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# The District's Stepchild: The Total Erasure of Low-Income Latinx Students' Needs at Continuation High Schools

Gabriela R. Ornelas  
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THE DISTRICT'S STEPCHILD:  
THE TOTAL ERASURE OF LOW-INCOME LATINX STUDENTS'  
NEEDS AT CONTINUATION HIGH SCHOOLS

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A Thesis  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
Chicanx-Latinx Studies

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Arts  
in  
Chicanx-Latinx Studies

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By  
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## INTRODUCTION

According to the California Department of Education, continuation schools are a form of alternative education that provide a high school diploma program for credit deficient students. To be placed in a continuation school, the student must be classified at risk. The majority of the continuation student population are categorized as delinquent by legal and school-board systems. Within California, there are five hundred and twenty continuation schools, serving over 70,000 students.<sup>1</sup> A disproportionate number of those students are of color from low-income communities. Given their backgrounds, many students endure difficult life circumstances whose consequences manifest as emotional and behavioral disorders, learning disabilities, educational disengagement, and perceived acts of juvenile delinquency.<sup>2</sup> Acknowledging the link between our educational and capitalist systems, it is evident that economically disadvantaged students of color are tracked into alternative education, specifically into continuation high schools.<sup>3</sup>

Continuation high schools that serve this vulnerable demographic of students receive inadequate funding, teaching materials, and supplementary resources, which makes it difficult to adequately serve the students' specific academic and emotional needs.<sup>4</sup> Worsening the situation, there are no institutionalized accountability systems at continuation sites. The district and the state are not making any changes to address the resource disparities as there is no formal or established avenue of communication between the schools and the administration.<sup>5</sup> As

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<sup>1</sup> Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, "California's Continuation Schools" *Ed Source* (2008).

<sup>2</sup> William F Kratzert and Mona Y. Kratzert, "Characteristics of continuation high school students: Continuation Education Program Summary." *California Department of Education* (1989).

<sup>3</sup> Deirdre M. Kelly, *Last chance high: How girls and boys drop in and out of alternative schools* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Greg Austin, Don Dixon, Joseph Johnson, Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Milbrey McLaughlin, and Lynne Perez, "Alternative education options: A descriptive study of California continuation high schools." *West Ed* (2008).

<sup>5</sup> Milbrey McLaughlin and Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, "Raising the Bar, Building Capacity: Driving improvement in California's continuation high schools." *The California Alternative Education Research Project* (2012).

continuation high schools primarily serve low-income Latinx students, the alternative sector is forced to navigate intense structural challenges.

Little research exists regarding continuation high schools' positionality within the educational system. Therefore, my study is one of the first to examine the structural conditions facing continuation high schools through a teacher's perspective. I explored educators' experiences by conducting 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Southern California continuation high school teachers. Guided by this methodological approach, I focused on the following areas of study: the teacher's career, the teacher's interactions with students, and the teacher's opinions regarding their accessibility to funding and resources. Serving 10% of the student population, how can structural issues present with continuation schools be unacknowledged or unaddressed by parents, district administration, and the greater community? Why do continuation high schools that primarily serve low-income Latinx students face disproportionate institutional challenges? My study explores the underlying factors that allow the systemic structural issues within continuation high schools, which result in the low educational performance of low-income Latinx continuation students. Within my study, I conclude that teachers, the outer community, and school-board administrators utilize cultural deficit thinking and stigmatization as tools of total erasure to exchange low-income Latinx students' social identities with racialized and classist stereotypes; in consequence, these mechanisms allow the district to impose invisibility on students' academic and emotional needs in order to justify the formation and maintenance of institutional challenges for administrators' fiscal benefit.

My empirical work is significant because it introduces an analysis of how and why structural issues persist within continuation high schools using a racial and socio-economic lens. I believe my study contributes to existing literature regarding education as it provides evidence

that the education system reproduces social inequality. An interdisciplinary piece, my study utilizes the intersections of critical race theory, conflict theory, and education to expose the systemic obstacles embedded within academic institutions that make it difficult for low-income Latinx students to succeed academically.

### ***Contextual Literature***

Literature regarding continuation high schools is limited. I researched archives within libraries across California, navigated academic online sources, read texts from established California Department of Education databases, and connected with fellow scholars whose current work focuses on alternative education. Through existing literature, I pieced together a contextual overview of California continuation high schools.

### ***History of Continuation High Schools***

According to the California Department of Education, continuation high schools are a form of alternative education that provides high school diploma programs for non-traditional students.<sup>6</sup> Established in 1910, the motto of continuation high schools has remained, which is “to serve those who are deficient in the rudiments.”<sup>7</sup> Even though the mission statement has never been altered, continuation high schools’ target population, educational objectives, and institutional purpose have shifted over the decades since its creation. These distinct shifts can be described in three eras that are shaped by their historical, political, and social contexts.

The first era began with the establishment of a continuation high school in September of 1910 in California. With World War I beginning in the near future, there was an increased need for industrial labor. As this demand became more severe, an influx of child labor was able to

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<sup>6</sup> *Continuation Education Program Summary* (Department of Education: 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Joseph F. Johnson and Lynne G. Perez, "California continuation high schools: A descriptive study." *The National Center for Urban School Transformation* (2008).

partially fulfill employment gaps. In consequence, there were many children who were working full-time jobs and were unable to attend school. This population needed an alternative educational option that was flexible and basic. In response, continuation high schools were created to provide a very basic education and give students access to apprenticeships that taught occupational, life skills. Primarily, these schools served Native American and working class, immigrant youth populations as they were the primary work force behind child industrial labor at the time. During the continuation high school's initiative years, the primary goal of the institution was to provide vocational training.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1930's, the implementation of compulsory education laws and child labor laws initiated the second era as the focus and purpose of the continuation high school was altered. Not only were children not allowed to be employed as full-time laborers, they were legally obligated to attend school for longer hours. With the implementation of the new laws, there was an influx of primarily low-income urban youth who were beginning to enter into the school system. During the '30s, the education system in place was not structured or equipped to provide educational services to the increasing population of children. In response to the larger student population, the US federal government began to provide funding incentives to continuation schools that consisted primarily of low-income minority students. Set within the racial and classist historical context of the '30s, the US educational system and federal agencies utilized segregatory practices in order to separate new low-income students of color from the general white student population.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Deirdre M. Kelly. *Last chance high: How girls and boys drop in and out of alternative schools*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993)

<sup>9</sup> Deirdre M. Kelly. *Last chance high: How girls and boys drop in and out of alternative schools*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); John W. Voss, "Handbook on continuation education in California." *California State Department of Education* (1968).



With the influx of new students of color between the 1930's to the 1960's, continuation high schools sustained their vocational education objectives but for a different social purpose. The schools' main goal was to socialize the "maladjusted" urban youth of color. Continuation high schools believed that socialization for this population consisted of the reformation of inherently delinquent behaviors to prepare them for the "world of blue-collar work." This shift resulted in the categorization of continuation high schools as dumping ground for low-income students of color who the education system had identified as maladjusted. Mirroring the educational strategy of tracking, continuation high schools not only targeted urban youth of color, but also heavily contributed to the racialized, classist process of stigmatization that categorized low-income continuation high school students of color as abnormal, unengaged, and deviant.<sup>10</sup>

Alongside the Civil Rights movement, the 1970's began a period of social reform within various institutions including the education system. This time period granted continuation high schools the ability to integrate progressive opportunities. During this third era, continuation high schools began to invest time and effort into fully serving their continuation students. This shift is exemplified through the implementation of new social, academic, and professional programs and policies within continuation schools across the US. For example, many schools added community vocational learning opportunities, granted students the ability to take college courses, implemented flexible attendance schedules, and provided students with the opportunity to earn a

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<sup>10</sup> Deirdre M. Kelly. *Last chance high: How girls and boys drop in and out of alternative schools*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); D.W. Robinson, "Alternative Schools: Do They Promise System Reform?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, 54, no. 7 (1973): 433-43.

high school degree. As of now many of these types of progressive programs have diminished, only leaving the opportunity to graduate high school with a general diploma.<sup>11</sup>

### *Characteristics of Continuation High Schools*

As of today, the California alternative education system contains five hundred and twenty high schools that serve over 70,000 students or 10% of the California student population (EdSource, 2008). Students within alternative education are disproportionately students of color from low socio-economic communities. Statistics indicate that California continuation schools are 55% Hispanic, 20% White, 4% Asian, and 16% African American. In addition, over 70% of this student population is enrolled within free or reduced lunch programs.<sup>12</sup>

In general, the population of students who attend continuation high schools are vulnerable. Low-income youth of color who are coping with personal, academic, and mental struggles are overrepresented within continuation high schools. With a majority of the population being students of color, 20% are English learners. In addition, continuation high school students are three times more likely to be in the foster care system. Furthermore, many are coping with disabilities – 20% have diagnosed learning disabilities and 50% have emotional and behavioral disabilities.<sup>13</sup> In addition, students who attend continuation high schools are more likely to have to persevere through adverse environmental circumstances which often results in students participating within delinquency. For example, the majority of students who are in foster care are often categorized as truant as instability of their “home-life” blocks their ability to participate within education. Moreover, rates of regular and heavy alcohol or drug use are two times higher

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<sup>11</sup> D.W. Robinson, “Alternative Schools: Do They Promise System Reform?” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 54, no. 7 (1973): 433–43.; Vernon H. Smith, “Options in Public Education: The Quiet Revolution.” *Phi Delta Kappan* 54, no. 7 (1973): 434–37.

<sup>12</sup> Greg Austin, Don Dixon, Joseph Johnson, Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, Milbrey McLaughlin, and Lynne Perez, “Alternative education options: A descriptive study of California continuation high schools.” *West Ed* (2008).

<sup>13</sup> William F Kratzert and Mona Y. Kratzert, “Characteristics of continuation high school students: Continuation Education Program Summary.” *California Department of Education* (1989).

among continuation students compared to their peers. In addition, students are three times more likely to have been in four or more physical fights and twice as likely to have been a gang member. Overall, continuation high schools serve a vulnerable student population; therefore teachers and administrators are called to respond to a heightened level and concentration of personal, social, and academic needs.<sup>14</sup>

### *Institutional Challenges*

There are many detrimental institutional factors that have made it difficult to adequately serve this unique demographic of students. In general, California districts provide funding and resources for a school based solely off the number of students they serve. Alternative education was constructed in order to have smaller student to teacher ratios to promote the success of non-traditional students with differing academic needs. One main issue is that state finance and governance policies view continuation schools as smaller versions of comprehensive schools. Because funding is based exclusively on the number of students they serve, continuation high schools are unable to provide adequate resources and services. This has formed negative outcomes that burden students and teachers. One consequence is that teachers have to focus on credit recovery without the same individualized time and resources per student as comprehensive high schools. Another is that schools are unable to acquire ancillary staff including counseling, vocational education supports, and additional academic aids because there is little funding to address student needs. In addition, continuation schools cannot acquire the financial assistance necessary to connect with and integrate outside services (such as drug and alcohol support programs) that can truly benefit this vulnerable population of students.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tara M. Brown, "Lost and Turned Out: Academic, Social, and Emotional Experiences of Students Excluded from School." *Urban Education* 42, no. 5 (2007): 432-455.

<sup>15</sup> Camilla A. Lehr, Chee Soon Tan, and Jim Ysseldyke. "Alternative schools: A synthesis of state-level policy and research." *Remedial and Special Education* 30 no. 1 (2009): 19-32.; Greg Austin, Don Dixon, Joseph Johnson, Jorge

To address the lack of funding and resources given to continuation high schools, there must be a strong accountability system in place. As of now, continuation high schools and their corresponding districts follow a vague accountability measure called the Alternative School Accountability Measure (ASAM). In 2001, the State of California implemented the ASAM in order to enable school leaders to document and define their own important academic “engagement” benchmarks.<sup>16</sup> Over time, the ASAM has proved to be ineffective as it is not incorporated into any overarching school assessments. Because it is not fully integrated, many government officials, educational policy makers, and district members assume that materials, curricula, and support systems in comprehensive schools are the same for continuation schools.

However, this assumption is not valid because continuation high school students are coping with adverse personal and environmental challenges that create different social, personal, and academic needs than traditional students.<sup>17</sup> Overall, the problem that continuation high schools face is a lack of consensus and communication among educators, policy makers, the state, and the district around addressing the lack of funding and resources affecting continuation schools, creating legitimate expectations for teachers, and measuring the effectiveness of the school in serving their students.

## ***Summary of Chapters***

### *Chapter 1*

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Ruiz de Velasco, Milbrey McLaughlin, and Lynne Perez, "Alternative education options: A descriptive study of California continuation high schools." *West Ed* (2008).

<sup>16</sup> Susan C. Bush, "Building Effective Learning Environments in California's Continuation High Schools." *Jon W. Gardner Center* (2012).

<sup>17</sup> Milbrey McLaughlin and Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, "Raising the Bar, Building Capacity: Driving improvement in California's continuation high schools." *The California Alternative Education Research Project* (2012).; Gilbert Guerin and Lou Denti, "Alternative Education Support of Youth At-Risk." *The Clearing House*, 73, no. 2 (1999) 76-83.

The first chapter, “Cultural Deficiency: Scapegoating Communities,” introduces the cultural deficit conceptualizations as a mechanism of total erasure utilized by continuation teachers in misplacing blame onto the communities for low-income Latinx students’ increased educational needs. Ignoring that students’ adverse circumstances caused by poverty, continuation teachers identify a lack of parental engagement and communities failing to value education as the main reasons for students’ poor academic outcomes. By participating in deficit discourse, educators perceive continuation students as unworthy of academic supports. The necessity of providing adequate resources for low-income Latinx continuation students is completely dismissed within educational settings as their communities are scapegoated for the academic, emotional, and social challenges faced by youth members.

### *Chapter 2*

The second chapter, “The Case Study of Mr. Gray,” reveals the complex, contradictory narrative of Mr. Gray, a veteran *special-subjects* teacher. Mr. Gray employs a cultural deficit framework to justify his self-designated parent-like role. Holding adverse racialized and classist misconceptions regarding low-income Latinx people, Mr. Gray validates the supplementary support that he provides for his students. Even though he serves as an emotional and academic aid as he forms relationships with students, the cultural deficit reasoning wrongly blames parents and communities and, thusly, justifies the structural issues affecting low-income Latinx continuation students.

### *Chapter 3*

The third chapter, “The Stigmatization of Low-Income Latinx Students,” presents the damaging roles of the outer community and district members in mobilizing the mechanism of stigma by attaching racialized and classist stereotypes to low-income Latinx continuation

students. Unaffiliated entities brand students as academically unengaged and deviant to justify overlooking the continuation population. The process of stigmatization results in institutional consequences that adversely affect students' ability to access necessary educational resources. A tool of erasure, stigma exchanges the increased academic, emotional, and social needs of low-income Latinx continuation students for stigmatized misconceptions.

*Chapter 4:*

The fourth chapter, "The Case Study of Mrs. Johnson," highlights the uplifting narrative of Mrs. Johnson, a veteran English teacher. Mrs. Johnson deconstructs the stigma attached to low-income Latinx continuation students by actively rebranding continuation high schools. Through utilizing the techniques of reclaiming terminology, implementing school pride, and integrating community engagement, she demonstrates her students' scholastic and professional success. Consequently, Mrs. Johnson deconstructs misguided stereotypes regarding the continuation student population.

*Chapter 5:*

The final chapter, "Structurally Imposed Invisibility," exposes district administrators as orchestrators of the structural issues that hinder low-income Latinx continuation students' educational success. Mobilizing the mechanisms of total erasure, administrative members are the gatekeepers of the district as they purposefully impose invisibility onto the needs of students to justify deprioritizing continuation high schools. As lead decision makers, administrators abuse their power for the fiscal benefit of the district; purposefully restricting funding to maintain structural issues present within continuation high schools and therefore negatively impacting students' academic performance.

## CHAPTER 1 CULTURAL DEFICIENCY: SCAPEGOATING COMMUNITIES

The history of America's racism is clearly visible within our current education systems as schools serve to reproduce social inequality. Understanding that continuation high schools' origins lie in the reformation and socialization of low-income students of color, it is clear that race is a fluid factor in deciding the goals, curriculum, and perceptions of continuation high schools and their students. As continuation sites primarily serve low-income Latinx<sup>18</sup> youth who are academically struggling, continuation students are victims to the racism that is based within the institution itself.

Systemic racism is sewed within America's fabric. Historically, the Eugenics movement deemed race to be biologically predetermined based on one's genetic makeup; white elite scientists attempted to solidify scientific evidence to exempt their racist conceptualizations and promote white supremacy. In consequence, false biological ideologies regarding race excused and continues to excuse acts of racism, violence, and prejudice against people of color.<sup>19</sup> Today, the systematic reproduction of social inequality based on race and class is ongoing, even though many Americans may believe that we are in a post-racial society.

A veneer of colorblindness defining current race relations has not erased America's history - a colonized land that used racism as a tool of domination - but has attempted to shadow and ignore how race is interconnected and based within all existing systems. By denying racism's existence, racism has evolved into internalized hate, unconscious acts of prejudice,

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<sup>18</sup> Tanisha Love Ramirez and Zeba Blay, "Why People Are Using The Term 'Latinx'," last modified July 5, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-people-are-using-the-term-latinx\\_us\\_57753328e4b0cc0fa136a159](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/why-people-are-using-the-term-latinx_us_57753328e4b0cc0fa136a159)

<sup>19</sup> Timothy McGettigan and Earl Smith, *Formula for Eradicating Racism: Debunking White Supremacy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016).

racial coding, microaggressions, and total erasure of the struggles of communities of color.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout US history, racism has always existed; we must recognize that racism reconfigures itself to survive and persist.<sup>21</sup> Today, a common way that racism is sustained is through cultural deficiency - scapegoating communities of color for the structural, institutional issues that they are personally facing.<sup>22</sup>

Implicit racism is fluid within the California education system. Within my study, teachers are agents in sustaining the hegemonic racialized legacy of continuation high schools, even though they are students' primary academic and emotional aids. Continuation teachers partake within cultural deficit discourse, as many do not fault students but blame their communities for the social, economic, and academic issues the students introduced into the classroom. Racialized and classist perceptions of the students' family dynamics, home environments, and neighborhoods drive teachers to become complacent to the structural issues (lack of funding, resources, teaching materials, and district recognition) as they choose to blame communities rather than recognize the districts' inequitable fiscal actions.

### ***Blaming Low-Income Latinx Communities***

Within Continuation high schools, teachers blame perceived deficiency fostered by low-income Latinx parents for the formation of continuation students' increased academic and emotional needs. Through my study, I found that a multitude of continuation high school teachers fail to acknowledge the structural issues that hinder low-income Latinx parents from participating in their child's schooling. Rather, many often identify educational ignorance and/or

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<sup>20</sup> Michael K. Brown *Whitewashing race: The myth of a color-blind society*. (London: Univ of California Press, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Michael K. Brown, *Whitewashing race: The myth of a color-blind society* (London: Univ of California Press, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura, *Mexican Americans in School: A Decade of Change* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1979).



parental neglect as the main causes for the limited academic success of students. Latinx guardians are viewed as inadequate parental figures that lack educational aspirations for their children. Portraying this ill-advised perception, Ms. Rhodes, an interviewee, describes what she thinks is the most important issue to address in continuation high schools, she states:

We need more support by the parent. I think over the years, mom has said maybe she has cared but I think nobody addresses what's happening [at home.] They just need the support of an adult who is an advocate for their child, the person you're taking care of. A part of it is the environment you create at home, the educational expectation. I think change will come from the outside more than here. A teacher, an institution can only do so much.<sup>23</sup>

Conveying that continuation high schools lack parental involvement, Ms. Jones implicitly blames low-income Latinx parents through stating, “They just need the support of adults who is an advocate for their child.” Teachers’ sentiments regarding parental involvement and community values are culturally deficient conceptualizations. This framework argues that cultural attributes of a racially marginalized community prevent their members from obtaining economic and social mobility.<sup>24</sup> By assuming parents’ lack interest in participating with their child’s education, teachers actively dismiss fiscal obstacles perpetuated by poverty that hinder low-income Latinx parents. Even though parents are working laborious, time intensive jobs to support their families, guardians’ efforts and care outside of the classroom are often invisible to and unacknowledged by continuation teachers.

Low-income Latinx parents have a different perception regarding educational involvement than do teachers, administrators, and schools. Many Latinx parents grant full authority to educational systems in teaching their children; guardians believe their role is to take care of their children’s physiological and emotional needs as much as they can to promote

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<sup>23</sup> Rhodes, Jane. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 27, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura, *Mexican Americans in School: A Decade of Change* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1979).

students' learning.<sup>25</sup> Working multiple, time intensive jobs, guardians lack the extra time needed to engage in "typical" educational practices.<sup>26</sup> Traditional forms of parental involvement do not align with low-income Latinx parents' belief regarding education. Therefore, continuation high school teachers misinterpret parents as uncaring in regards to their child's academic success. These adverse perceptions regarding guardians' educational involvement is damaging as it refuses to acknowledge parents' economic stressors and true aspirations for their children.

Within education, parental involvement is positively correlated with academic success; continuation sites do not have an established parental presence. Typically, teachers as well as administrators are trained to encourage parents to actively engage in school and at home as agents within their children's education.<sup>27</sup> Within continuation high schools, parents and guardians are not typically integrated within the educational activities of their students, which is a stark difference compared to typical comprehensive high schools. Mr. Robinson describes the ways in which the two sectors of education differ:

Looking at it from a parent point of view, my wife works at one of the top schools... The PTA raised over \$100,000 every year. You walk on campus; you run into more parent volunteers than you would teachers. So, it was heavily parent oriented and [the school] is very successful. It was probably the top one or two schools and this is based on test scores, based upon the environment of the school. In the classroom for 23 years here, I think I had one parent ever call me and say, "How is my kid doing?" and, they can call directly to our classrooms unlike comprehensive high schools.<sup>28</sup>

Racial and socio-economic characteristics explain the disproportionate levels of parental involvement between continuation high schools and comprehensive high schools. Mr. Robinson

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<sup>25</sup> Joan M.T. Walker, Christa L. Ice, Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey, and Howard M. Sandler. "Latino parents' motivations for involvement in their children's schooling: An exploratory study," *The Elementary School Journal* 111, no. 3 (2011): 409-429.

<sup>26</sup> Paru Shah, "Motivating participation: The symbolic effects of Latino representation on parent school involvement," *Social Science Quarterly* 90, no. 1 (2009): 212-230.

<sup>27</sup> Joyce L. Epstein, "Building Bridges of Home, School, and Community: The Importance of Design," *Journal of Education for Students Placed At Risk* 6, no. 1 (2001): 161-168.

<sup>28</sup> Robinson, Aaron. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 7, 2017.

fails to acknowledge that continuation high schools primarily serve a low-income Latinx population. Considering demographic differences, parents of middle to upper class communities typically can be more involved in the education system than parents from low-income communities.<sup>29</sup> Lack of parental involvement due to economic hardship and institutional accessibility, leaves low-income students of color at a disadvantage as it limits their ability to advocate for themselves.<sup>30</sup>

Beyond assumed parental scholastic conceptualizations, continuation high school teachers often blame parents for neglecting their children and, therefore, negatively impacting their academic success. This typical narrative is derived from a lack of understanding regarding the social, political, and economic contexts in which parents are advocating and raising their children. Affected by external and institutional challenges, Latinx parents are expected to navigate an educational system that does not accommodate them. Instead of acknowledging these factors, teachers often fault parents, Mrs. Garcia explains:

There are issues with parents. Sometimes, [students] don't get time to get to school so they don't get breakfast. There's no stability at home or no accountability. I want to say that some parents try but if there's only one parent that parent isn't super dedicated and doesn't make sure that their children have their needs covered. I had a kid we lost this year - he was gang affiliated from a very unstable home. And, that's the biggest problem. It's a lack of parenting. Its' home issues.<sup>31</sup>

Mrs. Garcia's sentiments regarding parental neglect mirror a common belief among continuation high school teachers. Instead of communicating and consequently, understanding the stressors of low-income Latinx guardians, teachers and administrators view parents as uncaring and

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<sup>29</sup> Annette Lareau, *Home Advantage: Social Class and Parental Intervention in Elementary Education* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Jane Graves Smith, "Parental involvement in education among low-income families: A case study," *School Community Journal* 16, no. 1 (2006): 43.

<sup>31</sup> Garcia, Monica. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, June 30, 2016.

undedicated to fostering their children's successful academic performance. There needs to be an understanding amongst teachers that parents are trying to maintain the well-being of their families and themselves in the face of adverse economic and social circumstances. Low-income Latinx parents are unable to integrate and participate within educational settings due to a variety of factors including: language barriers, working multiple jobs, a lack of institutional avenues, and external monetary responsibilities.<sup>32</sup> Their work schedules and precarious financial situations prevent them from being involved in their children's educational goals. Misconceptions held by continuation teachers are harmful to students as parents do put in effort to promote their children's social and physical survival.

Continuation high school educators believe that a lack of parental involvement signals that the home environments of continuation high school students are not academically supportive; this belief correlates with misconceptions that low-income Latinx communities do not value education. The conceptualization that communities of color do not view education as a priority for their children's success is a racialized, classist myth,<sup>33</sup> mirroring the adverse misconception that a student is not academically successful because they came from a culturally deficient environment.<sup>34</sup> The majority of continuation high school teachers reflect this type of deficit framework. Ms. Williams declares, "They are not coming from environments where academics are honored."<sup>35</sup> Because of low parental involvement within continuation high schools, teachers, such as Ms. Williams, conclude that low-income Latinx parents and communities place little value upon their child's academic success. This generalization calls

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<sup>32</sup> Inna Altschul, "Parental Involvement and the Academic Achievement of Mexican American Youths: What Kinds of Involvement in Youths' Education Matter Most?" *Social Work Research* 35, no. 3 (2011): 159-170.

<sup>33</sup> Martin Guevara Urbina and Claudia Rodriguez Wright, *Latino Access to Higher Education: Ethnic Realities and New Directions for the Twenty-First Century*. Charles C Thomas Publisher, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Richard R. Valencia, "Mexican Americans Don't Value Education!" On the Basis of the Myth, Mythmaking, and Debunking," *Journal of Latinos and Education* 1, no. 2 (2002): 81-103.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, Amanda. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 8, 2017.

upon the racial stereotype and scholastic myth that Latinx people are too ignorant to understand the economic importance of educations' potential to make students' upwardly mobile.<sup>36</sup> In opposition, research confirms that Latinx parents and communities care about their children's education as they embrace similar ideologies that encourage academic success.<sup>37</sup> Even though the belief that education plays a significant role in children's lives is present throughout low-income Latinx communities, it is invisible to continuation teachers who already maintain a dismissive view of the parents of their students.

Overall, the education system, including schools, administrators, and teachers, do not understand the challenges facing low-income Latinx communities. Acknowledging that most of the continuation teacher participants are white is important. Research illustrates that white teachers typically do not fully understand the communities that students of color come from. As many have never been exposed to the culture, educators construct racialized and classist misconceptions regarding community values.<sup>38</sup> For example, if teachers would talk to low-income Latinx community members rather than create assumptions, their perceptions would potentially shift regarding the communities' cultural values which recognize the importance of education. By placing blame on the parents and home environment for students' lack of academic success, educators collectively construct a narrative that scapegoats low-income parents and their communities for students' increased academic challenges. Instead of recognizing the strained financial familial situations that students are coming from, continuation

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<sup>36</sup> Richard R. Valencia, "Mexican Americans Don't Value Education!" On the Basis of the Myth, Mythmaking, and Debunking," *Journal of Latinos and Education* 1, no. 2 (2002): 81-103.

<sup>37</sup> Norma González, Luis C. Moll, and Cathy Amanti, *Funds of Knowledge: Theorizing Practices in Households, Communities, and Classrooms*. (New Jersey: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Christine Sleeter, "Preparing White Teachers for Diverse Students," *California State University Monterey Bay* (2008).

teachers mobilize a cultural deficit framework that dismisses parents and communities as potential advocates for students.

### *Academically and Socially Maladjusted Students*

Maintaining a deficit perspective, continuation teachers begin to misguidedly construct a damaging causal narrative between communities and students: unsupportive home environments headed by neglectful parents produce academically and socially maladjusted children that comprise the continuation high school population. Instead of recognizing the ways in which low-income students of color do not receive needed resources, continuation high school teachers blame communities of color for students' increased behavioral and emotional issues that affect their academic success.<sup>39</sup> In response to a question regarding the issues that continuation high school students' face, Mrs. Williams constructs this causal relationship by stating:

Their learning ability is very low and, in some regards, their abilities are like that of middle school[ers] - the emotional abilities and, quite often, their skill abilities especially in my class... They already have a lot of defenses; they are already putting up a fight because that is what they have learned to do where they come from, that you have to put up a fight if you're not comfortable with something. There is not a lot of self-reflection. It's the age where that kind of thing has to start kicking in and because so many of these kids come in from home with dysfunctional ways of behaving, they can't.<sup>40</sup>

Many teachers view their students to be maladjusted because of the cultural deficits that are perceived to be embedded within the socialization of low-income Latinx youth. Continuation teachers mobilize racist and classist stereotypes regarding low-income Latinx people to blame the communities for the perceived developmental academic, emotional, and social challenges of continuation high school students. In consequence, continuation teachers, like Ms. Williams, mobilize this misguided framework to attach the labels of immature, unengaged, and delinquent

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<sup>39</sup> Sue Books, *Poverty and Schooling in the US: Contexts and Consequences* (New Jersey: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>40</sup> Williams, Amanda. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 8, 2017.

to low-income Latinx students with low educational attainment.<sup>41</sup> Within academic settings, cultural deficiency is typically used as an explanation for low scholastic scores, high drop-out rates, and adverse life trajectories after leaving the system within communities of color.<sup>42</sup>

Historically, continuation high schools originated with the goal to Americanize and socialize the maladjusted Native American and Latinx youth. Currently this relationship between communities of color, deviance, and continuation sites has not changed. The belief that low-income communities of color produce “bad” children is present within alternative educational settings. When Mrs. Williams states that, “They are already putting up a fight because that is what they have learned to do where they come from,<sup>43</sup>” she institutionalizes the criminalization of low-income Latinx youth. Within continuation high schools, teachers fail to recognize the interference of students’ adverse environmental circumstances with students’ capability to educationally engage. Hence, educators continuously scapegoat low-income Latinx communities for the social issues of continuation students; by blaming communities, teachers contribute to Herbert Gans’ narrative of the undeserving poor, meaning that the low-income sector of society is viewed as unworthy of resources.<sup>44</sup> Within continuation high schools, teachers participating within cultural deficit discourse expunge the educational systems’ responsibility to provide resources or programs that assuage students increased needs as their communities are placed at fault for students being academically delayed and socially maladjusted.

Moving away from deficit thinking, the empirical work of Catherine Kim, Daniel Lossen, and Damon Hewitt debunks the notion that low-income Latinx families and communities are at

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<sup>41</sup>Sue Books, *Poverty and Schooling in the US: Contexts and Consequences* (New Jersey: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> Thomas P. Carter and Roberto D. Segura, *Mexican Americans in School: A Decade of Change* (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1979).

<sup>43</sup> Williams, Amanda. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 8, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *The war against the poor: The underclass and antipoverty policy*. (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

fault for the social and academic issues of students of color. Instead of blaming communities for negative academic outcomes, many scholars are starting to critique the role poverty plays in low-income communities of color as outside fiscal strains increase the educational needs of youth members.<sup>45</sup> The variety of emotional, social, physical, and economic challenges associated with poverty that students' face are not produced or sustained by their communities but set within a larger societal context of a racialized and classist hierarchy that subjugates low-income people of color to the bottom.

### ***The Impact of Poverty***

The culturally deficit framework blames “the culture of poverty” for the academic, social, and emotional challenges that students of color endure. Conceptualizations that mirror this type of thinking are ingrained within the educational system.<sup>46</sup> Among continuation high schools, teachers, who are students' primary academic and emotional advocates, concurrently uphold racist, classist labels regarding their low-income Latinx students by utilizing cultural deficit beliefs as justification; Ms. Michelle states,

Parents should be dealing with the problems they created for their kids. They didn't give their kids what they needed for success – how to interact with others or how to act in a classroom - learned behaviors not starting at home and we can't change that.<sup>47</sup>

Continuation teachers such as Ms. Michelle view students who are the most disadvantaged as a damaged product of their culturally deficit communities. By claiming that deviant behaviors, like fighting, is a direct result of their communities and parents, Ms. Michelle mobilizes the misconception that Latinx low-income communities are deficient through the belief that the

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<sup>45</sup> Catherine Y. Kim, Daniel J. Losen, and Damon T. Hewitt. *The school-to-prison pipeline: Structuring legal reform* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

<sup>46</sup> James Collins, "Language and Class in Minority Education," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1988): 299-326.

<sup>47</sup> Michelle, Allison. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 21, 2016.



“culture of poverty” supports damaging values regarding youth members’ academic success. This conceptualization overshadows and sustains the oppression that low-income Latinx people face.<sup>48</sup> The culture of poverty does not justify why low-income students of color are not becoming upwardly mobile; rather, the structures that reproduce social and economic inequality within poor communities of color play a significant role. Low-income communities of color are at a stark disadvantage when it comes to acquiring necessary resources to survive within our capitalist hierarchical society.

As teachers connect the issues that their students’ face with racist and classist cultural deficit explanations, they ignore the ways in which conditions constructed by poverty affect low-income students of color. Instead of scapegoating families and communities, teachers must become aware of the ways in which poverty plays a role within the lives of low-income Latinx people. This begins by recognizing that continuation sites serve a disproportionate population of low-income Latinx students that are adversely effected by intersecting institutions. Angela Davis, a radical scholar, has concluded that all institutions sustain racial and economic inequality as low-income people of color receive the least amount of resources, bear a disproportionate amount of unjust punitive action, and endure high levels of emotional and physical violence.<sup>49</sup>

Instead of scapegoating whole communities and cultures, there must be a shift to focus on the failure of a multitude of systems that play a part in upkeeping and reproducing racial and economic inequality. In addition to an overrepresentation of low-income Latinx students being placed in the least funded sector of education, continuation high schools, students are forced to navigate unjust external institutions like prison and court systems, healthcare systems, social

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<sup>48</sup> James Collins, "Language and Class in Minority Education," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1988): 299-326.

<sup>49</sup> Angela Davis, *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

services, and capitalist systems that do not adequately service their communities. Because people of color are barred access to these systems by racism and classism, their low-income communities of color do not have the economic and social capital needed to receive adequate medical care, psychological services, legal services, economic opportunities, and adequate housing options.<sup>50</sup> Without these resources, low-income Latinx continuation students are entering educational settings with an unacknowledged increase of emotional, physical, and social needs but are expected to academically perform at the same level of students' who are not facing these challenges.

### *Conclusion*

The belief that our education system is a “great equalizer” - meaning that education alone grants social mobility, is a myth. Our education system actively plays a role in reproducing racial, classist, and capitalist hierarchal structures regulating low-income students of color to the bottom. Within the education system, many teachers mobilize cultural deficiency discourse by blaming parents, perceived unstable communities, and skewed community values.<sup>51</sup> Justifying the reproduction of inequality based on privilege within our education system, cultural deficit thinking makes the societal adversity faced by low-income Latinx continuation high school students invisible. Utilized by continuation educators, the cultural deficit framework is a tool of erasure that silences the actual, impoverished environmental conditions that adversely affect low-income Latinx continuation students forming the narrative of the “undeserving poor.”<sup>52</sup> In consequence, structural issues present within alternative educational settings hinder meeting

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<sup>50</sup> Valerie E Lee and David T. Burkam, *Inequality at the starting gate: Social background differences in achievement as children begin school*. (Washington: Economic Policy Institute, 2002).

<sup>51</sup> John H. McWhorter, *Losing the race: Self-sabotage in Black America*. (New York: The Free Press, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> Herbert J. Gans, *The war against the poor: The underclass and antipoverty policy*. (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

students' increased needs as their parents and communities scapegoated for their children's perceived, stunted academic and social development.

## CHAPTER 2 CASE STUDY OF MR. GRAY

Mr. Gray is a middle-aged white man who has been working as a special-subjects teacher at the same continuation high school for over ten years. Before transitioning to alternative education, Mr. Gray worked in comprehensive elementary schools for over 10 years. He decided to switch into a different sector of education as he desired to teach an older student population and had a personal connection with a teacher at a local continuation high school. Being raised in a low-income family, he feels empathetic and understanding of the adverse environmental conditions that his students are facing. Like many other continuation high school teachers, Mr. Gray is forced to adopt multiple external teaching, extracurricular, and administrative roles to provide students with a variety of structured learning experiences. As part of a strong cohort of teachers, Mr. Gray provides emotional support. He supports the construction of continuation high school as a safe and stable setting for students. Mr. Gray describes his personal teaching pedagogy as, “having fun – my classroom is my playroom;” he believes in facilitating an interactive, collective space where students can collaborate, negotiate, and learn together.

The case study of Mr. Gray presents an in-depth analysis that exposes the contradictions between misguided justifications for caring for students and positive teacher-student interactions. Mr. Gray cares for the emotional, social, and academic needs of low-income Latinx students but, at the same time, blames their communities for producing those needs. Utilizing a cultural deficit framework, Mr. Gray is able to validate his position as an alternate parental advocate for his students. This complex story reveals the ways in which teachers are intricate figures in students’ lives; Mr. Gray has good intentions when teaching vulnerable students of color but does not fully understand the adverse community conditions that comprise students’ backgrounds. By scapegoating communities, Mr. Gray fails to recognize the racialized and classist barriers that

make it hard for low-income Latinx students, parents, and communities to participate, navigate, and survive within the educational system.

### ***Perceived Parental Disengagement***

Mr. Gray mobilizes a cultural deficit framework that scapegoats low-income Latinx parents for the academic, emotional, and social challenges that continuation high school students face as he places blame on the perceived unstable home environments of students. When discussing the importance of role models for continuation high school students, Mr. Gray describes,

There is one example I give in class. There is a video. One reason I went to Africa is that there was this population of elephants. And, They moved them. And, for expense, they grabbed all of the younger ones that were teenagers and below and put them into this game reserve for a period. They started causing havoc because they didn't know how to be an elephant. Someone goes, "You need to bring a couple of adults in." So they went back, got a couple of adults, put them in there, and it changed overnight. It's kind of the same thing with these teenage kids. With some of them, they get their role models by joining gangs - it's the same thing I think...How do they know what it is to become an adult. A lot of our population is from single-parent homes. A lot of them don't have fathers. And if they do, both parents are working. We call them latchkey kids - they are waiting for their parents to come home.<sup>53</sup>

To contextualize his cultural deficit conceptualization, Mr. Gray uses an unsettling metaphor that compares child rearing practices of elephants to the parenting styles of low-income Latinx families. By employing historically damaging racialized stereotypes, Mr. Gray inserts his perception of low-income Latinx continuation students' maladjusted socialization as modeling animalistic behavior. Explicitly, Mr. Gray states that his students lack any type of parental supervision and guidance. Justifying his position as a caring continuation educator, Mr. Gray attempts to portray his role as a substitute parental figure based on his belief that children's guardians are totally absent within students' lives. By blaming parents, Mr. Gray propagates

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<sup>53</sup> Grey, Henry. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, August 10, 2016.

classist and racialized stereotypes that label low-income Latinx parents as absent and neglectful instead of recognizing that students' guardians have additional familial fiscal strains.

By believing that single mothers, absent fathers, and parents working multiple jobs create immature, delinquent children, Mr. Gray refuses to recognize the larger social, political, and economic hierarchy fixed within our society that places low-income Latinx communities at the bottom. Perpetuated by poverty, the failure of intersecting institutions oppresses low-income communities of color making it difficult for parents to become involved with their children's education.<sup>54</sup> Mr. Gray utilizes a deficit cultural framework to scapegoat parents instead of recognizing ways in which low-income Latinx parents, students, and communities navigate their oppressed lived-realities.

### ***Lessened Academic Expectations***

Mobilizing a similar cultural deficit framework, Mr. Gray holds preconceived notions regarding the academic aspirations and life priorities of low-income Latinx communities. Within our education systems, teachers, administrators, and schools often believe that poor communities of color do not value education as a part of their children's success.<sup>55</sup> This is a myth; however, many teachers mobilize this conceptualization regarding community values to justify minimal scholastic expectations for low-income students of color.<sup>56</sup> Mr. Gray reaffirms this common fallacy by stating,

“But, for the most part, most of the students that I find want to work. And, what's taken out of the high school system is the vocational part, the woodshop, the auto shop, the home etc. Not everyone wants to go to college and statistics are showing that. We are

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<sup>54</sup> Jane Graves Smith, "Parental involvement in education among low-income families: A case study," *School Community Journal* 16, no. 1 (2006): 43.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Guevara Urbina and Claudia Rodriguez Wright, *Latino Access to Higher Education: Ethinc Realities and New Directions for the Twenty-First Century*. Charles C Thomas Publisher, 2015

<sup>56</sup> Ana Bruton and Rebecca A. Robles-Piña, "Deficit thinking and Hispanic student achievement: Scientific information resources." *Problems of Education in the 21st Century* 15 (2009): 41-48.; Richard R. Valencia and Daniel G. Solórzano, "Contemporary Deficit Thinking," *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice* (1997): 160-210.

getting our entire educational process to get kids to go to college when we're only graduating 25% of the population... The kind of the student I see at the continuation school is different. Students are like, "Just show me how to do it. Let me go do it. I don't need all this b\*\*\*\*\*. I'm not going to college," and that's pretty much been predominantly the male population. A lot of the females we get are first generation in Hispanic and they want family; they are all still not into the American Woman work.<sup>57</sup>

Through this Mr. Gray mobilizes blatant, intersecting racial, socio-economic, and sexist stereotypes regarding low-income Latinx communities. Believing that students are not adjusted to "American" ideologies regarding success, Mr. Gray through the statement, "A lot of the females we get our first generation in Hispanic and they want family. They are all still not into the "American work," exposes his prejudice belief that Latinx women are inclined to settle down and reproduce, stripping his girl students of academic aspirations. Constructing misguided perceptions regarding Latinx values in opposition to the importance of American work, Mr. Grey deliberately criticizes the lack of implemented programs that typically track students of color into laborious jobs. By mobilizing these adverse misconceptions, Mr. Gray wrongly justifies his continuation high school's low academic outcomes with the belief that students as well as their communities do not hold high scholastic expectations and aspirations. Overlooking education's role in reproducing social and economic inequality, Mr. Gray actively blames low-income Latinx communities for not valuing education and adversely stereotypes continuation students for not being qualified to partake in academic opportunities.

Often, teachers along with administrators and hired staff in educational settings associate low-income communities of color with perceived racialized and classist stereotypes.<sup>58</sup> Mr. Gray implicitly contributes to the trapping of continuation high school students within a cycle of perpetual poverty that reproduces negative economic and social life trajectories. Mobilizing

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<sup>57</sup> Grey, Henry. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, August 10, 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Sue Books, *Poverty and Schooling in the US: Contexts and Consequences* (New Jersey: Routledge, 2004).

damaging deficit cultural conceptualizations regarding upheld educational values of communities of color, Mr. Gray jeopardizes the educational outcomes of low-income Latinx continuation high school students.

### *Employing Emotional Care for Students*

Mr. Gray utilizes cultural deficit framework to explain the heightened concentration of emotional, academic, and social needs of the low-income Latinx continuation student population. Even though this framework is damaging for affected communities, these misguided beliefs push Mr. Gray to become a visible emotional and academic support for students. A beloved educator amongst students and fellow faculty, Mr. Gray implements positive and caring academic practices that promotes students' comforts, satisfaction, and emotional validation within the classroom; Mr. Gray illustrates,

I am definitely a emotional support. Because, some of these kids come in and every day they don't have a pencil. As a teacher, some people harp on that. So, I have my little straw jars full of pencils. Some may think, "You are a student and you are here to learn." Some teachers want to get on them for that. But, by the time they are through me, they know what I think it is to be a teacher... When you can build a relationship with a kid, most of them will perform better. At that age, students want to be liked. Once you put something between you and them, you lost them until you can get them back. That's kind of been my philosophy with kids. I would much rather have them on my side than against me. It's not always possible but, for the better, I try to find something that I can tie in. At least they can say, "okay, he is cool?"<sup>59</sup>

Evidently, Mr. Gray understands the dependent relationship between emotional health and academic success for students, especially within continuation high schools. By not focusing on small pieces that are out of students' control along with providing small gestures of care, Mr. Gray is able to create a welcoming academic space for students. Apart from academic expectations, teachers are actively attempting to form bonds with students as a form of emotional

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<sup>59</sup> Grey, Henry. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, August 10, 2016.



support within education settings.<sup>60</sup> As he believes that building relationships with students is integral, Mr. Gray puts in his own effort and time to form bonds with students to encourage their academic success within his classroom.

Teachers who care by showing personal investment in students, forming close relationships, and understanding emotional challenges, have the most positive impacts on low-income students of color.<sup>61</sup> By recognizing the emotional and social needs of his students, Mr. Gray becomes an educator that students and faculty value. Even though Mr. Gray emotionally and academically supports his students, he explicitly participates in cultural deficit discourse that blames parents and communities for the academic and social challenges of continuation students. Contrary to the damaging racialized and classist misconceptions that he holds regarding low-income communities of color, Mr. Gray cares about his students' personal welfare. However, Mr. Gray's academic and social expectations are detrimentally lowered for students as he blames parents and communities for the increased needs and consequent, perceived academic stunting of his students.

### *Conclusion*

The case study of Mr. Gray provides a contradictory narrative that exposes the indistinct, intricate roles that continuation high school teachers play in forming misguided ideologies regarding communities' academic aspirations and students' positive academic experiences. Even though Mr. Gray was an active emotional and academic advocate for students, his deficit conceptualizations form limitations regarding how successful his students can be. Adverse racialized and classist misconceptions regarding low-income Latinx communities became the

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<sup>60</sup> Katia Fredriksen and Jean Rhodes, "The role of teacher relationships in the lives of students." *New Directions for Student Leadership* 2004, no. 103 (2004): 45-54.

<sup>61</sup> Angela Valenzuela, *Subtractive Schooling: US-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010).

driving force behind the supplementary emotional support that he provides for his students. The belief that low-income Latinx parents and communities ignored students' welfare and produced academic and social challenges, justifies and validates Mr. Gray's self-attributed role as a parental, guiding figure for students. He creates positive experiences with students; however, his reasoning for putting in time and effort to care students is misguided. In the end, mobilizing a cultural deficit framework to validate care is damaging to communities, parents, and students as it justifies the blaming of low-income Latinx people for the concentration of students' issues and therefore, the unjust allocation of resources to address those issues.

### CHAPTER 3 STIGMATIZATION OF LOW INCOME LATINX STUDENTS

Alongside teachers utilizing cultural discourse, the outside community plays an integral role in preventing schools from adequately serving low-income Latinx students. Within continuation high schools, the student demographics reflect an overrepresentation of this disadvantaged group. The outer community and district administration interpret this overrepresentation to mean that all low-income Latinx students must be inherently deviant and academically unengaged. These qualities evolve from stereotypes regarding this demographic which are then actively employed by non-affiliated members to stigmatize the continuation schools and their student population.

Stigma, historically, is a racialized and classist process that exists in educational settings and informs misguided perceptions regarding the academic competency and the educational success of working-class students of color. Many stigmatized individuals develop a strong consciousness regarding the attached stigma; they are fully aware of the how others negatively perceive them.<sup>62</sup> In response, working-class students color develop negative psychological effects that damage their self-esteem. Overall, racialized and classist stereotypes legitimate attached stigma by influencing the ways in which students view their communities and themselves. Constant stigmatization within educational settings becomes exhausting for low-income students of color; in response, students become less willing to engage academically and view the resulting low scholastic success as a reflection of internalized stigma.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Jennifer Crocker and Brenda Major, "Social Stigma and Self-Esteem: The Self-Protective Properties of Stigma," *Psychological Review* 96, no. 4 (1989): 608.

<sup>63</sup> Victor Chavira, Jean S. Phinney, and Lisa Williamson, "Acculturation attitudes and self-esteem among high school and college students," *Youth & Society* 23, no. 3 (1992): 299-312.

Social stigma refers to active disdain toward a particular group based on social characteristics that are deemed as unacceptable or undesirable. There is a strong relationship between stigma and ones' social identity, as stigma refers to an individual being rejected from a society based on a discredited attribute attached to their social identity. Through the process of stigmatization, others' reactions to the rejected person further perpetuate the tainting of that individuals' actual identity. Erving Goffman's concept of social stigma explains that a member of an existing disadvantaged group, who may have faced systemic oppression, faced the mechanism of courtesy stigma functions to discredit the individuals' "social power" – their societal autonomy. Therefore, the whole society, including the affected individual, is unable to deconstruct stigma as all members take an active part in sustaining extreme disapproval where victims' voices are quickly discredited.<sup>64</sup>

Traditionally, stigma has been attached to poor people of color within "urban neighborhoods." Coming from perceived ghettos, community members are viewed as reflections of the underclass. Therefore, the identities of working-class members of color are negatively branded as they become equated to misconceptions regarding criminality, poverty, and personal competency.<sup>65</sup> Dominant classes employ social stigmatization to reproduce social inequality and therefore maintain supremacy. Affecting working-class people of color, stigma is utilized in order to reinforce social, economic, and political hierarchy so dominant can exploit disadvantaged communities without pushback. In consequence, working-class people of color are unable to be upwardly mobile as they are barred by stigmatization.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Loic Wacquant, "Territorial stigmatization in the age of advanced marginality," *Thesis Eleven* 91, no. 1 (2007): 66-77.

<sup>66</sup> Colin McMullan and Sarah Wakefield, "Healing in Places of Decline: (Re)imagining Everyday Landscapes in Hamilton, Ontario," *Health & Place* 11, no. 4 (2005): 299-312.

The majority of students in California continuation high schools are Latinx people from working class backgrounds. Reflected within the collection of interviews, the continuation student population faces an increased concentration of stigma driven by racialized and classist stereotypes. When students first enter alternative education, they feel figuratively pushed out of comprehensive schooling as they are placed into the perceived “dumping ground” of our education system. Heightened stigma surrounding continuation high schools and their students permeate administrative sectors and the outer community. As students’ identities are replaced with adverse misconceptions, stigma shadows and invalidates their emotional, behavioral, and academic needs.

### ***Stigmatizing Continuation High Schools***

Outer community members and school board administration mobilize the power of stigma to negatively label continuation high schools as they serve low-income Latinx students. In particular, district members are influential perpetrators of stigma; used as a tool by dominant groups, stigma sustains power. Dominant entities can maintain control over disadvantaged groups by translating prejudice into stigma. When the educational system’s purpose is to reproduce social inequality, administrators become powerful perpetrators of stigma who have significant impacts on the perceptions of students.<sup>67</sup> Because administrators hold significant power within educational settings, they are active agents in placing stigma upon continuation high school students; Mr. Miller describes:

[From] the administrator end, I don't think the district office give us much. I don't think they care about the continuation school as long as things aren't bad...I do not think the district cares about us; it's kind of like, “Oh, they're alternative ed, so it's fine.” I think [we] are brushed under the rug because we are this continuation schools and all the ‘stupid losers.’<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Nihad Bunar, "Multicultural Urban Schools in Sweden and Their Communities: Social Predicaments, the Power of Stigma, and Relational Dilemmas," *Urban Education* 46, no. 2 (2011): 141-164.

<sup>68</sup> Miller, David. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 7, 2017.

Many teachers, including Mr. Miller, share this same opinion regarding the districts' negative perceptions of alternative education. Labeling continuation high school students as "stupid losers" reflects the stereotype that Latinx students are academically unengaged.<sup>69</sup> Through the process of stigmatization, dominant entities, like the districts, who hold a substantial amount of power discriminate against and socially exclude particular individuals; this is possible through perceiving and enforcing misguided stereotypical characteristics as fully compromising branded communities and, consequently, shadowing the lived-realities of the stigmatized persons.<sup>70</sup>

It is evident that continuation high schools and their students are viewed as an expendable sector of the educational system. As students are perceived to be resistant to acculturating to traditional educational settings, administrative entities tend to rely on inaccurate stereotypes to justify their misconceptions.<sup>71</sup> The district holds a grand amount of power in deciding funding and resource allocation, and as such the impact of stigma attached to continuation high schools based on stereotypes is serious. If district members believe the stereotype that low-income Latinx continuation students are academically stunted and unengaged, they feel justified in their administrative actions in neglecting and dismissing the needs of this student population.

Many teachers note experiences where district administration mobilize these negative sentiments by directly attaching stereotypes to continuation high schools and their students. In these instances, administration serve as active agents as they utilize the tool of stigma to shame this sector of alternative education. A common misconception that is often assigned to

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<sup>69</sup> Sofia Villenas and Donna Deyhle. "Critical race theory and ethnographies challenging the stereotypes: Latino families, schooling, resilience and resistance." *Curriculum Inquiry* 29, no. 4 (1999): 413-445.

<sup>70</sup> Bruce G. Link, and Jo C. Phelan, "Conceptualizing stigma." *Annual review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2001): 363-385.

<sup>71</sup> Ziva Kunda and Paul Thagard. "Forming Impressions from Stereotypes, Traits, and Behaviors: A Parallel-Constraint-Satisfaction Theory." *Psychological review* 103, no. 2 (1996): 284.

continuation high schools is that these particular settings lack academic rigor. Mirroring the experiences of many teachers, Mrs. Johnson describes:

“For my students in general, I remember having IEPs [Individual Education Plans] with a certain school psychologist that works in the district. He called our school a credit mill. He was kind of from the old era of continuation high schools. This was my first experience with him...and, he was like, ‘You are just going to go here and they're going to give you.’<sup>72</sup>

Through this interaction with administration, Mrs. Johnson illustrates the ways in which district members actively attach stigma to continuation high schools. As administrators tend to not be directly present within the classroom, they often rely on misconceptions and stereotypes as supplementary information to inform their personal conceptions of continuation high schools.<sup>73</sup>

The majority of continuation high school students are low-income Latinx youth; district members labeling the schools which they attend as non-academic “credit mills” calls upon the stereotype that low-income Latinx students are unable to participate within academically rigorous settings.<sup>74</sup> Powerful individuals, like school-board members, stigmatize groups by classifying differing characteristics, typically informed by racialized and classist stereotypes that are false and damaging.<sup>75</sup>

School board administrators interpret the low-income Latinx identities of the continuation student population to match racial and socio-economic stereotypes. Typically, low-income Latinx students are perceived to be scholastically inferior.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, by classifying a school

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<sup>72</sup> Johnson, Lauren. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 11, 2016.

<sup>73</sup> Stephanie Madon, Max Guyll, Sarah J. Hilbert, Erica Kyriakatos, and David L. Vogel. "Stereotyping the Stereotypic: When Individuals Match Social Stereotypes," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 36, no. 1 (2006): 178-205.

<sup>74</sup> Villenas Sofia and Donna Deyhle. "Critical race theory and ethnographies challenging the stereotypes: Latino families, schooling, resilience and resistance." *Curriculum Inquiry* 29, no. 4 (1999): 413-445.

<sup>75</sup> Bruce G. Link and Jo C. Phelan, "Conceptualizing stigma," *Annual review of Sociology* 27, no. 1 (2001): 363-385.

<sup>76</sup> Yolanda Flores Niemann, "Stereotypes about Chicanas and Chicanos Implications for Counseling," *The Counseling Psychologist* 29, no. 1 (2001): 55-90.

that serves this population as non-academic, administrators are further perpetuating the ideology that low-income Latinx students have limited scholastic capabilities and educational aspirations. As these types of experiences are recurring for continuation high school teachers, it becomes apparent that the district mobilizes stigmatization through the use of racial and socio-economic stereotypes.

Alongside the district, the broader community also upholds and perpetuates the process of stigmatization. Communities play an integral role in placing and maintaining stigma attached to disadvantaged groups. As entire communities hold collective power, members with more social and economic privileges categorize others' social identities to place individuals within a normative social order. Through this process, communities often normalize and validate damaging stereotypes of low-income people of color.<sup>77</sup> Within the wider community, continuation high schools are heavily stigmatized. All teachers noted that the continuation high schools and admitted students are perceived very negatively by any community members that were not directly affiliated with the schools; Mr. Robinson illuminates:

It's pretty much been the same over my 20 plus years. Most of them are all negative; most of them are misperceptions. But, in general, the perception is that kids who go here are stupid and bad. [Continuation schools] are not a place you would ever want to let your kid graduate from. The community just has a very low opinion. Unfortunately, the district office doesn't really try to change that perception, even though, we are probably the most accredited school...Overall the perception is not very good.<sup>78</sup>

All teachers report that outer community members' perceptions regarding continuation high schools and admitted students are very negative. Typically, these misconceptions attached to this student population are racialized and classist. By devaluing the identities and lived-experiences of disadvantaged groups, communities categorize branded individuals as undeserving of

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<sup>77</sup> Wolf Wolfensberger and Stephen Tullman, "Community and Stigma," *Understanding Care, Welfare, and Community: A Reader* (2002): 138.

<sup>78</sup> Robinson, Aaron. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 7, 2017.



resources as their actual needs are dismissed and their actual identities are stigmatized.<sup>79</sup> By labeling the continuation high school student population as “stupid and deviant,” community members mobilize prejudiced stereotypes such as criminality and low scholastic capabilities in regards to low-income Latinx youth.<sup>80</sup> Overall, outer community members collectively stigmatize and devalue continuation high school students. As the community normalizes stigma attached to continuation high schools, it become a common to fear this student population and invalidate their actual social identities and needs.

The racial and socio-economic demographics of the continuation high school is a core contributor to the perpetuation of stigma. By mobilizing stereotypes attached to low-income Latinx people, the district and community can dismiss this student population by labeling the group as academically unengaged. Many teachers identify race and class as the main factors that push the perpetuation of stigma attached to continuation high schools, Ms. Sanchez elaborates:

I feel it’s probably an economic thing. We tend to push the things we don’t like out of our minds. [Continuation schools] are the little forgotten people... I don’t know if it’s a true perception but the perception is that [continuation students] don’t amount to much or mean much. I don’t know if it’s just socio-economics involved with that explanation because they are minorities [from] low socio-economic [backgrounds].<sup>81</sup>

Ms. Sanchez’s conclusion is common, as other teachers held similar sentiments. Traditionally, stigma is attached to disadvantaged groups. Existing within an unequal social, economic, and political hierarchy, low-income people of color endure systemic racialized and classist stigma.<sup>82</sup>

Within continuation high schools, teachers acknowledge that the unjust processes of

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<sup>79</sup> Penelope J. Oakes, S. Alexander Haslam, and John C. Turner, *Stereotyping and Social Reality* (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, 1994).

<sup>80</sup> Eric J. López, Stewart Ehly, and Enedina García-Vásquez, "Acculturation, social support and academic achievement of Mexican and Mexican American high school students: An exploratory study," *Psychology in the Schools* 39, no. 3 (2002): 245-257.

<sup>81</sup> Sanchez, Vivian. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 7, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Mark L. Hatzenbuehler, Bruce G. Link, and Jo C. Phelan, "Stigma and social inequality," In *Handbook of the social psychology of inequality* (Springer Netherlands, 2014).

stigmatization which attach racial and socio-economic stereotypes are prevalent within educational settings.

District members and the outer community are dominant entities that utilize stigma to control, negatively label, and dismiss continuation high schools and their students. Mobilizing racialized and classist stereotypes, low-income Latinx students are classified as scholastically unengaged and deviant children who attend non-academic schools. Hence, the continuation student population is totally devalued and delegitimated by all who are not directly affiliated with this alternative sector of education. In consequence, dominant groups that perpetuate stigma have concrete negative impacts on the students and their schools.

### ***Tangible Consequences of Stigma***

Stigma is fluid within continuation high schools as it perpetuates structural issues. Resulting from constant stigmatization, continuation high schools as a whole have become negatively branded. Mr. Ellison describes this sentiment by stating, “I think the continuation school is very stigmatized both as the teacher and a student - it is considered to be a dumping ground.”<sup>83</sup> The association of continuation high school with a “dumping ground,” has made it difficult for admitted students to obtain adequate resources through the educational system. Stigma attached to low-income Latinx students at continuation high schools has led to damaging consequences for students, teachers, and supervising staff – a reflection of Goffman’s theoretical framework regarding institutionalization of stigmatization. Through the process, individuals are stripped of their individual identities and perceived through a negative lens to be uniform with all the members of the admitted group. In conclusion, institutionalized stigmatization is a powerful

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<sup>83</sup> Ellison, Brian. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 7, 2017.

mechanism that upkeeps and shadows the adverse challenges that branded persons are forced to navigate within institutions, including the educational system.<sup>84</sup>

Racialized and classist stigma attached to low-income Latinx continuation students has negative impacts on the perceptions that students hold of themselves. Supported by existing research, stigma is often internalized by branded individuals. As students are constantly stereotyped for educational disparities, their self-worth and academic outcomes are affected;<sup>85</sup>

Mr. Gray elaborates:

I think they come in not believing that they are good for whatever reason. I think they come in with gaps in their education and teachers are straight up telling them they are bad. Most of the kids, when they come to our school, first don't want to be there because they've heard, "This is not [the comprehensive high school], This is [the continuation high school]. This is where all the tough kids are."<sup>86</sup>

Continuation high school students are fully aware of the negative manner in which others perceive them as people and students. Identifying as a marginalized group, branded individuals are conscious of the stereotypes attached to them. Particularly for students of color, stigma consciousness often leads to low educational outcomes.<sup>87</sup> Low-income Latinx students begin to align their personal identities with imposed educational stigma as they are placed in continuation high schools - which are branded as non-academic settings that serve "tough" children. Therefore, they begin to recognize and assume the stereotyped behavioral and social differences between comprehensive and continuation settings. Adverse branding of continuation high schools causes admitted students to internalize imposed educational stigma.

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<sup>84</sup> Erving Goffman, *Asylums: Essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates* (New Jersey: Aldine Transaction, 1968).

<sup>85</sup> Brenda Major, Wendy J. Quinton, and Toni Schmader, "Attributions to Discrimination and Self-Esteem: Impact of Group Identification and Situational Ambiguity," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 39, no. 3 (2003): 220-231.

<sup>86</sup> Gray, Henry. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, August 10, 2017.

<sup>87</sup> Brenda Major, Wendy J. Quinton, and Toni Schmader, "Attributions to Discrimination and Self-Esteem: Impact of Group Identification and Situational Ambiguity," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 39, no. 3 (2003): 220-231.

A secondary consequence of stigmatization is that educators often are discouraged from working at continuation high schools by fellow teachers and outer community members. Most noted that teacher deterrence from continuation educational settings is a constant experience that they have had when transitioning into alternative education. Ms. Brown shares an interaction she had with a local comprehensive teacher before accepting the job offer for the current continuation high school in which she states:

When I meet people in the community, doctors' office, beauty appointments, other teachers. It's like, "Oh, where do you work? Oh, I'm a teacher. Oh, what do you teach? Oh wow, high school seems like it would be hard." And then when it comes to continuation it's like, "Oh wow, why would you want to stay or work there? You must be a saint."<sup>88</sup>

Mobilizing racialized and classist stereotypes attached to low-income Latinx students, unaffiliated teachers actively brand continuation high schools as inherently bad. By legitimizing and perpetuating stigma, members of the broader community attempt to deter teachers from working with this population. As non-affiliated teachers align stereotypes with continuation high schools, they actively dismiss the lived-realities of the students as they are informed by misconceptions and, consequently, discourage fellow teachers from entering alternative education.

Along with negative impacts on students and teachers, stigma regarding continuation high schools leads to a high principal turnover rate. Principals hold significant power in forming an educational structure that is conducive to their student population. Therefore, administrators who understand the students and their needs lead the most successful schools.<sup>89</sup> This is not

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<sup>88</sup> Brown, Cynthia. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. California, May 21, 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Antoinette F. Riester, Victoria Pursch, and Linda Skrla, "Principals for social justice: Leaders of school success for children from low-income homes," *Journal of School Leadership* 12, no. 3 (2002): 281-304.

commonly reflected within continuation high schools. Principal placement is inconsistent and ill considered; Mr. Robinson describes:

We have had a lot of principals in a short amount of time. That has been a difficult situation at times because a lot of people were brought in here just for the sake that we needed a body to be the administrator. In that situation, we made the best of it. And, it made everybody become more of a unified staff because we were always kind of working against the person who was the administrator. They really didn't care about students and thought horrible things about them. They had no vested interest in working here except to end out their career and, or be a stepping stone for whatever they're going to do next.<sup>90</sup>

Reflected in Mr. Smiths' explanation, administrators are not particularly chosen to be placed within continuation high school because of prior experience or desire to work within alternative sites. Since the stigma attached to continuation high schools is pervasive, candidates are often dissuaded from accepting principal positions. Hence, continuation high school principals are usually individuals who believe and maintain stereotypical misconceptions as they have never had any previous interactions with alternative education. As principals are not invested in caring for these students, they leave the position soon after. Constant administrative instability and inattention negatively impacts teachers, as they must constantly advocate outside of the classroom to meet students' needs. Stigma attached to continuation high schools and their students leads to inadequate administrative placement and, therefore, high principal turnover.

Utilizing racialized and classist stigma, harmful conceived perceptions permeate through alternative educational settings and lead to adverse structural consequences. Within continuation high schools, constant stigma has become institutionalized as stereotypical misconceptions have produced negative outcomes that affect students, teachers, and administrative staff. As stigma is intertwined within the structure of alternative education, continuation high schools are forced to align with the assigned label, "dumping ground."

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<sup>90</sup> Robinson, Aaron. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. Independence High School, February 7, 2017.

## *Conclusion*

The process of institutional stigmatization mobilizes racial and socio-economic stereotypes to negatively impact Latinx low-income students of continuation high schools. District members and the outer community create, spread, and maintain stereotypical misconceptions. Through stigmatizing the continuation high school and admitted students, these dominant entities neglect and distance themselves from the issues that are faced by the disadvantaged, branded group, low-income Latinx youth. Teachers noted that stereotypical misconceptions inform tangible consequences that affected students, faculty, and staff. Overall, structural stigma is a powerful tool of domination as it shadows the challenges faced by low-income Latinx continuation students. Therefore, students are viewed as unworthy of resources because they are wrongly perceived to be academically unengaged and deviant. In conclusion, the process of institutional stigmatization exchanges the social identities of the low-income Latinx students with false racial and socio-economic stereotypes. Stigma is utilized by the outer community and district administration as a tool of erasure to invalidate students' emotional, social, and academic needs; therefore, imposed stigma becomes institutionalized within continuation sites as the mechanism is used to justify and allow the persistence of structural issues.

## CHAPTER 4 CASE STUDY OF MRS. JOHNSON

Mrs. Johnson is a white woman who is a veteran English teacher who has worked at the same continuation high school for over seven years. Initially, Mrs. Johnson taught as a teacher at the district's main comprehensive high school. However, she transitioned into alternative education after being offered a position at the local continuation high school by a district member who believed that she would be an effective educator for the continuation student population. Being raised in a Mexican lower middle-class neighborhood, she was influenced by surrounding Latinx people that comprised her community, schools, and personal relationships.

Given her intercultural background, she is keenly aware and empathetic towards the challenges that face her working-class Latinx continuation high school students. Moreover, Mrs. Johnson is conscious of the significant role that the district and the outer community play in perpetuating adverse stigma attached to continuation high schools and their students. Her unique perspective grants her the ability to see her students as children with a heightened concentration of needs rather than academically unengaged and deviant students. Being an active advocate for her students, Mrs. Johnsons' main goal as an educator is to rebrand her continuation high school and, therefore, deconstruct established, damaging stigma.

The case study of Mrs. Johnson illuminates the ways in which an educator can counter imposed stigma by dominant entities. Acknowledging that intrusive stigma has a significant impact on continuation high schools and students, Mrs. Johnson actively attempts to rebrand her school. She is a caring educator whose consistent advocacy showcases and promotes students' academic success and self-worth within alternative education. Through shifting branded language, promoting healthy school pride, and integrating into the outer community, Mrs. Johnson actively deconstructs damaging misconceptions and replace these sentiments with

positive connotations and interactions. The unique narrative of Mrs. Johnson presents practices that other educators can mobilize to rebuild working class Latinx students' personal self-esteem and public perception within the surrounding community.

### ***Reclamation of Terminology***

Before partaking in tangible action, Mrs. Johnson believes that it is integral to shift terminology to uplift continuation high schools and admitted students within communicative discourse. Typically, stigma attaches itself through verbal labels; these adversely branded words are then used and reacted to negatively by the outer community.<sup>91</sup> Mrs. Johnson identifies the term continuation high school as a stigmatized label; she describes,

I would like to challenge the language of continuation high school student and traditional student. I usually like to use the terms comprehensive high school and alternative education... Sometimes, I'll use traditional because I know that's the language that people are familiar with. But, I will very rarely ever say continuation high school. The only time I'll ever say it is when I'm trying to make sense to someone who doesn't know what it is. I usually always alternative education. I like to be able to say alternative because it has a more positive connotation.<sup>92</sup>

By exchanging the term continuation high schools with alternative education, Mrs. Johnson aims to alter the discourse in a positive manner. Labels attached to a stigmatized, disadvantaged group socially adopts a parallel connotation. When utilized, dominant groups can further stigmatize branded individuals within everyday conversation. By shifting the terminology, disadvantaged groups can reclaim alternative labels that uphold their true social identities.<sup>93</sup> A passive action to rebrand continuation high schools, Mrs. Johnson attempts to erase the stigmatized term and,

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<sup>91</sup> David McMillan and Charles Stangor. "Memory for Expectancy-Congruent and Expectancy-Incongruent Information: A Review of the Social and Social Developmental Literatures," *Psychological Bulletin* 111, no. 1 (1992): 42.

<sup>92</sup> Johnson, Lauren. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 11, 2016.

<sup>93</sup> Joshua Aronson and Claude M. Steele, "Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69, no. 5 (1995): 797.



consequentially, pushes the outer community to distance stereotypes from continuation high schools.

Language is a powerful avenue that perpetuates racial and classist stigma. Mrs. Johnson mobilizes a powerful technique that actively rebrands continuation high schools. Personally, I support her shift in terminology, but for the purpose of this thesis, I utilize the term continuation high school for understandability as it is the only word that technically identifies this particular sector of alternative education. Initially, taking a conceptual approach, Mrs. Johnson becomes an active advocate as she reclaims labels within the classroom and the outside community.

### *School Pride*

In addition, Mrs. Johnson mobilizes a rebranding technique that aims to rebuild the diminished self-worth of continuation high school students. As branded individuals have a stigma consciousness, working-class Latinx students are completely aware of what it socially means to be admitted within continuation high schools. Mrs. Johnson believes that implementing sources of school pride in which students can partake begins to deconstruct the stigma that directly effects them; she illustrates,

I think we're constantly trying to find ways to challenge that narrative that has been written about alternative ed. despite our efforts. We have a mascot, t-shirts with logos on them; we have sports team – a basketball court with the logo too. Students caring about their school is important; I think the more things that we do, the more we challenge the narrative. [Continuation schools] shouldn't be viewed as a punishment, like a negative place.<sup>94</sup>

Through implementing tangible takeaways and participatory avenues that promote school pride at continuation high schools, students counter skewed misconceptions. To deconstruct established stigma, individuals with more social power must grant autonomy to adversely

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<sup>94</sup> Johnson, Lauren. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 11, 2016.

branded persons. Through personal agency, disadvantaged groups are then able to redefine their social identities.<sup>95</sup> Mrs. Johnson presents practices that provide working-class Latinx students the ability to be prideful and claim ownership over their continuation education experiences.

By implementing school pride, Mrs. Johnson counters the stigmatized portrayal of continuation high schools. As the students to feel that there are aspects of their schools that are worthy of being cherished, students themselves begin to personally deconstruct the negativity surrounding continuation high schools. In addition, Mrs. Johnson allows students to care for their own educational aspirations by providing avenues in which the school can be validated as legitimate and positively impactful on students. Rebranding the school to be a prideful space for the outer community and students, Mrs. Johnson actively counters harmful stigma.

### ***Community Engagement***

Through courses, Mrs. Johnson utilizes community engagement to showcase the professional and academic development of her continuation high school students. As she reintroduces her students into the community in a positive manner, Mrs. Johnson informs others' misconceptions with positive social interactions with continuation high school students; she elaborates

So, I think giving them as many opportunities as I can to get outside the school and talk to other people that work in organizations around here is best. We took a couple kids to do a fundraising business presentation in front of [a local] business. [The owner] held a whole staff meeting and I took my kids; they had their PowerPoint ready and they were wearing their ties. And, they were fundraising for a non-profit so they wanted to get these people from the business to donate to their funding campaign. They had everything ready. For them, it was like, "Oh we are fundraising because we're going to be able to get money." And for me I am looking at my kids who were developing real-world skills. Giving them more opportunities to feel successful in various capacities outside these walls, I think is real important. And when they interact with people in the community, they break down misconceptions.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Karen Kaiser and Jane D. McLeod, "Childhood Emotional and Behavioral Problems and Educational Attainment." *American Sociological Review* 69, no. 5 (2004): 636-658.

<sup>96</sup> Johnson, Lauren. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 11, 2016.

By integrating students into the community to do professional non-profit work, Mrs. Johnson challenges every racialized and classist stigma that has traditionally been attached to them as working-class Latinx continuation students. To counter such stigma, the conceived negative attributes attached to disadvantaged groups must be critiqued. By exposing these attributes as false, branded individuals can be liberated from stigmatized expectations.<sup>97</sup> Providing avenues in which students can positively interact with the outer community, students can then mobilize their own actions to prove their own worth.

Through community engagement, not only are students granted the opportunity to develop academic and professional confidence but they are able to showcase and defend their success to the outer community. Mrs. Johnson has a strong passion in sharing the successfulness of her students to others in order to deconstruct stigma. By exchanging adverse misconceptions with the tangible professional and academic work derived from continuation high schools, working-class Latinx students provide tangible experiences to community members that validate their goodness.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, Mrs. Johnson is a caring educator who has devoted her time and effort into authenticating the value of the existence of working-class Latinx continuation high school students to the students, themselves, and the outer community. She believes that rebranding alternative education is the ultimate mechanism in deconstructing damaging stigma attached to continuation high schools and admitted students. Through utilizing the techniques of reclaiming terminology, implementing school pride, and integrating community engagement, Mrs. Johnson

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<sup>97</sup> Syed M. Ahmed and Ann-Gel S. Palermo, "Community Engagement in Research: Frameworks for Education and Peer Review," *American Journal of Public Health* 100, no. 8 (2010): 1380-1387.

actively uplifts continuation students as academically and professionally successful while exposing skewed misconceptions as derivatives of racialized and classist stereotypes. Mrs. Johnson presents a unique narrative that provides rebranding instruments that can be utilized in any scholastic setting that serves disadvantaged communities to counter stigma and promote positive educational outcomes for students.

## CHAPTER 5 STRUCTURALLY IMPOSED INVISIBILITY

Continuation high schools are dealing with structural issues that hinder their ability to serve the increased academic needs of the student population. Continuation sites primarily serve low-income Latinx youth, often their communities and the students, themselves, are labeled by cultural deficit discourse and stigma through racial and socio-economic stereotypes. In consequence, continuation students are left at a stark disadvantage as they are vulnerable to dominant educational entities who wish to orchestrate the total erasure of their social identities. Through believing that low-income Latinx continuation students are unworthy of resources, decision-making gatekeepers are validated in their action to underfund sites and, therefore, perpetuate institutional challenges present within continuation high schools.

The education system reproduces economic and social disparities. Countering the myth that education is the great equalizer, white youth who have social, economic, and political capital are generally the students who succeed academically. Dominant gatekeepers that hold power within our education system craft explicit and implicit rules that define positive educational outcomes. Typically, privileged white and middle upper class students are the only individuals who have access to knowing and following those rules.<sup>98</sup> Upon high school graduation, these privileged students are upwardly mobile, meanwhile poor students of color are disadvantaged because the education system was not created with their success as a founding principle. Forced to navigate overly bureaucratic spaces within underfunded schools, poor students of color do not have access to satisfactory educational experiences. Therefore, they are unable to gain any type of economic, social, or political capital that are promoted in the myth of education as an

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<sup>98</sup> Erin McNamara Horvat and Annette Lareau, "Moments of social inclusion and exclusion race, class, and cultural capital in family-school relationships." *Sociology of education* (1999): 37-53.

equalizer of disparities. In consequence, the status of low-income students of color remains stagnant within the set social and economic order after leaving academic settings. The disparities seen among white students and those of color demonstrate that, contrary to great equalizer myth, the education system institutionalizes the reproduction of social inequality.<sup>99</sup>

Poverty is not the cause of poor scholastic performance, but its consequences are deeply impacting schools and their students' academic outcomes. Low-income students of color face unmet academic and emotional needs that are driven by the adverse circumstances that accompany poverty. As education systems refuse to address or centralize these needs, academic settings fail to serve low-income students of color. Typically, schools that serve the low-income student population are severely underfunded; school districts receive considerable funding from local property taxes, thus a portion of school finances are dependent on property values in the area. Lower property values mean funding available for low-income students is further reduced. The limited success rates of low-income students of color lead to districts viewing those students as academic failures and, therefore, unworthy of resources. District administrators rely on a myopic explanation for low academic success and fail to recognize the impacts of unfulfilled emotional and social needs on academic performance. Inadequate funding justifies incorrect perceptions of students' ability results in schools that lack the adequate resources, materials, and support to respond to the academic, emotional, and social needs of low income students of color. Instead of focusing on the elimination of poverty, education systems must implement reform to mitigate the effects of poverty on the academic success of low-income students of color.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Sanford M. Dornbusch and Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar, "Social Capital and the Reproduction of Inequality: Information Networks among Mexican-Origin High School Students," *Sociology of Education* (1995): 116-135.

<sup>100</sup> Pedro A. Noguera, "The Trouble with Black Boys: The Role and Influence of Environmental and Cultural Factors on the Academic Performance of African American Males," *Urban Education* 38, no. 4 (2003): 431-459.

As continuation high schools primarily serve low-income Latinx student populations, there are many structural issues present within continuation sites that adversely impact the students' ability to academically succeed. As lead decision makers, the district and its administrators are powerful agents in creating, allowing, and perpetuating these institutional challenges. By mobilizing stigma and relying on deficit thinking, school board members ensure the total erasure of low-income Latinx students' social identities by further imposing invisibility onto continuation high schools. As it becomes acceptable to neglect the academic needs of low-income Latinx students, the districts fail to recognize continuation high schools, ignore students' emotional and academic needs, and perpetuate damaging structural issues. Holding centralized and considerable power, districts play a key role in reproducing social inequality within our educational system by actively overlooking continuation high schools.

### ***Unrecognized by the District***

Continuation high schools are often ignored by their school districts. Students' and teachers' needs are deemed as insignificant by schoolboard administrators as they tend to deprioritize the issues present in continuation sites. Continuation high schools feel left behind as districts centralize their efforts on comprehensive high schools. Even though continuation high schools are in need of the most support, districts decide to neglect their most basic requests. Continuation teachers recognize their schools' positionality within the established educational social order; Mrs. Baker states:

We are overlooked and it's fairly noticeable. I think if someone else or three other schools needed something before us, we would be fourth on the totem pole. They have been talking about doing something nice on our campus for the past years. They have had the money but something else came up and they can't do. Part of it is that you don't want to rock the boat too. We don't want to bring any noticeable negative attention or let them know because they are always looking for something not good instead of something good. When something good happens here it is often overlooked. The focus for this new superintendent is on the high school, to get the high school straight. We can be the lowest

rated high school; I don't think they would really have a big deal with that.<sup>101</sup>

Within the outer community, schoolboard administrators attempt to maintain a positive image of the district as a whole. The district-imposed invisibility of continuation high schools results in administrators only being present within continuation high schools in response to students who contradict the districts' favorable portrayal. The district chooses to interact with continuation sites only during times of crisis, which further reinforces schoolboard administrators' misconceptions regarding students. By the districts believing that low-income students of color are academically unengaged and deviant, educational sites that serve them are often overlooked.<sup>102</sup> Compared to comprehensive education, continuation sites are deprioritized by the district as the alternative sector rarely has their needs addressed by school board administration. While focusing on comprehensive educational settings, administrators often ignore alternative sites as continuation high schools serve a smaller population and low-income Latinx students.

Because districts treat alternative educational sites as the “stepchild,” there are no formal avenues of communication between administration and continuation high schools. As continuation sites are only acknowledged when something negative occurs, district members rarely interact with continuation students under neutral or positive circumstances. In consequence, the district does not recognize school-led constructive efforts that attempt to rebrand the site like planned community actions, fundraising programs, or school-pride events. Many teachers' shared this sentiment regarding the lack of school district presence within their schools, Ms. Flores describes:

I feel like there could be more presence from the administration coming to school events. I believe there's just some disengagement. I feel like the teachers do a [great] job being available for the kids and doing after school events. And, I just feel like sometimes I wish

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<sup>101</sup> Baker, Helen. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 11, 2016.

<sup>102</sup> David Wakelyn, "State Strategies for Fixing Failing Schools and Districts. Issue Brief," *NGA Center For Best Practices* (2011).



everyone was there for that because I think it's really important to break apart negative perceptions. And, I don't feel like everyone always is willing to come to [continuation high schools]. I would say that administration's always the hardest part because they think of us in a certain way.<sup>103</sup>

It is evident that administrators are unwilling to involve themselves within continuation high schools even when the school is conducting commendable, positive work. School board administrators demonstrate that they are resistant to deconstruct their misconceptions of low-income Latinx continuation students; therefore, administrators misguidedly discount the needs low-income students of color from any type of decision-making, reformatory discourse, or simple interactions.<sup>104</sup> In order to counter inequitable administrative action, district collaboration to improve education disparities that effect “urban” educational settings has a significant positive impact on students’ educational outcomes.<sup>105</sup> These positive impacts cannot manifest when districts refuse to establish an administrative presence within continuation high schools. Districts are opposed to dedicating effort to this because they would then be forced to respond to students’ needs and deconstruct the misconceptions regarding low-income Latinx students.

Relative to comprehensive high schools, continuation high schools are deprioritized by the district. As noted by educators, continuation sites are rarely acknowledged by their administrators. Typically, district members are only attentive to continuation high schools during times of crisis, when they must act to protect the districts’ public image. Because interactions are limited to adverse circumstances, the racialized and classist stigma that districts hold regarding continuation students is reaffirmed. However, when continuation schools are functioning well and improving, districts are unwilling to acknowledge their constructive efforts. Hence,

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<sup>103</sup> Flores, Sergio. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 8, 2016.

<sup>104</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

<sup>105</sup> David DeMatthews and Hanne Mawhinney, "Social Justice Leadership and Inclusion Exploring Challenges in an Urban District Struggling to Address Inequities," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 50, no. 5 (2014).

administrators are unable to break down their misconceptions to respond to the heightened emotional and academic needs of students. A lack of active district presence within continuation high schools is detrimental to the success and well-being of low-income Latinx continuation students.

### ***Ignoring Students' Needs***

Continuation high schools are intended to facilitate an alternative diploma program for students who are behind academically in comprehensive schools. Even though continuation educational settings operate a credit-recovery program, districts often implement policies that place unrealistic expectations on students and teachers. For example, administrators have directed all district schools to shift to an A-G model - a list of course requirements that were created by the UC and CSU systems to assure that students are prepared for college.<sup>106</sup> With no additional funding, teachers are expected to adapt their courses in order to uphold this requirement; Ms. Brown elaborates more on the negative impact this policy has:

Given that we are a continuation site, a full academic schedule with a-g requirements doesn't work for them. I think you have to condense it to still provide them with that because we don't have the money and students don't have the time. We are trying to make it a mini high school and it's like, 'It didn't work when it was a big one so to give them that won't work either.' I just don't honestly feel that the way that it's structured is going to help most of these kids when leave here - to be ready to go out, get a job, and take on the world. And, I'm not saying everybody needs to be in a suit and tie or go to college. But, they don't have any of the professional skills necessary to leave. When they leave here, they need to be able to have the motivation to take care of themselves and have the tools to do so. I just don't think that the A-G model is supportive. I think it gets overshadowed with, "Let's get these numbers of graduates going to college." Its' unrealistic without funding and these types of students.<sup>107</sup>

With the introduction of the A-G model, continuation sites are expected to form academically intensive courses even as teachers are struggling to provide basic credit-recovery courses.

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<sup>106</sup> A-G Subject Requirements *University of California*, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Brown, Cynthia. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. California, May 21, 2016.

Deprived of adequate funding, it is almost impossible for continuation sites to comply with these requirements without having the resources to promote students' scholastic success. While the districts aim to maintain their college-readiness image within the outer community, continuation sites are having to deal with the consequences of policy. As districts hold centralized authority, they have the most power in deciding policies, budgetary allocations, academic assessments, and scholastic expectations. School board administrators' actions are representative of dysfunctional bureaucracies, meeting school board administrators often in continuation high schools for the betterment of the district rather than their low-income Latinx students.<sup>108</sup> Within continuation high schools. Increasing academic rigor prior to providing emotional and educational support is setting low-income Latinx students up for failure.

In addition, districts have made fiscal decisions that adversely affect continuation high schools. Repeatedly, "urban" districts commit ill-advised, unsupportive action that neglects to understand the impacts on disadvantaged student populations.<sup>109</sup> Because districts have total autonomy over funding allocations, they make decisions based off whatever will most benefit the district rather than equitable distribution. As comprehensive schools are financially prioritized, district budget cuts disproportionately impact continuation high schools. This issue takes on a tangible representation as students with heightened behavioral issues are purposefully misplaced and funneled within continuation high schools; Mr. Ellison, a veteran science teacher, further explains,

Also, there are some kids that shouldn't be in a regular school or in a continuation school. They should be in a [community day school]. Because of funding, we get a lot of resistance from the district and then there's a lot of issues. Kids that we know that need this extra help or need to be moved; the [district] postpone[s] and postpone[s] by saying,

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<sup>108</sup> Martin Haberman, "Who Benefits from Failing Urban School Districts? An Essay on Equity and Justice for Diverse Children in Urban Poverty," *University of Wisconsin Milwaukee* (2003).

<sup>109</sup> George Theoharis, "Social Justice Educational Leaders and Resistance: Toward a Theory of Social Justice Leadership," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (2007): 221-258.

“We will do this test,” or “We will do that test to the psychologist.” And, we're like it's not going to solve the problem because we need to get this kids in the right services. But, because there is not much money, there's a lot of resistance from them. But, it ends up hurting the kids who need to be in continuation high schools.<sup>110</sup>

Students who ought to be placed in more behavioral intensive educational sites are instead funneled into continuation high schools. Administrators intentionally misdirect students in order to keep more bodies and their attendance funding within the district. Continuation schools lack the necessary funding to address student's emotional and academic needs; therefore, they are financially incapable of providing behavioral supports for misplaced students. Moreover, overcrowding classrooms is harmful to all students, as they are unable to obtain enough resources, educator interaction, and teaching materials to be academically successful.<sup>111</sup>

As continuation high schools are created to be smaller, more intimate classrooms for students who are academically delayed, funneling other youth with more needs into continuation sites is contradictory to the educational setting's purpose. Gatekeepers of educational opportunity, districts can decide through budgetary allocation which schools will be more academically successful; this choice reinforces an economic and academic hierarchy which severely limit the opportunities for disadvantaged students. Typically, low-income students of color entering educational settings with higher needs are the most negatively impacted by unjust hierarchal power as they are allocated the least resources. Rather than distributing resources equitably, districts employ them partially for self-benefit.<sup>112</sup> Districts are purposefully misplacing students into continuation schools for financial benefit, and as such the low-income Latinx students' academic welfare is compromised.

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<sup>110</sup> Ellison, Brian. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, February 7, 2017.

<sup>111</sup> Lana Muraskin, "Barriers, Benefits, and Costs of Using Private Schools To Alleviate Overcrowding in Public Schools. Final Report," *US Department of Education* (1998).

<sup>112</sup> Martin Haberman, "Who Benefits from Failing Urban School Districts? An Essay on Equity and Justice for Diverse Children in Urban Poverty," *University of Wisconsin Milwaukee* (2003).

Mirroring a dysfunctional bureaucracy, continuation sites hold a disadvantaged position within the established educational social order. Through failing to recognize the differing needs of continuation high schools, administrators implement policies for the betterment of the district that place unrealistic expectations on alternative sites who lack the financial and resource capability. By instituting the A-G model and purposefully overcrowding continuation high schools, the district minimizes their own financial burden to the detriment of continuation students' academic success.

### *Inadequate Funding Allocations*

As continuation high schools serve low-income Latinx students facing additional environmental challenges, this sector of education requires adequate resources to aid their increased emotional and academic needs. However, continuation sites face a multitude of reoccurring structural issues derived from inequitable funding allocations; teachers are forced to constantly compensate for many adverse institutional issues. When teachers do not have access to teaching materials, it is formidable for them to successfully facilitate their courses. Therefore, students are barred from academically engaging within classrooms.<sup>113</sup> Many teachers shared stories regarding resource restriction's negative effects on continuation sites; Mr. Gray states:

We have been on a shoestring budget to the point when [the district] w[as] counting how many copies we made on the copy machine and would say, "After this amount; you're supposed to be on your own." But rarely did that happen. Most of the time we went out to go buy the paper and any other supplies we needed on our own because our budget was too little.<sup>114</sup>

Continuation high schools struggle with limited scholastic supplies including: printer paper, text books, writing supplies, desks, etc. Unfortunately, a lack of resources is a common issue that

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<sup>113</sup> Sorie Gassama, "The Correlation between Poverty and Learning: What Can Be Done to Help Children with Limited Resources Learn," (2012).

<sup>114</sup> Gray, Henry. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, August 10, 2016.

arises within educational settings that serve low-income students of color.<sup>115</sup> In response, continuation teachers, like Mr. Gray, are forced to compensate for teaching material restrictions. To facilitate courses, continuation teachers use their own money and effort to acquire needed scholastic supplies. Districts administrators are in full control of school funding allocations as gatekeepers to scholastic opportunity. Within “urban” educational settings, districts frequently do not provide the appropriate resources for the schools that serve low-income students of color. In consequence, the schools are forced to navigate these institutional disparities because school-board administrators do not value the academic potential of their student population.<sup>116</sup> A lack of accessible resources within continuation high schools makes it difficult for low-income Latinx students to succeed academically.

In addition, continuation high schools face a lack of teaching staff to adequately provide for low-income Latinx students’ academic needs. As continuation sites serve students who require credit-recovery oriented programs, it is integral that these alternative educational settings hire enough educators to facilitate needed courses. However, limited teaching staff has pushed continuation educators to absorb multiple additional academic roles in order to provide a variety of subjects that students are behind in; Ms. Garcia, describes the way in which fellow continuation high school teachers adapt their educational roles:

We don't have enough teachers so we have to teach a lot of combination classes. Or, we have [one] class that is history and it meets the world history, US history, government, or economics requirements that one teacher is going to teach. One day, a teacher may teach economics and, two weeks later, she may teach us history and, two weeks later, she's going to teach government because there's not enough teachers. And, student who really needs U.S. history are getting something else that they don't need. In English, it's a little bit better, even though we're teaching combination classes. Because English is English, even though sometimes were teaching at different grade levels. Same thing with the

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<sup>115</sup> Sandra Feldman, "Children in Crisis: The Tragedy of Underfunded Schools and the Students They Serve." *American Educator: The Professional Journal of the American Federation of Teachers* 16, no. 1 (1992): 8.

<sup>116</sup> Jean Anyon, *Radical Possibilities: Public Policy, Urban Education, and a New Social Movement* (New Jersey: Routledge, 2014).

sciences, we have one science teacher and we may teach two different science classes but we might have the needs of four or five different sciences. We are providing a bunch of kids with all different science fields and they're getting science credits but none in the right sciences.<sup>117</sup>

It is evident that continuation high schools are navigating through the imposed structural issue, a limited academic staff. Within continuation sites, educators have to adapt their teaching roles to facilitate needed academic courses across subjects within differing grade levels. By consolidating classes, continuation high schools are able to technically provide for students' academic needs in an efficient manner. However, combined courses present within "urban" schools have a negative impact on students' academic success.<sup>118</sup> In actuality, a lack of teaching staff leaves low-income Latinx continuation students at a disadvantage as these courses limit satisfactory scholastic experiences that promote positive educational outcomes.

The district inequitably allocating funding is a reflection of administrator's failure to acknowledge the external adverse challenges faced by low-income Latinx students. Continuation high schools serve students attempting to navigate educational settings with external emotional trauma. For schools that serve low-income populations of color, providing emotional resources is integral in securing the academic success of students.<sup>119</sup> Within continuation high schools, there are limited emotional resources available to students; Mrs. Johnson shares how the lack of recognition of the increased emotional needs of students impacts their academic experiences:

But, it's hard because we are constantly against emotional problems. Along with having a better understanding with what alternative ed. is, then the funding needs to also come behind that. And, I think what they really need to realize is that they fund us on a per-pupil basis still. The issues that come with [continuation schools face] inequitable funding in the sense that we have kids that need more emotional help. If we're going to be equitable, we need to give more to the kids who need more. If we have to give alternative

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<sup>117</sup> Garcia, Monica. First Name. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, June 30, 2017.

<sup>118</sup> Douglas Ready, Valerie Lee, and Kevin G. Welner, "Educational Equity and School Structure: School Size, Overcrowding, and Schools-Within-Schools." *Teachers College Record* 106, no. 10 (2004) 1989-2014.

<sup>119</sup> Jane Knitzer and Jill Lefkowitz, "Resources to Promote Social and Emotional Health and School Readiness in Young Children and Families." *National Center for Children in Poverty* (2005).

ed, more money in order to have the same opportunity that comprehensive has because more money means smaller class sizes and more emotional health resources, then we have to do that. But, right now funding is the same way that you fund comprehensive high school. It doesn't make any sense to me. At least, in the past, the state recommended 15 - 1 and alternative ed. Sometimes, I have like 30. And, it's doing a disservice to the kids. They have a lot of those emotional needs that can very easily take over the classroom. And, if there's 30 of them, it's really hard for me to attend to both the emotional and the academic needs of all of them without any resources to refer them too. So, I think that with a better understanding of what the purpose of alternative ed. is and what the power of alternative ed. can be that it needs to be equitably funded to match that.<sup>120</sup>

Clearly, enrolled low-income Latinx students were unable to navigate comprehensive classrooms as they have increased emotional needs driven by additional environmental challenges. As emotional health drives academic success, continuation students need emotional supports in order to be able to academically engage. Districts fail to provide funding for emotional supports within continuation sites. Exacerbated by overcrowded classrooms, the emotional needs of all students cannot be fully addressed by one educator without any supplemental resources. As districts do not recognize this relationship between emotions and academics, continuation high schools are unable to institutionalize emotional resources that students can access.

As districts fail to provide equitable funding allocations, continuation high schools are unable to provide low-income Latinx students with the academic and emotional resources to promote positive educational outcomes. Administrators purposefully create and perpetuate structural challenges to upkeep the educational social order that deprioritizes continuation high schools, which provides the district with some financial gain and social credibility.<sup>121</sup> Driven by the districts' personal agenda, teachers are pushed to compensate for the structural issues that interfere with everyday classroom interactions. Continuation high schools are an underfunded

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<sup>120</sup> Johnson, Lauren. Interview by Gabriela Ornelas. Transcript. California, July 11, 2016.

<sup>121</sup> Frank Adamson and Linda Darling-Hammond, "Funding Disparities and the Inequitable Distribution of Teachers: Evaluating Sources and Solutions," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 20 (2012): 37.



sector of our education system that manifest into limited scholastic materials, minimal teaching staff, and a lack of institutionalized emotional supports that adversely affect low-income Latinx continuation students.

### *Conclusion*

District administrators are the gatekeepers of academic opportunity within our educational system. The lead decision makers, districts often overlook continuation high schools. Compared to comprehensive high schools, continuation high schools are not a priority of the school board. Administrators actively impose invisibility on the needs of low-income Latinx students as they refuse to have a supportive administrative presence continuation sites, and only interact with continuation students when sites are in crisis reaffirming adverse stereotypes. Reflecting dysfunctional bureaucracy, districts often execute unrealistic expectations onto continuation high schools for fiscal benefits. Through implementing A-G courses and funneling misplaced students into continuation sites, administrators dismiss the needs of continuation students who need small intimate classrooms that uphold a credit-recovery program. As districts have centralized control over funding allocations, administrators create, allow, and perpetuate structural issues within continuation high schools including: limited scholastic supplies, a lack of teaching staff, and minimal emotional support resources. By purposefully imposing invisibility over the damaging environmental conditions and consequent emotional needs of students, schoolboard administrators restrict funding that would address institutional challenges and therefore fail to promote low-income Latinx students' academic and emotional welfare.

## CONCLUSION

In this exploratory study, I researched the institutional obstacles present within Southern California continuation high schools that hinder low-income Latinx students' academic success. Guided by limited existing literature, I explored the teachers' career, interactions with students, and opinions to accessibility to resources and funding. Through oral narratives, I pieced together a comprehensive analysis of the driving factors that contributed to structural issues present within continuation high schools by examining the role of the educator. My study concludes that teachers, the outer community, and district members utilize cultural deficit thinking and stigmatization as tools to oppress and dismiss low-income Latinx students' social identities and exchange them with racialized and classist stereotypes; these mechanisms of total erasure are then mobilized by school-board administration to impose invisibility over students' academic and emotional needs to justify the creation and perpetuation of structural issues for districts' fiscal benefit.

A disproportionate concentration of structural issues is present within continuation high schools. These challenges are often obstacles that hinder continuation students' academic performance. By blaming communities and branding continuation students with negative stereotypes, teachers, the greater community, and district members justify the structural challenges that impede the academic success of low-income Latinx continuation student population. Therefore, the mobilization of cultural deficit frameworks and racialized and classist stigma become tools of dominations that create a total erasure of low-income Latinx students' social identities – as it obscures the adverse social circumstances faced by students that results in increased academic and emotional needs.

As continuation teachers misdirect blame onto Latinx communities, they identify parental neglect, intentional ignorance regarding education, and a failure to value education by Latinx communities as key factors that hinder low-income Latinx students' success. By participating in cultural deficit discourse, teachers fail to acknowledge the ways in which intersecting external conditions perpetuated by poverty interfere with low-income Latinx students' educational experiences and academic performance. Erasing the systemic external circumstances faced by continuation students, teachers construct the narrative of the underserving poor, which portrays low-income Latinx students as unworthy of resources by placing blaming them for their disadvantaged positionality. By blaming parents and Latinx communities for continuation students' academic and emotional challenges, continuation teachers utilize this tool of domination to invalidate the Latinx students' agency. Erasing their actual needs with cultural deficit conceptualizations, low-income Latinx continuation students are denied parental or community advocates to speak against the structural issues that persist within continuation sites.

In addition to blaming communities, the mechanism of stigma plays a significant role in attaching racial and socio-economic stereotypes to low-income Latinx students at continuation high schools. The community and district members are main agents that form and perpetuate misconceptions of the students' character. By branding low-income Latinx students as deviant and academically unengaged, unaffiliated community and school-board members exchange the social identities of low-income Latinx students with negative stereotypes. The process of stigmatization allows perpetrators to neglect the needs of students and distance themselves from the issues present within continuation sites. In consequence, community and district members will not advocate for low-income Latinx continuation students as their perceptions regarding the

continuation population align with racialized and classist stereotypes; therefore, both groups believe that continuation students are unworthy of resources.

Mobilizing the two tools of total erasure - cultural deficit thinking and stigma - school board administrators impose invisibility over students' social identities in order to form, implement, and perpetuate structural issues within continuation high schools. Latinx communities and low-income Latinx students are therefore unable to advocate for academic and emotional needs; meanwhile, the greater community is unwilling to deconstruct racialized and classist misconceptions of the students. As head decisionmakers, the districts dismiss the emotional and academic needs of students as their communities are blamed for the issues and students' social identities are stigmatized. Administrative systems refuse to maintain a supportive presence within continuation high schools, and as such deprioritize the needs of continuation high schools because they are aware that parents, Latinx communities, and greater community members are unable or unwilling to advocate for students' emotional and academic success.

As low-income Latinx students are viewed as unworthy of adequate resources, school-board administrations easily execute and perpetuate institutional issues that disproportionately affect low-income Latinx continuation students. Driven by fiscal benefits, districts implement unrealistic expectations, limit educational materials, refuse to provide essential emotional resources, and restrict staffing. By mobilizing cultural deficit frameworks and stigmatization, districts dismiss students' adverse circumstances and their consequent emotional and academic needs in order to inequitably restrict funding that would otherwise address structural issues and promote the academic and emotional success of low-income Latinx students.

Clearly, continuation high schools face a disproportionate concentration of institutional challenges because the site serves low-income Latinx populations. My study regarding this

underfunded alternative sector of education brings forth one collective narrative that exposes how educational systems reproduce social inequality, as the total erasure of low-income Latinx continuation students' academic and emotional needs permits systemic structural issues which are validated by racialized and classist stereotypes. I firmly believe that my findings justify and demand transformative reformations of our education system.

With an understanding of the increased academic, emotional, and social needs of low-income Latinx students, school administrations must provide equitable funding to continuation high schools in order to promote students' educational success. In addition, supplementary funding needs to be provided to institutionalize crucial resources. For example, schools can be provided with funding for teachers to host events that rebrand continuation high schools and their students, which provide opportunities for the greater community to deconstruct stereotypes and misconceptions. Moreover, continuation sites can form avenues that encourage accessible parental involvement while breaking down the institutional obstacles that make educational participation difficult for low-income Latinx communities. These programs would promote transformative change that promotes students' social and educational welfare.

### ***Limitations and Future Research***

My research describes how educational institutions utilizes tools of total erasure to mask students' actual social identities and, further, perpetuate structural issues within continuation high schools, hindering the academic success of low-income Latinx students. One shortcoming of my study is the small sample. When I further my work, I will collect data on a larger scale to negate or compliment my findings. Moreover, I believe my findings can be strengthened by further research that interrogates the current climate of continuation high schools from a student and district perspective to collect a more in-depth overview that is derived from a comprehensive

collective of narratives. My research characterizes the current situation in Southern California continuation high schools within our education system's embedded social order through teachers' perspectives; however, more research is needed to fully delve into the complexities of my findings and analyze by cross-examining different perspectives.

APPENDIX A:  
GLOSSARY

**Latinx:** a self-identification term developed on college campuses as a gender-neutral alternative for Latino/Latina

**Cultural Deficit Model:** a theoretical framework that assumes poor educational performance is attributed by the students' familial dynamics and communities, while failing to acknowledge institutional barriers

**Social Stigma:** a theoretical framework that describes the total rejection and condemnation of a disadvantaged individual on perceived racialized and classist stereotypes that erase their social identities.

**Institutional Stigma:** a theoretical framework that describes the process of stigmatization utilized by an institution to exchange disadvantaged groups' individual identities with tainted misconceptions that are viewed to be uniform with all the members of the stigmatized group

**Dysfunctional Bureaucracy:** an administrative system that inequitably distributes resources for self-benefit, holding centralized organizational authority.

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