaching again in their fourth year, and 17% vacated positions before their fifth year (Mitani et al., 2022). Data showed that 30% of uncertified novice teachers resigned within 5 years, denoting approximately 21% of the nation's first-year public school teachers in 2012 (Podolsky et al., 2019). The same study found that monetary incentives including increased compensation, loan forgiveness, and retirement benefits may motivate teachers to return to the profession (Podolsky et al., 2019).

Less attractiveness to the teaching profession further highlighted the alarming increase in teacher shortages. The TALIS 2018 survey found that, on average, 25% of teachers perceive the profession as valued (Viac & Fraser, 2020). Except for Black teachers, who had turnover nearly equivalent to White teachers, Latinx, Asian/Pacific Islander, or those who identified as people of color had less attrition (Knight et al., 2022). Factors contributing to a reduction in the minority teacher pool are the choice for graduates to seek other more lucrative employment for graduates and more unsuccessful teaching examination rates (Ingersoll et al., 2019). According to Ingersoll et al. (2019), the leading causes of minority instructors' underrepresentation in the teaching profession are access barriers and a shortage of qualified candidates. As a result, emphasis has centered on preventing discrimination in hiring qualified minority candidates and devising solutions to ensure these barriers do not hamper progress.

National reports highlight the diverse impact of teacher shortages on lower socioeconomic hard-to-staff schools that typically serve marginalized populations that are more acutely affected urban schools (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Darling-Hammond and Podolsky (2019) equated the teacher shortage

resurgence partly to insufficient support for underfunded schools with lower teacher incomes and harsh work environments, a byproduct of the disparity in wealth distribution. Based on survey records from the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), school districts in lower socioeconomic environments with marginalized students experience more deficiencies with the teacher shortage and an underprepared supply of teachers (Sutcher et al., 2019). According to the American Institutes for Research and National Center for Children in Poverty, roughly 25% of children reside within poverty lines, and 1 in 30 are homeless in the United States (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). Schools with less resources have increased turnover, unrest, and widening student achievement gaps. Schools that service predominately low socioeconomic students of color experience depend more heavily on less experienced beginner teachers than suburban (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Viac & Fraser, 2020). Primarily teachers leave hard-to-staff schools due to the perceived negative school culture compounded by administrative lack of support, leadership styles, decisions, and pervasive lack of respect (Holmes et al., 2019). Novice teachers typically need more confidence and readiness to navigate the multifaceted requirements of working in a more vulnerable school (Viac & Fraser, 2020). Hard-to-staff schools often hire into the school year, forcing unprepared teachers into classrooms that inevitably underperform and result in teacher attrition (Podolsky et al., 2019).

The intent of the national Race to the Top Fund plan and other statewide initiatives is teacher preparation programs to effectively develop and graduate committed teachers (Mitani et al., 2022). Although there is respect for the profession, statistics have shown a decrease in students pursuing university teaching degrees (Deever et al., 2020; Garcia & Weiss, 2019). There was an estimated 35% decline in teacher preparation program participation and approximately a

23%-degree completion rate (Sutcher et al., 2019). After completing program requirements, negative self-efficacy, discouraging administrative leadership styles, promotion uncertainty, and isolation persuaded preservice teachers not to pursue teaching careers (Dos Santos, 2021). Generally, teachers who complete alternative certification programs reported feeling more unprepared than individuals with traditional training (Mitani et al., 2022). Dos Santos (2021) noted that teaching is one of contemporary society's most isolated and despondent professions, with burnout more prevalent in individuals who express inefficacy. Teachers are less inclined to continue working in or rejoin the profession when their self-efficacy to handle job tasks is inadequate, which keeps the national teacher supply trending downward.

Hard-to-staff schools and districts experience more hardship associated with teacher retention, threatening student learning and achievement (Holmes et al., 2019). When effective teachers are consistent throughout the school year, research demonstrated that students could increase their standardized test scores by 10 percentile points. However, increased teacher burnout, high turnover increases, disruption, and shortage rates impact students' motivation and decrease student performance (Holmes et al., 2019; Pressley, 2021).

Even with economics or geography, teacher retention remains a general problem in all areas. Whether implemented in charter or traditional schools, the ECHS model demonstrated higher teacher retention with a 2% to 4% lower attrition rate than comparable comprehensive public high schools (Knight et al., 2022). Although measuring such a specific aspect might prove more challenging, the mission-driven emphasis on admitting underrepresented students in higher education institutions may benefit teacher retention at ECHS locations. Knight et al. (2022) findings implied that ECHSs could improve student outcomes by stabilizing the learning environment and reducing instructor turnover.

Legislative Actions

State-level actions to tackle teacher shortages have emerged with scholarly-supported reformations addressing improving teacher compensation, professional development, and culture (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019; Podolsky et al., 2019). Teachers have the most significant personal impact on students' academic success, and those who employ best practices improve student and school performance (Sykes & Martin, 2019). In 2015, quality state proposals presented to the U.S. DOE addressed financing practices that allowed wealthier districts to pay their employees more and strategies to enhance the caliber of leaders in schools that struggle to fill positions. High-quality state plans incentivized teachers to accept positions in high demand subjects and schools by offering them additional pay for their commitment.

Despite the efforts in programs such as the ECHSs, marginalized students continue to exhibit mixed results in academic achievement, and college matriculation is a complex process from high school (Duncheon, 2020). Legislation like the Texas 60x30 plan (60x30TX) has emphasized increasing the number of collegegoers and certificate holders (Duncheon & Muñoz, 2019). The primary objective of 60x30TX is for the state's population to encompass at least 60% of people with at least a certification, 550,000 college graduates with marketable skills, and ensure loan debts do not surpass 60% of individuals' first-year salary by 2030 (THECB, 2019).

Meanwhile, at the micro-level, school districts require leaders to strategize to manage the diverse impact of state-wide policies and teacher retention concerns in their local area (McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Additionally, districts have sought to amend management practices to remove barriers to effective recruitment and retention (Podolsky et al., 2019). Comprehensive policies should address the shortage and support teachers' needs, ensuring capable instructors educate students.

Benefits to Understanding

Since desire is not always followed by the subsequent actions to realize the ambitions, the opportunity to focus on the needs of teachers and catalyze change to manage retention issues is at hand. Data indicated that teachers are experiencing tremendous stress and anxiety in many current educational environments (Pressley, 2021; Viac & Fraser, 2020). Numerous studies identified supportive environments coupled with regular professional mentorship as vital to retaining novice teachers (Deever et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021). Teachers who perceived a powerful sense of preparedness beyond their student teaching training through further pedagogical development possessed a higher self-efficacy and typically stayed in the profession (Podolsky et al., 2019; Seelig & McCabe, 2021). Researchers focused on the importance of schools supporting teachers when handling parent communication, technology, and wellness (Pressley, 2021). Seelig and McCabe's (2021) idea for reframing how retention is viewed illuminated the practical reasons teachers remain in the profession: commitment, collaboration, and connection to the students, local community, and leadership.

The ideas to develop mentoring, training, and incentives such as salary to support teacher retention policies and practices can be developed to champion teachers (Sutcher et al., 2019). Comparatively, a more sizable proportion of unprepared teachers leave their jobs, a cautionary tale that shortages will continue to escalate without intervention at multiple levels. Preparation programs can be developed to foster more supportive organizational cultures to help teachers meet high demands (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). Some research suggests that potential teachers are attracted to hard-to-staff districts when offered competitive compensation (Tran & Smith, 2019). Further, tackling issues concerning fair salary, mentorship or onboarding initiatives, and

continuous professional growth opportunities could positively impact retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019).

Lack of ECHS Teacher Perspective in Literature

Research into ECHS models and the impact on diminishing barriers to students' success underscores the potential to further research knowledge by investigating the teachers' outlook on school culture (Knight et al., 2022). Duncheon and Muñoz (2019) illustrated that despite the critical role of teachers in promoting students' achievement, their viewpoints are not well represented within literature. Deever et al. (2020) examined the perspectives and retention of CTE teachers and noted the possibility for further inquiry into similar problems applied to other secondary or specialist teachers. Understanding the ECHS teachers' perceptions could impact how issues are addressed to support teachers, positively impacting students' success (Podolsky et al., 2019).

The literature on teacher shortage has not been unanimous, as some considered the issue an exaggerated invention (Sutcher et al., 2019). Research literature indicated that statistics regarding teacher shortages and an agreement about what constitutes a shortage for each localized market need to be improved, leading to many researchers investigating retention instead. Although several researchers have investigated why teachers leave, there is considerably less attention to why teachers stay (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). Although numerous quantitative research studies are available regarding preservice and in-service teachers, the phenomenon is rarely studied qualitatively (Dos Santos, 2021).

Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive review of the literature surrounding early college high school inception and the importance of teachers' influence on student outcomes. The myriad

of elements influencing teacher motivation and job satisfaction are aspects that affect teacher persistence within the profession are outlined. Teacher attrition and retention crisis were addressed as a system problem within K-12 education. SCCT and SDT were suggested theoretical frameworks to understand how teacher experiences generate meanings and affect career choices.

The next chapter will outline the methodology and research design of this qualitative research. Chapter 4 will provide the results of the research. Chapter 5 will summarize the research and offer conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to investigate and understand the lived experiences of Texas urban early college high school (ECHS) teachers. Teacher retention remains a systemic problem in education despite economics or geography. Whether implemented in charter or traditional schools, Texas ECHS models demonstrated higher teacher retention with a 2% to 4% lower attrition rate than comparable traditional comprehensive public high schools (Knight et al., 2022). This chapter provides an in-depth report of the research phenomenon, theoretical framework, research design, and quality standards that were employed throughout the study. Semistructured interviews were the primary qualitative method used for data collection. Incorporating interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) with the idea that social cognitive career theory and self-determination theory affects interpretation allowed the meaning behind the lived experiences and perspectives of ECHS teachers to be revealed. IPA guided the data analysis and treatment which uncover essential elements in the participants' interview dataset. The chapter concludes by outlining strategies implemented to protect participants from unnecessary risk, ethical considerations, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The research question utilized to guide this qualitative study was:

RQ1: How do early college high school teachers describe and perceive their professional experiences working in urban settings in Texas?

Research Design and Method

This study employed a qualitative research methodology with a phenomenological orientation and semistructured individual interviews. Qualitative research is used to comprehend

how individuals perceive the world around them and the meaning they associate with their experiences (Creswell, 2009). The multidisciplinary use of qualitative methods to investigate the subjective lived experiences of participants enables researchers to reveal a more profound significance and understanding of a social phenomenon (Leavy, 2017). The study's social phenomenon was how ECHS teachers perceived working in urban environments and how experiences influence their career decisions. Considering the perspectives of this population adds to the literature on the school model and informs decision-makers about why retention rates are higher in this group.

With multiple unique qualities, qualitative research provided many benefits that enabled an extensive inquiry into the breadth of the study participants' professional experiences (Creswell, 2009). First, performing qualitative research generated a thorough grasp of the experiences in ECHS environments gathered from speaking to individuals first-hand (Creswell, 2013). Secondly, qualitative research enabled participants to express personal accounts and gave voice to their opinions. Finally, qualitative research yielded a better familiarity with teachers' urban ECHS contexts.

The phenomenological qualitative research approach involved gathering and analyzing data to gain insight into ECHS teachers' experiences in urban ECHS environments. Phenomenology is the study and method of categorizing, describing, interpreting, and analyzing the patterns of human experience to find meaning behind how these teachers respond to specific events (Smith, 2016). Phenomenology research provides a clearer picture of the precise techniques people use to negotiate meanings in their interactions, which in turn affects how they understand experiences (Leavy, 2017). Considering Husserl's theory that people are only moderately aware of conscious experiences, phenomenology seeks to uncover the often unknown

factors, such as thoughts and feelings residing in the periphery of the world around individuals through inquiry (Smith, 2016). Interpreting the phenomenological description by comparing different experiences in the urban ECHS context allowed for the evaluation of the significance of each experience participants described (Creswell, 2009). Interpretive phenomenological analysis allowed the detection of the various aspects of participants' experiences.

The study employed phenomenological interviewing as a qualitative research method to investigate the experiences and perceptions of ECHS teachers. Phenomenological interviewing enabled participants to share stories of experiences which could be used to formulate meaning (Lauterbach, 2018). The phenomenological process represented a neo-positivist inquiry to obtain factual accounts of participants' subjective lived experiences. According to Seidman (2019), the goal of interviewing was to realize the narrative of the teachers' lived experiences and the meaning they placed on each memory. As the researcher, I developed a subjective understanding of the experiences and perspectives pertinent to the study through interviewing participants (Lauterbach, 2018).

The phenomenological interview approach involved multiple interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2019). First, I established a relationship with the participants to share the study context which they consented to participate. Secondly, I engaged the participants in guided questioning to reconstruct their thoughts and feelings associated with the study's purpose. In the final phase, participants were asked to reflect upon some aspects of the first two parts to describe what the experience personally meant. The three-interview series served as a relationship-building tool, highlighting my commitment to the research, and enhanced my understanding of the participants.

Population

When selecting a sample size, I considered the constraints, goals, scope, and type of phenomenon being evaluated (Warren, 2001). Since this research concerned lived experiences, recruiting persons with first-hand accounts immersed in the environment was critical (Seidman, 2019). Participants were recruited through social media teacher or educator groups and via direct emails to ECHS campus administrators and teachers. Social media group administrators were contacted to solicit permission to advertise within each group. Additionally, ECHS campus administrators in districts that did not require a separate Institutional Review Board were contacted to request permission to contact campus teachers to participate. Site privacy, data security, confidentiality, and other regulations were strictly adhered to and preserved for everyone. Since the research did not concentrate on a particular school or district, participants represented a diverse group of teachers.

Participants were selected based on being current Texas ECHS teachers working in urban environments. The total number of members within contacted social media groups was approximately 1,200,000. Although the potential population encompassed a vast group to recruit from, not all group members met the criteria, and some members potentially belonged to multiple groups. Permission was requested from 12 groups, and authorization was granted by administrators from eight of the groups.

Recruitment from ECHS campuses required me to build an Excel workbook of ECHS campus contacts. ECHS campus names were downloaded from the TEA CCMR ECHS website, and administrators’ and teachers' email addresses were found on campus websites. The total number of ECHS campuses contacted was 103. Permission to recruit teachers was granted from

nine administrators to email teachers directly, and three others preferred to forward my original request to the teachers.

Once permission was granted by social media group administrators and ECHS campus administrators, a recruitment letter was posted on each group page and emailed to each ECHS campus teacher to attract interested parties. The letter is included in Appendix B. The recruitment letter provided a link to my dissertation website with pertinent information regarding the study. Disclosed information included (a) the study's purpose, (b) the criterion for participation eligibility, (c) the risks and benefits of participating, (d) time commitment, and (e) my contact information. The website also had a link to a copy of the informed consent form establishing voluntary participation. After obtaining the signed consent form from each participant, they completed the self-administered questionnaire, which gathered demographic information. Questionnaires were also used to verify participants' eligibility. Invitations to participate were extended to individuals who satisfy the research criteria. No paid advertisement was utilized in the process.

In order to combat attrition, participants were recruited until the sample size was achieved. I also implemented active recruitment through snowballing to enroll additional participants in the study. Snowball sampling is a qualitative recruitment strategy of asking established participants for referrals to other prospective participants to interview for the study (Creswell, 2013).

Study Sample

Criterion sampling is purposeful sampling in which participants were selected who possess homogeneous characteristics to ensure that participants meet the eligibility requirements (Seidman, 2019). The sample population for this study was teachers who currently work in

Texas's urban intensive, emergent, or characteristic ECHS environment. Typically, urban intensive is large schools located in large metropolitan cities with large populations of minority students, with outside factors such as low-income housing and poverty affecting the school (Milner, 2012). Urban emergent schools are located in places with less than one million people who experience similar characteristics outside of school as the urban intensive, such as a considerable number of students from minorities and immigrants living in poverty. Urban characteristics may be rural or suburban schools that experience similar contexts, such as increased English language learners, low socioeconomic conditions, and other factors similar to intensive and emergent environments. The sample size for this study was 14 participants from various locations. Brinkmann (2013) noted that qualitative interview studies involve a maximum of 15 individuals. Participants from Texas school districts and charters were recruited through social media platforms and direct emailing with administrators with the understanding that the study could achieve saturation prior to reaching 15 individuals.

The purposeful sampling included participants of any gender who were in-service teachers that met the study criteria. Although all participants were current urban Texas ECHS teachers, no minimum teaching experience was stipulated to be eligible. Qualified instructors with employment in addition to teaching, such as part-time positions, were allowed to participate. All preservice teachers were disqualified from participation since they were not district or charter school employees. This study also did not include participants not teaching for any reason other than temporary short-term leave. The purposeful sampling process commenced when responses showing interest in participation were submitted and finished when 14 individuals were interviewed.

Materials and Instrument

This study's primary data collection method was interviewing, one of the most commonly used techniques in qualitative research (Seidman, 2019). Qualitative interviewing strategies engaged participants in open-ended questioning to capture the responses in an informed consent recording (Warren, 2001). Interviews occurred on Zoom videoconferencing in a semistructured format incorporating visual interaction and sharing capabilities (Salmons, 2014). Semistructured interviews involved asking standardized preplanned questions and followed up with probing questions based on interviewee responses (Seidman, 2019). Individual participants' stories and responses to the interview protocol were collected and analyzed to find meaning related to the problem, purpose, and research question while leaving the opportunity to follow up intuitively (Durdella, 2020).

Member checking was used after interview transcription and initial interpretations were documented. Validating responses through member checking enabled participants to appraise their interviews findings for accuracy (Seidman, 2019). Participants received an email with a summary of their interview and any emerging interpretations within 24 to 48 hours following their interview in order to examine and clarify the data. Member checking permitted participants to communicate their reactions to the interview and reflect on their professional experiences (Seidman, 2019). The entire process affirmed whether participants substantiated my judgments regarding meaningful aspects of the interview, and enhanced research credibility.

Individual Interview

Data collection instruments are guides that direct focus on accessing and regulating the information sought to address the research questions (Durdella, 2020). The interview guide ensured that participants were asked the same fundamental questions while allowing individual

perspectives to surface (Patton, 2014). Individual interviews were conducted to investigate the experiences and perspectives of urban ECHS teachers. Individual participant interviews were completed based on predesigned instruments to gather data, while telephone and email correspondence was used to follow up. Each participant possessed unique experiences and perceptions working in their program, which were critical to the study. As the researcher and interviewer, I regulated the information sought by asking pertinent questions to address the study's goals.

Patton's (2014) qualitative interview guide was used to develop semistructured interview questions. Established standardized interview questions increased the comparability of participant responses and organization of collected information. The interview guide with questions and probing questions is included in Appendix D. As more participants were interviewed, researcher bias decreased, and natural themes emerged. Interviews were private virtual meetings at scheduled times agreed upon by the participant after signed informed consent was received (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Each phenomenological interview had three parts: pre-interview, interview, and follow-up, with the primary interview spanning 20 minutes to one hour. Interviews were recorded with the Zoom transcription function activated to generate transcripts for each individual. The Zoom transcription was compared to the video recordings to ensure each interview was rendered to text verbatim.

Upon receiving IRB research approval (see Appendix A), I recruited potential participants via social media and alternative measures for the interview series. I responded to interested parties via telephone and email and moved forward with those who met the criteria. After the initial contact was completed, each participant received and signed the tailored informed consent form requiring their electronic signature (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). After

which each person was screened based on their self-administered questionnaire. Individuals who met the criteria to participate were invited to complete an interview via an emailed thank you letter. The letter stipulated that the (a) participants identifying information would remain confidential, (b) consent to participate was voluntary, and (c) responses would not specify them as a respondent. Then participants agreed upon a scheduled date and time for an interview.

Panel of Experts

By employing the Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel - VREP procedure, a panel of experts evaluated the interview questions. The author granted permission to use the instrument and to publish the results in the dissertation. An email authorizing permission is included in Appendix E. In order to collect replies from participants that offer valuable data, VREP helped to verify that the questions were clear, relevant, and constructed to serve the research purpose predicated on the researchers' operational assumptions (Simon & Goes, 2016).

The expert panel consisted of three professionals in their fields with terminal degrees. Reviewer 1 had a Doctor of Education degree in Organizational Leaders, qualitative researcher experience, and over 30 years of leadership experience in the U.S. Army and local community. Reviewer 2 held a Doctor of Education degree, decades of higher education experiences as a professor mentor and expert researcher. Reviewer 3 had a Doctor of Education degree, 35 years as a K12 educator, with experience as an ECHS principal and Director of Secondary Education. Information provided by the panel was used to reframe the interview question protocol. The original revised protocol is in Appendix D.

Self-Administered Questionnaire

Demographic information was obtained from interested participants to screen for eligibility via a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was short, with only nine

questions and can be found in Appendix C. Interested parties were prompted to provide their contact information, demographic identifiers (e.g., gender, age range, education level, ethnicity, and teaching experience), and ECHS information. Participants were asked to provide their school and district information to allow me to verify that they currently work at an urban ECHS campus. Questionnaire submissions were automatically filtered into a spreadsheet for organization purposes and encrypted for security and confidentiality. The verification screening was done virtually through campus, school district, and TEA website searches without contact with entities or persons working within the organizations. Eligibility verification was a critical step within the phenomenological inquiry.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was an ongoing process of systematically examining and organizing accumulated data to understand the phenomenon under study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Each participant completed a self-administered questionnaire to determine eligibility and develop a demographic profile of identified participants. Interviewing ECHS teachers was the main form of data collection implemented in the investigation, followed by interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). The participant's subjective experiences transcribed from recorded interviews were threaded together to address the constructs within the study to formulate each participant's theoretical narrative and profile (Seidman, 2019).

Maintaining confidentiality and organization were paramount to a successful research project. Therefore, each participant was referred to as participant, followed by a number (participant 1) to maintain confidentiality and guarantee distinguishability for organizational purposes. Seidman (2019) proposed that referring to each person being interviewed as a participant rather than subject or interviewee suggests active engagement and equity in the

interviewing relationship. After the interviews were completed, comprehensive data analysis was performed to avoid imposing meaning or new questions on other interview participants. Transcript data were evaluated to find central themes within the dataset to reveal unique and shared experiences and perceptions (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Organization

Data were stored in encrypted files on a password-protected computer, in an online password-protected repository, and backed up onto an external hard drive secured in a locked cabinet. These files and equipment were only accessible to me throughout the process. Each interview video and transcript file were carefully named and stored chronologically to maintain organization (Smith & Davies, 2015). Throughout the process, I maintained a detailed research journal to ensure accurate tracking of all information regarding interviews, reflections, ideas, and changes. The journal served as an audit trail annotating modifications to themes and the purpose of their use to guide reflection on the understanding of the analysis (King & Brooks, 2018). Through journaling, I captured experiences, emotions, and initial thoughts, as perceptions can change over time (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Reflection enabled more profound interpretations and understanding of the data and subsequent actions to be examined.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Husserl developed the science of phenomena as a philosophical analysis of things and how they are perceived through an epistemological framework (Eberle, 2014). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), an articulation that began in the 1990s, focused on understanding the lived experiences of human subjects through rigorous examination of the details expressed in shared accounts (Eatough & Smith, 2017). This research explored urban ECHS teachers' career experiences by collecting and analyzing data to interpret meaning. In-

depth and individualized narratives of participant experiences were possible through IPA's descriptive and interpretative nature (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), which enhanced my understanding (Smith et al., 2009).

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) and self-determination theory (SDT) were employed as the theoretical frameworks to find meaning within the experiences and perspectives of ECHS teachers. SCCT analyzed self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, goals to motivate actions, job satisfaction, well-being, and self-management (Brown & Lent, 2019). While SDT postulated that self-efficacy was increased in workplaces that supported employees' sense of respect, freedom to make their own decisions, competence at their jobs, and connectedness to others (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). IPA, SCCT, and SDT were interconnected to examine given accounts to ascertain the underlying meaning within those narratives.

The analysis process began with one case, analyzed the details, and then moved on to the next case (Thorpe & Holt, 2008). IPA steps involved (a) generating transcriptions, (b) organizing data for familiarization, (c) determining experiential statements, (d) identifying common themes and developing interpretations, and (e) maintaining a summary table and reflective journal (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Transcripts from each interview were individually read to develop familiarity with the participants' worldview (Thorpe & Holt, 2008). Initial notes regarding the transcript were generated to highlight the participant's descriptive and conceptually essential ideas (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). Experiential statements were formed and clustered from the notes to identify themes.

Guided by the research question, I categorized clusters to identify meaningful personal themes from patterns found within individual data. Themes were distinctive or reoccurring statements found across participants' transcribed interview data (King & Brooks, 2018). While

some themes were determined using deduction, in IPA research analysis, themes were derived inductively despite previous assumptions or what was being sought (Eatough & Smith, 2017). I created a summary table to eliminate overlapping themes and determine specific links to fundamental organizing concepts (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021; Thorpe & Holt, 2008). Then, the remaining participants were analyzed similarly to the first.

The summary table from Participant 1 was utilized as a working template undergoing revisions as additional participant themes were gathered (Thorpe & Holt, 2008). Central themes were filtered to capture the participants' shared experiences and perceptions of working in urban ECHSs. Noteworthy excerpts from interview transcripts were included in the next chapter to give voice to the participants. Excerpts were edited to omit words such as 'um,' 'yeah,' and 'uh' to enhance readability (Roulston, 2014). Finally, the report communicated the data analysis findings with illustrative extracts and analytical commentary regarding the discoveries and conclusions (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

Researchers are responsible for strictly adhering to ethical standards to protect human subjects (Billups, 2021). Goodness, integrity, and trustworthiness was reflected throughout the investigation of the phenomenon and present in every aspect of the written report (Ryan et al., 2007). During the IPA interview process, sensitive issues arose that could have been harmful to participants, but they were managed with care and sensitivity (Smith & Davies, 2015). Research was not initiated until after receiving the Institutional Review Board's approval. Secondly, I established protocols to protect participants' treatment, rights, privacy, data, and confidentiality (Billups, 2021).

All documentation and data collected was securely stored on a password-protected device and online storage. Each participant signed the informed consent form before any data were collected (Warren, 2001). Although the anticipated risk was low, potential risks to participant was, clearly expressed on the form along with what would be shared to avoid placing participants in a compromising situation (Billups, 2021). Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study without repercussions. Questions regarding the procedures were addressed before, during, and after data collection (Billups, 2021).

Assumptions

As the researcher, I anticipated that the survey respondents would be honest in their answers. The participants' familiarity with ECHS and adherence to state guidelines was a further presumption. I also expected that when asked interview questions about the urban ECHS, participants would answer truthfully and candidly. The answers to the research question would not be relevant if the participants were not employed at an ECHS program.

Limitations

Limitations existed within the qualitative research methodology processes required for data gathering and my presence impacted participants' responses (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). First, each participant's lived experiences varied depending on individual circumstances and experiences. These factors influenced individual responses to questions regarding self-efficacy and career decisions which contributed to student outcomes. Secondly, the limited sources of prior research restrict the study as there was less available information in the literature to enhance the contextual information. Third, although each participant presented unique experiences, limiting the study to 14 teachers provided a narrow view of the phenomenon. The constraints of the population restricted the study's usefulness beyond the schools included

generalizing about all urban ECHSs impossible. However, future research potential lies in further exploring the identified themes and replicating the study with similar populations in other locations.

Delimitations

Delimitations were the constraints voluntarily placed on the researchers' study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). These restrictions were the parameters that I used to set limitations on the research to prevent the project from becoming insurmountably challenging to attain. For this qualitative phenomenological study, the purposeful criterion sampling included ECHS teachers working in urban educational settings. The research delimitations stipulated that participants from various schools and districts were knowledgeable, current ECHS teachers working in urban Texas ECHS campuses. Participants were intentionally selected due to the ECHS teachers reporting higher retention rates than traditional high schools, a systemic problem in K-12. Additionally, researching this phenomenon aimed to present this population's perspectives within literature and illuminate how their experiences influenced their career decisions.

Summary

Chapter 3 explained the research methodology and design that support the purpose and research context through the theoretical framework. With this study, I hoped to share more about ECHS teachers' experiences in urban settings and how those experiences influenced their career choices. The population, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis were defined. As the primary data collection process, qualitative phenomenology was used to engage participants in semistructured interviews. The data analysis was done per the IPA criteria. Themes underscored

crucial participant interview elements, which highlighted unique and collective participant narratives. This chapter also included procedures to enhance reliability and ethical concerns.

Chapter 4 will reveal the results found in the research of the participant's experiences. In order to increase the study's transparency, the results also include stories from the participants that substantiate my analysis and interpretations. Chapter 5 will summarize the research, offer conclusions, define implications, and discuss future research.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter describes the research results and presents an overview of the lived experiences of 14 early college high school teachers. Direct emails to early college high school (ECHS) campus teachers and posting on social media educator groups were employed to recruit participants. The criteria for participation included being an ECHS teacher in Texas of any gender over the age of 18 with any amount of teaching experience. Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized to facilitate, transcribe, and evaluate semistructured interviews that lasted approximately 20 to 60 minutes.

Participant Demographics

Study participants were from nine diverse early college high school (ECHS) campuses across Texas. Demographic data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The 14 participants (n = 14) consisted of three men (n = 3) and 11 women (n = 11) working in urban contexts. Participants' ages ranged from the early 20s to 50+, with teaching experiences ranging between 2 and 33 years. The participants' self-identified ethnicities were four African Americans or Black, three Hispanics, six Caucasians or White, and one Asian or Asian American. Two of the participants had bachelor's degrees, nine had master's degrees, and three had doctorates, according to the reported highest level of education.

The student body at these educational institutions were diverse in terms of race, language, culture, and economic status (Schaffer et al., 2018). The analysis of ECHS teachers' experiences working in urban ECHS environments was guided by Milner's characterizations of urban schools in this study. Urban intensive are heavily populated schools located in large metropolitan cities (Milner, 2012), often with a disproportionate number of students from minority and immigrant families in low socioeconomic circumstances (Schaffer et al., 2018). Urban emergent schools are

locales with less than one million population that experience similar characteristics outside of school as the urban intensive. Conversely, urban characteristics are in schools typically not classified as urban, including rural or suburban schools that deal with situations comparable to urban intensive and emerging settings (Milner, 2012; Schaffer et al., 2018). ECHS campus classifications, according to Milner (2012), included two urban intensive, one urban emergent, and 11 urban characteristic classifications.

For inclusion in this study, participants were required to work as ECHS teachers. The primary objective was to capture the voices of those entrenched in the ECHS environment. Although they were not required to identify as dual credit teachers or professors, six participants worked as adjunct professors, and two taught college prep courses at the ECHS. Additionally, two participants had transitioned from the professoriate to solely working at the secondary level, and three were former K-12 administrators who had returned to teaching. Table 1 shows the participants' demographic information in order based on interview chronology.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

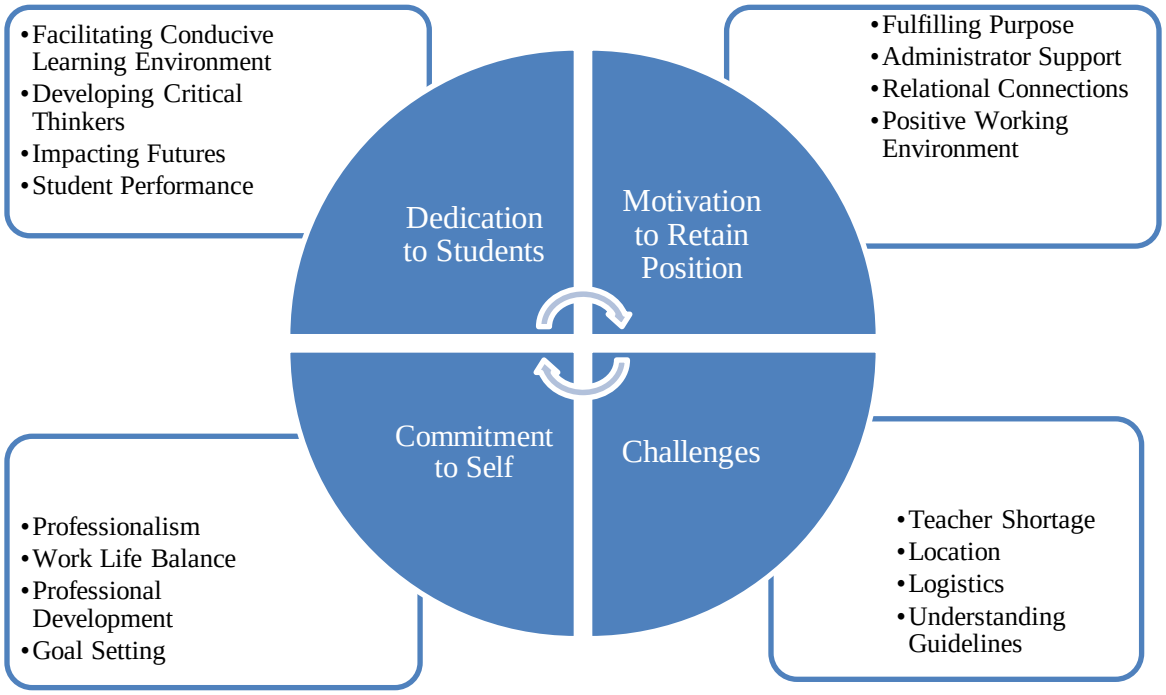
Participant	Urban classification	Years of service	Age range	Gender	Ethnicity	Highest education
P1	Characteristic	10–20	40–49	Female	Hispanic	Bachelor's
P2	Characteristic	10–20	50+	Male	Black	Doctorate
P3	Intensive	20+	50+	Female	Black	Doctorate
P4	Characteristic	10–20	30–39	Female	Hispanic	Master's
P5	Characteristic	2–5	20–29	Female	White	Master's
P6	Characteristic	30+	50+	Male	White	Master's
P7	Characteristic	20+	40–49	Female	Black	Master's
P8	Intensive	6–10	30–39	Female	White	Master's
P9	Characteristic	10–20	30–39	Male	White	Master's
P10	Emergent	10–20	30–39	Female	Asian	Doctorate
P11	Characteristic	6–10	50+	Female	White	Bachelor's
P12	Intensive	10–20	40–49	Female	Hispanic	Master’s
P13	Characteristic	2–5	30–39	Female	White	Master's
P14	Characteristic	30+	50+	Female	Black	Master's

Central Themes

The research examined how early college high school teachers understand and perceive their lived experiences working in an urban environment. For this research, urban includes schools that deal with everyday issues found in a typical urban school. Research questions guided the study and interview process to address and report the real-world experiences of ECHS teachers that affect their career decisions. The investigation led to the emergence of four central themes, including (a) dedication to students, (b) motivation to retain position, (c) commitment to self, and (d) challenges. Central themes were each supported by four subthemes, illustrated in Figure 1. Themes and subthemes are outlined according to the sequence in which they appeared in the analysis rather than arranged hierarchically.

Figure 1

Central Themes and Subthemes of Participants' Interviews



Participants' descriptions of the lived experiences of ECHS teachers contribute to the broader path toward discovering beliefs and career choices. Despite the differences between each

story, numerous aspects from the 14 narratives came together to form the central themes and subthemes. Every central theme varied in how it impacted the knowledge, beliefs, and professional choices of ECHS teachers. This chapter will present the central themes and subtheme in detail, along with participant excerpts, to provide evidence to support the research question: How do early college high school teachers describe and perceive their professional experiences working in urban settings in Texas?

Dedication to Students

Every participant stated that their main reason for working at an ECHS was to improve the lives of their students. Participants reported that ECHS student recruitment procedures ensure compliance with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) ECHS Blueprint Outcomes Based Measures (OBM) for student populations. TEA characterizes ECHSs as "open-enrollment high schools that allow students least likely to attend college an opportunity to receive both a high school diploma and either an associate degree or at least 60 credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree" (TEA, 2022, para. 1). Terms applied to describe student demographics across all participants were "at-risk," "first-generation college goers," "high-emergent bilingual," and "low socioeconomic." Participants noted that these students often need more resources outside the schools to succeed independently of the program support. All shared that they are teaching the students to be critical thinkers to build confident, articulate students. The participants expressed that their experiences working with students in the program were challenging while producing immense satisfaction and joy. The four themes that arose were (a) facilitating a conducive learning environment, (b) developing critical thinkers, (c) impacting futures, and (d) student performance.

Facilitating a Conducive Learning Environment

Facilitating a learning environment that produced confident, knowledgeable students who developed college-level abilities to succeed inside and outside the classroom was essential to all participants. The participants observed a more positive school culture at the ECHS than their past experiences at traditional campuses. They perceived that stakeholders worked together to facilitate a holistically conducive student learning environment**.** Although many students experience challenging home lives, P4 described the ECHS as a "bubble" where "I see my environment as safe learning" in which teachers and students "are blessed to be at this campus, cause every child should have that experience."

Participants explained that they needed to create a conducive learning environment because outside obligations created obstacles to students' success. When speaking about barriers to learning, P9 stated:

> With our ECHS kids. And again, some of those issues come up. You know…I don't have internet at home…I haven't seen my mom in 3 or 4 days…I'm sorry this wasn't done because I had to get my brother and sister ready for school, and I had to get lunches packed, and I had to get them this and that.

Many exploited that knowledge to counter those obstacles within the classroom environment strategically. P9 went on to say:

> Then you realize that these kids can't go to the library at midnight and hop on the Wi-Fi. Some of them don't even have cars and couldn't even get there even if they had the opportunity. And so, I realized, okay, let me slow the curriculum down. Let me do it where I can. I can get these kids to succeed with the resources I could give them.

Another top priority was developing learning environments that prepare students to survive college coursework. Participant 2 indicated that ECHS teachers understand the importance when they stated, “There's a lot more at stake because… you're giving kids a label. This says they're ready for something and the onus is on you to make sure they really are ready for that thing.” P9 shared, “My main goal was to use this as a chance to show these students what life was like in an actual college classroom.” In speaking about the challenge of college coursework, several participants highlighted an apparent disconnect between professors and ECHS students who require more support; P7 stated:

> There's a huge gap. Between professors who come on campus to teach and leave versus the embedded professors because you have the students who come crying about those professors. And a lot of those teachers have never taught on a high school campus before. And so, these are actual professors, adjunct professors who teach on, you know, various campus satellite campuses…and they've been doing this for 20 years. All they know is college students. So, they come for 40 or 90 min. They teach their class and then they leave…It's like because you're not on a high school campus you don't realize yes this is a student yes this is a college course, but this is also a high school student. He's in football, he's in theater, he's in this, he's in that, he's still living at home, there's problems at home. And so as embedded, you realize that and you understand that. And so, it changes how you deal with them.

Consequently, participants use class time and resources to provide student-centered learning environments that encourage students to take risks in their learning. P4 reminisced about a high school teacher who positively impacted learning for students. P4 stated, “There's a specific teacher that…brought in students. And they were from all levels. And I wanted to be like

him.” Through the process, participants experienced students' willingness to “go deeper,” be “more themselves,” and “articulate how they really feel.” The participants conveyed that there must be a balance of rigor, expectation, and support to drive success.

Participants understood the need for a conducive learning environment for students to reach their full potential. Students have adult challenges that require finesse to help them navigate the ECHS program. Developing a rigorous program that provides students with academic and emotional support enhances the potential for success. By recognizing the student population's unique challenges, participants were deliberate in their efforts to ensure comfort and caring were communicated to students.

Developing Critical Thinkers

Participants taught students to think critically about the content to formulate individual perspectives, which generated more confidence in their ability to transfer knowledge and skills into ventures beyond the walls of the ECHS. One crucial difference the participants identified between traditional schools and ECHS was the “full autonomy” of some ECHS teachers to make curriculum decisions that encouraged higher order thinking. Comparatively, in a traditional school, P12 perceived, “There are too many hands in the pot…it’s almost like a plug and play.”

As a result, participants across the study focus energy on teaching students hard and soft skills that can transcend high school based on participants' experience. Students are taught to “engage” and “connect” with the content. By facilitating a classroom environment that allows students to access and assess their learning, participants experienced students being more analytical and thought-provoking. P3 voiced the need to help learners assess situations and use tools available to manage coursework and relationships with professors. P2 explained the importance of developing students' independence to reach success:

> You're supposed to be picking up kids at risk and then giving them a supportive environment to do something they normally wouldn't do, so that's the driver. And it's not just to the classroom…It's also the mentality of how do you get the kids to actually understand that they're getting ready to step out into this big void. They have to be relying upon themselves to be self-sufficient, to be advocates, and to be thinkers. Because they come in from other environments where…you don't think you just do what the teacher says you do and you fill in the worksheet and you fill in correctly and you passed. Right? And that's not how college works. College is supposed to spur creativity and critical thinking. And a desire within the person to show a sense of accomplishment that they can do this thing in front of them. And I think that's the hardest thing too. That's one of the biggest things you have to deal with…I have to get them from a high school level to a college level. So, when they leave, they can be successful.

Many participants perceived misalignments of the high school curriculum to ECHS students' experiences and their vernacular. When asked about challenges in the curriculum, P7 responded, "It's a barrier now. I teach Brown and Black students, and I'm teaching British Lit to brown and black students. So, they're like, what's this have to do with me? I want to be an engineer."

Regarding students overcoming inherent challenges, P8 divulged that, "representation matters especially in our current lovely political climate, when books and curriculum are being challenged and thrown into the flames." Therefore, many participants encourage learners to synthesize the content to articulate divergent perspectives and dialogue in a safe space. When describing the critical thinking process with students, P7 stated:

> I tell the kids from the beginning…What I want you to get out of this course is how to think, how to process information, how to take it from here to here, how to duplicate that in conversation, how to duplicate that in written form. I just have to use these particular texts. In order to do that because this is what my job tells me I have to do but the skills are what we're focusing on. What we're here for is how this works up here [point to head] and how you use this [point to head] to process the information that I have to, you know, use in order to get y'all to get this [point to head] working… And so breaking that down and just and explaining that to them and then once they start to see like, oh, it's really…about…understanding how conflicts and society affects different people, how people may use literature to combat those different things that are happening in society. So it goes beyond just the text itself. Over the past couple of years, that's been my struggle because the population of students that I've always taught forever don't necessarily align with the subject that I'm teaching.

The ability to communicate learned information in written and oral expressions is a critical life skill participants strive to impart to their students. By fostering opportunities for students to explore course content analytically, they learn to apply the concepts in everyday life. Ensuring students adequately prepare for their future is especially important to participants and the mission of the ECHS.

Impacting Futures

All participants expressed a deep desire to work with the ECHS demographics to expose students to opportunities they may have never encountered without the program. P9 labeled high schoolers earning their associate degree as “mind blowing” and “purely amazing.” Participants recognized their work impacted students on many levels, including soft skills, college grade

point averages, and emotional well-being. Regarding the program design's underlying expectation of matriculation, despite the students' enrollment in high school, P2 expressed, "Readiness happens on many levels, whether it be an academic level or mental level. And that's the biggest struggle because kids can be academically capable but they're not mentally ready, they don't succeed." When asked about success, P1 stated, "My students will come back and tell me, Ms., I'm the only person that has ever graduated from a university in my family. So, then you're affecting their children, their children are gonna be graduating from university."

Some participants reflected upon their similar upbringings that connected them to their students' stories. When speaking about past experiences, P12 revealed, "I'm a product of [school district] here in [city], Texas, and I've always wanted to come back." P8 disclosed that the desire to teach at Title I campus was "because I understand the value of an education and I understand the challenges of being a first-generation college student. Being a first-generation college grad and a first-generation American too." Empathizing with students' stories, P2 reflected:

> You see these stories of kids who come from similar circumstances that I grew up in. Who are given an opportunity and with the rights support and the right environment they can really blossom. They go and they're the first ones to graduate from college…You go to the community college graduation. And the parents are overjoyed because they come from an environment where nobody's done this before and even the associate [degree] is there. That's the beauty of it, that's what motivated you.

ECHS teachers relate to the experiences of their students as they may have experienced similar contexts as youths. Several may agree they intentionally sought employment at their ECHS due to their kinship with the students, school, district, or community. They strive to show the students an alternate route to life that could lead to a prosperous future.

Student Performance

ECHS programs and school districts establish and maintain high expectations for student performance through continuous monitoring. Although many students at an ECHS are not typically described by participants as “top tier” or “exceptionally gifted,” historically they outperform peers in neighboring traditional high schools on standardized assessments. P12 said, “we have six stars. So that means the TEA has given us a star in every single subject.” They also mentioned that some neighboring high schools in their district fell short of this benchmark.

All 14 ECHS campus program designs offered students the option to graduate with an associate degree. According to P9’s experience with the program’s goals for students, “all of them will have the opportunity to graduate with an associate degree within 3 years’ time…It has an effect on behavior too because you know when that kind of a standard is set you…rise to meet that challenge.” Based on veteran college professor and ECHS instructor P14’s experiences, they felt invigorated by ECHS students' willingness to work hard to reach their goals compared to traditional college students' perceived apathy since COVID-19. P14 shared that the ECHS students appear to be more willing to “meet the professor [ECHS teachers] where the professor [ECHS teachers] is willing to take them.” P4 expressed the appeal of working with ECHS students, stating, “This is my sixteenth year, and I'm like, oh man…in those moments where I see that light bulb, I'm like, this is why I keep going.” Many other participants shared the same sentiment about the “aha” moments.

Student performance is a byproduct of the teachers' dedication to their success. However, as expressed by P8, although ECHS teachers concentrate on developing students into thinkers and leaders, “Education is political.” Another frustrating aspect, according to P3, is that “it's like people aren't satisfied that we far exceed…it's always push, push, push.” P3 described the

experiences of constant evaluation and data-driven leadership decisions as being “under a microscope” although “we far exceed the national averages…It's kind of fishbowl-ish.” As P1 stated, “we always have to be very much on point in terms of the trends. We have to be very much on point in terms of policies on requirements.”

The consensus from the participants was to ensure that they build relationships with students to increase connection, improve students' ability to learn, and harmony within the school. Students performed better when there was an authentic engagement with the students beyond the course material. Working at the ECHS allows opportunities to help provide educational support for students to persist with their life goals after graduation. Dedication to students is shown through persistence in developing self-assured, independent learners who meet performance standards and transfer knowledge to other endeavors.

Motivation to Retain Position

Another central theme that every participant recognized was motivation affecting participants’ individual transition, development, and persistence within the profession. The four subthemes that emerged were (a) fulfilling purpose, (b) administrative support, (c) relational connections, and (d) positive working environment. Relationships with people and the work environment affected participants’ experiences and motivated career decisions. People included leaders, peers, students, and parents. Leaders at the campus level had the most influence on all aspects of the teachers' experiences and development.

Fulfilling Purpose

Mainly derived intrinsically, the participants' defined purpose for teaching at the ECHS program was one of the most mentioned motivations. Individual sense of purpose was from a

perceived connection to the ECHS mission bolstered by the positive organizational culture. When reflecting on teaching as their vocation and purpose, P4 shared:

> Everyone has a gift, and depending on that gift, you go into that area, that career, that job. And sometimes, I guess, sometimes it takes us a while to find that gift and thank goodness I found that, I found that calling.

Based on P9's experiences, they stated, “Teaching high school was the last thing I ever wanted to do, but somehow life works out and now I can't see myself doing anything else…I enjoy it more than working at a university.” As shared by P13, “I really believe in what they're [ECHS program] doing because college is so expensive and so many young adults just come out of college buried in debt.” When speaking about how the principal at the ECHS aligned the purpose to the mission, P5, a second-year teacher, stated:

> The principal…was talking about there's different stages of what a school can be either a bad or mediocre or good or…distinguished or excellent. He was like the where you wanna be. And he was talking about if you want to be different if you want to have that top tier you gotta be different…so that they're [students] able to get all the knowledge that they can.

Several participants expressed a deep passion and a belief in their ability. When a about asked about how working at an ECHS impacted their knowledge and beliefs, P2 conveyed purpose, stating:

> My belief system had me being able to be a teacher…That I needed to get all the education I can get because they can't take it from you…And I have always believed that in order to have a democracy, you have to have a great public education system. And being an African American, that was one of the things they didn't want us to have. You

> know, separate was never equal. And so, you had to go out and push. And I came from a family of people who believed that. And so, I took that belief, and that's what guides me to teach my kids. Because I don't care what race you are; in the end, theoretically, we should all be, hopefully, at some point, equal.

Participants shared a sense of purpose in the work that they engaged in with the students. P7 stated, “I love it. Just a level of actual instruction that I'm able to do and accomplish with my students.” From the point of view of P13's experiences, they stated,

> I've learned a lot. I mean a lot. But I feel like it's a really good opportunity for kids that the traditional public schools don't offer, and a lot of these kids were not flourishing in a traditional public school.

Based on P3's experiences with helping students find their passion, encouraging students to complete an associate degree first at a lower cost and finding happiness in their chosen path, whether it is college or career, has become the purpose.

ECHS teachers held a strong commitment to the program’s purpose and individual purpose. Leaders are the beacon for the ECHS program’s purpose, which cues staff to why it exists, what is held sacred, and what its legacy represents. When ECHS teachers experience a connection to the purpose, that motivates them to continue to teach.

Administrator Support

Participants consistently suggested that administrator support was essential to developing a flourishing school culture and environment. Administrator support was represented through encouragement, disciplined structure, effective communication, and acknowledgment of contributions. On the authority of P10, also a college professor teaching future teachers:

> I specifically did my dissertation on teacher retention, and my focus was leadership. So, I might be a little biased…but I do think that having the appropriate leadership in place does make a big difference in terms of teacher retention. Because kids will be kids anywhere you go…whether it's early college or not…but I feel like the leadership portion is what can change and, what can be affected, and what teachers ultimately stay or leave for. Because if you have bad leadership or poor leadership, or you have principals or administrators that you know aren't supportive, aren't visible, aren't giving teachers that kind of support. That's the stuff that people remember.

When participants experienced campus leaders who set high standards for students and staff, it cultivated an environment focused on academic achievement and appropriate social interactions of all stakeholders. Participants described those leaders as "strong," "supportive," "able to rally," "good communicators," and "encouraging." Regarding positive campus leadership, P8 explained, "I don't get anxiety when my bosses come in my classroom for an observation...He kinda lets me go. Have fun." Similarly, P9 shared their experiences with administrators, stating:

> My director, my principal, the council that works with us really gives us free [range] to teach our class the way we see fit…So there are no creating lesson plans. There are no mandatory 3 grades, 5 grades a week…I am treated as a professional professor…no walk-throughs.

Participants valued the ability to be involved in the decision-making process for strategic planning. Being informed even when the news was unfavorable was highly valued. Regarding the opportunity to receive information, P2 stated:

> You expect your early college teachers to be a little bit more aware of how things get administered. Right? And they can appreciate that you're doing your best and giving your best, and they'll fight harder for you. And their morale will be up because they know it's not just a struggle against an onslaught of all these things. Should be better, but for some reason, [things] aren't better because; I think a teacher will understand that…knowledge is empowering. And you know, even if it's bad news, at least you understand where the news is coming from and why it's there.

Likewise, although P14 expressed frustration due to the misunderstandings about the role of the ECHS embedded professors serving as ECHS teachers, the supportive ECHS Dean significantly influenced on their desire to remain at the campus. Likewise, P5 and others experienced additional support from "the instructional support menu" and "academic coaches."

Several participants noted that clear communication and understanding of leaders' vision were essential to teachers' job satisfaction. P12 expressed the importance of "setting up…an environment where teachers are comfortable asking questions…an open door with communication" with leaders despite "different types of leadership quality." P6 shared that the ECHS administrator "is in tune with everybody who's at the early college high school as well as getting things taken care of at the normal high school also."

On the other hand, some participants shared that their leaders had an "open door policy," but follow-through was often deficient. P12 shared an example of the frustration experienced when communicating with leaders; they stated, "They say I'll get back to you on that answer and then the answer never comes. You know, so they were lost with the communication." Further, the exchange highlighted the importance of effective communication and follow-through from leaders to cultivate a satisfying work culture.

Finally, participants suggested that administrative support could be shown by acknowledging teachers' contributions to the organization and rewarding diligent service. On the topic of salaries, P9 expressed the importance of increasing compensation to demonstrate recognition of professional credentials held by ECHS teachers, stating:

> If that's your goal…to have a professionally licensed teacher. We have a master's degree and so many hours in that topic that you need to reward them for that. And that means compensation. I don't see another way you're going to get a master's degree professional to do this.

Additionally, P5 expressed their satisfaction when teachers received periodic monetary incentives as a token of appreciation for high student achievement. However, P11 and P13 were willing to work at an ECHS campus that paid less than traditional high schools when they perceived a positive organizational culture facilitated by strong leadership.

Recognition was highly regarded as another means for remunerating hard work and dedication to the ECHS. P12 expressed anxiety about covering vacancies during the teacher shortage, but administrators demonstrated appreciation when awarded the title of Teacher of the Year. Regarding the experience, P12 stated, "I did get teacher of the year…What was difficult was there was not a teacher in the classroom, but I was a teacher of record. So, I'm glad my administration, you know, recognize the hard work that I did." Participants revealed their desire to transfer or leave the profession when neither existed. Similarly, P7 expressed exasperation concerning district support regarding pay scale, stating:

> We had a lot of good teachers last year who were good quality teachers, but they left. And I feel like the majority of the reason is because of the lack of support. I'm looking at teachers 2 or 3 years in…they're coming up with all these great lesson plans, but it's a lot

> of work. And I'm like, yeah, in 3 years when you realize that the amount of effort that you're putting in, you're not seeing that output on your paycheck, you're going to leave.

Supportive leaders developed positive ECHS cultures that promoted flourishing behaviors. Administrative support was experienced through well-established high standards, effective communication, compensation, and recognition. When ECHS teachers went beyond regular responsibilities to support the mission, rewarding teachers with monetary compensation or incentives and recognition communicated their value to the organization. By leaders implicitly acknowledging that ECHS teachers can handle positive and negative information and changes through transparency, leaders gained teachers' confidence in their ability and demonstrated admiration for employees.

Relational Connection

Connecting with students, parents, and colleagues significantly contributed to ECHS teachers' willingness to remain in their positions. According to P13's experiences with relationships within the ECHS, they stated:

> We're all a team. Whereas in the traditional ISD, I feel like parents, students, and teachers are kind of pitted against each other even though they're not supposed to be. But here we're all working together to make sure they are taking the right classes, they're enrolled in the right college courses. You know, we're all tracking their progress, and we're all helping them plan for what to do when they're done.

There was a sense that participants could relate to the students' stories due to past personal experiences. P8 described the students as "the sweetest, the most dedicated kids I've ever been with." Parents held high expectations for the students to perform well. Moreover,

parents supported the school's efforts to guide their students when contacted. P3 gave the impression that "it takes a village" when working with the students, sharing:

> I think because you get to see firsthand, like, student success. And because we have small numbers we have more of a personal connection, you know. I have all of the seniors. I have all 88 of them…My first three years there, I taught the same kids for ninth grade, tenth grade, and eleventh grade. That's probably not happening at a traditional school. And so, I got to develop those relationships with those kids and not only with the kids, but also with the families. And I mean, in this deal this is I think this is my eighth year there. It's still people that I had in the class of 2019 whose siblings, you know, are coming there. So, I mean, I guess like I said, it's you get to see firsthand the impact that this has on somebody. You don't, [it's] not like, oh, three or four years from now like how are you doing?

Working with students identified as not traditionally high achieving to help them transform into college-level students was portrayed as a labor of love for many participants. P14 reflected on their experiences connecting with students, stating:

> Although the students are still gaining maturity, the fact that they have the intellect to succeed in college courses is exciting for most teachers…To get them from where they were when they came to me to where I hope to take them when they leave at the end of the semester...it's rewarding but challenging, frustrating but enriching. So, all those dualities are there.

Establishing genuine rapport with peers was another important benefit to participants. Collaboration with colleagues to form relational connections was high on the list of influences

that promoted longevity within the profession. When speaking about collegial relationships, P14 shared:

> Technically at a college, we don't really have a team. It's every person to his own. But it really is very admirable, heartwarming when you encounter early college teachers…who bond for their common goal of the students. So that's what we have right now. There are four of us who are called embedded professors. And it seems like we kind of clicked. And we understand what we are supposed to do. But more than that, we always have the students' interests at heart first. I'm not saying that we're the best of friends. We are the best of colleagues in terms of performance, expectations, all those things that matter in a college setting. So. It's good to have people who you can rely on and who can rely on you when the need comes.

Equally, P4 shared, "I love everybody that I work with. Within this school, I feel like everybody enjoys what they do, and they love their students. And they really try to push their kids to do better."

ECHS teachers develop relationships or attachments with individuals forming a sense of community in the organization. They presented a desire to preserve stable, and gratifying connections with students, peers, parents, and leaders. Genuine connections provided support for students and colleagues.

Working Environment

Support from administrators, positive student relationships, and collegiality generated working environments that many participants described as "different" and a "utopia." The positive aspects of working in such an environment were expressed by P9, who stated, "I love it. I love every minute of it. I like the subject that I teach." According to P7's accounts of working

on a traditional high school campus that accommodates the ECHS program, “Everybody's trying to work in early college...We got a lot of teachers here trying to get in the early college program.” Staff members worked together to help facilitate the environment with the guidance of strong leaders. As explained by P10, “when the teachers expect higher from the kids, like you don't have excuses anymore,” the entire atmosphere transforms. When leaders utilized proximity control to maintain student discipline, P11 revealed, “There's less stress. You don't have to deal with, you know, kids trying to fight in your class. And quality, the relationships between the fellow teachers and the students is just phenomenal.”

Most participants shared that the ECHS climate has shifted their perspective on how schools could operate. None of the ECHS teachers anticipated leaving the ECHS environment in favor of early retirement or transferring to a traditional high school setting. P10 expressed that working in the environment “felt like it fed my soul…I felt like I needed that kind of happiness in my life.” Based on P4's experiences with positive student interactions, they felt the environment encouraged positivity, which impacted teacher longevity. They stated:

> It is the environment. It is an awesome environment there. Positive…Of course, there's issues always happening, but since majority of students are motivated, they motivate each other. And our struggling students see that energy happening...Of course, we always have struggling students, and they want to leave…the program. It's difficult because it's very rigorous. But…it seems like they’re…always encouraging each other and helping out. There's always competitions, and sometimes those competitions are not so good, and then they feel that they don't meet that expectations. They feel less. And they feel like they can't accomplish it. But majority of the time, they encourage each other; that environment that, okay, everyone can, and there's a goal, that associates and especially the first

> generation… I love the environment…students uplift each other, and they're respectful. So that keeps me going.

Students' determination to work diligently to perform well made the work environment more pleasant. P13 expressed, "It's really like changed the dynamic that I'm used to cause usually you're like trying to force the kids to learn and like these kids are like, yeah, got it…so it's just a very different environment in a good way." With regards to students' work ethic, P14 reflected on experiences, stating:

> Watching the whole process is…interesting, put it that way…I do get a whole lot of satisfaction knowing that these high school students have put themselves in into this challenging situation either by choice or by parental insistence. But they are there. So, it's amazing…Since I started teaching dual credit, I just refused to teach anything else.

When ECHS teachers perceived that there was balanced demand and support, it generated positive emotions, climate, and retention. ECHS administrators' visibility and strict adherence to student disciplinary expectations also contributed to ideal working conditions. Disciplinary issues typically experienced in traditional high schools were rare at these ECHS campuses. Taken together, these factors positively correlated to ECHS teachers' tenure.

Commitment to Self

Every participant had a distinct journey that guided them to teaching at an ECHS. They all related anecdotes that supported their decision to pursue this career. Participants gravitated towards the ECHS environment as the experiences enhanced their commitment to self. Commonalities in interviews revealed the shared importance participants placed on professionalism, work-life balance, professional development, and goal setting. Consequently,

these elements supported the participants' belief that non-ECHS peers aspire to work in the extraordinary environment cultivated by the ECHS.

Professionalism

Experiencing professional treatment by leaders was highly esteemed by participants. Many participants perceived that administrators respect their authority wielded within the classroom as dually employed professors at the ECHS campus. P9's experiences with leaders demonstrated their trust in the participants' competencies to conduct the class without interference. They stated, "I am a professor in that classroom. They, you know, they're there if I need them but unless I do, they're not coming in." On a similar note, P8 shared the pride of "just feeling like I am trusted. I am a professional…I'm not being babysat. I'm not being micromanaged. I don't have to worry about that on my campus." Likewise, P14 recounted how campus leaders eventually altered their perspectives regarding how to manage ECHS instructors teaching college courses, stating:

> Over time, when they started having more professors coming from the campus from the college into the campus…they understood that, yeah, we can't ask these professors from the colleges to come and attend our meetings. So, I say it was more like, okay, so we're starting to see what this woman, this professor, this instructor that we thought was ours is not really ours by virtue of her course is not, does not belong to the district…They'll say…you have planning time to meet with yourself or by yourself and plan your instructional design or whatever.

On the other hand, although some participants identified a level of progress in the ECHS management of staff compared to traditional high schools, some participants shared that there could be more improvement. P3 shared their perspective on ECHS teachers' need for autonomy:

> Treat us like we're professionals. I mean, we do get treated very well at my school. But you know, who else on their job is getting ran and walk through? It's like, so, somebody scribbling on a note pad…I have to sign my contract, and then the school board meets over the summer, and then you decide what the raise is. I don't know any other job like that where you have to sign a contract, and then you find out what you're making.

The barometer for managing the ECHS teachers is still developing. Generally, ECHS teachers enjoyed their relationships with administrators who exhibited confidence in their professional ability to instruct with minimal interference. While some experienced the hands-off approach, others were held tightly to historical high school staff management procedures. Overall, most ECHS teachers were motivated to remain in their current positions.

Work-Life Balance

Maintaining work-life balance was frequently discussed during various participant interviews. Although most participants expressed contentment with their organization, many might have agreed that an inordinate amount of time and investment was required for teachers. Regarding establishing boundaries in the possible work schedule, P8 explained the frustration felt by teachers, stating:

> I really like…the generation that's coming into teaching because they're setting those boundaries and not working for free at home, taking things home to grade and doing this and doing that. I really love that. I think we need to continue to push that into the profession and remove that expectation from teachers. I'm not getting paid. Why am I sitting here for a whole weekend lesson planning? I should be able to use my conference time to do that.

When P13 transitioned from a traditional school to an ECHS, working outside of school hours became a past reality; they declared, “I don't take anything home. Nothing. I'm here from 7:30 to 3:30. I do not email, grade, or anything outside of that. I'm on my son's schedule. I make sure everything is done during the day.” While some found the balance easier to attain, others had a different experience. Reflecting on the subject, P5 revealed, “For me, the most challenging thing is the afterhours that me and some other teachers pull to make things work from day to day.” P7 believed working outside the assigned work hours was inevitable for exceptional teachers and described the impact of time, explaining:

> If you're going to do a good job at it, it's going to invade your finances, your personal time, everything. And so that's just the nature of the job, and you can't really do a good job of it and keep that separate.

Similarly, P4 reflected on experiences with burnout due to the added responsibility to champion students’ extracurricular endeavors to provide a holistic high school experience. They went on to say:

> We feel like being a small campus, we have so many clubs and very, very little staff that everyone is sponsoring a lot. And…we can't say no because the students are like, we want to do extracurricular activities. We want to have what traditional high school has. And we feel like every single one of us has to be a sponsor.

The time spent working outside of school hours was almost an inevitable reality for all ECHS teachers. Most ECHS teachers perceive it as an unfortunate necessity to effectively teach students at a high standard. While some had nothing to complete outside of the workday, others were overwhelmed with the extra responsibilities. Some may agree that pressures to do more,

time constraints, and resource demands may contribute to the yearly turnover of exceptional educators.

Professional Development

Every participant mentioned wanting to attend meaningful professional development sessions to sharpen their craft. Past experiences included attending professional development at the Institute of Higher Education (IHE) partner campus, peer "learning walks," and engaging in "job alikes." In some instances, before budget cuts, some ECHS administrators allocated funding to allow different departments to select and attend training throughout the year. P4 remembered administrators extending invitations for multiple departments to attend training on a rotational basis. During collaborative debriefing, after teams returned from their training, P4 described the ECHS teacher as "motivated" and "reenergized" by the experience.

As many of them were the only educators for a particular subject, participants acknowledged that accepting responsibility for their programs and roles influenced their development, as P3 stated,

> It was a little challenging when I first got there...everybody is solo...You can bounce ideas off of somebody, but you're the only person that's teaching that...So I mean sometimes...it's kind of an isolation...At the end of the day is just you.

Participants also noted that working alongside colleagues with more credentials motivated them to pursue graduate school and professional conferences outside of school. In a discussion about lessons learned from colleagues, P1 shared that working at an ECHS was "Most definitely shaping my career decisions knowing that I am big a part of a bigger whole… I'm always learning; now I'm a student. I always tell the kids I'm a student too."

Several participants completed master's degrees after starting at the ECHS to enable them to teach college-level courses. Meanwhile, others were pursuing doctorate degrees. Flexibility within their schedule enabled P14 to attend graduate school, they explained:

> But there's something about being immersed in education, in the environment that really forces or causes someone to want to pursue education higher. So, before I started teaching, dual credit or early college, I always had…one of those dreams, deferred situation that Lanston Hughes talked about. So, I deferred it. But arriving at the early college, it's…that I have a chance actually to study, to apply to a university to start my PhD. So, it is not as time consuming as the regular…K 12. It really is not. So that gives me time to be in that environment where I can help students, but also help myself and I can use me to motivate students as well. So, you have no idea how much they like the idea that we are both students even though I'm also their instructor. But the fact that I'm a student as well really encourages them and encourages me to keep plugging on.

Yearly engagement in the organizational culture of the ECHS environment empowers ECHS teachers to retain a growth mindset. Continuous improvement was fostered through ECHS teachers' investment of personal time and resources to educate themselves on trends and content knowledge. The primary learning objectives for ECHS teachers were to remain informed about the content developments to support student learning and professional growth. ECHS teachers demonstrate professional leadership and prioritize the needs of their students.

Goal Setting

Most participants associated goals with the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and expressed that achieving student-centered yearly professional goals defined their success. Concerning goal-setting objectives for the T-TESS, P7 shared, "I've been

trying to move over to distinguished on a more consistent basis…Focusing on like making my classroom, my instruction more student centered. And so that's my professional goal." By the same token, P12 disclosed, "Every year my professional smart goal is to get the students to pass…college [course]. My personal goal is to create like a relaxing environment where students feel comfortable to approach me with any questions that they have."

Every participant found fulfillment from interacting with students and assisting them in their learning and development. Students' high achievements reaffirm the participants' feeling of successful performance, further informing career decisions to remain. The optimal measure of professional teaching achievement was student achievement, as explained by P14, who reflected:

> You know, sometimes they say you should not measure your success as a teacher or instructor with student performance, but you should. Because when a teacher is pouring in all the skills and talents and everything else into a student, I don't see any other…effective measurements that would equal having students grow, succeed, and advance to where they're supposed to be. So, student growth and success really have done it for me.

Several participants shared anecdotes about former students who returned to visit after graduation. Visitors shared how their knowledge from the participants' course significantly affected their future success. Participants reflected on the pleasure they experienced in knowing how they positively impacted the students' future endeavors. Regarding their impact on student success, P3 reflected:

> Success to me is their success. It's not really my success…Because that says that when you were there I pretty much I did right by you. I made sure that you had the tools that you needed to go out here and be successful, l and get whatever it is you wanted to do

> with as little debt as possible. That to me is my number one…I told my kids at the beginning of the year I said, Here's the number one thing I want for you to do. I want you to be happy. I don't know what that looks like for you, but I'm going to help you find out in the next 187 days.

ECHS teachers' purpose for entering the field and working with students within the program was to support students in their efforts to aspire and achieve their college and career goals. Making a positive impact affirmed the link between professional goals and student achievement. Further, it clarified ECHS teachers' awareness of their professional identity and increased job satisfaction.

Challenges

All participants shared the challenges of working in the ECHS system. The subthemes that highlighted the most critical challenges facing an ECHS specified by participants were (a) teacher shortages, (b) location, (c) logistics, and (d) understanding guidelines. Participants reported staff shortages at many campuses. The program's physical location and daily logistics were recognized as operational aspects that needed consideration. Repeatedly, participants mentioned misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the regulatory guidelines by parents and outsiders. The participants perceived these challenges as stifling the students' growth and maturity as college learners and influencing staff members' retention.

Teacher Shortages

Over half of the participants shared their experiences of being short-staffed throughout the school year. Shortages were due to teachers leaving mid-year and the inability to find or replace candidates for critical positions. The prominent content area shortages identified were Mathematics, Special Education, and English. During a teacher shortage, in addition to their

courses, P12 was assigned as the teacher of record for a vacancy to develop lessons to ensure the students received appropriate materials. They disclosed, “so there's four teachers in my department and one teacher decided to leave in October and we did not have the staffing at all. So, I was teaching freshmen and sophomores at the same time.” Consistent with P12's experience, P5 shared a similar story, explaining:

> I would say one issue that our school's math department is facing right now is being understaffed… the department head…is responsible for [them] in addition to her classes and preps and her kids. Figuring out what the subs are supposed to give…So, one issue for us is the issue of we need more math teachers, which I know is not a lack of trying on HR's part. There's just a shortage. But that's something that we're facing.

Participants shared that teacher shortages produce a cumulative effect on students’ other courses, frequently resulting in gaps in their learning. Regarding the consequence of teacher shortages to student learning, P11 said:

> Right now, we have a teacher shortage, which you know the whole state does…We can't find an algebra teacher. So that's been a challenge trying to teach students chemistry, which is algebra-based, when they don't have that base knowledge at the level they need. And we have some other shortages, too, but I think that's probably across the state…you know, not only do you have to do your job, but you got to do the jobs of the other people.

ECHS campuses experienced teacher shortages in various areas, affecting the system at multiple levels. Teacher shortages in requisite courses hampered student preparation and achievement. The impact also added pressure and responsibility on other staff members to cover vacancies.

Location

The consensus of all participants was to locate the ECHS separately from the traditional high school students, a tenet of the TEA ECHS Blueprint. Within the study, three participants' campuses were situated on a traditional high school campus with students intermixing, three were on the traditional high school campus in a segregated area of the building, and eight were on a separate campus or the partner IHE campus. Participants emphasized that ECHS students needed opportunities to experience immersion and independence in an environment apart from the high school setting. Participants mentioned the possible correlation of the physical locations of the ECHS to student enrollment, student success, and staff comradery within the ECHS culture. P3 compared the enrollment differences of their ECHS that is housed on the IHE campus to other Texas College and Career Readiness School Models (CCRSM) in their district, not on a college campus, stating:

> We have two early college high schools in our district. And now we have, I wanna say, four P-TECHs, which we didn't used to have 4 P-TECHs. We just had the two early college high schools. But our numbers of people who apply are…significantly higher than the other ones. Maybe it's because we've been there. We've been the first...You know, it's, we have like heavy siblings, like you're the fifth sibling in your family to come through this school. And none of the other schools are actually located on the college campus. They bus back and forth. So, I don't know.

For campuses situated on a traditional high school, with the school within a school model, participants articulated that the experience would be more rewarding for all if the students took college courses on the IHE. As an advocate of college campus immersion for ECHS students and instructors, P14 proposed:

> Students would really benefit a whole lot better if they took their college courses at the college or university. The early college environment in the high school is very confusing to the students...If they were allowed to be and to go to the college campus every day, they will be forced to mature and take the whole program seriously...The high school walls tend to have a gripping and crippling effect on the growth and transition of the students.

Participants working in environments with no separation or who have experienced relocation from the IHE back to the traditional high school campus described the campus as operating less effectively. The educational structure produced fewer intentional ECHS student interactions and ECHS-specific collegial interfaces. Experiences from P1, P2, P5, and P6 suggested that when leadership is unaware of the physical location's impact on the program's success, they situated the program in places that contributed to less efficiency. Regarding relocation and administrators' grasp of the importance of engrossment within the college environment, P6 shared:

> So, I guess the first thing that I would say to you is simply this…I thought that the move of bringing everyone back from [IHE partner name] to the high school campus was an ultimate mistake. If you're going to tout me as an early college high school and you're going to say to me, we want kids to understand what college experience is about, then leave us alone and let us stay. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that there are some people in charge who don't get it. I think you have to look past yourself, and you have to have the idea, I don't know about you, but I grew up in a home to where my parents consistently said to me, I want you to be better than us. I don't want you to be like us…So I struggle with the fact of, why there is leadership that doesn't have that same idea.

Analogous to the sentiments of other participants located in the traditional high school, P1 shared the academic and social benefits and conflicts associated with location, expounding:

> We need to separate our early college population and have them on one wing of the building and have all the early college teachers on that side of the building. Being able to work with each other...to support their students…Unfortunately, because we don't have that encapsulation and a lot of the other entities are influencing our students. So that's where I kind of like, okay, let me identify which ones are the early college kids...That way, I can make sure that they are supported because they can get lost in the crowd…Because they have a lot of outside influences from the other student population, which is just the high school route, that's detrimental to our students at this point. So...finding a way for them to come back and kind of band together again to be able to have that same synergy like they had at the original campus is very difficult… I saw the numbers last year and they're definitely not the numbers that we were used to.

One crucial factor was the universal agreement among ECHS teachers to locate the ECHS apart from the typical high school students. ECHS student camaraderie was missing on a traditional high school campus, with all students mingling, without ECHS students, in a separate building area. ECHS teachers underlined the necessity for ECHS students to be involved in and have independent learning experiences on the IHE campus. Only then did they believe students would gain a full appreciation for the rigorous nature of college and perceive themselves as mature college learners.

Logistics

Participants identified the logistics required to manage the ECHS efficiently as other challenging experiences. Traditional high school and IHE schedules often do not align, requiring

ECHS campuses to determine alternate student schedules. One solution conveyed by P6 with scheduling was, “We basically follow [IHE partner name] schedule because their Monday through Thursday.” Besides Friday, which leaders mandated as a study hall day for all students to receive extra academic support, P3's ECHS campus followed the IHE schedule. The campuses of P7 and P14 also implemented Friday tutorials for students enrolled in college courses.

Strategies for student travel between the IHE and ECHS campuses created logistical confusion on many participants’ campuses. P7 noticed that logistics challenged the flow of daily operations at their ECHS, which is located in a separate wing within the traditional high school building. Regarding the matter, P7 stated, “I think just logistics…Cause this is not [a separate] early college high school. So, this is a program within a program…So, trying to get this program to align with the main campus logistically is sometimes tough.”

Additionally, participants recognized that accountability for students’ whereabouts was challenging on ECHS campuses. Rather than students being taught solely on the ECHS campus, some ECHS campuses transported them to the IHE campus for their college courses. Along those lines, P6 shared:

> We have a bus that runs from [the ECHS campus] to [IHE partner campus]. So if you have an 8 o'clock class at [IHE partner campus] and you're in the early college high school, you ride the bus. So, I stand out with my attendants, and I check off every student that I have that gets on the bus.

Conversely, P12's experience in the ECHS building located on the IHE campus footprint provided greater visibility, accessibility, and effective transitions of students between each location. Further, P11's comments about the practical and ineffective nature of the logistical plan of the ECHS located on a college campus, stating, “We are on the college campus. They'll leave

our wing and go to their college classes and then come back. So, we're kind of like their home base.” However, regarding student accountability inefficiencies, P11 perceived that teacher shortages caused additional strain on the staff and also impacted logistics. They stated, “On top of that, you got to worry about who's checking…that the kids made it back from their college class on time.”

Logistically, many ECHS systems have defects in their execution. Students' necessity to commute between the ECHS and IHE throughout the day generated complications with accountability. Furthermore, participants perceived logistics as a yearly campus struggle, with the leading solution emerging as a program relocation to the IHE campus.

Understanding Guidelines

Participants sensed public misconceptions regarding program requirements stipulated in the blueprint and regulatory guidelines at the college level. Consistent with P2's sentiment that ECHS teachers must be abreast of policies and help stakeholders understand them, P1 stated, “it's that ever evolving changing requirements of students going towards the associates and…graduation as a high school student. So, I think the biggest obstacle is getting them to understand what the requirements are and having them fall in line.”

One significant challenge to interpreting the blueprint observed was the misconception of Texas ECHS students' demographics. Some participants designated some ECHS students as “regular,” “emerging bilingual,” “needing accommodation,” “at-risk,” and “disadvantaged.” The community may need assistance associating these characteristics with ECHS students. Taking the descriptors into account, P4 communicated the challenges staff and students may experience with the general public's perceptions:

> They assume that every child that attends an early college is the top 10%. That. Oh, no...there's no issues… I explain the blueprint to others, even teachers or non-teachers…I explain what that blueprint is for our at-risk students to be exposed to...higher education...So that is a challenge...I feel students, when they say I go to an early college, I feel that when they're outside of school, they feel that too.

The paradigm shift in their perception of the dynamics found in an ECHS relating to the student demographics was further illustrated by P5, who stated:

> I think almost the entire school is classified as economically disadvantaged…As far as achievement goes, they're not top tier for the most part. Most of them are like mid-tier as far as…achievement goes…I think my mind changed about a few things. Like before you get into the classroom, everything here is idealized, and the kids are perfect.

Although these characteristics that can challenge learning may exist, according to P10, "The expectations are much higher. We need them to perform at a different level than your…traditional high school student. It's kind of like building each student up not just in one area but in all of them."

Understanding that the students are between two realities as a high schooler and a college student is a struggle for many. According to P7, the realities of the quality of students at their ECHS were often depicted incorrectly; they shared:

> The students that are in this program are just pretty much regular students…Other than, you know, the college placement exam, it's really not much of a difference. I get to do a lot of more higher-order thinking types of activities because these are seniors. But I've done the same type of teaching with just regular high school seniors, as well…Knowing

> both sides of the coin, knowing what it looks like in college but still...trying to support them because, yes, you're a college student, but you're still just a high school student too.

Concerning the misconceptions of the student population served, and how that affects teaching strategies, P9 provided an account:

> It's a college course that needs to be on a high school pace. You know, I can't just print up the syllabus, give them their assignments, put it on Blackboard, and expect them to do it by the due date. You know, because you're dealing with, you know, high school kids…you can't just put your directions on the assignment, ship it off to them, and expect them to understand what you're asking. You need to go step by step just because, cognitively, they're not there yet, and that level of independence isn't there for them yet…Another big challenge that I've had to get used to is on the early college high school level, you may be dealing with students that are across the spectrum. So, I have the valedictorian of the class in one of my early college high school classes, and in the same class, I have an EB student that is almost brand new to the country and who receives ESL support and across the room from him I have a student that receives 504 accommodations. So even though, you know, on the college level, I would sit there and look at you and think, you know, it's not my duty necessarily to provide accommodations. It's on the student. On the high school level of that, it means I need to provide those accommodations.

Along with understanding the ECHS program, the IHE requirements were mentioned as information often misunderstood. Misunderstandings were experienced through encounters with students, parents, staff, and community members. Concerning parental expectations, P7

experienced a misalignment of expectations and knowledge of the professional obligations of ECHS teachers teaching college courses. They stated,

> Just dealing with things like FERPA, understanding that I don't have to necessarily maintain communication with my early college parents the way I had to do with my high school students. That was probably like one of the biggest differences.

With regard to parent comprehension of college regulations, P14 shared:

> Trying to get the parents to understand that their children are now in college and trying to encourage the parents to let go, to not be hovering and be overprotective and all…They don't understand what FERPA is. So that's the area where you have to try to break it down to them that there is indeed a law that says that I'm sorry, I cannot discuss your child's grade with you because your child is now in college. So that's what I would say…is over-encompassing for us.

The participants perceived many challenges in conceptualizing what an ECHS campus and the students represent. Understanding the population served affected the implementation of the mission by leaders. Relational connections allow teachers to convey the ECHS purpose and strategic plan to support students' goals.

Summary

Working in an ECHS heightened participants' awareness of student options and shifted their perspectives on high school teaching culture. Although there were challenges, the ECHS environment was generally deemed idyllic to teach and learn. Participants expressed comfort and stability that motivated them to remain within their positions, unlike past experiences at the traditional high school campuses. In ideal scenarios, the students, teachers, and administration operated as supportive members of the positive school community and culture. Participants'

commitment to self was punctuated by their perceived level of professional treatment by leaders, work-life balance, development opportunities, and achievement of student performance goals.

All participants conveyed a genuine love of teaching and their students. There was an authentic connection to the ECHS mission and a recognition that the pathway to career success can begin with more than pursuing a four-year degree. Experiencing ECHS students' work ethic and innocence in their pursuit of achieving the tremendous objectives of the ECHS program generated immense satisfaction and joy for all participants. Ultimate job satisfaction occurred when participants perceived that students applied lessons learned in the classroom to their future endeavors to reach personal objectives.

Despite achieving and surpassing typical trends, participants' ECHS campuses were under continual assessment and evaluation for continuous improvement. The idea of such scrutiny was daunting and taxing on the teachers, resulting in shortages. Additional stressors were the need for stakeholder understanding of the program's requirements and compounded demands on teachers' time, which were considerable barriers to satisfaction. Additionally, some students' mindset, motivation, and work ethic present another barrier to program success, eventually impacting teachers' motivation.

Although ECHS teachers' professional goals were student-focused, they sought relationships and autonomy. Witnessing peers' success prompted many participants to seek independent professional development and continuing education opportunities. The formation of ECHS instructors' professional identities was facilitated by assuming responsibility for their course development and professional growth. More professional growth happened when ECHS teachers have sufficient resources and the leeway to manage their classrooms independently. ECHS instructors must believe that they are capable of controlling their surroundings, being

agents of their behavior instead of instruments of external pressures and establishing genuine relationships with others.

The next chapter will further review the central themes, subthemes, and ECHS teacher experiences that refer to and build upon previously conducted research. The findings will be contrasted with previously published research, which will offer fresh insights into the lived experiences of ECHS teachers. Study limitations and their implications for future ECHS studies and actions regarding ECHS teachers, ECHS supervision, and the ECHS environment will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative exploratory study was to investigate and understand the lived experiences of urban Early College High School (ECHS) teachers in Texas. In order to educate historically disadvantaged students, ECHS programs employ dual-credentialed teachers who can help students expedite the process of earning college credits or an associate degree while in high school. According to Duncheon and Muñoz (2019), teachers are crucial to students' educational success, yet their perspectives are underrepresented in the literature. Moreover, the ECHS model showed better teacher retention with a 2% to 4% lower attrition rate than comparable comprehensive charter or traditional high schools (Knight et al., 2022).

This chapter summarizes the study findings and implications specified in the previous chapter regarding ECHS teacher experiences and how they affect their perspectives and career decisions. The chapter concludes with limitations and recommendations for the practice and future research studies regarding ECHS teachers, ECHS supervision, and the ECHS environment. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to explore the research question: How do early college high school teachers describe and perceive their professional experiences working in urban settings in Texas? The phenomenological process represented a neo-positivist inquiry to obtain factual accounts of participants' subjective lived experiences. Descriptions of the personal experiences of ECHS teachers provided by participants advance the overall process of identifying and understanding values and beliefs. Triangulation of the research findings and previously published literature about education, ECHS teachers, and teachers' career decisions were examined. Additionally, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) by

Lent et al. (1994) and SDT by Deci et al. (2017) were the theoretical frameworks used to guide the study and explain the phenomenon to expand the understanding of previous research.

Data analysis of the 14 participant interviews revealed four central themes with four supporting subthemes within each. The four central themes included (a) dedication to students, (b) motivation to retain position, (c) commitment to self, and (d) challenges (Figure 1 in Chapter 4). Dedication to students focused on how ECHS teachers improved the lives of ECHS students by facilitating conducive learning environments that encouraged critical thinking and generally high-achieving performance inside and outside the classroom. The second theme centered on the profound significance of fulfilling individual purpose, administrative support, relational connections, and positive working environment that motivated ECHS teachers to support students. ECHS teachers' commitment to professionalism, work-life balance, professional development, and goal setting influenced career decisions. Finally, the challenges of working in the ECHS system centered on teacher shortages, location, logistics, and program guidelines.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Past Literature

Each theme and emergent subtheme will be further discussed in this section. The results will be compared with previously published research studies, providing new perspectives on the real-world experiences of ECHS teachers. Generally, the findings showed that ECHS teachers attempted to provide nurturing and compassion towards their students as they endured the challenge of being dually enrolled in high school and college. Studies have indicated that a favorable educational environment benefits learners' intellectual, interpersonal, and affective growth (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). Maintaining an overall positive school culture was essential for student achievement and impacted ECHS teachers' perceptions of their work and the education system.

Dedication to Students

In this study, ECHS teachers' primary reason for working at an ECHS was to improve the lives of their students who were identified as "least likely to attend college" (TEA, 2022, para. 1). According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) ECHS Blueprint, the program is designed to give students "an opportunity to receive both a high school diploma and either an associate degree or at least 60 credit hours toward a baccalaureate degree" (TEA, 2022, para. 1). Since some ECHS teachers may have encountered comparable circumstances as young people, they empathized and often connected with their students' experiences. Some study participants also concurred that they deliberately pursued work at their ECHS because of their connection to the students, school, district, or community.

ECHS teachers also indicated that students experience urban contexts within their community, which may sway their progression in the program. Milner (2012), a trailblazer in the field of urban education research, expanded the parameters of the urban school norm definition to take into account the surrounding community, race, academic, economic, and social framework that has an impact on the schools, challenging the views of academics, legislators, and educators. Students from minority backgrounds constitute a disproportionate share of the student body in urban schools, and English language learners are more likely to reside in underprivileged areas (Benson & Owens, 2022; Milner, 2012). The student demographics at the ECHS programs denoted urban qualities in terms of race, language, culture, and economic status (Schaffer et al., 2018). Although statistical data were not tabulated, many of the participant ECHS teachers reported that students they serve were from low socioeconomic conditions, which typically correlates with a significant percentage of free or reduced lunches for students in what is known as high-poverty schools (Walcott, 2019). By acknowledging the particular

problems the student population encountered, ECHS teachers could facilitate conducive learning environments for students to capitalize on opportunities and overcome obstacles to their education while at school.

The study outcomes coincide with scholars' idea that high school collegegoer cultures can support students' goals and assist them with college and career preparation (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). ECHS teachers repeatedly praised the program's physically and psychologically safe learning environment that made students and staff feel encapsulated from detrimental outside influences (Knight & Duncheon, 2020). ECHS programs within the study promoted study skills, college preparedness, technical abilities, and adaptability among ECHS students (Calhoun et al., 2019; Duncheon, 2020). Rigorously designed ECHS learning environments offered students emotional, social, and academic resources, increasing positive student outcomes. According to Duncheon and Muñoz (2019), students prepared for college are better suited for any postsecondary path after high school, including working, learning a trade, enrolling in a university, or entering the military.

Based on their own experiences, ECHS teachers devote their efforts to providing individual support to students (Calhoun et al., 2019), teaching hard and soft abilities transferable beyond high school. One essential life skill that instructors aimed to instill in their students was the capacity to convey knowledge orally and in writing. Reportedly, students become more analytical and thought-provoking when accessing and evaluating material because they learn to "engage" and "connect" with the subject. Allowing students to investigate course material critically helped them learn how to apply the ideas in real-world situations. Participants supported the ECHS mission, placing a high value on assuring students are suitably prepared for college and career.

In order to improve students' capacity to learn and harmony within the school, ECHS teachers all agreed that it was necessary to develop connections with the students. In accordance with previous literature, ECHS teachers observed that IHE professors who taught ECHS students struggled to connect with students and often needed help managing their expectations of dually enrolled students (Mollet et al., 2020). Additionally, Mollet et al. (2020) noted that students reported that supportive relationships with their teachers motivated them to succeed and continue to strive in the future. The literature also stated that students' performance improved when ECHS teachers genuinely engaged with their students beyond coursework requirements. Working at the ECHS offers occasions to encourage students' academic persistence to ignite their desire to continue pursuing their goals after graduation. Based on anecdotes about conversations with past ECHS graduates, teachers shared that ECHS impacted students' views of optimism, self-efficacy, and confidence to make intelligent choices in their futures. Steadfast efforts to cultivate confident, self-sufficient learners who fulfill performance expectations and apply their acquired knowledge to new undertakings were attributed to dedicated ECHS teachers. Even though ECHS teachers held students accountable to produce high-quality work, they understood their role in students' experiences and believed continuous support was essential to effective classroom leadership.

As campus leaders, school administrators are critical in determining a student's academic success or failure (Duncheon & DeMatthews, 2018). ECHS programs maintain high expectations for student performance through continuous administrative monitoring (Burns et al., 2018). With data-driven decisions, evaluation, and continuous needs assessment, ECHS teachers felt the program was under a microscope and always striving to accomplish more despite already high student achievement. Although numerical data regarding student attendance, graduation, and

matriculation rates were not disclosed or solicited within this study, participants reported that their ECHS students typically exhibit better achievement rates than peers in traditional high schools (Song et al., 2021; Walk, 2020). ECHS performance standards considerably raised the probability that students will enroll in college, receive credit, and finish their undergraduate degrees (Burns et al., 2018; Song et al., 2021; Walk, 2020). Exceptional ECHS leaders utilized transformational leadership tactics to create environments that supported the development of a positive school culture and inspired their subordinates, teachers, and students to surpass expectations (Adams et al., 2020; Villarreal et al., 2018).

Motivation to Retain Position

ECHS teacher participant motivation to retain their position stems from a combination of self-leadership autonomy, access to information (Hakanen et al., 2006), administrative support, professional development (Knight et al., 2022), and appreciation (Bakker et al., 2007). Job satisfaction strongly influenced ECHS teachers' desire to continue in the profession and encourage others to seek careers in education (Baluyos et al., 2019). Perceptions of their working environments were profoundly affected by ECHS teachers' self-efficacy, wellness, dedication, and stress levels (Farmer, 2020; Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Viac & Fraser, 2020).

The self-determined intrinsically derived purpose of ECHS teacher participants was an important motivator that inspired them to work within the urban ECHS environment. Intrinsic motivation enriched ECHS teachers’ organizational commitment, initiative, performance, and satisfaction (Van den Broeck et al., 2021). ECHS teachers held a strong belief in their ability to uphold the program’s purpose and help students find their passions for life after high school. Even though there was a large distribution of marginalized student populations (Sykes & Martin, 2019), some ECHS teachers preferred working with students with historically unequal access to

higher education in American institutions (Knight et al., 2022). Participants disregarded preconceived stigma associated with the environment in favor of knowing how to instruct students from diverse ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. Strong intrinsic motivation enabled ECHS teachers to dedicate significant resources to teaching, furthering their career growth (Liu et al., 2019).

Every ECHS teacher in the study was affected by outside influences that challenged their perspectives. Some challenges were absorbed and interpreted favorably, while others discouraged and adversely affected ECHS teachers' motivation (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). Leaders are the beacon for the ECHS program's purpose, which cues staff to why it exists, what is held sacred, and what its legacy represents. Among all the workplace factors, school administrators' efficacy and support were mentioned the most by participants as indicators of ECHS teachers' job satisfaction and outlook (Viac & Fraser, 2020). ECHS teachers evaluated administrator support through encouragement, organizational discipline implementation, effective communication, and acknowledgment of contributions. According to Farmer (2020), administrators' impact on the environment and staff was the best predictor of teacher turnover, which may be the belief of ECHS teachers in this study.

Administrators set the tone for the workplace by making leadership choices that foster a supportive work environment and a healthy work culture (Baluyos et al., 2019). ECHS teacher participants perceived that their administrators affected their psychological well-being significantly (Farmer, 2020). Consistent with Liu et al. (2019), many educators in the study campuses have preferred organizational learning cultures in which leaders utilize an inclusive leadership style. Empowering ECHS teachers to engage in professional autonomy, collaboration on school improvement projects, and participation in decision-making facilitated the preferred

ECHS work environment. In order to foster a positive workplace culture, ECHS teacher participants emphasized the significance of leaders with exceptional communication and follow-through. Understanding the leader's vision was essential to the teachers' buy-in to the program's mission. Participant teachers stressed the virtue of establishing an atmosphere where, regardless of differences in leadership styles, educators feel free to raise questions and have open lines of communication with administrators. Receiving beneficial, encouraging feedback and sufficient performance explanation and direction provided ECHS teachers with a strong sense of job satisfaction and devotion to their workplace (Viac & Fraser, 2020).

Administrative support was also demonstrated by recognizing study participants' contributions to the school and awarding dedicated performance. Compensation was identified throughout the literature and by ECHS teachers in this study as a crucial dimension of job attributes that define teachers' well-being (Baluyos et al., 2019; Viac & Fraser, 2020). The teachers contended that respecting the profession through careful consideration of compensation packages and benefits compared to other professions plays a role in attracting and retaining employees (Tran & Smith, 2019). ECHS teacher participants perceived low salaries and reduced funding for education due to economic downturns as markers of an overall absence of appreciation for the teaching vocation, leading to a decline in enthusiasm for teaching. Adequate compensation to meet the needs of ECHS teachers may produce more work engagement, job satisfaction, and an impression of financial security (Baluyos et al., 2019).

Adjacent to administrative support provided by the leadership team, social support perceived from peers heavily influenced ECHS teacher participants' well-being, job satisfaction, and burnout (Baluyos et al., 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009; Viac & Fraser, 2020). Along with autonomy and competence, according to self-determination theory, human development is

motivated by the fundamental psychological desires for relatedness or relationships (Deci et al., 2017; Kaplan, 2021). Bonding with others fostered ECHS teachers' sense of belonging within the ECHS community (Deci, 2009). The need for relationships drives ECHS teachers to maintain close, satisfying relationships with peers, administrators, students, and community members in social exchanges (Deci et al., 2017; Kaplan, 2021). Developing sincere relationships with coworkers through collaboration was highly valued among the factors that encouraged career longevity. Having the support system found in these relationships with peers benefited ECHS teachers' well-being and students' academic success and support system.

The small school environment in the study enabled ECHS teachers to develop meaningful relationships with students and parents as they often taught the same students for multiple years throughout high school. Occupational well-being encompasses a multifaceted notion of ECHS teachers' reactions to the mental, emotional, physical, and social circumstances associated with their work and vocation, which affects students' success (Viac & Fraser, 2020). ECHS teachers developed genuine relationships with students to facilitate the successful transformation of high school students into college academics. ECHS teacher participants described the process as satisfying, demanding, infuriating, and enlightening. Parents with high expectations for their students supported the school's mission and developed connections with the school, which also aided in the transformative process.

In addition to integrating technology, administrative duties, student support, and curriculum design, ECHS teachers' professional obligations include managing their students' mental, physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being (Viac & Fraser, 2020). ECHS teachers in the study oversee a diverse student population with mixed needs, talents, and demographics in increasingly bureaucratic learning environments (Farmer, 2020). The research findings, which

highlight the importance of job design and school climate in fostering teacher well-being, were confirmed by ECHS teachers, who touted those factors as necessary (Dreer, 2022). The perceived unfavorable school climate, exacerbated by the leadership's absence of support, the decisions made by the leadership, and the general lack of respect, were the justification stated by ECHS teachers when contemplating leaving the profession or transferring from hard-to-staff schools (Holmes et al., 2019). However, ECHS teachers who felt they would stay until retirement described a utopian environment that fostered autonomy, competence, and meaningful relationships with colleagues, students, and community members.

Commitment to Self

With transitions from college or corporate positions, each participant's path to teaching at an ECHS was unique. While some ECHS teachers had credentials to teach college courses through a regional community college or university accrediting agency (TEA, 2020), others taught high school credit courses. According to the value that ECHS teachers placed on professionalism, work-life balance, professional development, and goal setting, the study found that these teachers gravitated to ECHS programs that strengthened their commitment to personally held values about the education system. These factors reinforced the ECHS teachers' perception that peers from outside the ECHS aspire to work in the unique atmosphere that the ECHS fosters.

Based on the SDT framework, the autonomy granted to some ECHS teachers empowered them, fostering more confidence in their capability to instruct and guide students (Deci, 2008). Autonomy was one of the factors that enabled ECHS teachers to believe that they maintain ownership and control of their capacity to conduct their classroom and develop meaningful relationships with students and colleagues (Deci, 2008; Gagne & Deci, 2005). Due to these

conditions, ECHS teachers exhibited self-efficacy, motivation, and job satisfaction (Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021). The conditions also promoted well-being and constructive systemic interaction (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Gagne & Deci, 2005). Although all ECHS teachers did not experience those dynamics, each program executed diverse specifications and expectations. However, in all interviews, ECHS teachers expressed high intrinsic motivation and goal orientation towards student success, which they ascribed to personal success.

Though most ECHS teachers in the study were satisfied with their arrangement, many may agree that teachers were required to dedicate excessive time to work-related activities. Some ECHS instructors noted a desire for improved work-life balance, supporting research showing that teachers experience work-related anxiety and stress due to their workload (Pressley, 2021; Viac & Fraser, 2020). While some ECHS teachers found it more straightforward to maintain balance, others encountered more difficulty due to the complications of increased commitments and sponsorships. Working after hours was perceived as a virtually unavoidable consequence of exceptional teaching for almost every ECHS instructor. Some ECHS teachers may concur that the annual turnover of outstanding educators may emanate from the pressure of added responsibilities, time infringements, and resource demands of working in a high-stakes ECHS program.

Meanwhile, ECHS teacher participants were inspired to maintain forward professional growth momentum through ongoing involvement with the cultural environment of the school. The most common element influencing the ECHS teachers' efficiency and originality was their competency levels (Baluyos et al., 2019). Therefore, the ECHS teachers invested personal time and resources to remain apprised of the latest developments within their discipline and the teaching profession. Material improvements to enhance student learning and professional

development exhibited ECHS teachers' professional leadership. ECHS teachers regarded opportunities to develop their skills and obtain experience as critical work resources that improved job satisfaction, motivation, and professional competencies (Viac & Fraser, 2020).

Throughout an educator's career, having the opportunities to participate in professional learning via official professional development, informal collaboration, or feedback is a persistently positive motivation. According to the ECHS teachers, burnout is more common in people who show inefficacy, making teaching one of modern society's most isolated and depressing professions (Dos Santos, 2021). Every ECHS teacher participant found fulfillment in establishing student-centered learning goals and strategies to improve their professional development to reach the goals. Achieving student-centered yearly smart, professional goals reflected on the state performance evaluation was the primary measure most of the ECHS teachers used to indicate success. Students' high achievements reaffirm the participants' feelings of successful performance, further clarifying their professional identity and informing career decisions to remain. However, when job demands were beyond perceived ability, the ECHS teachers in the research showed less desire to remain in their positions or the teaching field.

SCCT crystalized the meaning attached to the experiences and professional interests of the ECHS teacher participants, influenced by their perceptions of environmental support as well as their abilities to achieve and influence their goals (Brown & Lent, 2019). The ECHS teachers in this study proactively determine goals, convictions, and interests that represent their preferences toward work decisions (Kaplan, 2021). Success or failure shapes the essential knowledge that ECHS teachers need to adapt their attitudes toward self-efficacy and student expectations, determining their enduring interest or disinterest in teaching (Brown & Lent, 2019; Lent et al., 1994). Personally chosen goals to help students perform well or earn their associate

degree were professional goals that increased the study participants' willingness to persist within the profession to satisfy the program's objectives successfully (Shang et al., 2022). These clear, definite, and firmly held objectives demonstrated a crucial element of the SCCT that indicated teachers' tenacity and ensuing success in the urban ECHS context (Lent & Brown, 2008).

Challenges

The challenges of working in the ECHS system, according to the ECHS teachers in the study, were teacher shortages, the physical location of the program, operational logistics, and stakeholders comprehending guidelines. According to the participants, these issues affected staff retention and the capacity for students to grow into mature college learners. In the study, the ECHS teachers observed a variety of teaching vacancies on ECHS campuses, consistent with national reports on the varied effects of teacher shortages on lower socioeconomic hard-to-staff schools with marginalized students (Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Holmes et al., 2019; McHenry-Sorber & Campbell, 2019). Attributed to lower pay, unfavorable working conditions, a lack of administrative support, and stress (Dos Santos, 2021), turnover reportedly contributed to teacher shortages on the study's campuses (Mitani et al., 2022). Although school administrators and human resources departments scrambled to accommodate the loss, job openings remained an issue, and ECHS teachers assumed the added workload that openings generated (Mitani et al., 2022).

The physical location of the program and its day-to-day operations were aspects that participants indicated needed attention. The ECHS Blueprint states, "The ECHS location shall be: a. On a college or university campus, or b. In a high school—as a standalone high school campus or in a smaller learning community within a larger high school" (TEA, 2020, p. 3). While location information has been a longstanding requirement for the ECHS, a new finding is

how participant ECHS teachers perceived the program location and logistics significance. Details regarding ECHS teachers' perspectives on ECHS program locations and logistics were not discovered during the literature review for this project.

The participant ECHS teachers emphasized the need for ECHS students to have opportunities for independence and immersion in the IHE environment. Staff camaraderie, student success, and student enrollment may correlate with the physical locations of the ECHS programs. The study findings show that in the case of ECHS programs located on traditional high school campuses, the school within a school model, students could benefit immensely from attending college courses on the IHE campus. Among all models, campuses without separation of the ECHS program from the general population were perceived to function less efficiently. According to ECHS teachers who worked in contexts where the program was relocated from the IHE back to the traditional high school campus, there was also a perceived decline in program efficiency and increased apathy among students and staff. Both instructional designs resulted in fewer collegial interfaces unique to an ECHS environment and less purposeful and spontaneous positive student connections. Within the study, the ECHS teachers seemed to argue that when students experience the independence associated with college life, they would fully appreciate the opportunity and view themselves as capable, responsible undergraduates.

ECHS teacher participants also mentioned the logistical requirements for successfully operating the ECHS as a significant undertaking. Logistics was a yearly campus struggle for all ECHS programs in the study. Since Texas high school and IHE schedules frequently diverge, ECHS programs accommodated in traditional high schools must devise alternative student schedules. Student transportation between the ECHS and IHE campuses mentioned within the study generated administrative complexity and imposed further responsibilities on the ECHS

teachers for student accountability. On the other hand, ECHS programs housed within the IHE campus footprint offered greater convenience, visibility, and efficient student transition between all locations.

The most frequently suggested solution to location and logistical issues emerged as a program relocation to the IHE campus. ECHS teacher participants perceived that the potential impact of the physical location on the students' mindset and staff morale may be unknown to leaders. Some participants may argue that programs are positioned in less efficient settings when administrators are uninformed about the effect of the location and subsequent logistics required to manage the position on program success. Moreover, the student motivation generated by the chance to experience classes at the IHE enhanced students' drive to continue their education and assimilate into college culture (Duncheon, 2020).

Finally, despite the elitist perception thrust upon ECHS students, ECHS teacher participants found that some students struggled to fulfill the portrayed quality. Some research suggests that even with the efforts of initiatives like ECHS programs, underrepresented students continue to demonstrate inconsistent academic performance, and their likelihood of college matriculation after high school can be daunting (Duncheon, 2020). Participants frequently reported that students, parents, other non-ECHS teachers, and the public misinterpreted the stipulations of the ECHS program and regulations of the IHE partner. Community members might require guidance associating characteristics of ECHS students to descriptors such as “emerging bilingual,” “at-risk,” and “disadvantaged” to grasp the challenge students have elected to pursue. Comprehending the dual realities students face as high school and college students and how those archetypes impact pedagogical approaches can be problematic. Some reported that stakeholders’ expectations and the actualities of the obligations of ECHS teachers instructing

college courses, in this study, were divergent. ECHS teacher participants recognize the need for a paradigm shift in how the public interprets the complexities of ECHS student demographics to fully grasp the magnitude of the challenges the program, ECHS teachers, and the students elected tackle.

Limitations

Finding new phenomena through qualitative research might prove successful, particularly when applying interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to comprehend the subtleties of participants' lived experiences. With IPA, I fully engaged with the interview data and concentrated on each unique narrative. Despite the advantages of an idiographic focus, there are also disadvantages. Specifically, there are constraints on the qualitative research methodological procedures necessary for collecting data and my involvement in the interview process, affecting participants' responses (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

Within this study, all ECHS teachers were currently in the profession, but not all were teaching college courses. The sampling method that enabled participants' self-selection to participate in the study produces unknown individual bias regarding their motivation and interest in the topic, which was a limitation. Participants represented various ethnicities and were not considered homogenous samples. Although ECHS teachers shared a unique outlook on their experiences, with only 14 participants, the study provided a narrow scope of the phenomenon. Personal beliefs and environmental exposure further divided ECHS teacher participants' lived experiences. These elements affected each person's answers to career choices and self-efficacy questions.

ECHS campuses included urban intensive, urban emergent, and urban characteristics from independent school districts and charter schools. Geographically, ECHS teachers were from

eight different schools spanning across Texas, likely further limiting the study. In addition, differences in school size, student population served, urban contexts, and the isolation of being the sole ECHS instructor for each subject rather than a part of a team may further influence experiences, opinions, and decisions. The limitations imposed by the populations restricted the study's applicability outside the schools involved, preventing generalizations about all urban ECHS teachers and urban ECHS programs. However, future research focusing on a subset of the sample's demographics or geographic regions could significantly impact knowledge about the ECHS experiences.

Even though I made efforts to mitigate bias by bracketing, it is paramount to note that disentangling from my experience as a K-12 high school administrator, particularly as an urban ECHS characteristic campus administrator, may have affected the interview and analysis procedures. Although member checking, journaling, and consulting were used to help minimize and buffer biases and preconceptions, IPA nevertheless necessitates a substantial degree of researcher interpretation. Nonetheless, the study's conclusions provide insight into the experiences, perspectives, and professional choices made by ECHS teachers in their efforts to make a significant impact on the teaching profession.

Implications

The study's conclusions serve as the foundation for several implications regarding how the findings might influence practice and future research. Even though the study's results only apply to the participants, this research helps school administrators, ECHS programs, and ECHS teachers learn how to support other ECHS teachers in their pursuit to champion ECHS students within the program. Teacher burnout, high turnover rates, disruption, and shortage rates impact students' motivation and performance (Holmes et al., 2019; Pressley, 2021). Stabilizing the

negative impacts of attrition on the ECHS environment could support the primary goal of the ECHS program, which is to enhance student outcomes for achievement and college and career readiness (Knight et al., 2022).

According to Brown and Lent (2019), SCCT recognizes the relationship between environmental conditions and the meanings people ascribe to self-management, well-being, and job satisfaction. Studies show that supportive environments that allow professional development opportunities help retain teachers in the profession (Deever et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021). Job satisfaction and self-efficacy indicators in ECHS teachers include their enthusiasm, dedication, energy, and confidence in their ability to perform their job as ECHS educators. SCCT also explains how educators developed their professional interests and made career decisions to continue teaching urban ECHS students. Within this study, ECHS teachers' extrinsic motivation from administrative and colleague support, professional learning, and autonomy were employment resources that promoted motivation to remain in their position, job satisfaction, commitment to their organizations, and well-being (Viac & Fraser, 2020).

However, the primary source of teacher shortages characterizes one of the most significant financial burdens on school districts and states (Deever et al., 2020). Teachers who have earned a master's or doctorate have higher exit probabilities than those whose highest level of education is a bachelor's (Knight et al., 2022). ECHS teachers who teach college courses must possess a master’s degree or higher. As expressed by the study participants, if ECHS teachers perceived they were unsupported and unappreciated, that could result in resignations or early retirement. Premature retirement or resignation signifies fewer instructors willing to accept positions within the ECHS, increasing teacher shortages. Potentially, it indicates that fewer college courses are offered at the ECHS campus, requiring more logistical maneuvers to

transport students to IHE campuses. Hence, the crucial question is not about the number of personnel to staff the classes but rather the number of adequately prepared individuals who meet credentialing standards and are ready to contribute their specialized knowledge in the ECHS sector.

Additionally, by comprehending the effects of autonomy on teachers, program administrators at all levels can be more informed on how it influences ECHS urban teachers' interpretation of their experiences that lead to actions. According to self-determination theory, ECHS teachers are more motivated to participate when they perceive their efforts will impact the outcomes (Deci et al., 2017). ECHS teachers will put more effort into work-related tasks when they feel more accomplished and have the opportunity to assume authority (Deci, 2008). Enhancing the well-being of urban ECHS teachers through employee resources could enhance workforce sustainability in ECHS settings.

Recommendations

This phenomenological qualitative exploratory study set out to learn more about and comprehend the lived experiences of Texas's urban Early College High School (ECHS) teachers. Research findings are intended to increase the literature surrounding ECHS teachers' perspectives about working in urban environments and their career decisions to remain or leave the profession. The results highlight the impression of ECHS teachers' dedication to students, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, commitment to self-preservation and development, and the challenges faced by working with marginalized populations in a high-stakes environment. Moreover, discussions will be shared regarding the administration's effect on ECHS teachers and how they significantly influence job satisfaction, impacting their commitment to the organization and profession.

Recommendations for Practice

The experiences and perspectives of the ECHS teachers in this study offer a wealth of knowledge to the practice. Considering that ECHS teachers in the twenty-first century must oversee students' mental, physical, emotional, and intellectual health, they also utilize technology, handle administrative responsibilities, foster teamwork, and develop a curriculum (Viac & Fraser, 2020), resulting in many experiencing high-level stress, fatigue, and burnout. Although ECHS teachers represent a small percentage of teachers within the system, their student outcomes substantially positively impact school and district overall state performance accountability ratings and college and career readiness indicators. Nevertheless, the probability of ECHS teacher attrition is strongly correlated with administrative climate, wages, and opportunities for teacher development (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Low et al., 2022).

Provide Administrative Support. Leaders most significantly affect ECHS teachers' engagement, working conditions, and autonomy, influencing job satisfaction and motivation. Although student demographics and their subsequent challenges may not change, how administrators lead and support ECHS teachers can be developed to inspire teachers to provide students with high-quality instruction (Baluyos et al., 2019). Administrators can practice positive leadership strategies that foster open communication, shared decision-making, and a positive school culture. Additionally, determining strategies to provide meaningful appraisal and positive feedback affecting ECHS teachers' job satisfaction (Viac & Fraser, 2020) can also be improved to encourage buy-in to the ECHS purpose, mission, and vision (Podolsky et al., 2019).

Evaluate Location and Logistics. As noted in the research findings, location and logistics heavily influenced the culture and operations of the ECHS program. Per the ECHS

Blueprint, the ECHS campus should be located in a segregated area of the building, on a separate campus, or the IHE partner campus. If a campus is publicized as an ECHS, students must have opportunities to separate from the climate of the traditional high school campus. Administrators should carefully consider the most appropriate actions to facilitate an immersive college experience for students and staff. Budget constraints may limit the physical location, but provisions should be made within the traditional campus to provide a level of encapsulation of the program to foster planned and spontaneous student and collegial collaboration and support. The positive outcomes of administrative support are enhanced ECHS teacher competence and ownership behavior, cultivating a sense of personal purpose in the workplace (Deci et al., 2017; Fradkin-Hayslip, 2021; Kaplan, 2021), and student citizenship behavior.

Professional Development Opportunities. Furthermore, addressing concerns about continuing professional development opportunities may improve ECHS teacher retention (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Since a significant percentage of inexperienced instructors resign from their positions over more tenured teachers, this warns that shortages may worsen without multifaceted strategic plans. Initiatives for ECHS teachers' preparation could be implemented to encourage healthier school cultures to assist ECHS teachers in meeting the demanding program requirements (Oyen & Schweinle, 2020). Administration might offer ECHS instructors flexibility and financial help to pursue further education to enhance their knowledge about the population they serve, which can strengthen their resolve to remain in their position. Comprehending the social contexts, content knowledge, and pedagogical techniques are equally important in an ECHS environment.

Professional development to broaden ECHS teachers’ understanding of urban schools and student context within the program should focus on the urban intensive, emergent, or

characteristic environments they serve. Due to the historically disadvantaged population they serve, training concerning antiracist education and sensitivity, available resources for students and staff, and student academic guidelines should be offered to adequately prepare ECHS teachers to work in urban ECHS environments. When ECHS teachers are unprepared or aware of the social contexts of the program, they become overwhelmed with the responsibilities they are entrusted to attend to for students, which may result in attrition.

Compensation and Incentives. In addition to developing relevant ECHS program training, offering incentives and increased compensation could be a part of teacher recruitment and retention policies and practices developed to support ECHS teachers (Sutcher et al., 2019). According to some research, areas with high teacher shortages may draw applicants if they are offered competitive salaries (Tran & Smith, 2019). Providing incentives such as higher compensation, loan forgiveness, and improved benefits packages could encourage more individuals to apply to teach at ECHS programs or foster conditions for teachers to return (Podolsky et al., 2019). Offering these opportunities for ECHS teachers to use autonomous self-determination to attain their goal of effecting change for students within the ECHS is a means of rewarding and motivating them (Deci et al., 2017).

Recommendations for Research

The findings and limitations found within this study informed the recommendations for future research. Study results demonstrate a need for further research into the unique experiences of ECHS teachers. Investigating how those experiences influence self-efficacy and career decisions will enhance practice knowledge. Additionally, exploring new themes not previously studied represents other critical areas for future research.

Replicate Current Study. The first recommendation for future research is to replicate the current study, focusing on the demographic or geographic scope utilized to open paths to discoveries. Although the limited number of participants provided a restricted overview of the phenomena, the 14 ECHS teachers within this study presented a distinct perspective on their experiences. Researchers could expand the number of participants to gain a broader view of the ECHS teachers' experiences. Additionally, future research could test a homogenous sample of only ECHS teachers who teach dual credit courses to determine what themes arise within the group. Moreover, future studies could narrow the geographic span of the ECHS campuses to specify the inclusion of urban intensive, urban emergent, or urban characteristics from independent school districts or charter schools rather than all classifications. Unlike the current study, which encompasses participants from across Texas, researchers could concentrate on ECHS teachers in a specific school, district, or city in future studies.

Explore ECHS Teacher Beliefs and Exposure. The second recommendation is for researchers to explore the ECHS personal beliefs and environmental exposure more deeply, which guide perceptions of the experiences on the ECHS campus, career choices, and self-efficacy. Factors that may affect experiences and the formation of opinions that influence decisions include variations in school size, the student demographic served, and urban surroundings. Likewise, teaching a topic as the only ECHS instructor rather than as a collaborative team member has an isolating effect that could alter perspectives on experiences. Past related and nonrelated career experiences assisted ECHS teachers with career decisions and shaped job satisfaction. Potential avenues for this recommendation include investigating the topics further and repeating the study with comparable populations in different places.

Explore Newly Discovered Themes. The third recommendation for further study is necessary to address topics that surfaced but have yet to be covered by previous research. Analyzing the interview data raised several new questions about the ECHS environment, the program, and ECHS teachers that need further investigation. In light of ECHS teachers' impact on students' achievement and their futures, regarding employment in ECHS programs, one concern was the school districts' hiring policies and the support they offered ECHS teachers. Another question concerning support was how administrators balance the demands of autonomy, collaboration, and supervision. Although this study provided this information, further insight into how their prior and current experiences influenced ECHS teachers' decision-making and self-efficacy would increase knowledge.

Other research opportunities lie with ECHS location and logistics and how these factors affect ECHS teachers' experiences and the overall program. Future research could explore how location and logistics are implemented, managed, and funded within the smaller school districts or charter schools, which research shows are often underfunded (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). Along those lines, further investigation could study the benefits and analysis of locating ECHS programs on an IHE campus instead of a traditional high school and how that affects teacher outcomes and attrition. Finally, further study is also necessary to understand how ECHS teachers manage difficult situations and high demand, how favorable and adverse experiences regarding all themes and subthemes influence career choices, and whether perception or attitude also plays a role in decision-making.

Summary

This phenomenological qualitative exploratory study examined Urban Early College High School (ECHS) teachers' lived experiences. Hard-to-staff ECHS campuses with

underrepresented students in lower socioeconomic urban areas suffer high teacher attrition. This study revealed how some urban ECHS teachers define their professional experiences, which affects organizational outcomes. Research also provided insight into the professional choices and self-efficacy that ECHS teachers reported that influenced their viewpoints. The dynamic and resolute research participants encountered obstacles and encouragement throughout their unique journeys, which helped them develop career competencies.

The central themes that emerged were ECHS teachers' dedication to students, motivation, commitment to self, and program challenges. Dedication to students centered on how ECHS teachers enhanced students' lives by establishing positive educational settings that promoted intellectual curiosity and generally high achievement. Their purpose, administration support, interpersonal relationships, and work culture inspired ECHS teachers. Professional treatment, work-life balance, opportunities for relevant professional development, and goal setting that bolstered their career choices were the main priorities of ECHS teachers' self-commitment. Ultimately, program requirements, location, logistics, and teacher shortages were the primary sources of difficulty for those employed in the ECHS system.

ECHS teacher participants' experiences and professional interests were determined by their views of the support system in their environment, and their capacity to accomplish and impact their objectives was considered through SCCT and SDT. One of the main factors that encouraged ECHS teachers to work in the urban ECHS setting was their organically driven, self-determined purpose. Administrator support, bonds with peers, and positive relationships with students and parents in social exchanges developed a sense of community, highlighting the value placed on self-determined relatedness. ECHS teachers actively recognize their passions, convictions, and ambitions when making career decisions. ECHS teacher's ability to adjust their

views regarding self-efficacy, student expectations, and their level of enduring enthusiasm in teaching is shaped by their success or failure.

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Appendix A: IRB Letter

Date: August 16, 2023

PI: Tamika Young

Department: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online

Re: Initial - IRB-2023-185

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Urban Early College High School Teachers' Experiences

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Urban Early College High School Teachers' Experiences*. The administrative check-in date is --.

Decision: Exempt

Category: Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;

Research Notes:

Additional Approvals/Instructions:

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable. All approval letters and study documents are located within the Study Details in Cayuse IRB.

The following are all responsibilities of the Primary Investigator (PI). Violation of these responsibilities may result in suspension or termination of research by the Institutional Review Board. If the Primary Investigator is a student and fails to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the Faculty Advisor then becomes responsible for completing or upholding any and all of the following:

• When the research is completed, inform the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. If your study is Exempt, Non-Research, or Non-Human Research, email orsp@acu.edu to indicate that the research has finished.
• According to ACU policy, research data must be stored on ACU campus (or electronically) for 3 years from inactivation of the study, in a manner that is secure but accessible should the IRB request access.
• It is the Investigator's responsibility to maintain a general environment of safety for all research participants and all members of the research team. All risks to physical, mental, and emotional well-being as well as any risks to

confidentiality should be minimized.

For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website
http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...
or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

Date: September 11, 2023

PI: Tamika Young

Department: ONL-Online Student, 17250-EdD Online

Re: Modification - IRB-2023-185

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Urban Early College High School Teachers' Experiences

The Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Urban Early College High School Teachers' Experiences*.

Decision: Approved

Findings: Minor modifications are approved.

The changes requested and approved are summarized below:
Minor modifications are approved.

If you wish to make any further changes to this study, please complete a new Modification Form. For additional information on the policies and procedures above, please visit the IRB website
http://www.acu.edu/community/offices/academic/orsp...
or email orsp@acu.edu with your questions.

Sincerely,

Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board

Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Attention: TX Early College High School Teachers

Hello, my name is Tamika Young. I am a doctoral student at Abilene Christian University and an educator. I invite you to participate in my research. The title of my research is An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Urban Early College High School Teachers' Experiences. This qualitative study aims to investigate and understand early college high school (ECHS) teachers' lived experiences working in an urban environment in Texas.

You are eligible to participate if you:

- Are an ECHS teacher in Texas
- Are over the age of 18 years
- Are any gender identity
- Have any amount of teaching experience

You are not eligible to participate if you:

- Are not an ECHS teacher in Texas.
- Are a student teacher

Your opinion is valuable and would be greatly appreciated. Participation is voluntary. The study would include a 45-minute virtual interview with me, the researcher. If you are interested, please click the link below to complete the short questionnaire. I genuinely appreciate your consideration and feedback.

Demographics Questionnaire link: https://tinyurl.com/4xyfcffe

Appendix C: Self-Administered Questionnaire

Contact Information:

Last Name
First Name
Email Address
Telephone or Cell Phone Number

Early College High School Information:

1. District Name

2. School Name

3. How would you describe your school? Select the option that best fits your school. (Note: Urban schools are grouped as urban intensive, urban emergent, and urban characteristic to consider the unique circumstances that urban schools and urban districts encounter.)

    a. Urban Intensive - large schools located in large metropolitan cities with large population of minority students and outside factors such as low-income housing and poverty affect the school.

    b. Urban Emergent - located in places with less than 1 million people that experience similar characteristics outside of school as the urban intensive such as a considerable number of students from minorities and immigrants living in poverty.

    c. Urban Characteristic - may be rural or suburban schools that experience similar contexts, such as increased English language learners, low-socioeconomic conditions, and other factors similar to intensive and emergent environments.

Demographic Information:

4. How many years of teaching experience do you have?

5. What subjects do you teach?

6. Age Group
    a. 20-29
    b. 30-39
    c. 40-49
    d. 50+

7. Gender Identity
    a. Male

   b. Female
   c. Transgender
   d. Other
   e. Prefer not to say.

8. Ethnicity
   a. White
   b. Hispanic or Latino
   c. Black or African American
   d. Native American or American Indian
   e. Asian/Pacific Islander
   f. Other

9. Highest Level of Education
   a. Bachelor's degree
   b. Master's degree
   c. Professional degree
   d. Doctorate degree

Appendix D: Individual Interview Question Guide

Introductory Protocol:

For accurate notetaking, I will record our interview today. For transparency, I am a solo researcher and will be the only person with access to the recording. The data must be securely stored for 5 years following the completion of the study. To continue in the process, you must sign the consent to participation form created to comply with our human subject guidelines and to ensure I have your permission. The form was sent to you in an email titled Consent to Participate Form.

The agreement indicates that:

(1) all information will be kept confidential,
(2) your participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue the process at any moment if you feel uncomfortable, and
(3) that I have no malicious intent.

[Pause to allow the participant to sign the consent form.]

I appreciate your decision to participate.

Time Disclaimer:

This interview is expected to take about 45 minutes. I want to ask several questions during this meeting. Although I do not want you to feel rushed, to respect your time, it might be necessary to interrupt you if we are about to run out of time so we can finish all the questions.

Introduction:

Again, thank you for choosing to speak with me today. You were selected as a participant because you work in a unique area of teaching which naturally creates a distinctive teaching and learning opportunity at an early college high school. Working in such a place generates a wealth of experiences you could share. This research project concentrates on the experiences of early college high school teachers working in urban settings in Texas and how their experiences influence their belief systems that guide career decisions. This study aims to give a voice to teachers working in these environments to learn more about their work life. The hope is that this research will add to the conversations about early college high school and inform decision-makers.

Interesting Background: (Note: Self-administered questionnaire was completed online prior**.**)

1. What subject(s) do you teach?

2. What was your field of study in college?

Interview Questions:

Inputs:

1. Please share (or explain) your career in education and provide your credentials for working in an early college high school.

   Probe: *Did you enter the ECHS through a traditional teaching path or from a higher education setting?*

2. Please share the circumstances that led to you becoming an early college high school teacher.

Environment:

3. Please discuss some of your experiences working at an urban ECHS campus.
4. What do you find most satisfying as an urban early college high school teacher?
5. What challenges have you faced working at an urban early college high school?
6. In what ways do you believe your experiences differ from teachers in traditional high schools?
7. Think about the first year you worked at an ECHS. How prepared did you feel?
8. What were your goals when you began teaching at an ECHS and are you accomplishing them?
9. What factors encourage you to continue to work at an urban ECHS?

   Probe: Are there any supports that ECHS provided that contributed to their longevity or success?

10. Please share ways you contributed to student success.
11. Please explain how the learning environment and curriculum affects your students.
12. Please describe how your teaching strategies impact students.

13. What are some barriers to early college high school students' success?

Outputs:

14. Please explain how your teaching career at an urban ECHS has influenced your knowledge and beliefs.
15. How has the knowledge you have gained while working at an urban ECHS shaped your career decisions?
16. What are teachers' most critical problems, particularly at an early college high school?
17. What is the most rewarding aspect of working in an urban ECHS?
18. If you had decision-making power, what improvement(s) would you suggest to help retain teachers in the profession and specifically encourage others to work in an ECHS?
19. Please describe an example of ways to help teachers be more equipped to be successful in an urban ECHS environment.
20. Would you like to share additional information about your experiences at your ECHS?

Appendix E: Expert Validation Permission (VREP)

To: Tamika Young
May 19, 2023

Thank you for your request for permission to use VREP in your research study. I am willing to allow you to reproduce the instrument as outlined in your letter at no charge with the following understanding:

- You will use this survey only for your research study and will not sell or use it with any compensated management/curriculum development activities.
- You will include the copyright statement on all copies of the instrument.
- You will send your research study and one copy of reports, articles, and the like that make use of this survey data promptly to our attention.

If these are acceptable terms and conditions, please indicate so by signing one copy of this letter and returning it to me.

Best wishes with your study.

Sincerely,

Marilyn K. Simon, Ph.D.

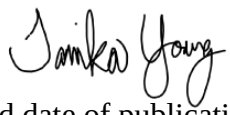
Signature_____

More information can be found in Simon and Goes' Dissertation and Scholarly Research: Recipes for Success, 2018 edition.

https://smile.amazon.com/Dissertation-Scholarly-Research-Recipes-Success-ebook/dp/B0765VLM4C/ref=sr_1_2?dchild=1&keywords=dissertation+and+scholarly+research+2018&qid=1623078590&sr=8-2

https://tinyurl.com/4s6wuee8

I understand these conditions and agree to abide by these terms and conditions.

Signed: 

Expected date of publication: June 1, 2024

Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel - VREP©
Revised 2019

By Marilyn K. Simon and Jim Goes with input from Jacquelyn White
From: Dissertation and Scholarly Research: Recipes for Success 2018 edition
http://www.dissertationrecipes.com/

Reviewers Name: _____

Expertise in Related area (please note courses taught, professional experience, publications, or degrees in related areas)

_____

http://dissertationrecipes.com/

Criteria	**Operational Definitions**	**Score** **1=Not Acceptable** (major modifications needed) **2=Below Expectations** (some modifications needed) **3=Meets Expectations** (no modifications needed but could be improved with minor changes) **4=Exceeds Expectations** (no modifications needed)				**Questions NOT meeting standard (List page <u>and</u> question number) and need to be revised.** ***Please use the comments and suggestions section to recommend revisions.***
		1	2	3	4	
Clarity	The questions are direct and specific. Only one question is asked at a time. The participants can understand what is being asked. There are no *double-barreled* questions (two questions in one).					
Wordiness	Questions are concise.					

	There are no unnecessary words					
Negative Wording	Questions are asked using the affirmative (e.g., Instead of asking, "Which methods are not used?" the researcher asks, "Which methods *are* used?")					
Overlapping Responses	No response covers more than one choice. All possibilities are considered. There are no ambiguous questions.					
Balance	The questions are unbiased and do not lead the participants to a response. The questions are asked using a neutral tone.					
Use of Jargon	The terms used are understandable by the target population. There are no clichés or hyperbole in the wording of the questions.					
Appropriateness of Responses Listed	The choices listed allow participants to respond appropriately. The responses apply to all situations or offer a way for those to respond with unique situations.					
Use of Technical Language	The use of technical language is minimal and appropriate. All acronyms are defined.					
Application to Praxis	The questions asked relate to the daily practices or expertise of the potential participants.					
Relationship to Problem	The questions are sufficient to resolve the problem in the study.					

	The questions are sufficient to answer the research questions. The questions are sufficient to obtain the purpose of the study.					
Measure of Construct: A: (Relationship to problem note questions in survey or interview)	The survey adequately measures this construct.* ***[Include Operational Definition and concepts associated with construct]*** ***List the questions from the survey or interview***					
Measure of Construct: B: (Relationship to problem note questions in survey or interview)	The survey adequately measures this construct. ****[Include Operational Definition and concepts associated with construct]*** ***List the questions from the survey or interview***					
Measure of Construct: C: ( )	The survey adequately measures this construct.* ***[Include Operational Definition and concepts associated with construct]***					
Measure of Construct: D: ( )	The survey adequately measures this construct.* ***[Include Operational Definition and concepts associated with construct]***					

*The operational definition should include the domains and constructs that are being investigated. You need to assign meaning to a variable by specifying the activities and operations necessary to measure, categorize, or manipulate the variable. For example, to measure the construct *successful aging* the following domains could be included: degree of physical disability (low number); prevalence of physical performance (high number), and degree of cognitive impairment (low number). If you were to measure creativity, this construct is generally recognized to consist of flexibility, originality, elaboration, and other concepts. Prior studies can be helpful in establishing the domains of a construct.

Comments and Suggestions

Types of Validity

VREP is designed to measure face validity, construct validity, and content validity. To establish criterion validity would require further research.

Face validity is concerned with how a measure or procedure appears. Panel needs to address the following questions:

1. Do the survey/questions seem like a reasonable way to gain the information the researchers are attempting to obtain?
2. Do the survey/interview questions seem well designed?
3. Do the survey/interview questions have clarity?

Face validity is independent of established theories for support (Fink, 1995).

Construct validity seeks agreement between a theoretical concept and a specific measuring device or procedure. This requires operational definitions of all constructs being measured as noted in VREP.

Content Validity is based on the extent to which a measurement reflects the specific intended domain of content (Carmines & Zeller, 1991, p. 20). Experts in the field can determine if an instrument satisfies this requirement. Content validity requires the researcher to define the domains they are attempting to study. Construct and content validity should be demonstrated from a variety of perspectives and noted in the VREP.

Criterion related validity, also referred to as instrumental validity, is used to demonstrate the accuracy of a measure or procedure by comparing it with another measure or procedure which has been demonstrated to be valid. Are there similar surveys/interview questions from other studies? If after an extensive search of the literature, such an instrument was *not* found, then the instrument that meets the other measures of validity are used to provide criterion related validity for future instruments.

*Operationalization is the process of defining a concept or construct that could have a variety of meanings to make the term measurable and distinguishable from similar concepts. Operationalizing enables the concept or construct to be expressed in terms of empirical observations. Operationalizing includes describing what is, and what is not, part of that concept or construct.

References

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