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# Breaking through the Bars: Understanding the K-12 Educational Experience through the Voices of Individuals Who Were Incarcerated

Lisa Ann Hill  
*Iowa State University*

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**Breaking through the bars: Understanding the k–12 educational experience through  
the voices of individuals who were incarcerated**

by

**Lisa A. Hill**

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Program of Study Committee:

Joanne Marshall, Major Professor  
Melanie Brooks  
Leslie Hogben  
Gary Ratigan  
Jan Westerman-Beatty

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2013

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## ABSTRACT

A phenomenological approach was used with this study to give a voice to individuals who are incarcerated for the purpose of understanding their past educational experiences in the areas of academics, personal/social, and career exploration. The study included interviews with 25 individuals who are incarcerated and who were purposefully selected to represent people from two groups: those previously known and those unknown by the researcher. Only individuals who are incarcerated who resided in an Iowa Correctional Facility participated in the study. A 45–60 minute semi-structured interview was conducted with each incarcerated individual. Interview questions focused on the individuals' perceptions of their K–12 education in regard to their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education experience. The findings identified the importance of including the student voice in the design and implementation of academics, personal/social behavior, and career education to ensure that K–12 students receive the necessary supports, thus possibly reducing their risk of future incarceration.

This study concluded its examination of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education and the inclusion of the student voice by determining that listening to the K–12 student voice in regard to the three components of education can better connect students to their learning, resulting in better academic achievement, appropriate personal/social behaviors, and a realization of possible future careers, as well as how students relate to school in general. It also provides ways in which the model can be modified to direct better service of students overall.

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

*We're Number One! We lead the world in prison incarcerations.  
If only we were Number One in education.*

Carroll, 2008, p. 31

Over the past several years, I have developed a daily habit of perusing the local county jail website to search for former students. This fascination began when a former student, Amy, with whom I had worked extensively as an at-risk counselor, was arrested shortly after her high school graduation.<sup>1</sup> At that point, other former students of mine had previously been arrested for various violations; however, this incident led me to question how a student such as Amy, who had received what I felt to be multiple areas of support during school, could be arrested within months of leaving high school. While I did not know why Amy was incarcerated, I found myself wanting to speak with her so I could ask her to elaborate on how she perceived her K–12 school experience. Was there something Amy would have wanted the school to do to help her or was her incarceration beyond the scope of school?

Amy's parents divorced after allegations of domestic abuse surfaced in the community, which left her mother financially strapped, trying to support three children on a minimum wage job. Amy's father abandoned his parenting and financial duties after moving out of the house. This left Amy's mother with little money. She often telephoned to ask the school to send a food box home with Amy from the district food pantry. Amy was truly

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<sup>1</sup> All names used in this study are pseudonyms to protect the identity of incarcerated individuals.

embarrassed about her family issues and further disengaged from school. Many teachers assumed her poor attitude toward school was because she did not care about learning. As a result, personal/social behavior and one-on-one academic support were implemented. Extra academic assistance in the form of one-on-one instruction, weekly homework monitoring, and reading support were activated early in Amy's educational career, and set her on a path possibly to attend college. The school social worker offered mental health counseling once per week, and connected Amy's family with outside agency support to aid her in overcoming the emotional obstacles she fought as a result of the domestic abuse that had occurred in her home. Our efforts intended to help Amy form future goals so that she could see life beyond high school, continue her career exploration previously implemented in elementary school, and be supported to continue through the twelfth grade. Yet, despite attempts to meet Amy's educational, social, and emotional needs, she still ended up in jail. Amy had not developed the necessary skills to support her postsecondary transition.

Reflecting on Amy's situation, I realize now that we did not offer her the opportunity to be included in what should have been her decision-making process. As educators, we thought we knew what was best for her. We initiated changes to her academic program, yet we never considered the ways she might perceive the problems she faced. We connected her to mental health resources based on our best assessment of her personal/social well-being, but we never took the time to ask questions and listen to Amy's answers. We assumed we knew what she needed, but did not allow her the opportunity to respond to our efforts. Clearly, the tension existed between Amy's responsibilities and those of the school. Reflecting on this tension between student responsibility and the systemic school responsibility led me to question why we failed to simply ask Amy what she thought about

our efforts to educate her. Perhaps providing her with the opportunity to voice her opinion might have better suited her academic, personal/social behaviors, and career path needs. Allowing Amy to share her experiences, and listening to her, might have also provided us with information to improve education for her and all students in the areas of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education (hereafter referred to as, “the three components of education”).

It is important to listen to and hear students’ voices so that a deeper understanding of student struggles can be fully understood (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Burke Morrison, 2006). Leaving students out of the problem-solving process might result in short-term accomplishments, and may, in fact, cause continued long-term struggles with academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education (Bandura, 1997; Hunt & Touzel, 2009; Kochlar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010; Neumark, 2007). Long-term struggles can cause a student to fail in multiple areas of school. Students who struggle through school are more apt to fail, thus increasing their chances of being incarcerated as an adult (Western, Schiraldi, & Zeidenberg, 2003). Perhaps the structured educational experiences that we as educators thought would assist Amy missed the mark. While we knew we could not change this student’s experience beyond school, we did think that the interventions we applied to Amy’s situation would be the catalyst to help her build her life skills and initiate her own change.

The incident with Amy led me to question why a student whom we believed to have received ample support would be incarcerated shortly after graduating from high school, but also to question what was missing from her educational experience that could have helped her be successful. Many schools throughout Iowa offer support to students identified as at-risk, using the Iowa *Guidelines for Serving At-Risk Students* (Iowa Department of Education,

2007), which explains to educators what academic, personal/social behavior, and career education should be provided to students identified as struggling students. While this guide did not exist when all the participants in this study were still attending school, protocols had been established in the 1980s that required K–12 schools to provide struggling students with appropriate supports to help them succeed in school (Department Iowa Department of Education, 2007). Ultimately, these required protocols led Iowa to create more concrete procedures that guided K–12 schools in their attempts to support struggling learners (Iowa Department of Education, 2007). These earlier requirements evolved into the development of 2003’s *Instructional Decision Making*, which held K–12 schools accountable for “identifying and addressing the academic/behavioral needs of all students” (Iowa Department of Education, 2007, p. 4). As a result of *Instructional Decision Making*, the *Guidelines for Serving At-Risk Students* (Iowa Department of Education, 2007) and followed by the *Iowa School Counseling, A Program Framework: One Vision, One Voice* (Iowa Department of Education, 2008) were created to further assist schools in properly identifying and supporting struggling students. According to the Iowa Administrative Rule (Iowa Code 280.19A, 2012), Iowa requires public schools to develop plans that accommodate students who might need extra support with academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. These three components fall within the competencies designated named in *Iowa School Counseling: A Program Framework* (Iowa Department of Education, 2008). For example, the academic component promotes the development of the K–12 students’ skills in that they can “articulate competence and confidence as a learner, identify attitudes and behaviors that lead to successful learning, and apply time and task management skills” (Iowa Department of Education, 2008, p. 10). Similarly, the component of personal/social behavior encourages

the K–12 school to assist students in developing skills that “recognize, accept, respect, and appreciate individual differences, use effective communication skills, and apply effective problem-solving skills to make safe choices” (Iowa Department of Education, 2008, p. 13). Likewise, the career education component is designed to help K–12 students “demonstrate awareness of the education and training needed to achieve career goals, select course work that is related to career interests, [and] use employability and job readiness skills in extended learning experiences” (Iowa Department of Education, 2008, p. 10).

Every K–12 student has the potential to become at-risk as defined by the *Guidelines for Serving At-Risk Students* (Iowa Department of Education, 2007) and within *Iowa School Counseling: A Program Framework—One Vision, One Voice* (Iowa Department of Education, 2008). It is through the development and implementation of targeted programming in academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education that appropriate supports may be provided to all students in hopes of eliminating their at-risk nature. However, there is no definite format for at-risk programming; schools have local control of the overall implementation of their programming, but must provide the State with the design of their at-risk plan, data collection, and reporting methods (Iowa Department of Education, 2007).

My thoughts turned to all my former students who had been incarcerated shortly after leaving school. What would these young people have to say about their educational experiences? The prior research I had examined identified minimal work indicating that adults who struggled in school and were currently incarcerated were asked specifically about their K–12 education in regard to the three components of education. No research could be found about listening to the voice of students who were now incarcerated as adults. This

population of individuals would be an example of students who had, by some people's judgments, failed early in adult life. This purposeful case sampling is a group of individuals who can provide information that might change the existing format of K–12 schooling (Creswell, 2005), or as Creswell (2007) suggests, purposeful case sampling provides “specific information about a problem” (p. 157) that “permits logical generalization and maximum application of information to other cases” (p. 158). Asking individuals who are incarcerated about their educational experiences will explore the phenomenon of K–12 education's academic, personal/social behavior, and career education components.

The individuals who are incarcerated are exceptionally appropriate when exploring the phenomenon of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education and the K–12 student, in that they provide understanding of a set group of individuals who can represent a larger population essential for this study (Creswell, 2005). In this study, students were referred to as K–12 although the participants may not have participated in every grade that a K12 school offers. Analyzing the themes generated from the participants' perceptions will allow the struggling K–12 student to finally be heard, and might provide teachers and others with some insight into struggling students' perspectives, allowing them a deeper understanding of the ways in which support could be improved to help these students with academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education.

### **Brief Literature Review**

In 2011, 65% of American prisoners had a high school diploma or GED, compared to 82% of the general population (Justice Center, 2011). The Justice Center (2011) also reported that 30% of these incarcerated persons are between ages 18 and 30, which is less than Iowa's 47.5% of the incarcerated population under 30 years of age (Iowa Department of



Corrections, 2011). Often, individuals entering penal institutions have struggled through school or dropped out. The phenomenon of a failed transition to adult life is indicative of individuals' lack of academic, personal/social, and/or career skills (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). While factors such as home life, poverty, and racism contribute to an individual's struggle to transition to adulthood (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007), this study focuses only on the K–12 school experience. Students spend a significant amount of time in K–12 schools learning about academic subjects, developing personal/social behaviors, and exploring future career options. On average, students spend 6.5 hours in school per day, which amounts to over 15,000 hours during a child's K–12 school experience (Roth, Brooks-Gunn, & Linver, 2003). In the end, some students graduate from the K–12 institution, while others drop out. While graduation status was not a determining factor for participating in this study, it did serve as a demographic of the participants, as each participant self-reported the type of student they believed themselves to be and whether or not they had graduated from high school. Graduating from high school provided a timeline for the participants' K–12 experience. K–12 education in the United States provides students with an opportunity to develop primary- and secondary-level competencies within the three educational components (Bloom, 2010). As children become young adults and navigate their way into postsecondary life, they use a variety of skills learned from their K–12 years, such as the abilities of reading and behaving appropriately in a variety of social situations (Beckett, 2008; Osgood et al., 2010). Academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education assist young people with becoming well-rounded individuals who are able to effectively balance adult issues such as holding a job, continuing an education, and raising a family (Swanson, 2004). Developing students' personal/social behaviors supports their

efforts to be independent so that they might manage life experiences while understanding their own personal strengths that keep them safe and within the rules set by society. Students must also expand their knowledge through career education to ensure they possess employability skills such as teamwork and problem solving. Students who struggle with these skills may find themselves flailing in transition, and are unable to cope with the demands of adult life—a situation that could even lead to adult incarceration (Arum & LaFree, 2008). Education plays a large role in deterring children from engaging in improper behavior that, as these children become adults, may lead them to encounters with the penal system (Gray, 2008). K–12 schools provide an environment that equips students not only with academics, but also personal/social behaviors which may prevent students from committing crimes as adults (Deming, 2011). While incarceration is only one outcome of poor transitioning skills, it is the focus of this study. This research, therefore, seeks to give voice to individuals who are incarcerated to better understand how K–12 education could prepare students for adult life prior to leaving school. By giving voice to these individuals, this study might (1) support teachers in deepening their understanding of why it is important to include the student voice with the three components of education, and (2) assist educators in reflecting on their own practices and beliefs concerning how their efforts support all K–12 learners, especially at-risk youth.

It has been stated that any effect schools might have on students' postsecondary outcomes is minimal compared to the ways that early life experiences affect predisposition outcomes later in life (Arum & LaFree, 2008). Many areas of a person's life influence that person's behavior. Yet despite popular belief, such as biological positivism, which states that criminality reflects individual character because criminals are “created inductively”

(Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990, p. 80), data over the past several years implicate both schools and the prison system in individuals' failed transitions (Bjorklund, 2011; Deming, 2011). Students who lack skills in one or more of the three components of education may find themselves more at-risk (Dryfoos, 1990). Some researchers believe that students who have the effective educational support of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education are less likely to be incarcerated as adults (Britt et al., 2005; Deming, 2011; Osgood et al., 2010). Regardless, schools can create environments that can aid in reducing risky behaviors that may result in incarceration (Deming, 2011).

The criminal justice system often directs K–12 students into the juvenile court system, where the outcome can be adult imprisonment, because once students find themselves inside the criminal justice system, it is often hard to escape (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 2005; Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010). This outcome has allowed U.S. prisons to form a new, communal group of incarcerated men and women, joined together not only by illegal activity but also by poor academic experiences and performance—hence, creating a population of individuals who remain continually connected to the penal system (Beckett, 2008; Pettit & Western, 2004; Vanderslice, 2004). Such students cannot often meet the educational expectations placed upon them, specifically due to obligations placed upon them by the criminal justice system. For example, students working with the court system have their school day interrupted by probation officers, court hearings, or other sanctions. This dilemma places schools in jeopardy of not meeting these students' needs, thus creating “increased crime and incarceration rates” (Spangenberg, 2004, p. 29). Students must attend classes consistently to receive the types of support and instruction that

meet their academic, personal/social behavior, and career needs. Ironically, legal obligations jeopardize these students' success.

Of course, prison is not a final destination for most of these individuals. In Iowa, 73% of individuals were released from prison, with only 31% returning because of recidivist actions (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2010). The national recidivism rate was reported at 43.3% (Pew Center on the States, 2011, p. 11). This study only focused on Iowa prisoners, who after serving their time, must re-enter society and possess the skills needed to support their adult life activities. For their part, prisons in Iowa recognize the need to reform individuals who are incarcerated. They offer comprehensive educational programs comparable to high school curricula, and focus on high school courses including mathematics, life skills, and vocational training (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2010). Personal/social behavior education is taught through Life Skills, a course designed to help prisoners understand themselves so that they can integrate back into society and make better decisions that, ideally, decrease their chances of returning to prison (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2010). Prisoners also receive vocational education and academic instruction, tailored to their needs; these range from special education services to college courses (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2010). These efforts form important steps in providing these individuals with the proper skills to help them transition back into society. However, this study is concerned with actions that K–12 schools might take to help students be successful academically, socially, and vocationally, specifically to *prevent* young adult incarceration. Thus, it asks the question, how can schools better meet student needs *before* they are incarcerated? Listening to students about their educational needs might provide better insight for school administrators to improve their support for at-risk students.

Although increased emphasis has been placed on gathering data about student achievement (Reeves, 2010), student data often lacks the students' voices. Student achievement data may tell school administrators about deficiencies in their schools' academic areas, but this data commonly fails to present the students' voice regarding their lack of achievement. In contrast to this larger lack of consideration, Bridgeland et al. (2006) conducted a study that focused primarily on what students had to say regarding why they failed to graduate. The findings revealed that students felt (1) academics were often too challenging, (2) no connection to their school, and (3) that real world problems were not acknowledged by their school. The study went on to suggest that students' voices be included when schools discuss ways to improve graduation rates and better prepare students for their futures. As Bridgeland et al. (2006) suggested, the premise of schools should be to assist students in reaching success beyond the classroom walls; to do this, schools need to explore the students' point of view.

### **Problem Statement**

For students who either drop out of high school or struggle with the transition to adulthood, the risk of being incarcerated increases (Bridgeland et al., 2006). While some research examines the benefits of listening to students' voices, little data exist on the perspective of individuals who are incarcerated and his or her educational experiences (Mitra, 2008). This is the very population that may provide teachers with a deeper understanding of how better to deliver curriculum within the three components of education: academics, personal/social behavior, and career education. This study attempted to provide an initial step in that direction.

### **Purpose of this Study**

This phenomenological study examined the K–12 experiences of current Iowa Department of Corrections offenders who ranged in age from 18–29 years old. The purpose of this study was to give voice to individuals who were incarcerated with the intent to understand how schools could adapt in order to better educate all students. I conducted an individual, 45–60 minute interview that focused on the educational experience of each participant prior to his or her exit from their K–12 school district. This research sought to provide deeper insight for educators regarding the influence of K–12 education on students who struggled after leaving school. Research questions were answered by recording and transcribing the voices of incarcerated students, and by coding the interviews for emerging themes. The emergent themes are discussed in Chapter 4: Research Findings. Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions discuss the significance of the findings and their application to future educational discussions that target student support for academics, personal/social behavior, and career education.

### **Research Questions**

To understand the participants' views on their educational experiences, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- (1) How do the participants describe their learning experiences in K–12 school?
- (2) To what extent do the participants perceive that their education prepared them in the areas of academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?
- (3) What do the participants think their schools could have done differently to better prepare them in the areas of academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?

- (4) Did the participants perceive their voice to have been by their teachers during their K–12 experience?

### **Significance of Study**

Iowa’s prison population is projected to reach over 10,000 offenders by 2020, an increase of 21% over the next decade (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2011). According to Kim et al. (2010), there may be a connection between adults who struggled as students and rising incarceration rates. While outside factors such as substance abuse and poverty contribute to the reasons that individuals become incarcerated, this study focuses on the school experience of individuals who are incarcerated. The State of Iowa (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2010) reported that the average educational level completed by prisoners is the eleventh grade and that the average prisoner reads at a ninth-grade level. This information addressed how developing an understanding of the K–12 students’ perception of the three components of education might better support students by increasing their overall abilities and perhaps avoid potential incarceration. Should the trend of rising incarcerations continue among younger adults, the result might have an economic and civic effect on society (Settersten, Furstenberg, & Rumbaut, 2005; Mitra, 2004). Students who do not obtain an education need more support in the adult world and have a greater chance of finding themselves incarcerated as an adult (Western et al., 2003).

Understanding the student voice in the K–12 school arena could inform school administrators of curricular deficits and further clarify students’ needs (Bloom, 2010). As such, this study sought to enhance the efforts of all schools to develop effective systems of support and to provide students with an education that increases their chances of leading rewarding lives.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this phenomenology was designed to better understand how individuals who were incarcerated perceived their voice being heard in regard to their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education. The conceptual framework was grounded in the three components of education constructed by the Iowa Department of Education's School Counseling Task Force (2008). While each component the Framework of Academics, Personal/Social, and Career Skills outlines specific skills that K–12 students should meet prior to graduating. Each component is based on Iowa Administrative Rule (Iowa Code §281. 12.3 (256), 2012), which requires that school counselors interweave the skills “throughout the [school] district’s overall curriculum” and be delivered to all students not only by school counselors but also by certified staff ( Iowa Department of Education, 2008, p. 91). Student voice was the mechanism by which this study answered the research questions in determining the influence of K–12 school on academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education by listening to student voices to gain a greater understanding of how schools implemented the required Framework of Academic, Personal/Social, and Career Development Skills.

Whereas K–12 students often are not allowed to express their thoughts about their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education, their engagement and participation in said areas is fully expected from their schools. Neglecting student voices in this way might lead to gaps in students’ overall education in the three components of education, with the outcome of possibly decreasing student engagement and participation (Lehr, Clapper, & Thurlow, 2005). Teachers commonly strive to provide students with the instruction and support to grow in these areas, ultimately to support them in their adult life.



However, understanding the ways that students perceive their education might challenge teachers' current reality and cause a shift in the K–12 educational paradigm that will meet students' needs more appropriately.

### **Research Design**

This phenomenological study sought to give voice to individuals who were incarcerated—people often perceived as apathetic, insensible, uncaring, and whose imprisonment is self-imposed (Hirschfield, 2008). This study attempted to portray the phenomenon of the K–12 experience through the voice of the participant to gain a sense of what students might experience attending K–12 schools. Phenomenology provided a lens to understand the perspective of young adults who struggled after leaving school and became incarcerated. The participants for this study were a purposeful representation of the general population who attended school. Understanding the individuals who are incarcerated from this point of view provides deeper insight into what the K–12 student experiences. Hence, the message from the study's participants was crucial for changing the delivery of K–12 curriculum so that academic, personal/social behaviors, and career education can be successfully implemented for *all* K–12 students.

Individuals selected for this study were young adults who reside in an Iowa correctional facility. They were identified by using the Iowa Department of Corrections' public database; some were former students of mine while others were not. This researcher conducted 25 interviews to gather the participants' personal accounts and perspectives of their educational experience. While Iowa prisons house offenders under age 18, this study selected only individuals between 18 and 29 years old. The greatest percentage (47.5%) of

Iowa's prison population is under the age of 30 (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2011) and prisoners in this age bracket had the opportunity to attend or finish high school.

This phenomenological study used inmates to better understand their perceptions of past educational experiences in regard to the three components of education. The phenomenon that was explored was the K–12 school setting and the influence that academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education has on students. The participants represented a marginal population that might have struggled with their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education and were seen as a challenge for K–12 schools. From the participants' perceptions, school administrators and teachers can learn a means by which to develop or change academic, personal/social behavior, and career education methods for all K–12 students. Interviews took place in a structured, private setting, as instructed by the Iowa Department of Corrections policies (see Chapter 3). Interviews were constructed in a semi-structured format, guided by the 14 interview questions previously determined (see Appendix A for Interview Questions).

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

*Even if she asked, I would say I did the homework, and she would believe me, because, you know, I am smart.*

Incarcerated individual, 2012

This phenomenological study examined the K–12 classroom experiences of 25 young adults serving prison sentences in the state of Iowa. This literature review examined and defined the three key areas of (1) academics, (2) personal/social behaviors, and (3) career education in relation to the student experience. Understanding gaps and strengths in the ways these areas of education support students is vital, in that each area seeks to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary for adulthood.

This literature review begins with an overview of this study’s framework—the three components of education that are derived from the Iowa School Counseling Framework (Iowa Department of Education, 2008). The chapter then examines how the voice of the purposeful sample tin relation to the K–12 school experience. This review also explores the literature base about the inclusion of the student voice in attempts to understand the needs of K–12 students. Finally, this chapter addresses how teacher professional development can enhance teacher knowledge about incorporating the student voice into the three components of education.

This literature review was conducted through the use of multiple sources of information. Search terms used included: offender, prisons, academics, personal, social, behaviors, education, qualitative research, and phenomenology. These search terms were identified through books, professional journals, and internet resources that were located through various sources such as ERIC, the Iowa State Library, the Drake University Library,

JSTOR, the Iowa Department of Corrections Library, and WorldCat. This study used sources dated from 1984 to 2012. These sources were examined repeatedly to support information in this literature review.

### **Overview of the Three Components of Education: Academics, Personal/Social Behaviors, and Career Education**

To gain a better understanding of why and how the three components of education can better drive student engagement forward, the Iowa Department of Education’s School Counseling Task Force provides school administrators with a framework for supporting developmental skills that is based on the recommendations of the American School Counseling Association (Iowa Department of Education, 2008), and focuses specifically on academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. Iowa Administrative Rule (Iowa Code §281. 12.3 (256), 2012) requires that the curriculum of school counselors such as the Framework of Academic, Personal/Social, and Career Development Skills be “embedded throughout the [school] district’s overall curriculum” (Iowa Department of Education, 2008, p. 91) and delivered to all students, not only by school counselors but also by certified staff through professional development activities. The framework promotes the benefits of incorporating a comprehensive model not only for counselors but also for teachers and school administrators. This model includes the components of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education, and each component promotes skills that students should acquire prior to graduating from high school. Furthermore, the skills addressed within each component might assist students as they transition to adult life. To be clear, policy focuses on students either having developed these skills to some degree before attending high school or having refined them by the time they graduate from high school. As such, it is imperative

that educators at the secondary level engage with and acknowledge weaknesses in support efforts for these components. Schools may examine student academic data to determine areas of deficit in academics. The personal/social behavior component might be explored through teacher questionnaires or student attendance, discipline, and counselor information. Career education deficits could be determined through classroom assessments designed to evaluate career education curriculum. The inclusion of student surveys in all three components of education will also provide schools with insights into student support. Only by gathering data that provides evidence of achievement or weakness in academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education might support efforts be improved for all students. This study focuses on these three components because it assumes that students cannot survive adulthood solely on their academic knowledge. Complementing students' academic development with personal/social skills and career education would provide them with the needed self-efficacy to become productive adults (Bandura, 1997). This study's conceptual framework of academic, personal/social behavior, and career education components hosts a variety of skills that students might acquire prior to exiting K–12 school. Each component will be presented below, including a discussion of how they are essential skills for adulthood.

While schools have always prioritized the development of students' academic skills, emphasis on expanding their personal/social skills and career education is increasing (Arum & Beattie, 1999; Young, Marshall, Domene, Valach, & Graham, 2010). Enhancing students' personal/social skills deepens their competencies in maneuvering around emotional obstacles while also developing awareness and understanding of how to engage with others (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010; Meece & Eccles, 2010). In turn, better personal/social skills

support students' career development skills. Career development skills allow students to explore future careers and to understand that academics and personal/social skills affect their career success. Schools, therefore, need to address the three components throughout the curricula to ensure that students graduate as employable persons (Neumark, 2007).

### **Component 1: Academics**

Three components support students as they progress toward their transition to adulthood. The first component of the conceptual framework is academics. Academic achievement is just one piece of students' education that helps prepare them for their future (Osgood et al., 2010). Naturally, academics are a major focus of K–12 education (Marin & Brown, 2008). Schools have different methods for implementing their curriculum, ranging from formal to informal, simple to sophisticated, and comprehensive to targeted approaches, depending on student need. What works well in one school with one student may not work well in another school with a different student. Teachers need to analyze student data, resources, and achievement records to determine the best instructional methods that support student learning. Incorporating student voice in the analysis of determining student achievement might further develop needed student supports (Mitra, 2008).

According to the Iowa Department of Corrections statistics (2010), the average education of prisoners in the state is just shy of high school graduation (11.7 grade equivalent). However, the average reading level of this same population ranks at the high school freshman level (9.5 grade equivalent). Because people with low levels of education have a higher chance of becoming incarcerated, connecting students to academics is critical for students' postsecondary transition (Swanson, 2004). The opportunity must be created for

students to properly communicate frustration with their academic growth and their needs, and carve a path toward adulthood that enables them to avoid incarceration.

Students who are connected to school may have the opportunity to be heard, thus creating higher academic engagement (Marin & Brown, 2008). A student-centered classroom might fortify academic achievement, in that each child would receive academic instruction based on individual need (Schmoker, 2011). As Lehr et al. (2005) found, there are evidence-based programs provided by schools that can support students in achieving academic success. Their research pointed to the importance of personalizing student assistance through programming that produces strategies originating from student need. Students who are provided a forum for their input are more likely to stay engaged with their learning, resulting in their graduating from high school with the academic skills necessary to compete in the work world. Hence, schools must craft classroom conditions that sustain academic growth for all students by providing a student-centered environment (Hunt & Touzel, 2009).

Likewise, Mitra (2008) examined the results of a San Francisco school that invited students to share their perceptions of their school's educational efforts. The results found students more engaged in their learning and more committed to school. Academic achievement can be fostered in a safe classroom environment that encourages learning for all students; otherwise, limited learning is all that will transpire. When students are restricted in their academic learning, they become disengaged and their likelihood of being incarcerated increases (Pettit & Western, 2004).

## Component 2: Personal/Social Behaviors

Just as organizations in the business world stress the importance of knowing and connecting with members of the group, so school administrators should use this philosophy in bridging connections between students and school in hopes that students develop a connection to school and their learning (Hill & Nave, 2009). Instruction and support on how personal/social behavior skills will be used can be modeled and expanded upon as students navigate their way through a K–12 school. It is by way of supportive connections to school that students can begin to develop and nurture the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills needed in the postsecondary world (Bangser, 2008).

From kindergarten to twelfth grade, children change—biologically, emotionally, and cognitively. Indeed, each child’s unique patterns of growth and development are formed by the social environment in which he or she lives (Bjorklund, 2011). By the time they reach adolescence, much of their personality has taken shape. Considering that children spend at least 13 years of their lives in school, attention needs to be given to their personal/social behavioral growth.

By attending to their perceptions of their school experiences, students gain a greater understanding of the factors that play into the ways they think and behave. For teachers, being aware of what today’s youth endure during their personal and emotional transformation into adulthood is paramount for structuring support efforts that meet students’ specific needs. As Oakes and Saunders (2007) discovered through their research with *Multiple Pathways*, schools could best meet student need through understanding that simply providing students with academic instruction is not enough. Oakes and Saunders presented information from various schools across the country that determined the best student learning occurs when



students' social growth as determined through their own voice is included with academics. Their social learning can then gravitate toward future employment or postsecondary education. Thus, teachers can assist students in bridging the gap between academic rigor and the inclusion of personal/social growth.

Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy (2006) believed that personal/social behavior is supported by the academic optimism revealed in the delivery of the instruction. Students who recognize that their school environment is a caring, helpful place will connect better and achieve faster academically. Including students in the decision-making process might provide schools a better chance of meeting student need (Britt et al., 2005). In Glasser's terms, the ways students know and feel will conflict with the ways that schools define support efforts. Glasser (1990) spent time speaking with students about their educational experiences to determine how students truly felt about their education in hopes of supporting administrators and teachers in implementing better performing classrooms. His research provided educators the information to develop an understanding of how to create a "quality school" (Glasser, 1990). Glasser's insights determined that conflict could cause students to dismiss a school's attempt to support them as irrelevant to their lives; at worst, it could cause students to openly rebel against educators. However, when administrators and teachers recognize and acknowledge the students' perspective in relation to personal/social behavioral needs, schools can adapt their support efforts appropriately.

In this way, including student voices in support efforts means not simply trying to understand individual students' voices, but understanding the issues that students grapple with in their social networks (Bridgeland et al., 2006). When support efforts enable children to navigate their personal well-being effectively, they create a foundational block to prepare

students for a chance at successful postsecondary transition (Britt et al., 2005). Students who do not hold the abilities to navigate their personal/social behavior struggle with areas that require good interpersonal and intrapersonal skills (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2006).

Personal/social behavior skills will be a continuous competency needed in adult life; strategies that assist young people in their development of personal/social behaviors may ease these possible struggles (Young et al., 2010). Children's support with their personal/social dimensions will lead either to a constructive or non-constructive outcome within the individual and the society they inhabit (Pulkkinen & Caspi, 2002). Beckett (2008) believed that students provided with support to overcome personal/social barriers have a better chance of achieving academic and behavioral growth, which ultimately would lead to achievable career goals.

Likewise, Britt et al. (2005) examined students who were identified as at-risk by their schools to gather student perceptions about their education. The study spent one school year with students to gain a better understanding of what students need from schools to help them better navigate life. Britt et al. found that student perceptions were that student voice did not matter to the adults within the school. Even though teachers and administrators stated that they wanted to know what was bothering the students and what could be done to support them, students reported that they were never given any opportunity to voice their concerns or problems. The study by Britt et al. concluded that students did not receive guidance with personal/social behaviors at home, which could suggest that students need further assistance to develop strategies that support their personal/social development.

While Britt et al. (2005) did not identify specific strategies that can support students with their personal/social behavior development, this study supports educators in

understanding the importance of allowing a student to internalize his or her sense of self, and expand ideas of personal interests that lead to a fulfilling adulthood and how the student voice can provide deeper insight of the students' sense of self and their personal/social behaviors. Students who do not internalize their sense of self may become prone to the same types of self-defeating behaviors that lead to incarceration.

Teachers are not alone in their recommendations to improve efforts that support students' personal/social behavior. The state of Iowa recognized such need and recommended that students acquire the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, such as communication, punctuality, and problem-solving abilities, necessary for college and career readiness before graduating from high school (Iowa Department of Education, 2008). The employability skills within our society have established the need for students to be taught proper personal/social behaviors. These employability skills, which today's workforce refers to as the 21st-century skills, are that employees need to have developed interpersonal skills, technology skills, and academic core knowledge (Silva, 2008). Students must understand the tasks that society expects of them in their adult life. A school's main goal is to develop young people who can enter the work place (Beck, 1992). The processes of following rules, developing friendships, and participating within a community are factors of students' personal/social behaviors that need to be understood and established (Resnick, 2000). Schools must create educational environments that promote students' personal/social competence through the modeling of healthy relationships between staff and students (Britt et al., 2005; Lehr et al., 2005). Earning a high school diploma means those students should not only have been prepared academically, but also have developed social skills that support their economic goals (Swanson, 2010). Students who do not receive K–12 training with their

personal/social behaviors may lag behind their peers in establishing themselves in the adult world. The results of no K–12 training might include lower wage employment and unhealthy relationships, among other life struggles.

The critical impact of students' poor personal/social behaviors may also create further division among disadvantaged populations, such as students placed in special education to support chronic behavioral issues. Hence, these students are then labeled as students in need of assistance, placing them among the disadvantaged population (Hirschfield, 2008). In turn, these students sometimes become habitual offenders of school policies, running a great risk of failing at postsecondary transition and facing possible incarceration after high school (Arum & LaFree, 2008). Students must be aware that their teachers care for them so that they may be open to their education (Noddings, 1984).

Arum and LaFree (2008) found that when schools provide students a setting in which teachers can support student social/emotional growth, students are more likely to graduate and avoid possible incarceration as adults. Students experience better socialization skills when teachers are equipped to create a school climate and that promotes student engagement (Arum & LaFree, 2008). Schools must strengthen the K–12 academic setting by providing teachers and students with the resources and skills needed in the postsecondary world, thereby decreasing the incarceration rate (Kochhar-Bryant, & Heishman, 2010; NAACP, 2005; Settersten et al., 2005). Ultimately, K–12 students who do not advance their personal/social well-being may flounder as adults, unable to maintain employment and possibly placing themselves in a disadvantaged population, such as those living in poverty (Danziger and Ratner, 2010). It is through the balance of academics and personal/social behavior education that student can be better prepared for a career (Cassidy & Bates, 2005).

Connecting students to school and modeling the ways in which people's personal/social behavior can affect not only themselves but others will support K–12 students as adults.

### **Component 3: Career Education**

Too often, school experience fails to prepare students successfully for the rigor of college or the workplace (Bangser, 2008). Many students educated in traditional high school settings fail at that transition and find themselves discarded into a desolate life, with possible imprisonment (Wilson & Green, 2010). Career education encourages students to anticipate their future careers and to better themselves and society. In essence, career education is the final piece of the personal/social development/academic achievement/work experience puzzle that, according to Gray (2008) and Mortimer and Shanahan (2004), prepares students for the next stage of life. Schools need to integrate career education into the overall K–12 curriculum, or students will continue to struggle with the postsecondary transition.

Currently, career education is taught at varying levels of a student's K–12 schooling. Students might be exposed to possible careers in kindergarten and then attend a job fair in fifth grade. Iowa now requires all eighth graders to develop a four-year plan that explores future career options, which is to be updated every year after (Iowa Administrative Rule [Iowa Code § 281.12.3.61(256), 2012). Consequently, *I Have a Plan Iowa* (Iowa Department of Education, 2012) provides a format in which students may develop their desired career path, but schools may use another method if desired. This format allows students to explore career and college options by completing guideways for each year of high school (Iowa Code §281.12 (256), 2012). While Iowa has a required career component for all students, the outcomes of this requirement have not been determined.

Career education must also be implemented throughout school curricula (Iowa Code §281. 12.3(11) (256), 2012). Regardless of subject area, teachers need to embrace the fact that they play a key role in a student's career education (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004). Knowing that merely providing academics to students does not fully engage children, teachers have the opportunity to deepen their role in supporting the career development of students. Teachers can take command of this key role by including examples of the ways in which lesson content is relevant to careers in the field, and thereby expose students to job interests and provide them with a voice in exploring future careers. For example, a biology teacher's lesson about global warming might spark an interest in students wanting to develop new methods to save the environment, and include examples of careers in meteorology or environmental science. It is the lack of exposure to career options that impedes students from finding career paths, thus creating defeating effects within society (Schneider, 2006; Western, Kleykamp, & Rosenfeld, 2006). To counter the defeating effects that the lack of career education plays, Mortimer and Shanahan (2004) advocated for the creation of academic policies that focus on career education. Such policies would formalize a curriculum that informs students about the ways in which their academics, along with citizenship, could enhance future career success. Requirements such as Iowa's four-plan (Iowa Department of Education, 2012) would suggest that it is possible to include the student voice so that deepening students' engagement can occur within academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education.

### **Student Voice**

While the Iowa Code requires schools to provide support for K–12 students in the three components of education, such efforts are designed primarily by adults; the voice of

students is not necessarily considered to be part of such design. As a result, K–12 students might not receive appropriate types of support in the three key areas as they transition to adulthood (Bandura, 1997). Students whose growth in these areas is stunted often find themselves facing a higher risk of incarceration (Western et al., 2003). Analyzing the student perspective from a marginal population might allow increased numbers of struggling learners to be heard and, in turn, to receive an education that supports the academic, personal/social behavior, and career education components. Such a perspective supports children in their right and capacity to become more than academically educated (Ayers, 2004), in that K–12 students live in a world that is complicated and reaches far beyond the academic realm. Indeed, excluding students from participating in the decision-making process can often lead to their failed attempts at adult life (Mitra, 2004), the effects of which can be costly and extend far into the future (Settersten et al., 2005). Including the student voice can increase the culture of the overall school environment, which in turn begins to increase student connections to school. When teachers create classrooms that place importance on the student voice, the educational setting then provides students with the “power with their teachers to improve curriculum and instruction” (Mitra, 2004, p. 653). As the student voice becomes part of the process, K–12 students can then begin to build solid connections to school. A stronger connection may help students develop better personal/social behavior and career education, which are necessary skills to adapt in our ever-changing world.

Understanding the ways that schools could incorporate the student voice into educational decisions might support school administrators’ efforts to better prepare students for their transition into adulthood. For these reasons, the student voice needs to be heard and understood for them to excel in the three components of academics, personal/social

behaviors, and career education. Beyond individual students' struggles, persistent underperformance in these areas (Project GRAD Houston, 2011) has larger social and economic consequences.

### **Previous Research on the Inclusion of the Student Voice**

The relationship between the student voice and the three components of education are four elements of the school world that school administrators and teachers can either hinder or support with students. Various studies have explored the inclusion of the student voice in academia. Among these are Bridgeland et al. (2006) and Mitra (2008), who examined the benefits of listening to the student voice in K–12 schools in various ways.

Studies have found that there are methods by which schools can change the school environment to better connect with students. Support efforts that include student input, such as the Student Forum documented by Mitra (2008), have improved student academic achievement and participation in school, and made the environment a welcoming and accepting place for all students. Mitra examined Whitman High School, located in California, as it initiated a project to bring the student voice to the forefront. Students attended professional development training with teachers, reworded curricular standards into terms students could understand, met monthly with teachers to collaborate on ideas, among other teacher–student initiatives, all of which resulted in a group of students developing equality with teachers versus perpetuating a hierarchy (Mitra, 2008). The climate of Whitman High School changed. When students were given a voice, they increased school engagement, which ultimately boosted academic achievement. Activities such as student council, chess club, music, and sports provide students with the experience of developing a



connection to school. As well, through these types of activities students can find their voice and contribute to their school's becoming more connected (Mitra, 2008).

Mitra's research on student engagement was not without precedent, however. Bridgeland et al. (2006) explored students' voice regarding their education only two years prior to Mitra's research. In their study, Bridgeland et al. interviewed former students (some who were incarcerated) from high schools across the United States—people in the midst of their own transition—to gain insight into what students were really saying about their educational experience. The study found that dropping out of school was neither a reason, nor the sole cause, for subsequent incarceration; rather, it was one aspect of the difficulties students were experiencing with their lives. More importantly, for the purpose of this study, it concluded that incorporating the student voice was of paramount importance. Their conclusion matched that argued by Mitra two years later: including the student voice facilitated meaningful relationships between educators and students, and the increase in students' connection to their schools resulted in learning and behavior that students could draw upon during their transition to adulthood.

This literature shows that evidence exists to support the argument that giving students a voice connects them to their schools. However, before the student voice can be brought to light, schools need to be aware of the benefits of listening to their students' concerns in the three components of education. Unfortunately, research is minimal with regard to providing voice to individuals who found themselves incarcerated and their perceptions of their past K–12 educational experience with any one of the three components: academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. Developing an understanding of what a disadvantaged population, this study's participants, has to say about their past educational experiences

might assist teachers with developing further support for students within academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education, thus increasing the students' enjoyment of their overall school experience. As the Iowa Counseling Framework (Iowa Department of Education, 2008) affirmed, the goal is for students to acquire a sense of themselves as well-rounded learners through the development of the three components of education. Without the inclusion of the student voice, some students may continue to have limited connections to school, possibly resulting in their being at higher risk for incarceration.

### **Student Connections through School Relationships**

Many areas of a person's life influence that person's behavior. Home life, high-risk behavior (such as substance abuse), economic status, poor academic achievement, and personal experiences all play a role in a person's development (Dryfoos, 1990). How a person chooses to react to these different experiences can contribute to success or failure as an adult. Unfortunately, a child is not always in control of life experiences. Student struggles, which range from poverty to school bullying, are all pieces of a child's reality that can produce poor outcomes. Ever since the Coleman Report (1966), educators and sociologists have questioned how much the school environment contributes to a student's success, especially when the student comes from a troublesome home environment. However, as educators, we are devoted to supporting students at school as much as possible. Both the Iowa Code and NCLB require that schools provide the three components of education to all students; hence, creating an environment that helps students gain knowledge, skills, and career awareness before leaving school. As such, a child's social environment, whether it is school, home, or with peers, has a lasting effect on the growth and development of that child (Bjorklund, 2011). Nevertheless, educational support is often extended to

students so they may overcome obstacles in their lives, and become self-sufficient individuals. When struggling students are not offered appropriate types of support, they may not transition to postsecondary life effectively, and may become involved in behavior that leads to incarceration (Arum & Beattie, 1999).

Incarceration is not a foregone conclusion for students who struggle, of course, but this does not mean that educational support, such as academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education, does not play a role in shaping the behavior of young people, either. Schools can prepare students to become contributing members of a community by providing education in academics (Lehr et al., 2005), personal/social behavior (Beckett, 2008), and career education (Bangser, 2008). Academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education can establish a foundation for all students as they grow and transition into adulthood. Without these three components, K–12 students may stumble, which might eventually leave a student frustrated or withdrawn from school and life (Project GRAD Houston, 2011). While there are many factors that can contribute to an individual's incarceration, examining why students are not connected to their education may provide key findings that could help young people circumvent incarceration. Studies such as those by Bridgeland et al. (2006), Britt et al. (2005), and Mitra (2008) found that listening to the K–12 students' voices prior to their exiting school might possibly increase their engagement, better prepare them for their future, and perhaps enable them to avoid altogether the possibility of incarceration.

Inclusion of the student voice in education is easier said than done, to use a cliché. However, relatively recent studies support the argument for including the student voice in education, especially in the three components of education. The next section discusses these

components, and outlines actions that school administrators could take in order to support all learners, and examines the importance of including the student voice in K–12 education.

### **Reasons for Incorporating the Student Voice in Academic, Personal/Social Behavior, and Career Education**

In 2008, the Pew Center reported that “more than one in every 100 adults is now confined in an American jail or prison” (Pew Center on the States, 2011, p. 3). This startling statistic begs consideration of the catalysts that caused these individuals’ incarceration. Home life, childhood trauma, or education can all contribute to behaviors that lead to incarceration. This discussion focuses on the three educational components and on the reasons that young adults might be incarcerated after leaving school. This section also explores the importance for school teachers of listening to and including the student voice as a way to improve their support of all learners.

While research reports, such as Bridgeland et al.’s (2006) *Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, and Britt et al.’s (2005) *Listen to the Children: Students At Risk For Academic Failure Speak Out*, agree that schools do play a role in the postsecondary outcomes of students, there is also conflict when it comes to defining the exact nature of that influence. Some scholars, such as Sampson and Laub (1993), argue that students who profess a connection to their schools experience effective educational support—not only from their academics, but also from personal/social behavior growth and future career plans. Such students are less likely to be incarcerated as adults (Deming, 2011; Osgood et al., 2010). In opposition, other scholars agree with Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) in arguing that any effect schools might have on students’ postsecondary outcomes is minimal compared to the ways that early life experiences affect predisposition outcomes later

in life (Arum & LaFree, 2008). Regardless, no scholarship at either end of this controversy conclusively rules out the influence of schools in students' postsecondary transitions. On a societal level, given that students who become incarcerated after leaving high school burden taxpayers—whether that burden is in the form of education dollars or federal and state incarceration costs—it is imperative to uncover the ways that school support efforts could be improved. At the individual level, understanding the ways support could be improved would enhance the lives of these students and, potentially, their contributions to their communities.

Helping students grow in the areas of reading and mathematics is the focus of K–12 schools across the nation (Ansalone, 2010). Funding for schools is often tied to student achievement scores, and largely ignores other deficits children may experience (Ansalone, 2010). Thus, the need for students to develop skills in the area of personal/social behavior and career education is not always emphasized by such funding. An encompassing K–12 educational experience is a key component of a child's overall development and eventual transition to adulthood (Blankstein, 2004). Teachers cannot let academic data be the only driving force in their quest to educate children, but their efforts—indeed, any effort—will continue to be stymied without direct institutional support.

Teachers can improve student academic performance and, at the same time, build future citizens of character who can successfully navigate their transition to adulthood. Simply providing students with a diploma and then counting them as having graduated does not always mean that schools have done a sufficient job of educating their students. School administrators must realize that their teachers provide students skills in more than reading, math, and science. Citizenship and appropriate social skills are continually modeled and taught by classroom teachers (Hill & Nave, 2009). The effects a classroom teacher has on a

student can last a lifetime. As Deming (2011) found, the school environment plays a major role in pointing a student toward his or her future success, or possible criminal behavior. Helping a student develop his or her personal/social behaviors may prevent criminal behavior. A student who is not given the opportunity to develop appropriate responses to personal/social behaviors will struggle with successful integration into the postsecondary world.

Understanding the ways students perceive their educational experiences would allow school administrators to deliver a stronger curriculum, and in a safe and nurturing atmosphere, ultimately promoting student achievement in the three components of education. While assisting teachers with the development of effective curricula that meet all students' needs poses a challenge for school administrators and staff, the component they most often miss in such efforts is including students' perspectives. School administrators need to examine the student perspective, specifically of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education, to determine curricular deficits (Bloom, 2010). As Mitra (2008) reported, openness to students' voices might help inform school administrators of methods by which to deliver stronger instruction to all students. The interaction between teachers and students would also improve, since students who are given the opportunity to be active players in their educational plans are more apt to feel connected to school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The implications of such interactions are constructive for everyone involved: administrators could incorporate students' ideas into school policy and curricula, teachers and staff could implement curricula and support efforts that honor students' struggles while preparing them to meet rigorous expectations, and students could feel that their schools, far from being disinterested organizations, could help them shape their lives in meaningful ways—as well as

ease their transition into adulthood (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Swanson, 2010). Without striving for such possibilities, schools may continue to play a large role in students' failure to connect with school, struggles with life after leaving school, and possibilities for higher risks of behavior that leads to incarceration (Hirschfield, 2008).

### **Professional Development for Teachers**

Research has found that teachers can benefit from professional development to help them better understand how to incorporate teaching strategies into curricular content (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss & Shapley 2007). There is also evidence that including the student voice within the classroom setting can enhance student performance (Mitra, 2004).

Currently, Iowa only requires that students receive a K–12 education that implements the three components of education ((Iowa Code §281. 12.3 (256), 2012). Training teachers to further their knowledge of the three components of education or how to implement these three components is not discussed within this code.

Teacher professional development should provide an array of learning that supports the classroom teacher with developing not only strategies to improve student academic achievement, but supports students' personal/social and career well-being (Little, 1994). Professional development design needs to assist teachers in developing “strong connections between students' experiences and the goals of the curriculum” (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009, p.7). Teachers can provide students a stronger curriculum when they receive professional development that supports their efforts in the classroom with all three components of education. Sustaining the effects of professional development is crucial if student achievement is to be advanced. Teachers need to be given the opportunity of “collective participation” so that the curricular areas of personal/social

behavior and career education can be addressed (Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, & Yoon, 2001, p. 936). The results of professional development can then go beyond teacher learning and include students in the design and implementation of the three components of education. As Mitra (2004) found, when students are provided input in professional development the teachers shift their thinking to become more student focused. Teachers can possibly boost student achievement and engagement when they allow the student voice to become a part of the professional development process.

### Summary

Academic strategies, personal/social behavior supports, and exposure to careers can be provided to all K–12 students in a variety of ways. From hands-on manipulations to social support groups to career initiatives such as student internships, the abundance of benefits to students and schools makes clear the need for school administrators to listen to and include the student voice. Student involvement might improve the K–12 school experience, and possibly deter individual students from behaviors that would lead to incarceration. This literature reviewed the importance of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education in relation to the K–12 student and their connection to school. Studies have shown that students, given the chance to be heard, are more engaged with their institutions than are their peers at institutions that do not prioritize the student voice. Furthermore, their overall achievement levels are higher than those of disengaged students. It is the “what and how” of student data that school administrators need to analyze to implement proper change (Bloom, 2010; Mitra, 2008). Understanding *what* students need will help schools better understand *how* to implement supports to help students find success with their education. When students understand how their academics are connected to their



personal/social behavior, which is then connected to future careers, they may better prepare for their own future.

Finally, this literature review found studies that examine the student voice in regard to academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education and student achievement and connection to school. Much of the literature addresses reasons that students become incarcerated after dropping out of primary or secondary school, but scant sources provide the their perspective on their K–12 educational experience as well as its influence on their transition to adulthood. This review also found literature that addresses the importance for teachers to be provided professional development to support their efforts of incorporating the student voice into the three components of education. Without professional development about the student voice, teachers might not possess the skills needed to better support all students' academic, personal/social behavior, and career education. This study seeks to fill that void by giving voice to individuals who were incarcerated, thereby attempting to reveal deficits in the areas of academics, personal/social behavior, and career education for K–12 students. Understanding the reasons these former students failed at their transition as young adults might reveal concrete options for schools to incorporate the student voice in their decision-making processes and thus improve student engagement. Better student engagement will produce K–12 students with stronger personal/social skills who are more academically driven. Ultimately, the greater attention that schools give to providing students with education and opportunities to transition to adulthood, the more they can play a formative role in enabling children to transition successfully, give back to society civically and economically, and avoid even the possibility of incarceration.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

*If you see potential in me, get it out, fish it out.*

Incarcerated individual, 2012

As the American prison rate continues to outpace the nation's graduation rate, questions as to why this phenomenon continues need to be answered. In 2008, nearly 2.3 million people were incarcerated in a U.S. prison, while the nation graduated nearly 4.2 million students within the four years allotted to complete high school, yet approximately 1.2 million students of those 4 million dropped out of high school (Amos, 2008; Pew Center on the States, 2011). Research has indicated that students who were connected to school and engaged in their learning increased their chances for finding a job, continuing their education, forming supportive relationships with others, and lowering chances of incarceration (Bangser, 2008; Beckett, 2008; Lehr et al., 2005). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the K–12 educational experiences of current Iowa Department of Corrections offenders. This study examined the voice of the participants to answer four research questions:

- (1) How do the participants describe their learning experiences in K–12 schools?
- (2) To what extent did participants perceive that their education prepared them in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?
- (3) What did the participants think their schools could have done differently to better prepare them in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?

(4) Did the participants perceive their voice to have been heard by their teachers during their K–12 experience?

The literature reviewed for this study established the importance of including the student voice in educational support efforts for all students, yet many K–12 schools currently exclude students from decision-making processes. The review also found that K–12 students' disconnection from school often results from not being heard by their schools, and that this disconnection is responsible for rising numbers of learners who struggle. These disengaged youth fail in their transition to adulthood and, in turn, find themselves in the penal system.

Therefore, this study examined the K–12 educational experiences of individuals who were incarcerated by collecting perceptions of their overall K–12 education and the three educational components as reported by each. This research was phenomenological in nature, and examined the perceptions of 25 Iowa prisoners regarding their educational experiences prior to exiting their K–12 schools. The K–12 school experience was the phenomenon being explored and the participants were the purposeful samplings who had experienced the stated phenomenon. Purposeful case sampling was used for this study because individuals who were incarcerated provided powerful themes that might possibly improve the current K–12 school structure (Creswell, 2005).

This chapter addressed the methodology of this study by discussing the (1) rationale for the qualitative design and method of research; (2) selection of participants; (3) design of the study; (4) methods of data collection and analysis; (5) interview questions (6) interview process implemented with the participants; (7) ethical considerations; and (8) delimitations and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's

methodology. For this study's purpose, a qualitative approach provided a lens through which to understand better the reasons that students sometimes struggled with the three educational components. Deeper insight about K–12 education experiences by the individuals who are incarcerated might aid school administrators with future development and delivery of a stronger curriculum that meets the needs of all students with the three educational components.

This study analyzed interview data to understand why the inclusion of the student voice might be important for the implementation of the three educational components and, ultimately, for student success beyond their K–12 experiences. The messages from the voices of these participants might allow for a deeper understanding of the ways that K–12 education might better assist students with the three academic components.

### **Rationale for a Qualitative Approach**

A qualitative approach provided this study with a credible structure by which to gain a deeper understanding of individual or group societal issues, specifically by providing an adaptable setting in which to examine the views of individuals who are incarcerated (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Creswell, 2005). The research design of this qualitative phenomenology gave voice to individuals who were incarcerated by seeking to understand their K–12 school experiences in the three educational components.

This study's qualitative approach attempted to capture the voices of the participants to highlight the problems that occur when student voices are ignored in decision-making processes. A qualitative approach offered rich information that speaks to the ways students interpret their educational experiences (Maxwell, 2005). The educational experiences of participants provided insights into the phenomenon of K–12 schooling. As Creswell (2005)

stated, “qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 232). Thus, this study focused on the phenomenon of individuals who were incarcerated to gain perspective on the student experience prior to leaving K–12 school. Phenomenology is a research practice that allowed me to examine at depth the world of individuals through their perceptions and in their social contexts (Creswell, 1998). This study, therefore, was bound within the K–12 school experiences of the participants and attempted to answer the research questions by exploring the views of these participants through semi-structured interviews and then interpreting them.

This study’s epistemology was grounded in constructivism, in that it acknowledged that knowledge is shaped by the meaning that the participants give to their experiences with K–12 education (Anafara & Mertz, 2006). Accordingly, I relied on participants’ perceptions to create the phenomenological understandings (Creswell, 2005). Constructivism further allowed participants (subjects) and K–12 education (object) to emerge as partners in the generation of meaning (Crotty, 1998). The participant in this phenomenology, the individual who were incarcerated, provided information to understand the K–12 education. It is through understanding how these individuals perceives reality that K–12 schools might provide a more engaging curriculum and better support for all students. However, I acknowledged that my prior experience as a teacher, counselor, and school administrator also played a role with the data analysis of this study. I also acknowledge that I was a member of a state task force team that developed the framework for the three components (Iowa Department of Education’s School Counseling Task Force, 2008). This team gathered information to support Iowa Administrative Rule (Iowa Code §281. 12.3 (256), 2012), which requires that

the curriculum of school counselors include academic, personal/social, and career development skills. These skills are to be delivered to all K–12 students and are to be embedded throughout K–12 curriculum (Iowa Code §281. 12.3 (256), 2012). As a result, my former experiences with struggling students and serving on the state counseling task force have allowed me to further understand the challenges of the participants.

### **Rationale for Phenomenological Design**

Phenomenology structured the design of this study because it allowed for a deep examination of the K–12 experience of former students who were now incarcerated. The interviews from this study generated data from the participants' responses, which was then analyzed for emergent themes in regard to academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. Phenomenology is particularly suited for examining societal issues (Merriam, 2002). In this case, K–12 education was explored through the voice of the participants to determine how the three components of education prepare students for the adult world. The strategies of phenomenology offered a concrete and reliable method to investigate individuals' experiences of an event and during a set time period (Creswell, 2005).

Overall, the participants in this study served as a purposefully selected example of the phenomenon of the struggling student. The participants had attended a K–12 school and experienced the everyday occurrences that most American children have during their lifetime. However, the individuals who were incarcerated may not have participated in every grade a K–12 school offered. Individuals participating in this study may or may not have graduated from high school. Graduating from high school was not a requirement for this study, since the focus was the participants' perceptions of their K–12 educational experiences. The participants in this study provided a lens on the student experience. As

Merriam (2002) explained, “[f]rom phenomenology comes the idea that people interpret everyday experiences from the perspective of the meaning it has for them” (p. 37). The data gathered via this phenomenology provided a foundation for suggestions for K–12 education as a whole (which will be addressed in chapter five). The phenomenological design focused on the “acts of social interpretation and meaningful sense making” (Prasad, 2005, p. 13) of the participants, and should allow readers to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of including the student voice in the delivery of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education instruction.

### **Selection of Participants**

At the time of this study, each individual research participant was incarcerated. Thus, the scope of this phenomenological study was restricted to a distinct population. The setting of this study and the age of the participants bounds the research in that this study only included individuals who were incarcerated between 18 and 29 years of age who were residing in an Iowa correctional facility.

Purposeful sampling procedures (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008) for this study focused on choosing individuals according to four criteria: (1) Twelve individuals were former students whom I knew and with whom I had worked as a counselor and/or teacher at these previous K–12 schools; (2) I did not know thirteen of the participants prior to the study; (3) all individuals had attended K–12 school; and (4) all individuals were currently incarcerated. Knowing or not knowing the participants prior to this study was intended to minimize the possibility of bias. The participants’ perceptions revealed no difference when their data was analyzed for themes.

Of the 25 participants selected for this study, 15 were male and 10 were female. The larger ratio of male to female prisoners was due to the small number of females currently incarcerated—approximately 8%. All participants were at least 18 years of age and remained in prison throughout the duration of this study. Race and religion were not determining factors in selecting the participants. All individuals had attended K–12 school; some had graduated from high school, others had dropped out of school. Whether or not a participant had graduated from high school was not a criterion of this study.

One participant terminated the interview after only 15 minutes. This individual openly shared his experiences but was very uncomfortable in the small, enclosed attorney/client room where our interview took place. He also stated he wanted to return to the recreational room to watch a basketball game on television. While the interview with this participant did allow for all questions to be answered, an additional participant was added to the study to meet the study's intended time allotment of 45–60 minutes per individual interview. However, the information of the participant who ended his interview prematurely was recorded along with the other interviews.

Prior to this study, I worked with the Iowa Department of Corrections Director of Research to follow the proper standard of operating procedures with regard to the prison population. Individuals received a Participation Selection Letter from me that described the study (see Appendix B for the Participation Selection Letter). To ensure the protection of the prisoners, all participants completed an informed consent document (see Appendix D for the Informed Consent Document). For coding purposes, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect his or her identity.



### **Phenomenological Research Design**

The research design of this phenomenology gave voice to the individual in understanding his or her past educational experiences through the lens of the three educational components that formed the study's conceptual framework and based on educational criteria provided by the Iowa Department of Education (2008). A constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of analysis provided a systematic approach to organizing data. Data was organized and continually compared as themes became apparent within the data. The themes that emerged then formed the foundation of the study to define the phenomena that have occurred with the participant, and thus connected the study's contextual (data) information to the research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

The interview questions anchor this phenomenological study. Each question explored the perceptions of the participants in relation to their K-12 educational experiences in preparation for adulthood. The analysis of interviews sought to identify emergent themes from this data to provide answers for this study's research questions. The analysis also categorized the participants' interviews to allow for a comparison in which to better interpret the findings from the data.

### **Data Collection Methods**

Data collection occurred through individual semi-structured interviews with the participants. Phenomenological study supported the format of the semi-structured interviews (Fontana & Prokos, 2007) and the data collected from the interviews provided in-depth information, based on the perspectives of the participants. The research questions were answered through different interview questions (see Appendix A for Interview Questions). Interview questions one through five helped to answer research question one, interview

questions six through eight helped to answer research question two, interview questions one through 14 helped to answer research question three, and interview questions three, 10, and 11 helped to answer research question four.

A phenomenological study requires in-depth interviews with interviewees in order fully to answer the research questions (Creswell, 1998); twenty-five participants were interviewed for this study. In general, responses from interviews allowed for gathering data that defined the reality of each participant (Merriam, 2002).

### **Interview Process**

This study sought to understand the K–12 experiences of individuals who were incarcerated by identifying themes that emerged from their interviews. Understanding the perspective of students who struggled beyond K–12 schooling might be crucial information for improving the delivery of K–12 curriculum in the three educational components.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the Iowa correctional facility where each participant resided. Each participant was asked to participate in one 30–60 minute interview, but with the qualification that further probing and responses could take longer than the time granted by the Iowa State Department of Corrections in a single session. However, no further time was required to complete each participant’s interview. The study found emergent themes within the data collected from the participants. If further interviews were needed to ensure saturation of the data, I could have conducted more interviews. Due to the short length of one individual’s interview, a new participant was added. This study does acknowledge that one interview may have limited the data for this study.

The semi-structured interview process allowed for the flexibility needed to complete the interview or explore responses further. The survey tool consisted of 14 questions, and

asked participants to focus on their K–12 educational experiences, specifically in terms of how they perceived their experience in regard to the three educational components.

With the participants' permission and in accordance with IRB guidelines, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. At the termination of the study, transcripts and original audio files were destroyed. Participants were informed that they could choose not to answer any question they did not wish to at any time during the interview. Each interview was analyzed using the Iowa Department of Education's academic, personal/social, and career education framework to determine what the student voice says about the three educational components of a K–12 school. It was understood that the current model of the framework did not include the student voice, but this study sought to understand how the model may be redesigned to include the student voice.

The transcribed interviews provided the data necessary to understand the perceptions of each participant (Merriam, 2002). The analysis of the complex perceptions of the participants revealed key elements from each interview. Emergent themes were identified and coded until no new themes were apparent—or in Creswell's (1998) terms, when saturation of the data is reached. Identifying repeated patterns allowed for determining that no further information could be gained from the transcribed interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Data collected from the 25 participants' interviews allowed the research questions to be answered, thus permitting the analysis of findings from them all. The lack of support for all students in regard to their three educational components was explored through semi-structured interviews. As Lincoln and Guba (1995) emphasized, the purpose of the interview was to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Establishing a level of trust

that allowed me and the participant to initiate deep and rich conversations occurred between the participant and me (Moustaka, 1994). The data collected from these meaningful conversations provided 417 pages of data that were analyzed based on the conceptual framework of this study.

### **Interview Questions**

The interview questions were developed from the literature review in order to gather the perceptions of the participants' K–12 school experiences in regard to the three components of education. The interview questions were the primary method of data collection for this study, since in-depth interviews provided insight into the world of the incarcerated student and thus allowed for the student voice to be heard and understood.

The interview questions (see Appendix A for Interview Questions) were approved by Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E for Institutional Review Board Approval Form) and sought support for the study's research questions regarding the three educational components and the perceptions of individuals who were incarcerated. The questions were test-piloted and feedback was solicited to refine the interview. The test-pilot interviews were conducted in the month of October, 2011. I met with two former students who struggled to graduate from K–12 school. Interview feedback determined that question 11 needed to be reworded so that the word "teacher" replaced the word "education," and all questions needed to be direct but to allow for the semi-structured interview process to work. Analysis of the test pilot interviews determined that a question regarding what participants needed from their K–12 school experience should be included in the interview questions. The question, "*What is it that you needed from your teachers?*" was added. This question gave more depth to the perceptions and provided voice to the participants. On the whole,

test-pilot interviewees were very receptive to the questions and openly shared their ideas regarding rewording the questions to better serve this study.

The interview asked participants to focus on perceptions of their K–12 educational experiences as they related to their struggles after leaving school. Open-ended questions were asked in a semi-structured interview, which allowed each participant to reflect (Merriam, 2002) on his or her K–12 educational experiences. In general, semi-structured questions also allowed me to ask specific questions, and at the same time allowed for probing to gain deeper insight from the participants (Merriam, 2002). Interviews were guided by a set of structured questions to provide a framework for the semi-structured interview process. The semi-structured nature of this sort of interview also allowed for flexibility and flow during the interview process and established the understanding among participant to produce responses that spoke fully to the research questions.

### **Data Analysis**

Data for this phenomenological study were analyzed to identify emergent themes from participants' interviews, and were used to answer the study's research questions (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). After each interview, the participants were asked to verify their statements through member checking to ensure that their perceptions were not misinterpreted (Maxwell, 2005). After clarifying the perceptions of the participants' interviews for accuracy, the transcribed interviews were coded using a priori codes for initial themes in the three educational components and for student voice (See Appendix I: Participants' Interviews: Coding Table).

Coding was derived from this study's interview questions to determine the academic, personal/social behavior, and career education context of the participant (See Appendix I:

Participants' Interviews: Coding Table). Each component collected the overall perceptions of the participants to determine if they believed their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education needs were met. Academic codes determined the type of academic support that participants received: talented and gifted (TAG), special education (SPED), regular education, or at-risk. The participants' personal/social behavior was coded by who supported their needs: school, home, agency, or activity. Career education codes also determined where the participant perceived their career education to take place: school, home, agency, or activity. Each incarcerated individual's interview was broken down into eight sections: background, overall school experience, perceptions of academic education, perceptions of personal/social behavior education, perceptions of career education, one wish, keywords to support K–12 learners, and words of advice. Emergent themes were then defined and visually categorized. They are discussed in depth in Chapter 4, Research Findings. They are summarized briefly here. The participants' perceptions were initially sorted into seven categories: (1) background of education, (2) perceptions of academic education, (3) perceptions of personal/social behavior education, (4) perceptions of career education, (5) keywords to support K–12 learners, (6) perception of participants' voice being heard, and (7) voices of both male and female were captured. More men than women participated in the study because the Iowa Department of Correction's male population is higher than the female population (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2011). However, the female participants of this study were over-sampled because, in K–12 schools, the gender ratio is more evenly distributed throughout K–12 classrooms.

For this study, a “textual description” of the participants' educational experience in relation to the seven categories was analyzed to construct “an overall description of the

meaning and essence of the experience” along with my interpretations as the researcher to capture the interview experience (Creswell, 1998, p. 150). Due to the nature of this study, a true triangulation of the data did not occur through traditional analysis, since other research methods such as a focus group or survey were not conducted with prisoners. Data was examined by categorizing interview transcriptions and by identifying emergent themes (Marshall & Rossman, 1998). All interviews were transcribed by a licensed transcriptionist.

Data were categorized into emergent themes according to descriptors —academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education (Iowa Department of Education, 2008) — from the study’s conceptual framework (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). As stated above, each interview was also categorized into six sections to determine emergent themes within interviews. Coding the data allowed for clustering the emergent themes to synthesize the overall findings of the study (See Appendix I: Participants’ Interviews: Coding Table). The analysis of these descriptors determined the areas that participants saw as deficits in need of support or development by school administrators to better assist all students. Furthermore, peer debriefing was performed to minimize potential bias toward data and the analysis of emergent themes in relation to the research questions. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained, “[peer debriefing] is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session, and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer’s mind” (p. 308). For this study, a peer debrief was conducted by two educational colleagues who worked with me and held an educational doctoral degree. These colleagues worked in a variety of settings within the school system, from building to district administrators.

Peer debriefing captured information allowing me to narrow the key words found in the participants' interviews. One peer's written response questioned if I was too broad in the first collation of identifying keywords from the participants' interviews: "How do the keywords you extracted from the interviews answer your research questions? Look at your research questions and focus on those to get your keywords." These comments helped refocus me in the determining that the keywords centered on answering the study's research questions.

### **Trustworthiness**

While this study only used interviews for its data collection method, the phenomenological nature of the interviews provided in-depth information on the perspectives of the participants and guided me in their interpretation. Creswell (1998) cautioned that "[the] phenomenologist's view of verification and standards [is] largely related to the researcher's interpretation" (p. 207). The phenomenological lens prevented arbitrary interpretation in that this study's phenomenon is the K-12 school being analyzed through the perceptions of the individuals who were incarcerated. Furthermore, submergence in the data increases the trustworthiness in that the aspects of the data were scrutinized for emergent themes, raising the level of trustworthiness. This study's protocol of member checking, peer debriefing, coding, and interpretation promoted trustworthiness. This study's design made it more likely that the interpretations from the interviews were strong and credible (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

### **Credibility**

Credibility is a major aspect of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I acknowledged that outside threats exist beyond the boundaries of a K-12 school. Issues such



as family dynamics, substance abuse, and poverty had the potential to be divulged during an interview. I informed the participants that issues outside of the school realm might be addressed during the interviews. If such information was divulged, it was taken into consideration during the examination of transcribed interviews when looking for emergent themes. The semi-structured interview approach allowed for consistency to remain true within the interviews and at the same time provided questions that were not determined a priori to “explore the phenomenon and asking probing questions to get a more complete description” of the participants’ K–12 school experiences (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1992, p. 287). Interview coding excluded such issues, and drew upon emergent themes that specifically answered the research questions.

The credibility of this phenomenological study was established through the research questions’ answers, in that the research questions were test-piloted. Credibility was further established in the data analysis process, where critical attention was paid to potential biases that might have existed within the study such as understanding the researcher and participant role. I also established credibility through the study’s conceptual framework and research design (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The conceptual framework anchored this study by maintaining the focus on the three educational components and the inclusion of the participant’s voice. As a result of these steps, and in Lincoln & Guba’s (1985) terms, the findings of this study were both content-rich data (i.e., supported by the findings from the interviews) and supported by the repetition of information from the data analysis.

### **Transferability**

The findings of this study supported the research questions and justified the importance of considering the student voice in decision-making processes regarding

curriculum and support efforts in the three educational components. This study's rich content provides readers with the "fittingness of the context" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that may or may not have been relevant to their educational environment. In other words, the phenomenon of this study was transferred to other "educational" contexts with similar conditions (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). For example, the context of the individuals who were incarcerated provided school administrators with a deeper understanding of how the student voice could improve student academics, personal/social, and career education performance and assist students beyond high school (Bangser, 2008; Conley, 2010; Gray, 2008).

### **Positionality**

My prior experiences as a teacher, school counselor, at-risk coordinator, school administrator, and state task force member played a role in this phenomenological study. These experiences enabled me to understand further the challenges of the participants. I understood the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills necessary to protect the participants. My experiences as a certified school counselor supported the interview process in that my interview skills have been honed to capture the full experience shared by the incarcerated individual. As Polkinghorne (2005) suggests, "There is considerable overlap between the skills involved in research interviewing and those needed by counseling" (p. 142). I have also served as a clinical professor at Drake University where, from 2007–2009, I taught graduate students to use interview methodologies. I also have considerable experience in interviewing teachers, students, parents, and staff to develop an understanding of different events. In these instances, I used my administrative training to develop a relationship in order to establish trust quickly. However, I acknowledge that there is a difference between the goal of the qualitative research interview and the goal of the counseling or administrative

interview. Qualitative research interviews seek to gather information about the participant's world to develop meaning that speaks to specific research questions, similar to the goal of the counseling interview and sometimes the administrative interview, in helping a person develop an awareness of their perceptions. However, both types of interviewing call on similar skills. A qualitative researcher must be able to listen, pose open-ended questions, reframe, and probe to gain deeper knowledge of an individual's world (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). I possess these qualities because I developed them through my teaching, counseling, and administrative experience as they related to my interpersonal relationship skills.

I was aware of possible biases and I understand these biases. A possible bias could have been my work with some of the participants when they were my students. At various points in my teaching career, I had taught 12 of the participants. As an educator, I enjoyed working with these students and tried to get to know them on a personal basis. I tried to minimize the bias that might be inherent in these existing relationships by focusing on the ideas that participants expressed, asking questions for clarification, and generally verifying that the transcripts accurately reflected participant perceptions. Failure to follow this system of checks could have resulted in findings that reflected my own perception of the participants' experience, rather than the perceptions of the participants.

I entered this study believing that all the participants would be identified as struggling K-12 learners, and positioned this phenomenology as a way to understand the phenomenon of the struggling student. This belief was another bias of this study. My findings revealed that these students had not all been, in fact, struggling students. The participants self-identified themselves as talented and gifted, general education, special education, and at-risk students. In turn, the data collected from the participants' interviews revealed former K-12

students who had achieved success, suffered failure, or a combination of both when expressing their perceptions about their K–12 school experiences. In other words, the participants were not all former “struggling” learners, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter four.

All procedures were followed to ensure the credibility of adding this participant. The general context of the interviews provided a setting that allowed the participants to eventually relax and share their K–12 educational experiences. I was not hesitant to enter two of the correctional facilities, as the overall experience with prison officials was very welcoming. These facilities also provided me a handheld radio to communicate with the front office. I felt most apprehensive at the third facility, a medium security prison. I believe this was due to the fact that I was patted down and then required to enter the prison yard by myself. I felt my anxiety rise as I entered the prison yard, for when I looked around, all I saw was barbed wire everywhere, It looked like a long walk to my destination. Determined to see this study through, I took a big gulp of air and marched across the prison yard to the building housing the study’s participants. My fears were extinguished upon my second return to this correctional facility as I found there was really nothing to be afraid of within the facility.

All three correctional facilities supplied a comfortable room in which the interviews could be conducted. Rooms were furnished with conference room tables and chairs. Two of the facilities even provided rooms with windows. The windows offered a sun-filled setting in which a few of the participants and I enjoyed a prison lunch – a bologna sandwich, stewed tomatoes, a slice of bread, a cookie, and cup of lemonade. I had forgotten the taste of baloney

as I had not had a slice since childhood. I quickly became accustomed to each prison conference room setting and felt at ease during the participants' interviews.

Upon my initial meeting with the participants, I became very aware of their emotional and cognitive levels. As a former school counselor, I possessed the skills necessary to be highly attentive to participants' needs. My previous counseling skills allowed me to listen effectively to understand the meaning of what a person was saying. Also, my educational background in understanding all learners assisted me in meeting each participant at his or her cognitive level. With participants whom I did not know, a trusting relationship was established so that they felt comfortable answering questions. My experience as a school administrator, former counselor, and teacher provided me with the interpersonal abilities to establish trust with people quickly. I am able to put people at ease when in a stressful or uncomfortable situation. As the researcher, I believe I incorporated these abilities fluidly into the researcher-participant relationship.

However, I also understood that personal barriers with some participants might have existed as a result of the teacher-student relationship. In this instance, I acknowledged my role as a former teacher during interviews with participants who had been my students. Furthermore, attentiveness to the ways that power relationships may distance people emotionally enabled me to remain sensitive to participants' reactions, such that I could alleviate their fears or apprehension about the research or being interviewed whenever appropriate. This sensitivity also enabled me to keep my focus on the participants' protection and comfort, and that they held full authority over the interviews (for example, by reminding them that they could terminate the interview at their discretion). My relationship with participants who were former students potentially allowed each to share their in-depth

perceptions of the ways their K–12 experiences had come to fruition. To that end, my connection to the participants facilitated the interview process just as much as it may have served as a hindrance.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethically, I established a role separate from my role as an educator. I understood the potential for relationships with participants to evolve in multiple directions, ranging from an extreme distancing to strengthening the friendship bond with individuals with whom I was familiar. I maintained professional relationships during the interviews by informing the participants that I was speaking with them as a researcher and not a visitor. Allowing the participants to respond to the interview questions in a social context in which I was the researcher better presented this study with “honest and responsible comments” (Heppner et al., 1992, p. 288) as opposed to being a visitor. The setting of a prison conference room provided the interview process with a structured environment, thus supporting the social context of this research. If needed, the participants could have reflected on past experience to answer interview questions better. I understood that as the researcher, I needed to remain cognizant of the flow of the interview while providing the individual time to reflect. Remaining true to my research role helped ensure the credibility of this study.

To protect the participants and further enhance the validity of this study, standard procedures were followed. To ensure ethical conduct throughout this study, I obtained approval from Iowa State University’s Institutional Review Board prior to the start of the study (Appendix E). I was also granted permission to interview prisoners by the Director of the Iowa Department of Corrections (Appendix F: Research Site Permission Form). I also coordinated with the Iowa Department of Corrections Director of Research and Wardens to

ensure that ethical procedures were followed. The participants were prisoners at the time of their involvement in the study and, therefore, were a protected population. To ensure the participants were not taken advantage of and their identities protected, I followed the Iowa Department of Corrections policies and protocol.

Interviews took place in a secure room within each Iowa prison. Only the participant and I were allowed in the room during the actual interview. A pseudonym was assigned to each individual to protect his or her identity. All interview notes, audiotapes, and transcripts were stored in a secure location during the course of this study. Their destruction at the end of the study further ensured ethical treatment of their information and identity. Any individual who wished to withdraw during the study was allowed to do so, and without consequence. No participant withdrew from this study.

### **Limitations**

This phenomenological study encountered a number of limitations due to the nature and design of the research: sample size, correctional facility schedules, and correctional facility policies. I developed procedures and precautionary measures beyond the delimitations of the study to ensure that accurate findings resulted from systematic data collection and analysis. Possible limitations to research collection served as barriers for achieving valid conclusions.

The first possible limitation to the study was its sample size. Twenty-five participants were interviewed for 30–60 minutes. The nature of this study was to “describe and uncover the structures of personal meaning” (Merriam, 2002, p. 136) regarding the participants’ perceptions of their educational experiences. However, in cases where information was incomplete or not forthcoming, the participant pool was expanded until information

saturation was reached. The saturation of data was more than just a repetitive task; rather, it was a purposeful effort to establish the credibility of collected data (Creswell, 1998). Data was coded, member-checked, and peer-debriefed. Additionally, the participants' interviews were analyzed to ensure that the findings adequately reflected the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 2002).

Due to the schedules and policies of the correctional facilities, a participant could have been removed from the study for reasons beyond the control of this researcher. However, no participants were removed during this study.

A second limitation to this study was the context of the participants' educational background. Prior to the study, I had a preconceived notion that all the participants would have struggled as K-12 students. From the data I collected, I learned that the participants did not all struggle as K-12 students. The participants self-reported themselves as talented and gifted, general education, special education, or at-risk.

The last limitation to this study was the context of the interview setting. Interviews occurred in either a prison conference room or attorney/client conference room. Both settings were comfortable but somewhat controlled in that participants were escorted to and from the room by a prison guard. This created an atmosphere that felt rigid at the beginning of each interview. I believe this to be a limitation because the participants and I needed time to feel comfortable with the interview process.

### **Summary**

The objective of this study was to determine the K-12 educational experience perceptions of participants as they relate to the support or non-support received from teachers with the three components of education. The 25 participants who resided in an Iowa



Correctional Facility at the time of this study represented the K–12 student voice. Data was collected through individual interviews, which provided evidence of students who may have struggled with their transition to adult life, giving an opportunity to voice to their K–12 experiences and perceptions. Chapter 4 will present the findings from the individual interviews and answer this study’s research questions. The participants were asked to answer questions about their K–12 school experiences. Individual interviews collected the participants’ perceptions about their education and how schools could better prepare students. Half of the participants were former students of mine; the remaining participants did not know me prior to the study. Race and religion were not determining factors in participant selection.

This phenomenological study sought to understand the perceptions of the K–12 student in regard to the three educational components through the student voice, the incarcerated individual. By developing a deeper understanding of how students perceived their K–12 education, school administrators may then begin to include students in the decision-making process. Clearly, a complex interaction exists between the relationships that school administrators have with students and the curriculum, or three components of education (Macleod, 2007). A deeper audit and redesign of educational programming in the three educational component efforts—which also considers the student voice—might better support all learners. The outcomes might lower incarceration rates, increase graduation rates, and result in fewer students who struggle in their transition to adult life.

Maintaining an unconditional regard for students and fostering supportive relationships is critical to engaging youth in school; limited learning is all that will continue to transpire unless the three components of education are improved to encourage students’

personal growth. School administrators must realize that the connection between today's students and their schools is fragmented at best because of the struggles students encounter can divert their attention away from school. School personnel must develop support strategies that reach identified youth and understand that interventions implemented for one student may not necessarily work for another.

## CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

*I loved to learn, I loved to learn. I loved to learn.*

Incarcerated individual, 2012

### **Purpose of the Study Restated**

This phenomenological study examined the educational experiences of current Iowa Department of Corrections offenders, who ranged in age from 18–29 years of age, to understand the ways these participants perceived their K–12 school experiences. The perceptions of these individuals' experiences might be acknowledged by schools and used to improve the delivery of education to all students. As a purposeful population, participants offered a largely unacknowledged perspective on how students' experiences with academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education are implemented and on methods by which to improve the delivery and instruction of the three components of education. As such, the findings from this study may provide a better understanding of students' needs in K–12 settings. This study found that the answers to the research questions have similarities and, at times, coincide with each other. However, this chapter will break down each research question and discuss it individually. The following research questions guided this study:

- (1) How did the participants describe their learning experience in K–12 school?
- (2) To what extent did participants perceive that their education prepared them in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?
- (3) What did the participants think their schools could have done differently to better prepare them in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?

(4) Did the participants perceive their voices to have been heard by their teachers during their K–12 experience?

This study attempted to reveal the phenomenon of the K–12 experience through the voice of the individuals who were incarcerated to gain the meaning of what students might experience attending K–12 school. Phenomenology provided a lens to understand the perspective of young adults who struggled after leaving school and became incarcerated. This study’s overall conclusion was that K–12 students have a need to be understood by their teachers. Whether or not K–12 students felt supported or unsupported by their teachers or believed themselves to be successful or unsuccessful with the three components of education, the need to understood, cared for, and communicated with was important to the participants in this study.

### **Overview of Research Findings**

Table 4.1 provides an overview of each research question and theme found to answer the research question. Research questions and themes were discovered through this study’s set of interview questions (see Appendix A for Interview Questions). Interview questions one through five helped to answer research question one, interview questions six through eight helped to answer research question two, interview questions one through 14 helped to answer research question three, and interview questions three, 10 and 11 helped to answer research question four.

The research questions and themes are then summarized below and explored in greater depth later in this chapter.

Table 4.1

*Research Questions and Emergent Themes found in this Study*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Emergent Themes</b>
(1) How did the participants describe their learning experience in K–12 schools?	K–12 educational experiences were either supportive or non-supportive
(2) To what extent did participants perceive their education as preparing them in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?	Being prepared or unprepared for the real world
(3) What did the participants think their schools could have done differently to better prepare them in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?	Key words of advice for educators
(4) Did the participants perceive their voice to have been heard by their teachers during their K–12 experience?	Hear the student voice

**Context of Participants: Individuals who were Incarcerated**

This study sought the participation of individuals who were incarcerated from various prisons to examine their perceptions of their K–12 school experience. These individuals comprised a purposeful sample within the larger population of people who have experienced K–12 education. To understand the world of the participants in depth, this study explored the contextual conditions of each participant (Creswell, 1998). Therefore, the demographics pertaining to each participant’s prior education, current education, and self-reported supports

were examined and recorded. This strategy provided a boundary that formed a set period of time in which the K–12 school experiences of the participants could be explored and interpreted through semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2005). This method also allowed for a whole, useful description of the K–12 school phenomenon to occur by retaining as much of the participants' perceptions as possible (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews provided the data that created robust descriptions of the K–12 school phenomenon.

The reasons for each participant's incarceration were not a required topic of discussion during the participants' interviews. The participants were also informed prior to the interviews that their reason(s) for being in prison did not pertain to this study, and would not need to be provided. While the home life of participants may have been discussed during individual interviews, not all participants discussed their home life; thus, not enough data could be collected to saturate home life as an emergent theme. The study thereby keeps a tight focus on participants' K–12 educational experiences in relation to the three components of education.

### **Gender and Age Analysis of the Participants**

This study used a sampling of adults 18–29 years of age who were incarcerated in an Iowa State prison and had attended a K–12 school. This study included gender and age demographics because (1) both men and women from Iowa prisons participated in this study, and (2) the average age of the participants showed that their K–12 school experience had occurred relatively recently before their incarceration, in contrast with the average ages of then general prison population (Table 4.2). More men than women participated in the study because the male population within the Iowa Department of Corrections is higher than the female population. However, the female population of this study was over-sampled because

in K–12 schools the female to male ratio is more evenly distributed throughout K–12 classrooms. The greatest percentage (47.5%) of Iowa’s prison population is under the age of 30 (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2011) and this age bracket had the opportunity to attend or finish high school.

The findings of this study concluded that neither gender nor age were a factor in the overall perceptions of the participants. Both male and female participants reported similar experiences and used similar terms to describe their K–12 academic, personal/social behavior, and career education (see Appendix I for Participants’ Interviews: Coding Table). Knowing that neither gender nor age affected the participants’ educational perceptions might benefit teachers in working their future students. The participants’ lens draw importance to teachers listening and understanding their students regardless their gender.

Table 4.2

*Overall Participant Demographics as Related to Individuals in Iowa and U.S. Prisons*

Site	Gender	%	Average Age
Study	Female	40.0%	25.3
	Male	60.0%	25.6
Iowa Prisons	Female	8.2%	36
	Male	91.8%	36
U.S. Prisons	Female	7.0%	39
	Male	93.0%	39

Source: Iowa Department of Corrections, *FY2010 Annual Report* (2010); U.S. Census Bureau, *Design and Methodology: American Community Survey* (2009).

This demographic comparison provided an understanding of this study’s incarcerated population in relation to other Iowa and state prisons. The age comparison was to ensure that only individuals younger than 30 years of age participated in this study. Furthermore, this study confirmed that the voice of both genders was representative of the United States and

the state of Iowa as a whole. The general U.S. prison population of individuals greater than 30 years of age is slightly higher than Iowa's population and this study's population.

Regarding education level, Table 4.3 illustrates the participants' education in relation to whether a high school diploma or GED (General Educational Development) was earned, or if no diploma was earned. The education of the participants helps to connect their experiences with the three components of education. The participants offered their level of education and their plans regarding whether they intended to expand on their schooling while in prison. Overall, 48% of the individuals interviewed for this study had earned their high school diploma prior to entering prison. While 32% of the participants within the sample earned their GED prior to entering prison, 20% of participants within this sample neither completed their high school diploma nor earned a GED. Thus, all the participants in this study had experienced some sort of K–12 educational experience. The amount of education obtained by the participants did not have had an effect on their perceptions of their K–12 experiences. The data collected from this study determined that despite the educational level obtained by the participants, they still reported similar K–12 experiences and used similar terms to describe said experiences.



Table 4.3

*Educational Demographics of Participants in this Study Compared to Iowa and U.S. Prison Populations*

Site	Gender	% Earned HS Diploma Prior to Prison	% Earned GED Prior to Prison	% Who Have Not Earned Diploma or GED Prior to Prison
<b>Study</b>	Female	40.0%	30.0%	30.0%
	Male	53.0%	33.3%	14.0%
<b>Iowa Prisons</b>	Female	42.4%	41.8%	15.8%
	Male	33.2%	44.8%	22.0%
<b>U.S. Prisons</b>	Female	17.1%	16.0%	36.5%
	Male	16.5%	15.0%	58.4%

Source: Iowa Department of Corrections, *FY2010 Annual Report* (2010); U.S. Census Bureau, *Design and Methodology: American Community Survey* (2009).

Thus, the education level shown in Table 4.3 is indicative of the overall prison population except for the percentage of prisoners who did not earn a diploma or GED prior to incarceration. Individuals in Iowa prisons rank higher in educational obtainment than the national average of Individuals who is incarcerated. This representation is a limitation of this study. However, the findings from this study concluded that the perceptions of the participants help define the world of a K–12 student’s academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education.

### **Discussion of Research Question Findings**

#### **Research Question 1: How Do the Participants Describe Their Learning Experience in K–12 School?**

The findings for research question one were constructed from interview questions one through five (see Appendix A for Interview Questions). Quotes from participants were pulled from the data to capture the essence of the theme. The theme was used to define

participants' overall perceptions of their K–12 school learning experience. Overall, their perception was that the participants perceived their K–12 school experiences as either supportive or non-supportive in the classroom.

While it would appear that those students more apt to be engaged and academically driven in the classroom might have been more connected to school (Marin & Brown, 2008), the findings of this study revealed that even though participants might have performed well academically, performance did not guarantee their engagement or connection to school. Furthermore, this theme also revealed that participants who reported having non-supportive K–12 school experiences might have disengaged from school, but this disengagement doesn't mean they did poorly in regard to their academics. Therefore, the participants found their K–12 school experiences to be either supportive or non-supportive in nature.

In general, research question one depicted the overall perceptions of the participants' sense of school enjoyment and transition to adulthood based on their K–12 learning experience. The study's data determined that the K–12 learning experiences, whether supportive or non-supportive, did affect the outcome of the participants' postsecondary transition to adulthood.

### **Theme 1: K–12 Educational Experiences were either Supportive or Non-Supportive**

Supportive K–12 school experiences were reported by 15 of the 25 participants, or 60%. Individuals were asked about their perceptions of the three components of education to develop an understanding of their experiences in school. Regardless of how each participant was placed academically in school (whether deemed talented and gifted or at-risk, or placed in general or special education) these 15 participants perceived that his or her K–12 learning experience had provided a sufficient education. Some participants, such as Stephanie,

believed that they acquired all the knowledge necessary for finding success after leaving school to which she interpreted as support from her K–12 school.

Stephanie was a 26 year old female who earned her GED after getting kicked out of high school. She did not offer an explanation of why she had been kicked but stated that her focus was on having fun. From the moment we met, Stephanie was very relaxed and almost nonchalant in speaking about her past:

A lot of things were going on in my life. My mom and dad broke up. So my brother just got arrested. I got pregnant when I was 12 and everything was just chaotic and so I didn't want to be in school so I was just, I got kicked out every chance I got.

When I asked Stephanie what academic programs she had participated in while in K–12 school she reported that she had been in a talented and gifted program in elementary and middle school. As a result of these adolescent feelings, she began to try and get suspended from school. When pressed as to why she was suspended, Stephanie shared that her removal from school first began because of her attendance: “They [the administrator] kicked me out for truancy.”

Being suspended landed Stephanie in an alternative school. She met a teacher who knew she was talented and gifted and pushed Stephanie to use her abilities. Stephanie recalled how uncomfortable she felt in this situation:

But when I was there I did my work and my English teacher kept trying to get me to go into the advanced English class and so I went into and I just felt like dumb, like, I couldn't, like everybody else's stuff sounded better to me. I was like, 'Oh my God, I don't want to be in this school.'

Stephanie believed that many of her teachers had offered her support but had not incorporated her voice into her K–12 experiences. Teachers tried to provide her with supports they believed she needed and Stephanie is grateful for them trying to provide her with support. Stephanie did see school as supportive. However, she still felt different from her peers:

I always doubted myself. Like I had real low self- esteem growing up, so like I said my mom and dad had just broke up and I grew up in foster homes and they, my mom and dad had my brother when I was real young and my dad helped to getting us back, us back from the state [foster care]. And it wasn't until I was nine, and then they [my parents] were together until I was 12. And then they broke up. And my mom was depressed and she didn't care about what us kids did. So we started smoking weed, drinking and I got pregnant. My sister got pregnant. My brother got locked up so it was just other things going on in my life that interfered with my school that I didn't want to be there and because I couldn't do these things: go home, get high, and get drunk, I would rather be there than at school.

When I asked her if her teachers inquired as to why she fought the support they were offering, she simply stated, “No,” Stephanie then eagerly offered her perceptions of school: “I think I learned, educationally, and they taught me academically everything that I need to know, even though I quit so early. I obviously learned everything I needed in life, academically now.” Stephanie’s use of the word “obviously” connects to theme one in that she believed she did not need to finish her K–12 education because she had achieved the academic knowledge needed for adult life. Stephanie believed herself to be an intelligent young woman who let what she described as “fun” get in the way of her finding school

success. Regardless of leaving school early, she walked away from school feeling satisfied with her K–12 school experience and the knowledge gained.

Having a supportive K–12 experience enhanced the sense of enjoyment for Marc. Marc was a 29 year old man who earned his high school diploma a semester after his class graduated. He received his academic education in the regular classroom setting and struggled to get through school as he was involved with the foster care system as a result of early childhood family issues:

Things were a little rough with my mom. My dad passed away when I was born, so I didn't have a father figure. Like I said, I had an older brother and then I had a twin; he died at birth. We were both premature, you know. Me and my mom, we had problems with me growing up. Like I say, her being a single mom and just the area I grew up in.

Even with a troubled home life, Marc found school a place where his teachers supported him. Like Stephanie, Marc's sense of support did not affect feeling prepared or unprepared for postsecondary life: "I guess I wouldn't really say there wasn't no dislikes about it [school] because like I say, it [school] was kind of just me getting up every morning." Marc went on to describe why he thought school was supportive:

Marc continued to speak about his feeling supported by school as he recalled in his description of his academic experience, "I have learned a few things here and there, so, like I say, I do miss high school...based on what I did in there." What Marc did not provide, however, was the degree to which he was connected to school. Although Marc certainly found some part of his school experience to have been supportive, his feelings of missing school made him realize that he had enjoyed his time in school and missed that part of his

life: “I guess [school was] a place away from where I was living. Like I said, just to be able to be around different people instead of being at our house until I got placed in foster care.”

Similar to the others, Marc made no connection between the education he attained and his preparation for the real world as he only looked at school as now somewhat supportive.

Hanna had a similar perception of school as a supportive experience:

I mean, I liked school, period. I just liked being able to learn stuff. Just everything really worked for me...just learning stuff and being able to do it. Like what I am reading, I am using it in my everyday life.

Hanna was a 23 year old young woman who was mandated to graduate from high school a year early due to outside legal issues; she then planned on attending college. Hanna was currently continuing her education through prison during this interview.

Without hesitation, Hanna proudly stated that she had liked school and that it was a good experience even though she found herself incarcerated as a young adult. Her enjoyment of school and ability to learn increased her reported sense of self-confidence. In addition to liking school, she started college at age 17. However, like the others, her enjoyment of school did not have an effect on her postsecondary transition: “There was nothing for me I didn’t like; like I said, I enjoyed everything.” Hanna continued to share how she was furthering her education: “I am kind of settling right now to get started for the CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) I am going do; they [prison] have that class.” Even behind bars, she believed she was a capable learner as she found herself using previous learning in prison.

The participants who excelled in school even spoke of personal regret when recalling their K–12 experience. While these individuals had a sense of enjoying school, this

perception did not indicate a successful transition to postsecondary life. Their regret appeared to come from doing well in school but failing to carry some of that knowledge into a postsecondary life. Now, being away from school and having been placed into a situation with the opportunity to continue their education, they realized that academic achievement was a real and meaningful aspect of their lives. Amber, a 24 year old woman, summed up her experience with K–12 education by saying: “I think I would have taken it more seriously.” While Amber dropped out of school after completing 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she later earned her GED before being incarcerated:

Actually, after I had quit high school. I had got involved in a little bit of trouble at the time. So, my attorney had asked me to get involved with getting my GED. So, because I was under the age of 16, I had to get a court order to do that until I was 16. I was 14. I was 15, maybe 16 when I got my actual GED. I did that [GED] in maybe like, 6 months. And they [the court] didn’t have to tell me to get any GED because I got that when I was like 14, or 15.

Prior to being incarcerated, Amber stated that she did like learning in the K–12 classroom and also enjoyed the overall aspects of school: “I remember being in class when we had your [student’s] test, we would take like little notes, I remember that, and I remember like the parties that we would get at end of the semester.” Yet, Amber’s enjoyment of school did not always provide her with the structure and discipline she needed to stay focused:

I remember being in study halls even after I got into the point where my grades were slipping. I would stay after school you know, a half hour, to try to fix my stuff. But I was still too worried about other things, I mean, to do anything [in school].

Similar to the others, Amber perceived her K–12 school experience as supportive in nature, although, enjoying school did not guarantee that individuals would avoid jail time.

The participants' sense of enjoyment of K–12 school was an individual perception, yet they correspondingly agreed that academically, school was easy for them. The perceptions of these individuals' success seemed to rely solely on the fact that earning good grades came easily to them, and not on the instruction they received from their teachers.

The participants who perceived a non-supportive K–12 school experience, reported that ten (40%) struggled with most aspects of school in relation to academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. These individuals perceived their voice was insignificant in the classroom, which often resulted in them not feeling a sense of belonging to school. An example of the sense of not belonging was found with Susan.

Susan was a female in her late twenties who earned her GED prior to going to prison. She had attended school in multiple states before arriving in Iowa. As Susan recalled her overall school experiences, she had mixed emotions, crying one moment and smiling proudly the next. Regardless of emotion, Susan perceived her overall K–12 school experiences as non-supportive. Susan began her interview providing a lengthy description of her overall experience:

The schools in [the west] , had like over two thousand students and I don't think they [teachers] knew when I attended, you know. I really don't. And they [teachers] taught a course, but they didn't really, I don't know, I don't feel like they even knew I was there, you know, like it was really crazy, you know. [The south] was about the same. I went to high school in [the south]. And it was chaotic. It didn't seem like the teachers really cared, you know, or wanted to teach at all. It didn't seem like it,



you know. It seemed like they [teachers] were there, this was their job and to get through a day. And was just a struggle to get through the day. I could feel that coming off the teachers and I even felt some racism there, you know. And I have a problem with that, you know, because it was predominantly a Black school and yet the teacher allowed it, you know. We [the class] talked about racism and the teacher allowed them [students] to make jokes about Mexicans, which I stood up and walked out of the class. I got kicked out for a little while because of it [walking out], because I snapped.

Susan paused for a moment and then continued:

I was going to graduate a year early until they sent me to North Carolina because my grandma had died. So, they [school personnel] couldn't find my school records so they [school administrators] had to start me all over again. And, my grandma just died and my world was over, so I just dropped out. It was kind of hard because I went to another high school in North Carolina. And it bothered me, you know, that how am I going to ride the bus home and think how am I am going to mix some mustard with a little bit of hamburger I got to make dinner for me and my brother with the electricity off.

Susan never denied that she was not capable of learning. Quite the contrary, Susan believed she was very intelligent and still enjoyed learning new things. While in K–12 school, she received academic support through her school's the talented and gifted and at-risk programs. However, Susan believed she was minimally supported in school with her personal/social behaviors, which in turn resulted in her dropping out of school.

While she loved to learn, Susan did not feel all students or teachers took learning seriously. She felt that school was more of a game of who could survive; teachers recognized students who stood out or brought attention to themselves. Susan described not feeling supported by her teachers:

I...I...I didn't feel like a person, I didn't feel like I really mattered at all. I didn't even feel like my grades mattered at all, you know, because there, there was ways to, you know you can manipulate and even get in good with the teacher to where you know, your grade is not going to be bad and it didn't really even matter about our academics at all, you know.

With great passion, Susan clearly articulated the belief that her non-supportive school experience created a sense of not feeling a part of her school: “I want to know that I matter, that I am learning, that this does matter and not mess me up for life, you know, thinking about the future and colleges, and really it's just a manipulation game.” She reported that those students who could “manipulate” the teacher were those that felt as if they belonged in the classroom. Susan angrily perceived her teachers as not supporting her and her learning: “They [the teachers] get frustrated and they roll their eyes or whatever and they don't have time for you and they feel like, ‘Oh, God, you should have got this by now’ or when they don't really care.” Susan believed that what she gained from school, she did on her own. Her thoughts were echoed by other individuals who interpreted their K–12 school experience as non-supportive.

These participants perceived their non-supportive experiences as having deflated their confidence in school, or what they described as being “distanced” from their learning, and made them feel like outcasts in the classroom. They described themselves as having felt

invisible sitting in the classroom. David, a 21 year old young man who dropped out of high school, noted the lack of support from teachers and staff by explaining that he only received attention for poor behavior: “They paid attention to all the bad things you had done.” David oscillated between sadness and anger as he reflected on his perceptions of school support. On one hand, David believed he did well in school with his K-9 academics. He was engaged in his learning and received good grades: “I got A’s and B’s throughout school, B’s., A’s, B’s, and C’s.” David even spoke very highly of one special teacher. However, David’s transition to high school was difficult as he did not feel he received the academic assistance he needed to continue his success. As a result, he dropped out. David summed up his overall perceptions of not feeling supported by his K–12 school experience by describing each level of learning:

In elementary, you always get complimented. In high school, I know they say you are not supposed to like get things done. The school when you were getting little treats for doing things in school, it helped you a lot because not only did it help you motivate, it motivated you to keep thinking and you keep wanting to be doing stuff, but it also, taught you a way, to learn, you know. And you get to high school, it’s like they tell you like they wouldn't care. It was like the teachers [are saying], “It don't matter, we are going to get paid any way.”

Throwing his hands up in the air, David ended his explanation and sat back in his chair.

David was not the only participant who perceived his K–12 educational experiences as non-supportive. Curtis was a 23 year old man who did not graduate from high school but was working on general educational skills in prison. Curtis appeared somewhat bashful when we sat down for his interview. It was evident to me that he was slightly hesitant to

share his perceptions at the start of our conversation. However, once we got through a few interview questions, Curtis opened up and shared his beliefs about his K–12 educational support.

While in K–12 school, Curtis reported that he received his education in a general and special education classroom. His recollection of his K-12 school experience was not a pleasant one. While he did find social avenues to stay connected with peers, he did not connect with teachers.

When I asked Curtis to tell me more about why he felt unsupported by his teachers, he spoke with sadness in his voice: “I thought I was not in there. Like I was just, I was clear, I wasn’t in there [in the classroom as a presence to the teacher], [I] disappeared.” Finishing his sentence, Curtis looked to the ground. We then sat in silence for a moment. Curtis then continued:

I was always that kid that sat in way back of the class, not up front, where you know...they [teachers] needed to call them to side and ask them what is wrong.

For me, I think if a student is down, got their head down, you can always tell. Like how they... how they are walking into class, and got their head down and stuff like that.

Curtis’ perceptions of being invisible in class led to his belief that he was not supported in the classroom. Curtis remembered struggling to pay attention in class, which he said resulted in him being placed in a special education room that focused on his behaviors. Frustrated with every aspect of school, he quit attending school, Now as an adult, Curtis believed that if he could repeat his past, he would take charge of his education:

I would change a lot of stuff. What would I change about school? I would be sitting at a front desk, paying a lot more attention, raise my hand, and getting a lot more attention. And, ask questions, doing my homework, not skipping school, and not getting in trouble.

Curtis' thought that changing his behavior would help him feel more supported in school. His description of how he would change his behaviors, raising his hand and asking questions, reflect how he wanted his voice incorporated into the classroom and how he believed he could be more active in his learning. Reflecting on the interpretations of the participants who felt non-supported with their K–12 educational experiences, it was clear the lack of teacher attention left these individuals feeling diminished as a student and person.

Although the participants' K–12 educational experiences varied, the perceptions of their experiences reported were similar in that some of the individuals found their K–12 school experience to be supportive, as they stated they could make a connection to teachers through academics, personal/social behavior, and/or career education. These were also the individuals who smiled as they recalled the support they felt while attending school. On the contrary, other participants were brought to anger or sadness as they reported how their K–12 school was non-supportive in regard to their academic, personal/social behavior, and career educational experiences.

The identified educational level of these participants, ranging from talented and gifted to special needs, did not seem to affect their supportive or non-supportive K–12 educational experience. Academic ability did not matter to these individuals. Support, or lack of support, was observed as more important to the participants.

The participants reporting a non-supportive experience with their K–12 education identified a low connection to K–12 school because their teachers did not reach out to them. This perception often was reported as the participant having a low sense of enjoyment at school and a lack of understanding and care from their teachers. The keywords collected from the participants' interviews captured non-supportive statements to support theme two (see Appendix I for Participant Interviews: Coding Table).

**Research Question 2: To What Extent Do the Participants Perceive that Their Education Prepared Them in the Three Components of Education: Academics, Personal/Social Behaviors, and Career Readiness?**

The findings that emerged from the participants' interviews regarding research question two were analyzed according to the three components of education outlined by the at-risk framework guiding this study (Iowa Department of Education, 2008): academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. Findings that answered research question two were constructed from interview questions six–eight (see Appendix A for Interview Questions). Each component was examined individually to determine the emergent theme(s) within the component. Research question two identified a second theme that emerged from this study: Being Prepared or Not Prepared for The Real World. The data to support this emergent theme was captured from the participants' interviews. Data was collected and analyzed through Appendix I: Perceived Academic Preparedness of the Participant. How the participant perceived their preparation in personal/social behaviors was explored and recorded through Appendix J: Perceived Personal/Social Behavior Preparedness of the Participant. Last, the career education experiences of the participants were collected and analyzed through Appendix K: Perceived Career Education Preparedness of Participants.

These documents used the participants' own words to interpret the participants' overall perception of the degree to which their K–12 school experiences had prepared them to meet the three components.

This theme confirmed the presence of those participants who perceived that their K–12 school experience prepared them in the areas of the three components of education, while it also documented those individuals who perceived that their K–12 school experience did not prepare them with their academic, personal/social behavior, and/or career education. Affectively, the themes from research question two found that the extent of the participants' preparedness with their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education occurred more with academics, 60%, than personal/social behavior, 40%, and career education, 24%. Likewise, the data from the participants' interviews indicated that the participants were better prepared with their personal/social behaviors than career readiness. Preparedness for the three components of education was not affected by the learning category of the participant, such as talented and gifted (TAG), general education, special education (SPED), or at-risk.

### **Theme 2: Being Prepared or Unprepared for the Real World**

The preparation or lack of preparation, for the real world was captured through exploring the participants' experiences with all three components of education. Participants were divided about whether or not they'd been prepared for what they called “the real world.”

*Academics: Participants experiencing academic support in becoming prepared for the real world.*

The question of being academically prepared after leaving K–12 school resonated with the same 15 (60%) of the participants who had reported feeling supported with their K–

12 education. Most of these individuals not only graduated from high school on time but also planned to pursue postsecondary education after leaving prison (see Appendix J for Perceived Academic Preparedness of Participants). While the classroom experiences of the participants may have varied, the connections they made to their learning in preparation for their future were somewhat similar, in that many of them reported having been academically prepared by their K–12 school. The perception of being academically prepared was interpreted by some participants as their being academically inclined in multiple areas of curriculum. Jacob, for example, reported himself as an identified talented and gifted student.

Jacob was a 28 year old male, who earned a diploma at his hometown high school. Jacob had received a full-ride scholarship to a state university only to find himself incarcerated before earning a degree. He was furthering his education through academic opportunities offered in prison in hopes of returning to the university upon his release from prison. Jacob was very eager to talk from the moment our interview began. It appeared important to him that I knew his being in prison was not a reflection of his intelligence. Although the crime of the participants was not asked about in the interview questions; yet, Jacob immediately offered an explanation for his imprisonment: “I was motivated by school. I am going to tell you why? Is it okay if I ad lib?”

I answered with a nod of my head and stated: “You can say whatever you want.”

Jacob quickly responded:

In school I had a full ride scholarship to the state university so I went to the university. I was very gifted in school. So, I usually associated my school and money together. Like I say, I love money, and I say you, you get the NBA or the NFL, you know, which is rare, you have to have education, to get far in life. So, me,



I always wanted a suburban lifestyle but my problem was, I wanted it, those things now, instead of waiting until later, so you know, so I worked so hard in school I always thought it would pay off in the long run. So when I got to the university, you know what I mean, I am in the freshman year, I am in the dorms, you know, I see how people live, I mean [I'm] into Ramen noodles but they [other people] are going to new places, you know to get something to eat, and you know, this is how I wanted to be living now, and like we say, [the] high-end lifestyle. You know, they say you can't live a champagne lifestyle on a beer budget, you know what I mean?

“Yes,” I said, to which Jacob promptly followed up his question to me: “And so, I started doing other things to get me to that champagne lifestyle faster.”

Jacob continued to share how the different facets of his K–12 education experiences prepared him for the real world. Academically, he reported participating in his school's K–12 talented and gifted program. He perceived he had received a very strong K–12 education because of the opportunities his school's talented and gifted program gave him:

I think my vernacular group, you know, learned different words, and being around different teachers that had more intelligence, and I think that's about it, you know, the more educated you get, the more wisely you get through life.

Jacob believed that he was intelligent and that the more education he attained, the smarter he would become in navigating life. Jacob's belief that academics came easily spoke to his overall belief that his K–12 school prepared him for college: “High school was good to me. You know, I am not one of those people with too many regrets.” Jacob accepted his

responsibility for being in prison and relayed that his academic preparation did not play into his incarceration: “I had my own money, you know, but I was greedy.”

Even incarcerated, Jacob had confidence in his academic ability, yet took responsibility for his prior behavior. Jacob stated that the more education he obtained, the wiser he would become helping him navigate life. While some readers might feel this optimism is unwarranted, given that Jacob is now incarcerated, he believed that his academic education would assist him later in life.

Jamie, a 19 year old young woman who graduated on time from her high school, had similar perceptions of her academic preparedness and also identified herself as having been a talented and gifted student. Jamie was a fresh faced individual who seemed very proud of her academic abilities even though she had to finish her high school graduation requirements behind bars:

I graduated in county jail. My crime happened in November. And I had a full semester left of work to do and once that crime happened, it was on a Sunday night. From that day on, my teacher stuck by me and brought my school work to me. Faithfully, every couple of weeks, she would come up and check with me and reiterate everything that I was doing wrong [with school work] and she just helped me, and I got my diploma in honorary absence.

Jamie appeared to understand the significance of her education and its meaning. When asked how she perceived her academic education had prepared her, Jamie responded:

I may not be able to use it [academic knowledge], like, today but I know that further on in the future, like, I am going to have, like déjà vu and be able to recollect, and be

like, ‘Oh, my gosh, that is what the heck they were talking about!,’ and it will click, and I will be able to use that.

Jamie had aspirations to earn a college degree: “As a high school graduate, I stress on what I am going to have to do to in college.” While Jamie was not fully able to use the extent of her K–12 knowledge in prison, she did acknowledge her academic ability:

I am writing a memoir on my life, writing a book, but obviously that is not going to finish [her life is not over]. I am not going to finish with that until I am older. But I have started with that, and so that’s all that matters on that, just like I said, things, like I am going to paint on a side job, but for a main career, probably counseling.

Jamie had experienced great tragedy during her life. She told me her crime was violent and that she knew she still had a chance at reestablishing herself when released from prison.

Jamie described some of her crime but to protect her identity, this study did not elaborate on the details of the crime. Jamie believed her K–12 education provided her with the knowledge to continue her education after prison and become a successful adult. Jamie also hoped to implement her academic skills in the future. While there were other individuals who reported themselves as identified talented and gifted K–12 students, there were also participants who were served through general education and believed their K–12 academic experience sufficiently prepared them for adulthood.

David, for example, was a 21 year old, general education student who was very animated with his expressions. Throughout his interview, the tone of his voice mimicked his physical movement. His exaggerated animations helped me understand the importance of what he was explaining believed about his education. David stated that even though he

moved frequently, the schools he attended provided him a strong education. He attributed his success in school both to his academic abilities and his habit of finding one teacher in each school he attended that he could relate to and who allowed him to stay connected to school.

In speaking of one teacher who kept him connected to school, he said, “He [Mr. W] would stay after school with me just to teach me stuff that wasn’t even in our schooling [school day].” David spoke of Mr. W with great fondness in his voice about how Mr. W seemed to be the one teacher that helped him connect to school and learning. The significance of a teacher offering help resonated with David because he appreciated a teacher taking outside school time to help him learn. David went on to describe how the teacher had created this type of learning environment within the classroom, too, by encouraging peer responses from all students when one student was confused or had a question:

It was cool to see that if someone didn’t get something, the whole class, we would all [say], “Well, this is how it clicked with me,” and they [the confused students] would get it before a class was over!

David enjoyed the way in which the students learned from each other. He believed this was due to the academic setting that his teacher established within the classroom that supported the learning needs of David and the other students. Whole group instruction allowed David to earn an education that he believed prepared him outside the K–12 school.

Theme one also found that students who identified as special education students perceived themselves as having been academically prepared by their K–12 experience. For instance, Kameron reported having enjoyed school for socializing: “Because I knew I could get along with, I mean, the nerds in school I knew, the jocks and stuff, whatever, you know the different groups you had in school, I talked to everybody.” Kameron was a 23 year old

man who knew he had struggled with his academics but believed he still prepared for the real world regardless his academic ability:

Because I knew I could get along with, I mean, the nerds in school I knew, the jocks and stuff, whatever, you know the different groups you had in school I talked to everybody. I didn't judge anyone; I didn't pick on no one. I didn't use their kindnesses for weaknesses. I didn't, I wasn't that, that wasn't me.

Kameron understood that his personal/social behavior could help him navigate life.

Kameron did report that even though he found learning a new academic curriculum difficult, he was provided the opportunity to learn with teacher support: "I got along great with teachers and I just, it was a lot about myself." Kameron continued by offering his explanation of the meaning behind "myself":

A lot, I mean, I did realize that you got to be able how to talk to people and you have got to show a lot of respect, I mean, you have got to show respect to get respect. I knew going to school who I didn't want to be. I didn't want to be a bully. I didn't want to be the person who always has something negative to say and just complains about everything.

Kameron perceived his academic support as something that his teachers did not have to do but wanted to do because they liked him. Kameron went on to say: "I can't remember a teacher that didn't like me." Kameron connected his academic support to the personal/social support that he received from his teachers. The connection he had with his teachers sustained his academic efforts enough for him to continue learning: "They [teachers] just could break it down to where I could learn it better." Kameron admitted that he did leave school before

graduating, but maintained that his teachers' efforts helped him learn to the best of his abilities.

The participants who understood themselves as having been academically capable perceived that their teachers had supported their interest in learning. This study acknowledges that the academic capabilities of students vary in ability. However, research question two focused on the foundational knowledge provided to the participants and their perceptions as to the support they received with their academics.

*Personal/social behavior: Participants experiencing personal/social support in becoming prepared for the real world.*

The question of how prepared the participants perceived themselves to be with their personal/social behaviors found that 10 (40%) of the participants felt that their K–12 education had adequately prepared them for the adult world personally or socially (see Appendix K for Perceived Personal/Social Behavior Preparedness of Participants). While their exposure to personal/social behavior education varied, the connections these individuals made to their personal/social behavior preparation were somewhat similar. The participants reported receiving support from teachers and/or participating in school activities such as athletics. Hanna, for example, described her personal/social behavior school experience as one that had helped to overcome her shyness. Hanna believed her connection to school activities had helped her learn to socialize and develop more self-confidence: “[I became] active with, with other people. I was rather shy, really a homebody. I really [didn’t] go out.” Participating in school activities such as basketball, softball, and swimming supported Hanna’s personal struggle of being shy and also provided her a structured environment in

which she could engage with other peers, increasing her socialization behaviors, while under the supervision of an adult, the coach.

The participants' responses also suggest that K–12 students' personal/social behaviors could be developed through school supports. Anna, for example, was a 25 year old female who graduated from high school and continued her education while in prison. She received academic support in the K-12 general education setting. She remembered her personal/social behaviors had been met mostly through outside school activities and with specific school staff. During our interview, she occasionally dabbed her eyes with a tissue as she spoke of her childhood experiences:

I spent a lot of the time the counselor's office with personal issues at home or stuff like that, because, like with my family it is kind of has been legally in a lot of areas, so before my brother and I had hit school, they [the teachers], they knew my family. Anna attributed her participation in a school support group to her personal/social behavior development, as her attitude suffered when her family problems increased: "I had to go to different groups and stuff because of my attitude and YSI [Youth Service International] also—that was more from attitude and my outlook on life. So, I went to those groups." Anna not only participated in a support group, but met with her school counselor to better understand her struggle with her personal/social behavior:

A lot of the teachers at my school were in fact very, I would say personally, involved, you know, if there was [help] whether it be, in my life. They would help me through it [family issues]. I spent a lot of the time in the counselor's office with personal issues at home or stuff like that.

Anna's support with her personal/social education came from multiple areas of her K–12 school. She understood how to access help or support when needed, though she later admitted that she hesitated to ask for help: “Well, for me, it's not that I couldn't, I just didn't want to, like, I, was stupid, maybe.” Anna believed that when a student asked for help, the teacher might think the student was incapable of learning:

Because like when I couldn't like, I couldn't grasp what we were doing [in class], I would like, give up. Or, I would quit and they [teachers] would like keep pushing me to do good and they would try to explain it to me and I'd still get it. And I wouldn't still, wouldn't get it and would get irritated. They [the teachers] would tell me to like adjust my attitude some times.

Anna needed help to come in the form of teacher awareness. Anna contradicted herself in that she could ask some teachers for help but not others. When asked to clarify her contradiction, Anna replied: “It was...I mean there were some classes that I naturally had good grades, but the ones I was struggling in. Nobody [the teacher] held me accountable for that. I didn't even hold myself accountable.” Anna needed her teachers to ask her about her progress in school. She wanted teachers to hold her accountable as she had not developed the internal skills to hold herself accountable and so needed support.

Those participants who perceived that their K–12 school provided them with the education and support needed to develop their personal/social behaviors reported participating in school activities, support groups, and outside agencies. This study acknowledges that participants' personal/social behaviors were sometimes interpreted as a student's participation in activities. However, this study's focus is the classroom experiences that participants received and whether support from their teachers led to their possible



success with such activities. While there were no identical personal/social behavior experiences reported among the participants, the experiences of the participants concluded that when students have the opportunity to engage in activities a sense of belonging and a structure is created for them and perhaps allows them to feel connected to school. As a result, teachers might emphasize the importance of students participating in activities so that students can develop a better connection to school.

*Career education: Participants experiencing career education support in becoming prepared for the real world.*

As one component of a student's overall K–12 education, career education prepares students for the adult world by encouraging them to develop interests in possible future careers. While colleges and the workforce generally report that more and more high school graduates are leaving high school unprepared for postsecondary education or the job market (Bangser, 2008), six (24%) of these participants perceived that their K–12 school supported their career education in preparation for the transition to the adult world (see Appendix L for Perceived Career Education Preparedness of Participant). The other individuals, 19 (76%) reported that they did not remember receiving any K–12 career education. Tim, for instance, was a 27 year old man who graduated from high school with his class. He received academic support through general education courses. Tim believed he received no personal/social behavior education while in school. However, he stated that his career education needs were met by his high school's implementation of curriculum.

During our interview, Tim sat up in his chair as to show his pride in taking high school vocational education courses: "I liked to learn, I always liked to have information and being able to use that at different moments, even here [prison]. Tim reported that his

participation in these classes helped guide him toward a career in the Navy. He felt more engaged with his high school vocational technology classes and he could see the connection to his work in the Navy: “At first, it [K–12 career education] didn’t [help], so I went to the Navy. Then, I think it helped me with all my knowledge and stuff. I went to the construction battalion and ship-to-shore logistics.”

Tim also perceived that certain curricular areas of his vocational technology K–12 education had prepared him to develop a career:

I took construction and electrical [classes]. I will give you an example: welding. I went to the machine shop and [teachers] teach about the reason, explain the reason, and explaining the circumstance and radiuses and stuff how it applies to a machine. Tim stated that understanding how technology worked helped him advance in the Navy to a job he enjoyed as an adult. While his Navy career was derailed, Tim continued to focus on possible future career paths:

I like to work in the machine [shop] here today and go cook at night. I am kind of a real hands-on person, I like to do everything. Like in here I am chairman of an organization. It’s hard for me to relinquish control of certain areas. I just like to do it all. So, when I get out [of prison] I think I would like to go into business, like going into the restaurant business.

Tim’s perception was that he received foundational knowledge needed to help him carve his career path.

When I turned Amber’s attention toward her preparation in career education, she recalled that many teachers during her K–12 school experience had made the work in the classroom relevant to possible future careers: “A lot of teachers, when we were doing any

class, their main goal was to broaden our horizons when we left school, you know?” She continued to explain:

I remember hearing a lot of things, “Even though you know you may not think this is going to be important, or that it is going to matter in the long run, going to, as far as learning. Even though this may not seem important, but if you want to get into politics, then U.S. history is going to be, or government, so this is going to be something that you might need to know about.

While Amber’s interests were in nursing, she did understand that her education played an important role in her future career:

I want to, while I am here, retain as much educational level that I can. Before catching the crime that I am here on, I went back to school at [a community college] and got my CNA and was working on my LPN.

Amber added that her K–12 career education experiences focused on vocational and professional considerations that sought to prepare her for her future. She acknowledged that her career education was important in that the significance of that education remained with her as an adult: “Because I know today that education is a must-have; you have to have education and without education you will not prosper in life.” Amber articulated that she understood that her K–12 career education provided a foundation that would assist her in adult life despite being incarcerated.

Joe was a 27 year old male who had graduate from high school and took the concept of making learning relevant as student one step further. When asked whether his career education experience helped him prepare for his adult life, Joe, a rather down-to-earth guy, simply answered: “Yeah.” When I asked him to elaborate, Joe responded:

I think I was an okay student. I had my ups and down with learning. Sometimes it was kind of hard to catch onto some things but I got, I got the hang of it. I was in the BD [behavior disorder] classroom. In the morning I did the vocational, automotive and small engines. I started with small engines, went to, to vocational auto or, motor awareness and then started working at a motorcycle shop for part-time after school to learn a little bit more hands-on about engines. But other than that, I think school was fun. It was easy. My strong subjects were like history, automotive, P.E., and some science.

Joe took a drink of water, and continued:

I will be honest with that. Without Mr. W. and Mr. P., I'd probably still be wandering around or wondering what I am going to be, doing something I am not happy with, you know. My grandfather always used to tell me, "If you are going to do something, do something you love," and that is why when I started work in the shop, it is not, it is not a career for me, it is a hobby. I am getting, I am getting paid to do my hobby.

Joe was clearly enthusiastic about his choice of career in the auto industry. He credited his K-12 career education as providing him the foundation he needed:

What I think the schools are trying to do, they are trying to set [us] up for what is going to happen in the future, our lives without our parents, and raising kids and stuff like that, like our-our ways to get careers, okay?

Joe perceived his K-12 career education had, in fact, helped him find a job that not only was he good at, but enjoyed doing to make a living. Like Joe, Mike, too, stated that not only was

he provided a good career education, he also understood how his teachers tried to provide him with career exploration experiences that would spark his interest in a career.

Mike was a happy and polite, 23 year old man who graduated from a large city high school. Due to family mobility, Mike attended three different high schools. When asked whether career education had an effect on his thinking, Mike perceived that he did not finish it formally through classes, but did receive on-the-job career education in a sort of internship experience:

My dad introduced me to [a] guy and I did an internship at the Association of School Boards for a couple of summers. I did reception and stuff, did some filing. [I] did some video producing. They [Iowa Association of School Boards] make, like, films for the school district and stuff like that, but my dad's friend was a great guy. I learned a lot of that and I also did printing and stuff like that, so I helped him.

Mike's experiences with his internship allowed him to build skills and a sense of what he enjoyed. The internship also helped him discover how his experience will assist him later with his life:

I am going to look at going to [a community college] when I first get out, just take my courses maybe even in information technology, which is like a wide-open field right now, just to build up some credit and stuff like that and do and go in that direction.

When I asked how his K–12 career education was supported in the classroom, Mike responded: They [the teachers] always had projects that moved you along to finally think you have to plan out [for the future]. Overall, Mike perceived his K–12 career education as having helped him develop knowledge to support possible future careers. Mike did not have

a specific career path identified. Although, he believed his K–12 career educational experiences opened doors to that kept his curiosity and determination to succeed alive.

The participants who reported having had K–12 education instruction for future careers identified a clear connection between career education and the adult world. Being exposed to different careers determined how prepared the participants felt for the real world. However, those individuals who reported they did not received career education instruction found to have a lack of connection between their learning and possible future careers.

*Academics: Participants experiencing limited academic support in becoming prepared for the real world.*

Of the participants interviewed for this study, 10 (40%) perceived that their K–12 education had not prepared them academically (see Appendix J: Perceived Academic Preparedness of Participants). Some of the participants reported having struggled with their academics to the extent that they did not graduate from high school. This study found that 70% of the individuals reported themselves as non-graduates and had either earned a GED prior to being incarcerated or were completing a GED during the time of this study. This percentage is significantly higher than Iowa’s average graduation rate in 2011 of 88.3% (Iowa Department of Education., 2011).

While consideration of the relationship between academic preparation and incarceration at the state level lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, a significant proportion of this study’s participants perceived deficiencies in their K–12 schools’ academic education. For example, although Natalie had believed some classes to have been worthwhile, she now expressed wanting to have had more out of school in terms of being prepared in core curriculum. “I didn't have teachers to help me, I didn't have, I didn't have

nobody to teach me what I wanted to be, or you know, how to complete my goal or how to achieve my goal of being what I wanted to be.” Natalie was a 25 year old female who failed to graduate from high school with her class. She attributed many of her life struggles as hindering her ability to succeed in school. She believed herself to be bullied in school, which resulted in her fighting back and ultimately dropping out of school. While in school, Natalie’s academic needs were met through general education. During this interview, Natalie was in the process of earning her GED through the prison education system. Natalie was very fidgety throughout our conversation. Recalling school seemed to resurrect old memories:

I don't know why I didn't like school. Part of it was, just being, being on my, you know being on my own and not having to follow anybody’s rules but my own and then just having people not pay attention to what was going on with me so I didn’t really care for school that much.

Even though reflecting on the past was somewhat painful for Natalie, she did not hesitate to share her K–12 education experiences.

Academically, Natalie struggled through school. She believed she could not overcome her academic deficiencies because she was unsuccessful at attracting teachers’ attention. Instead of asking for help, she acted out and became a victim of bullying: “I got picked on a lot. Just a lot of students bullied me and there was lot of fights at school. I was always getting expelled or getting in-school suspension.” The results of Natalie’s behaviors led her to believe that teachers were ignoring her: “I had trouble learning. Some of my teachers didn’t really pay attention that much.” Natalie continued to describe her academic experience:

Well, for me, I require a lot of attention to study and to keep my mind on one track.

My perspective on teachers is...they don't want to see what is on the inside. They are only seeing what is right in front of me and they are not actually wanting to know what is going on, like, for my case.

Natalie stated that she continued to slog her way through her academic education until she left school prior to graduating. As Natalie described:

Finally I just decided to be a rebellious teenager. I ran away and started a life on my own. With nobody showing me how to live or what to do in situations that I got myself into that were bad situations. I didn't have anybody to teach me wrong from right. That is why I sit here today.

Natalie simply quit school and her life, believing that she could survive in the adult world with a minimal education. As a result of not being connected to school and her academics, Natalie believed she was ill prepared to navigate life and found herself incarcerated as she felt her family did not provide her the support she needed as a young adult. Likewise, Natalie perceived that her school was not caring or helping her develop skills needed in the adult world.

Curtis also believed his K-12 education did not academically prepare him prior to leaving school. Curtis remembered having struggled with his academics throughout school. He could even remember the courses that proved to be the hardest for him to learn: math and writing. When asked about his academic education, Curtis responded with: "It was kind of difficult." He went on to say: "The hardest class was math and writing. I hate to write." Curtis continued to describe his perception of why he was not academically prepared: "The teachers didn't listen to what I have to say. They used to just come and knock on my desk to



wake me up or talk loud.” When asked how he would have liked his teachers to approach him, Curtis said, “Talk to me more, talk directly to me. Both during class, after class, before class, stuff like that.”

Because he did not enjoy his academics, Curtis tried to hide in class by placing himself as far from the teacher as possible. As noted earlier, he said, “I was always that kid that sat way in the back of the class, not up front.”

Mike, Natalie, and Curtis all felt they could not have achieved academically because the classroom setting did not fulfill their needs as students. They felt that their teachers did not understand them as a person, which resulted in their feeling ignored and uncared for by their teachers. Furthermore, some of the other participants, such as Curtis and Carrie, stated that they did not see the importance of school and its connection to their future. The importance of academics was not made clear to the individual by their K–12 teachers; hence, they did not make an effort academically. As Mike revealed, “I didn’t find it important. I didn’t find it relevant.” Regardless of whether the participant struggled or misunderstood the school curriculum delivered to them, if the individual did not see the importance of learning, they did not try—which resulted in their perception that they were not prepared for the future. What is important is what can be concluded from the participant’s message to K–12 teachers about the delivery of instruction in the classroom. The participants who did not feel prepared academically reported being disconnected from their teachers and classrooms.

Despite the fact that the percentage of participants being academically prepared was roughly equal to those who felt unprepared, all these individuals found themselves in prison. Participants who believed themselves academically prepared also believed they were capable of learning new concepts, leading to their need to continue their education. As Jamie stated:

As a high school graduate, I stressed on what I am going to have to receive to get into college. I am in prison right now, so I got set back a little bit. There is a bunch of hoops I will have to jump through to even be able to attend college while I am here. I actually got good grades, so that felt good to be able to get good grades.

Jamie believed that she had received the needed education to continue on and earn a college degree. Similarly, Jacob also perceived himself as having earned an education that would support his continued learning: “I definitely think I was viewed as very inquisitive. I always asked questions. I definitely participated in what was going on [in the classroom].” These participants’ K–12 school experiences provided them with the confidence needed to continue their education beyond high school. These individuals also hoped to establish a career they were passionate about. Whether it was a career that required a college education or a vocational class, their K–12 school experience led to their self-perception of being prepared as a learner. However, the participants who reported their K–12 education did *not* academically prepare them struggled to focus on an area of employment and found themselves disengaged from school and thus not learning. While these individuals overall had no identical experiences of feeling unprepared academically, those who felt unprepared divulged academic experiences that were similar in that they were not engaged in their K–12 education and often felt invisible in the classroom.

*Personal/social behaviors: Participants experiencing limited personal/social behavior support in becoming prepared for the real world.*

This study found that most of the participants believed that their K–12 school experience had not prepared them with personal/social behavior education (see Appendix K for Perceived Personal/Social Behavior Preparedness of Participants). Furthermore, some

participants, such as Tina, believed their K–12 schools never offered personal/social behavior education.

When asked about her perceptions of her personal/social behavior education, Tina, a 29 year old woman who had spent her time in foster care, could not recall receiving any personal/social behavior education: “No, not that I remember.” Yet, when given a moment to reflect, Tina reported that she felt emotionally disconnected in the classroom:

A lot of things, you know, learning math, the English, at school was cool and stuff like that. But it didn't teach me any survival skills. It didn't teach me how, you know, it didn't teach me any of that. I wish I was more educated on my thoughts, my feelings, and the law.

Tina believed that academically, she had success in school. Her personal/social behaviors were the skills that she lacked as person: “I did pretty well in high school. My grades was never the problem. It was more behavior problems, problems at home. My favorite subjects were like subjects like English. I always excelled in writing.” Tina reported that if her teachers would have extended themselves beyond simply teaching academically, it might have broken down her barriers, allowing her to be more vulnerable with them and to develop her personal/social behavior skills:

It is cool to be smart, but there was really never any counter-balance, no really, ‘If you do this, this happens.’ You know, there was never no really [personal/social behavior education]—that was just something I had to learn. I had to learn on my own, the hard way.

Tina's expressed that the survival skills were a need she did learn, but after she left school:

I just feel like if we were taught at an early age how to control or stop a thought before it turns into a negative action, it would have kept a lot of us from being in prison or making bad decisions.

Tina's perception was that had she known how to deal with her personal/social behaviors, she might have not been incarcerated.

Amber was similar to Tina in the perception that her personal/social behavior was difficult to develop. While Amber felt that her school attempted to offer support with her personal/social struggles, neither the school nor individual teachers or counselors knew concretely how to educate her in overcoming personal/social behavior obstacles: "I don't think that [the school] really did [teach about personal/social behaviors]. Right now, today, I don't." Amber believed that her school experience did not provide her with the skills to deal with the personal/social dilemmas an adult can encounter in the real world. While Amber appreciated the fact that someone in school would listen to her, she wished a teacher or counselor would have incorporated personal/social behavior instruction into her schooling. Learning about her own personal/social behavior at an earlier age might have assisted Amber with her decision-making process, thus avoiding prison.

Stephanie took a similar point of view as Tina and Amber: her feeling unimportant and not being noticed by her teachers had led her to believe that she received no personal/social behavior education while in school. "I just feel like, well, I feel like they [teachers] just gave up on me." Instead of letting teachers know how she felt, Stephanie acted out, which resulted in her being kicked out of school: "I don't think my teachers knew everything when I was struggling. Like when I got pregnant at 12, that was the most

embarrassing experience in my whole, my entire life.” Stephanie went on and shared her perspective on how her teachers might have helped her develop her personal/social behavior:

I don't know like if they [the teachers] knew us [students] on a more personal basis than just like going to teach the class and that was it. I think they [school] need to have self-esteem classes, too, because if you don't have self-esteem, then your self-esteem is low, then like, I felt that I was different. I felt like if I really reached out, then I would be really looked down upon so, but I think my problem was my self-esteem was so low. If I cared more about myself, I think I would have tried to do more for myself.

Stephanie stated that she simply could not care for herself because she did not know how to feel good about herself. Like the other participants who faltered in their personal/social behaviors, Stephanie's struggles with her personal/social behavior continued until she was arrested. She perceived her K–12 school experience as one that did not model or teach how to develop a sense of well-being that would support her in adult life. However, Stephanie did think she was making progress in developing more self-esteem due to the courses she took through the prison system: “I took this women's class and it was one of the—they don't have it no more, but it, this psychologist taught it and it was basically on self-esteem and it taught us about our bodies and all that.” Stephanie credited prison with taking the time to help her understand her personal/social behaviors and grow as a person.

The perception of being unprepared with personal/social behaviors by the participants' K–12 school was expressed by the majority of participants. While none of these participants had identical experiences of perceived unpreparedness, their perceptions were similar in that they reported not receiving support on personal/social behavior and believed

their K–12 education lacked engagement and connection between students and teachers. Knowing that the participants believed their connections to school came through their participation in activities, teachers can help students seek opportunities to become involved and perhaps, deepen their overall engagement with school.

*Career education: Participants experiencing limited career education support in becoming prepared for the real world.*

Participants' perceptions of lack of career preparation ranged from a simple statement of having received "nothing" to a more detailed explanation describing the absence of curriculum (see Appendix L for Perceived Career Education Preparedness of Participants). For instance, Hanna's explanation of what she thought to be an insufficient career education:

They [teachers] don't really prepare you for that. You have to go out and job search. And, I mean, I don't know how it is in school now, but when I was going to school, they didn't teach you how to do résumés and stuff like that, so [pause] at least the school that I went to.

Hanna recalled never having been exposed to career education. This lack of exposure left her feeling as if she were on her own to seek a future career. While career education should be part of a student's K–12 education, Hanna perceived that her school counselor did not implement career exploration.

Like Hanna, Susan recalled the feeling of helplessness and being left alone to figure out her future career:

Here I am 18 [years old] and I am freaking out, I have no idea, I thought once you get 18 and are an adult and school is out and I have no idea. At home I didn't have anybody that, I didn't have anybody care about even my driver's license.

Susan truly felt unprepared to transition to adulthood. She thought her life would fall into line as she turned 18. Unfortunately, Susan found herself at a loss as to how to proceed. Not knowing what she wanted to do for a career was only one piece of Susan's helplessness. Having not acquired a driver's license only added to Susan's vulnerabilities into adulthood. Now in her 20s, Susan still had not earned her driver's license. While Susan did say that she has aspirations to start a career in social work, she still did not understand the components of starting a career.

Agreeing with Susan's perceptions, Matt also wished that he had received a better career education. Matt was a 24 year old who earned his high school diploma a semester early through his school district's alternative school. Matt was confident from the moment our interview began, as he viewed himself as intelligent. He did not like the big school experience, which led to his decision to finish his high school education at an alternative school. Matt felt he received little assistance in his personal/social behaviors as he believed that his teachers and other school staff never cared for him as a person. When I asked Matt to reflect on his K-12 career educational experiences, he recalled limited career education during his time in school:

Maybe when I was in middle school and things like that, I went to career fairs. But I didn't understand that stuff. I really didn't, I remember thinking, I was just thinking about that the other day, that when I was a kid and we went to those career fairs, I didn't know, I just knew that it was a career fair. I didn't know the things that, you know because I was so young, I thought, 'Well, I am not going to have a job for many years.' When you are young, it feels like an eternity before you are going to ever have a job.

Matt went on to share how he did connect some of his learning to the present, yet still did not know exactly what to do with his knowledge:

You know I have never done much as far as work, but you know, I do. You know, I don't know I can't remember when or where or how, but you know, I am really good at math, you know, and that came from school. Sometimes, I don't think about it but if I hear somebody bring up something about, let's say World War II, it clicks, you know.

Ultimately, Matt's personal anecdote provided insight into the potential benefit of offering such programming:

Maybe if they [school] would have caught me at a younger age [grade school] where I would have tried, got more on the right path toward learning and understanding how and why I am going to need these things in my life, and by the time I got a job, I might have applied myself more.

Like many students, Matt's K–12 career education was almost nonexistent, so he believed himself to be unprepared to seek a career of interest and the schooling required to support such a career. However, prison had given him the opportunity to develop an interest in cooking: "I want to take culinary arts class. Before I was here I had a job as a cook. I love culinary, I love working with food, so I want to take that." Matt knew he would need to be employed once he exited prison, which resulted in his taking advantage of the career education that prison provided to inmates.

The majority of participants for this study perceived that they had little to no career education while attending K–12 school that prepared them for the working world. As a



result, these individual participants had dreams of finding a career but still did not understand how to properly prepare themselves for such jobs.

The answers to research question two demonstrated how some of the participants believed their K–12 experience prepared them in regard to the three components of education because of how they could connect with their learning and teachers. This connection was developed because the opportunity to engage in learning was provided by these participants' teachers. Those individuals who did not feel prepared with the three components of education reported that they struggled to engage with their learning and teachers. The lack of a connection occurred because these participants, 52% or more, felt unheard by their teachers, which then led to their inability to ask for help. Being unable to ask for help and engage with their teachers and learning left these participants feeling as if their education had not prepared them with the three components of education.

**Research Question 3: What Did Participants Think Their Schools Could Have Done Differently To Better Prepare Them in the Three Components of Education: Academics, Personal/Social, and Career Education?**

The findings for research question three were constructed from interview questions nine through 14 (see Appendix for Participants' Interviews: Coding Table). I analyzed word use in the transcripts, and then categorized those into action words that best described how the participants thought their K–12 school could have better prepared them regarding the three components of education. Data for research question three were analyzed through a coding table (Appendix I for Participants' Interviews: Coding Table) and resulted in keywords of advice for K–12 teachers on how to better prepare students in the areas of

academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. These words offer insight into students' perceptions of K–12 school.

Theme three: Keywords of Advice for Educators found that there was a collection of words used to describe the participants' perception of the ways their schools could have better prepared them in the areas of academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. Commonly, the participants' advice to their former schools and teachers provided evidence that some K–12 students do not feel prepared to transition into adulthood. The participants wanted their schools and teachers to know that there are methods by which they can support current and future students. This study found that merely listening and showing that a teacher cares about all students acknowledges that the words of the participants were heard. If teachers treated all students as if they were the only student in the class, then all students would have the opportunity to become connected to school and develop competencies with their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education.

### **Theme 3: Keywords of Advice for Educators**

In order to answer research question three, I analyzed the participants' interview data from interview questions one through 14 and identified keywords that emerged as an overall theme (see Appendix A for Interview Questions and Appendix I: Participants' Interviews: Coding Table). While research question three could be answered through different analyses, I captured excerpts from each interview and compared them to the information from the other interviews. Collectively, the interviews produced keywords used by the participants to answer research question three. Table 4.3 provides the number of times that keywords were used and the percentage of participants who used each keyword to create theme one. The

keywords describe the overall perceptions of the participants with regard to how teachers could better assist all students.

Table 4.4

*Significant Keywords from Participants' Interviews*

<b>Top Keywords Used by Participants</b>	<b>% of Participants Who Used Each Keyword</b>
(1) Understand	100%
(2) Help	92%
(3) Ask	84%
(4) Care	64%
(5) Listen	56%
(6) Pay Attention	52%

Participants were asked how their teachers could better prepare students in academic, behavioral/social, or career education. This question provided the participants the opportunity to express their words of advice for teachers. They not only provided logical solutions but also revealed many deep feelings from their past. Tears were shed by some of the participants when they stated their perceptions of how their K–12 school could have better implemented educational programming. Others became slightly angry when they recalled their K–12 education, saying that they might have experienced different outcomes if their education had met their needs. Regardless of the individual emotion, the opportunity to finally voice their perceptions about K–12 education seemed to empower these individuals. These words could be interpreted as a plea for K–12 teachers to hear these participants' voices from afar. The following keywords are discussed in order of use, beginning with the most used word: "understand."

### ***Understand.***

The first keyword that emerged from the participants' interviews was "understand." The word "understand" was used by 100% of the participants, as each participant referenced the word "understand" when answering the interview questions. Joe perceived that his frustration with his academics went unmet in the classroom: "I don't understand how you [the teacher] can help me understand this?" Joe wanted to make a connection with his teachers so that they, in turn, could feed his passion for learning. Joe gave an analogy from *The Simpsons* to explain his thoughts:

Hey, whoa, open your eyes! It is like the similar episode of *The Simpsons*, the Simpsons, where Nelson wants to build bicycles, like chopper builder. He wants to build custom-built bicycles and he wants to get a person to spot him fifty bucks to start his dream. Guess what! He starts it, you know, and he [Nelson] was a bully in all the episodes of *The Simpsons*. Then all of a sudden he changed his ways to build these bikes because he found a passion, you know.

Joe's use of *The Simpsons* illustrated how Joe needed his teachers to understand what he was passionate about learning. As *The Simpsons*' character found a passion for fixing bikes, Joe wanted his teachers to understand areas about which he was interested in learning. Joe believed that if his teachers had understood him, then they would know what he wanted to learn about and how to spark his passion in learning.

Matt, too, struggled to be understood: "They [the teachers] just didn't understand." The need for teachers to internalize the word "understand" is evidence of how the participants' voices need to be heard and also acknowledged. Matt needed his teachers to reach out to him so that he knew they understood his needs: "Maybe like I said, it may, if

they [teachers] would have approached me in a different way, I would have reacted different and they, then they would have. I think they were good teachers, they just didn't understand." Matt felt that teachers understanding his academic needs and personal/social needs would have helped him develop the connection he desired to school.

Susan reflected that in her experience, not one of the teachers had understood her academic, personal/social behavior, and/or career needs. She stated how she wished teachers would have responded to her: "Just an understanding like, letting them [students] know, hey, I understand home life is not right." Susan believed that if teachers had understood her more, she would have been able to connect with the teacher and the school. For Susan, the degree to which a teacher would connect did not seem to be the issue. As she believed, she simply needed the teacher to understand her needs with all three components of education.

The word "understand" resonated with all of the participants in how they perceived the lack of understanding as not answering their K–12 learning needs. The keyword "understand" also connected to five other keywords or phrases: help, care, ask, listen, and pay attention.

### ***Help.***

The second most expressed word was "help." "Help" was used by 92% of participants. The word "help" was described by participants as a lack of assistance from teachers, or it was admitted that individuals found it hard to ask for help within a classroom. However the participants perceived "help," it was evident that the word "help" was a key component that should be explored to understand how to better support K–12 learners.

The perception of how difficult it was for a student to ask for "help" was described by Hannah, who reported: "It was hard to ask for help [for anything in school]." When asked

why she found it hard to ask for “help,” Hannah replied:” If a teacher, personally if I, if I go in class and I feel like the teacher doesn’t care, then why should I care if my teacher doesn’t care about helping me?” Hannah interpreted the teacher’s not caring for her as the teacher not wanting to help her. As a result, Hannah believed her teacher did not care for her, but could never confirm this perception. Hanna’s perception, however, was her reality. She felt ignored by the teacher and did not have the personal/social skills to ask for help, resulting in Hanna’s interpretation of the lack of “help.” Hannah’s interpretation of her poor performance in school led to her to believe she was not capable of achieving the three components of education.

Anna, too, had difficulty in asking for help: “I really, it was hard to ask for help because there was such big classes.” Because of the class size, Anna felt as if she were a number and not a student. She did not qualify for other academic supports, as she reported she was a general education student; thus, she perceived herself as neglected by teachers in the classroom. Like Anna, the participants who hesitated to ask for “help” struggled to connect with their teachers. Reasons from other participants for not connecting with their school experience ranged from class size, to being shy, to being misunderstood by teachers. The level of the participants’ abilities did not affect the perceived lack of “help,” for, as stated previously, 92% of the participants self-reported the lack of “help” with the three components of education.

Asking for help was not the only struggle the participants perceived. They also perceived a lack of care from the adults at school. Many participants believed the teacher simply needed to notice that students needed help. A few of the participants perceived that the teacher did not care to help them, such as Joe: “All she did was sit at a computer and play

with her computer and when a child, if one asked for help, [she'd say] 'Figure it out for yourself, it's [the assignment] not that hard.'" Joe's interpretation of this teacher was that she truly did not care, since she treated teaching as simply a job. Joe continued:

Nobody asked [if I needed help]. I think they knew [I did], because I had gym class open and another period of the day I was helping out the janitor and I got credit for that, going and helping her for an hour and I would leave, I would go smoke.

This experience led Joe to believe that his teachers did not assist students: "They [the teachers] really didn't do anything to help." Teachers who do not reach out to students thus appeared as if they did not care about "helping" students.

Increasing teacher–student communication can bridge a partnership between the teacher and the student and develop a deeper level of understanding by each person (Mitra, 2008). Fortunately, this study also discovered that some participants experienced a teacher inquiring about their learning. Jamie recalled one teacher that she found she could ask for help:

She [the teacher] was able to sit down with me and whatever I needed help on, whether it was math or, you know. Even if it was an elective, she always helped me; she was very, very attentive when I talked to her. It wasn't just like, it wasn't just about school, it was about everything.

Jamie credited this teacher with helping her through all three components of education. Jamie had future career goals and was very driven to overcome obstacles in her life and find success. Jamie's final words about her teacher were: "She is the definition of human kindness," an accolade she spoke with great emotion.

**Ask.**

The keyword “ask” was used by 84% of the participants and was the third most used word. “Ask” was a word used to indicate the idea that educators need to question students about what they needed in relationship to their learning. Tina, for example, wanted her voice to be heard but did not feel comfortable approaching her teachers. She recalled: “No one really sat down and got the problem of why I acted the way I did or what caused me to not want to apply myself.” Tina believed that if her teachers had spoken to her as they checked her understanding of the lessons, she might have done better in school. As she stated, she needed a teacher to partner with her in learning instead of directing her learning: “Back then, I just didn’t [know], no one asked me, for one. I didn’t think it was okay to be smart.” Thus, Tina simply did the bare minimum to get through school: “I just did enough to get credits but I really didn’t do much to get what I needed. I never really did apply myself.”

Susan provided a perspective similar to Anna’s need to be asked whether she understood, but added the consideration that teachers also need to ask about students’ well-being: “No one [teacher] asked me. No one really sat down and got [to] the problem of why I acted the way I did or what caused me to not want to apply myself. Or, no one really asked.” When teachers only focus on delivering instruction to students, they may miss those students who struggle with their academics, personal/social behavior, and/or career education. Susan implied that simply asking her about her personal/social behavior might have helped her become more comfortable in, and connected to, school, in that a teacher would have opened the door for her to feel accepted.

Anna and Susan were not the only participants to speak about this experience of not being asked about their progress of learning. Marc echoed similar sentiments. He reported



that no teacher had ever approached him about his learning or well-being: “Nobody [the teachers] really asked me [about myself or school]. I can’t even remember once.” Marc went on to describe how no teacher had asked him about his personal/social behavior: “Once I had to attend all seven periods in my class day, so some classes I would go to, some of them I wouldn’t. I would show up late.” Marc stated that no teacher “asked” about his absence from class:

They [the teachers] would, I mean, I would get in trouble for it [absence]. I would see the administrator or whatever. Or get a referral [for] after school detention or whatever. But like I say, it was nothing they took further action on.

Further action for Marc eventually resulted in his working with the juvenile court, where, he stated, he finally found adults who would ask about his well-being. Working with the juvenile court gave Marc what he perceived as wanting—an adult that would ask him what he needed. Marc commented about how simply being asked by an “adult” helped him meet his own emotional needs. While he did not speak of school fondly, he could identify what he believed to be missing in his education.

Molly was an individual who was not shy. She was a 29 year old woman with a bold personality. She earned her high school diploma as was extremely proud to announce that she had graduated with her class. Molly held a tissue to her mouth throughout our interview as she had all her teeth removed a few days before our interview. She apologized for her struggle to annunciate her words but wanted to share her perspectives on her K–12 experiences. She received academic support through her school’s at-risk program and believed her personal/social behaviors were supported by school activities and outside

agencies. Molly believed her school attempted to offer career education intermittently throughout her K-12 education.

Molly believed that teachers should open the door for students to use their voice, regardless whether a student asked or not: “If it was me, I would pull them [students] aside and be like, ‘Are you understanding this’ or ‘Do you need more help’ or ‘Is there something to it?’” Molly believed that by simply asking students about their understanding of the schoolwork, teachers would provide the opportunity for the student’s voice to be heard. Molly furthered her explanation by providing her own experience:

Like in what class was that...I want to say my English classes or history, no it was history. The teacher would not pay attention if you were asleep, didn't care. Would constantly have his back turned to the class, one voice [the teacher voice].

I could hear the frustration in Molly’s voice as she recalled how the only voice in the classroom was the teacher voice. It was evident that Molly had wanted to be included in her education as she remembered another experience with her physical education class in which she was not asked, but told how her education would be implemented:

It was just the whole dressing out [physical education clothes] and not being able to do the things like I wanted to do them instead. And, like for them [teachers] telling us, ‘You have to do it this way, you have to do that.’ Well, maybe I can't do it that way, you know, because there are certain things since I am so little that I can't do. I have trouble with, like the sit-up stuff here, I cannot use it [exercise equipment] I have to get on the floor and do them [exercises] because my legs are too short, I can't reach it [the floor].

Asking students about their learning or personal/social behaviors was important to these participants. Asking about them would have made the participants feel acknowledged by their teachers, which might have resulted in their being better connected to school and perhaps have increased their success with the three components of education.

*Care.*

The keyword “care” was the fourth most word stated by 64% of the participants as a word used to suggest ways in which schools could better prepare and meet their K–12 needs. Understanding how to “care” for students was articulated by Kenny.

Kenny was a 26 year old male who was so anxious to share; he came to the interview with notes. He had take the time to read and re-read the study’s information and consent forms to which he carved out his thoughts on paper to ensure he was prepared for the interview. Entering the interview room, he fervently shook my hand, ready to begin his interview.

Kenny thought of himself as a “bad kid” in school:

I was a bad kid in school. There is no other way to put it. You know, I didn't want to listen. There was nothing that you guys [general teachers] did, that...I didn't like authority. I don't care who you were, I don't care how much you ordered me. I just didn't care, and, it was all about me. I was just selfish .I wanted to do, what I wanted to do.

Yet, despite being a “bad kid”, Kenny still had the need to be cared for by his teachers.

Kenny stated that his motivation was closely connected to whether a teacher cared for him: “There were a few select teachers that actually cared to sit down and talk to me, you know, or listen to me.” Kenny interpreted his teachers taking the time to talk with him as

caring for him. This was an important aspect of Kenny's K-12 experience, but one that was provided by very few of his teachers. Kenny explained in definitive terms that teachers' lack of care might even be a factor in tragic events that affect schools:

You [have to] care, if you have a heart, and if you, if you really know what you are doing, you can see what kids are doing, you know? I bet if somebody would have sat back and paid attention on what was going on with that Columbine deal, they would have seen it [student shooters], you know?

Kenny was angered by the thought that teachers did not care for students. His connection with "care" and the Columbine shootings spoke to his passion about the need for care in school.

Another student, Stephanie, argued that when students feel connected to school, it personalizes learning and ultimately provides students with the care they need. Stephanie believed that students would learn better "if they [the teachers] knew us on a more personal basis than just like going to teach the class and that was it." Like Stephanie, David also felt that "care" was necessary for students. However, David took the idea of "care" further and equated care with a family unit: "That would look great if they [the teachers] just supported each student, each student, the way they supported their family." David felt that if his teachers had provided him support like a family, then his teachers would have been connected better to his learning.

The word "care" was perceived as a missing initiative by most of the teachers in these participants' schools. Much like the word "help," "care" was seen as a way teachers could better meet student needs.

***Listen.***

“Listen” was the fifth most used word, in that 56% of the participants spoke to express their perception that teachers had not always heard students in the areas of academic, personal/social behavior or career education needs. In explaining how listening encourages students to connect to school, Jacob believed that when teachers not only listen but show students that they are listening to them, students become active in their participation: “I think when a teacher listens to a student, it makes a student more vocal, being heard.” Jacob’s statement described how he perceived a teacher as needing to provide students with the opportunity to express their thoughts and be heard within the classroom. Jacob also related the idea of teachers’ listening to parenting: “You know it [school] almost is like parents in the home, you know, when parents listen, you know, kids come to them more and talk about more than [they do with] the parents who know it all.” Jacob believed that students who were listened to would also become more vocal in their learning. Providing an avenue for students to verbalize their opinion would have allowed Jacob the setting he needed to participate fully in his education.

Not listening was also interpreted by participants as teachers not being aware of students. Kameron simply wanted to be heard so that he would know he existed in the classroom. Kameron wished: “They [the teachers] would have listened more to what I had to [say].” Kameron continued: “Maybe I could understand that I knew what I was saying, going on, you know, maybe help me out to where I could understand stuff.” Simply listening to Kameron might have boosted his confidence in his learning. As Kameron described: “You know something has got to be a balance [between teacher and student], but it would be nice to be heard and told what is going on, you know.”

For her part, Jamie expressed having wanted teachers to be aware of the many students within the classroom. She believed that teachers should “listen” to all students: “They [teachers] also have to know that [there] are the other half of the class that are listening, that [students] are wanting them[teachers] to interact.” Jamie perceived that many students went unnoticed because the teachers did not take the time to listen these students.

The keyword “listen” thus encapsulated the participants’ perceptions that teachers could better support students by listening to their needs, which in turn might better support students in the three components of education. “Listen” was just one of the emerging themes that the participants revealed as a need to be seen and recognized by their K–12 teachers. The necessity for the participants to be heard or listened to is interpreted as making room for the other person and staying aware of the other person by paying attention and respecting the other person, regardless whether it is your student or not (Palmer, 1998). The need of the participants to be listened to illustrates how they perceived their K–12 teachers as not understanding who they were or what they needed to be successful with their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education.

***Pay attention.***

The sixth keyword that emerged from the participants’ interviews was a phrase: “pay attention.” This phrase was used by 52% of the of the individuals interviewed. “Pay attention” described the perceptions of the participants in regard to their K–12 education and the need of students, such as Carrie.

Carrie was a 26 year old woman who did not graduate from high school. She was in the process of earning her GED in prison during this interview. She received K-12 academic support from the special education classroom. Carrie could not recall receiving any

personal/social behavior or career education while attending K-12 school. Upon our meeting, Carrie was quite reserved as if afraid to answer an interview question wrong. Sensing her uneasiness, I reassured her that what she shared was valuable information to which she responded, “I have anxiety.” I told her that was okay and she did not have to answer any questions she did not feel comfortable with answering. Carrie looked at me for a moment. Taking a big breath, she seemed to relax a bit and recalled:

Like probably, in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade middle school, maybe, like 6th or 7th grade middle school, when I really started coming into my own and recognizing myself as person. I was really goofy and like the class clown for a while. And then, once I got to high school, I started getting in trouble.

Providing this information brought a slight smile to Carrie’s face and with that, our interview went into full swing.

Carrie, who felt almost neglected, perceived that her teachers simply ignored her: “They [the teachers] wouldn’t pay any attention to me at all.” Carrie further explained why she longed for her teachers to pay attention: “I wish I wouldn’t have done it but I went through middle school completely copying off other people’s answers.”. Carrie perceived her teachers did not know how much she struggled to learn different academic concepts. She gave a math example: “Learning something like algebra was like learning to read Chinese. It, it was... I would rather give birth than have to go through that, it was so hard.” Carrie suggested that paying attention is a behavior that teachers should improve upon to help their students: “Just pay attention more and when they [the teachers] notice things, do something about it, let somebody else know.” Carrie believed that had her teachers paid attention to

her, she may have done better academically. Carrie thought her personal/social behaviors could have been better met if her teachers would have paid attention to her actions.

Cam stated a similar idea: “I needed more attention.” Cam was a 28 year old male who dropped out of school and earned his GED prior to being incarcerated. Incredibly polite, Cam answered my interview questions with a “yes, ma’am” and “no, ma’am” throughout the conversation. Cam reported that he loved to read yet found math as his hardest subject. He chuckled when I agreed with him on math being a hard subject. Cam received academic support through general education classes. He believed his personal/social behaviors were supported by the school and activities. Cam felt he was never exposed to any K-12 career education.

Cam believed that he did not know how to seek attention in a proper way, so he was ignored by teachers. Cam described how, if given the chance, he would seek attention as other students did in his class. He went on to say there was a point in his K-12 education that he was like the other students “Once upon a time I did get good grades and then, like I say I started being lazy and thinking it was all going to be given to me.” Cam continued, “I was able to do it [school work], I just started being lazy. That’s it. And then, I like, once I started being lazy that was it.” I asked Cam what his teachers did about his laziness, his reply, “I needed more attention.” Cam could not explain exactly what that attention would look like for him, which may be an example of how his personal/social education had not taught him how to properly gain the attention of others.

Similarly, Kenny stated the importance of teachers paying attention to their students: My opinion of “pay attention means,” you know what I mean, you kind of, you [the teacher] see the little things [turning in homework] that they [students] do and you



just, you pay attention to it. You remember it, you know. You see if it is anything outside the norm, you know, and if it is something that that person wouldn't normally do, you may not have to bring it to their attention at first.

Students need an adult to pay attention to them, but in a supportive light. These participants perceived that support from a teacher can develop a student's connection to school, helping students grow in their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education. Teachers who provide students constructive feedback are providing the need for "paying attention" to students. "Paying attention" can then create a school environment that possibly enhances a student's personal/social behavior in a supportive manner (Resnick, 2000). A supportive experience with personal/social behaviors, or academic or career education, can assist a student in developing self-confidence and the enjoyment of school (Lange & Sletten, 2002). As the participants described, when a student believes a teacher is paying attention to their academic, personal/social behavior, or career education, they can flourish in the K–12 setting.

The six keywords that emerged to answer research question three provided a lens through which to view the participants' perceptions on how to better meet the academic, personal/social behavior, and career education of students. Research question three was also answered through the perceived academic, personal/social behavior, and career education preparedness of participants (see Appendix J, Appendix K, and Appendix L for Perceived Academic, Personal/Social Behavior, and Career Education Preparedness of Participants). This information supported the keywords that emerged in the participants' interviews. Understanding keywords and the perceptions of the participants in relation to the three

components of education might provide teachers a clearer picture of how to meet the needs of all students.

**Research Question 4: Did the Participants Perceive Their Voice To Be Heard by Their Teachers During Their K–12 Experience?**

The findings for research question four were constructed from interview questions three, 10, and 11 (see Appendix A for Interview Questions). Furthermore, the keywords that resulted from research question three support research question four in that the collection of words spoke to the level at which the participants' voices were heard by their teachers. Phrases from these individuals were also analyzed, and then captured to conclude that the answer to research question four were needs, or wants, of the participants as they relate to the student voice being heard. For example, needing or wanting, the teacher to ask about their academics was a recurring theme that identified the fact that the participants did not believe their teachers always heard their voices.

Phrases from the interviews were categorized into action statements that best described how the participants perceived their voice to be heard during their K–12 school experience. Research question four was answered by one emergent theme: The voice of the participants was perceived as being unheard during their K–12 school experience in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. These phrases offer more insight into students' perceptions of K–12 schools in that teachers who better understand the importance of listening to the student voice might enhance the K–12 student experience. The results of K–12 students being heard might lead to better preparation with student academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education, thus leading in turn to an easier postsecondary transition.

#### **Theme 4: Hear the Student Voice**

Research question 4 found that of the 25 participants in this study, 13 (52%) of them perceived their voices as being unheard by their teachers during the K–12 school experience in regard to the three components of education. The keywords “understand,” “listen,” and “ask,” which were gathered from the individuals’ interviews, further demonstrate how the need for the students’ voice to be heard is an important factor of a student’s overall K–12 education. While 52%, or slightly more than half, of these participants reported that their voice was unheard by their K–12 teachers, further evidence found that the keywords shared by the participants supported the need for teachers to listen to the student voice. As described earlier in this chapter, all of the individuals stated the need to be understood by their K–12 teachers. The participants’ descriptions of how their teachers did not respond to their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education needs answers research question four. The participants perceived that their voices simply went unheard or were silenced by teachers. This led to further disengagement for many of the participants. As Joe reflected, “I don’t understand how you [the teacher] can help me understand this [three components of education]?” Joe and the other participants did not believe their teachers to be incompetent; the participants simply had the need to be understood. As Mike summarized, “I would have reacted different then they [the teachers] would have. I think they were good teachers; they just didn’t understand.” Mike viewed his teachers as competent in their ability to teach content but believed they did not attempt to understand his needs as a student. The way in which Mike responded to his teachers was a result of his perception that they did not understand him as a person.

Offering students a structure in which their voices can be heard can provide the further support needed in the development of their academics, personal/social behaviors and career education (Mitra, 2004). However, K–12 students might not comprehend that a support such as hearing the student voice can be established within an educational structure. Thus, students can interpret the lack of their voice being heard as something they have done personally, or not done, to create an environment in which they will not be listened to. As described by the participants, the structure in which a student is allowed to communicate can affect their perceptions of their K–12 education.

While in school, some participants struggled to find their voice and ask teachers for assistance. Others simply felt ignored and took a “why bother” approach to school. Either way, the majority of participants did not perceive that they had a voice in their K–12 education. For instance, Hanna was a rather shy individual who believed her shyness prevented her from asking for help. Hanna wanted her teachers to reach out and help her, and did not feel comfortable in using her voice: “It was hard to ask for help.” When asked how her teachers viewed her as a student, Hanna softly replied, “Quiet, very quiet.” In turn, Hanna stated that she did not feel she could voice her thoughts in school because she was never sure the teacher wanted to hear her.

I was one of the students that was really over-looked. I just, you know, I was real passive. Like I said, I didn't, I didn't like to ask for help because I was so shy, so I was like, whatever, I figured it out one way. If I didn't figure it out, I just didn't do it. Being unable to express her needs resulted in Hanna's withdrawing from school, lowering her academic achievement: “I always did my work and did very well at my schoolwork, but I just didn't participate as far as being outwardly talkative.” Hanna continued: “It is kind of

like out-of-sight out-of-mind [with teachers], you know.” Hanna knew she had a hard time sharing, but as she stated, could not find her voice on her own because of feeling invisible in the teacher’s eyes.

Curtis was similar to Hanna in the perception of not having a voice heard. Curtis was also a person who perceived that if teachers allowed the student voice to be heard, students might change their path, resulting in a better outcome: “Maybe everybody wants their own opinion; if I could probably put my two cents in toward making it to my destination, it probably would have changed it [the future], you know.” Curtis felt that had his opinion about his education been included in the decisions about his learning, his future may have had a different outcome. Reflecting on his past K–12 educational experiences provided Curtis with the opportunity to articulate how he wanted to have a voice in his education but no adult would provide him that opportunity. Curtis now believed that having his voice included in his K–12 education might have deterred him from making poor choices and landing in prison. These participants believed that the more a teacher would listen to and hear what students were saying, the more apt students would be to use their voice in the classroom, thus resulting in students’ better achievement with the three components of education.

Other participants also expressed their perceptions of how their voice was not heard through brief phrases that addressed the need for K–12 students to be heard. I specifically asked each participant research question 11: *How could teachers better support students in the areas of: academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education?* This question sparked a flood of advice. Participants eagerly offered their opinion on how teachers could

better support students. The findings concluded a great need for teachers to use their words to draw out the student voice.

The following quotes were captured from the participants' interviews and illustrate what the participants perceived as a need to be heard by their K–12 teachers. Each quote contains keywords that focused on answering research question four. Some of these phrases repeat the key phrases mentioned above in research question three as advice for teachers, but here these quotes are directed particularly at specific strategies that teachers and schools could employ to hear the student voice.

***Ask:***

Jamie: “Ask them [students] what is going on, you know, ‘why aren’t you coming every day?’” And,

They [teachers] need to sit down with their children. Like with their parent-teacher conferences they need to definitely utilize that. Like before when they parent-teacher conferences they need to sit down with the child sit or sit down with the teenager, even it is a college professor, sit down and ask them what is going on at home. What can we do that takes your mind offer of things at home?

John: “It [asking] was never the norm.” And,

“Ask them [students] what they like.”

David: “They [teachers] need to go and research more and ask questions to students.”

Tina: “No one [teacher] asked me. No one really sat down and got the problem of why I acted the way I did or what caused me to not want to apply myself. Or, no one really asked.” And,  
Just ask. A lot of the times, you can probably get an answer, you know from a closed mouth kid, and a lot of kids, I am just not going to volunteer information because a lot of the kids when there is something wrong they are taught just not to talk. They are taught just to shut down. But you just don’t tell people your business, you know, but if a lot of teachers would have shown interest, it probably would have made me push a little harder, you know.

Tim: “I would say them probably reaching out and asking if I wanted help or asking why I was going down that path.”

***Hear:***

Anna: “They [teachers] didn’t take what I said into consideration because they thought I could do it. They need to be more observant and have more open ears.” And,  
“Because somebody [teacher] should talk to them [student] and somebody should listen, yeah, I think that’s the answer.”

David: “I had numerous teacher conferences with the principal and my mother, my parents, all of us around but never got nowhere...They weren’t trying to listen [to me].”

Kirk: “You know something has got to be a balance, but it would be nice to be heard and what is going on, you know?”

Jacob: “I think when a teacher listens to a student it makes a student more vocal, being heard.”

Cam: “So I think if they [teachers] listen and sit back and figure out what the kids need and stuff [learning], it would be a lot easier. That way you could see where the kid was coming from.”

***Help:***

Natalie: “Why they wouldn’t help?” And,  
 “I don’t know why they [teachers] wouldn’t step in or why they wouldn’t help or what was going on with them.”

“Because they [teachers] could have easily stepped in and helped me and get the situation under control.”

Marc: “They [teachers] should probably be more aware and reach out and help some people [students].”

***Care:***

David: “Show them [students that you [teacher] cared they would eventually come around.”

Research question four provided an understanding of how the participants believed it was important for a teacher to hear what students are saying or are not saying in regard to the three components of education. The participants’ key words also illustrate how teachers need to initiate the student voice being drawn into the classroom. The keywords ask, hear, help, and care depict how the participants had a need to be understood by teachers. The participants communicated their need for a teacher to understand them as a person.



Allowing students to have a voice in their education in regard to their academics, personal/social behavior, and career education, as these participants conveyed the desire to do, can come in many forms. As these participants described, the acts of understanding, helping, connecting, asking, listening, and paying attention to students might provide students with a format in which their voices can be heard. These participants perceived that when student voices are heard, they are more apt to connect with teachers, resulting in better academic, personal/social behavior, and career education results.

### Summary

This study found that the phenomenon of the K–12 educational experiences encountered by participants who ranged in age from 18–29 years old, and who were both male and female, to be one lacking the student voice, thus resulting in the students feeling the need to be understood. Perhaps surprisingly, neither age nor gender played a role in the reported experiences of these students.

The phenomenology of studying the participants' K–12 school perceptions provided insight to the academic, personal/social behavior, and career education experiences of students. While this study found that some of the participants perceived their K–12 school experiences as supportive, the overall findings of this study concluded that the participants perceived a need to be heard by their K–12 teachers.

Being heard can come in different forms by way of teacher implementation. This study found six keywords that identified, through the participants' interviews, the possible needs of K–12 students to be heard by their teacher. The keywords discovered were - understand, help, ask, care, listen, and pay attention. These keywords answered this study's research questions that sought to understand the K–12 perspectives of participants.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

*I just feel like if we were taught at an early age how to control or stop a thought before it turned into a negative action, it would have kept a lot of us from being in prison or making bad decisions.*

Incarcerated individual, 2012

### **Purpose of the Study Restated**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the K–12 educational experiences of current prisoners who ranged in age from 18–29 years old. The study sought to give voice to these individuals who were incarcerated to capture perceptions of their K–12 school experience. This study referred to K–12 students because all the participants in this study attended a traditional K–12 school but not all had completed the thirteen grade levels required to earn a high school diploma. Therefore, the intention of this study was to understand how K–12 schools and their teachers might adapt and improve education for all students, no matter what grade level, in regard to academic, personal/social behavior, and career education.

This study's survey tool solicited the participants' perceptions specifically to answer the four main research questions:

- (1) How do the participants describe their learning experiences in K–12 school?
- (2) To what extent do participants perceive that their education prepared them in the areas of academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?
- (3) What do the participants think their schools could have done differently to better prepare them in the areas of academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?

- (4) Did the participants perceive their voice to have been heard by their teachers during their K–12 experience?

The answers to these research questions are all interrelated and somewhat overlapping. However, this chapter will break down each research question and discuss it individually yet remain cognizant that there is a connection among all four research questions. This chapter provides a discussion of the theoretical significance of the study, the emergent themes from the study, a discussion of the research questions, the practical significance of the study, and recommendations for teachers and other organizations that might benefit struggling K–12 students. Last, this chapter provides concluding remarks about this study's possible effects on the three components of education, the insights the participants provided to this study and possible outcomes for future K–12 students.

### **Understanding the Study's Phenomenon**

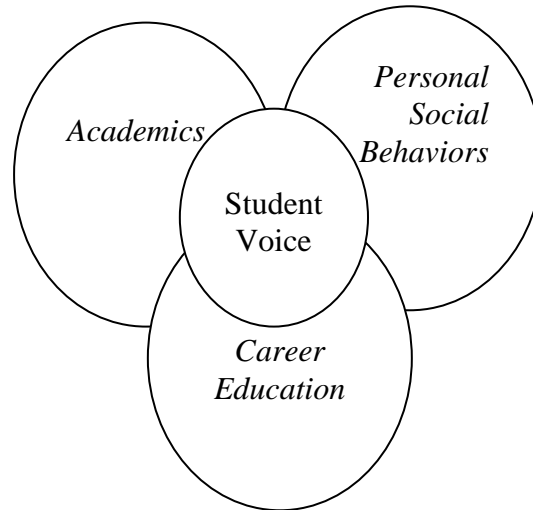
The phenomenon of the struggling student is relevant to this study in that the experiences of the participants represent the struggling student as a purposeful sample population. The participants served as a purposefully selected example of the phenomenon of struggling students as they have not been had the opportunity to be heard in regard to their perspectives in relation to the three components of education. Attending K–12 school is primarily an everyday occurrence for most American children. Acknowledging the perspectives of the participants might better inform teachers how to reach all K–12 students, increasing academic, personal/social behavior, and career education outcomes. This study's phenomenon can be the vehicle through which teachers begin to develop their understanding of how important is it to incorporate the student voice in the classroom.

### **Theoretical Significance**

In parallel to the literature reported, this study, too, revealed that student perceptions of their K–12 education in regard to academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education can be interpreted in different ways. This study explored the perceptions of students in relation to how they interpreted their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. This study's framework was built on the competencies designed by the State of Iowa that included the three components of education. The student voice was continually found to be the key ingredient in how the three components of education were implemented with students. The findings suggest that listening to the student voice can provide teachers with a different lens by which to better educate students to meet their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education needs.

Currently, this study found that the Framework of Academic, Personal/Social, and Career Development Skills (Iowa Department of Education, 2008) focused on the delivery of a students' academic, personal/social and career education. These components are to be embedded throughout a student's K–12 educational experience. However, what this framework does not require is the inclusion of the student voice. Changing the framework to include the student voice might assist students in further developing skills needed for adult life. The student voice needs to be the overlying component that connects all three components of education. Thus, Figure 5.1 depicts how this study's framework might change its focus to include the student voice in conjunction with the three components of education.

Figure 5.1: The Student Voice and the Three Components of Education



The next sections will discuss how the student voice can be embedded into each individual component of education.

### **Academics and the Student Voice**

A K–12 student’s academic outcome is dependent upon a number of variables. Rightfully, how one student learns may differ with another student. Talented and gifted, general education, special education, and at-risk students all have different learning needs. Many teachers analyze student data to determine how to implement the best instruction for these students. Those teachers who listen to and include the student voice before, during, and after instruction are more likely to meet the academic needs of individual students. Student achievement, incorporated with the student voice, might further student academic development (Mitra, 2008). This study suggested that when students are given the opportunity to have a voice in how their instructional needs are being met, they might fare better academically.

**Personal/Social Behaviors and the Student Voice**

Students' connection to school is based on their perception of their experience. These perceptions are built on the personal/social behaviors and skills the students possess when they begin school. How those personal/social behaviors are supported and nourished depends on the education a student receives while attending K–12 school. As Hoy et al. (2006) explained, students need to feel optimism about being in school. Students who can recognize that their personal/social behaviors are being met with positive regard have a better chance of succeeding in school within their ability.

Teachers must begin to understand and focus on students' personal/social behavior skills to best meet student need. Personal/social behaviors are competencies that are crucial in adult life. Listening to students in order to better understand their perspective on how they feel about school will provide students a safe and caring environment in which they can flourish as learners. When a teacher knows, understands, and listens to their students' emotional needs, deeper learning and a better connection to school can occur (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Mitra, 2004).

**Career Education and the Student Voice**

One goal of a K–12 school is to prepare students for future careers. Throughout their schooling, students should begin to explore their interests and develop the real-world skills needed in college and the workforce (Bangser, 2008). When teachers help students connect their academics and personal/social behaviors to future careers, student engagement is more likely to occur (Kochhar-Bryant, & Heishman, 2010; Lehr et al., 2005). Teachers who include the student voice in career exploration take career education a step further by

deepening the students' career knowledge and perhaps light a spark in the students' career interests.

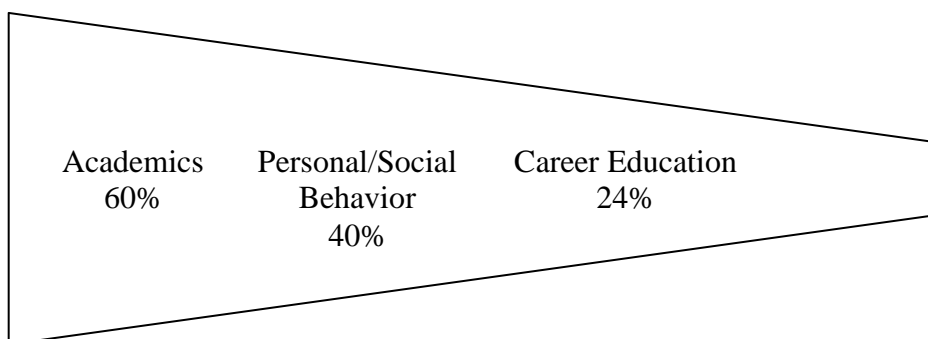
Students need the opportunity and encouragement to bring their voice into the classroom with all three components of their education. As discussed in previous research (e.g., Bridgeland et al., 2006; Britt et al., 2005; Mitra, 2008), the student voice is found to be of significant support for K–12 learners. Including the student voice in students' academic, personal/social behavior, and career education can deepen their connection to school and their teachers. The framework in which the three components are to be delivered to students needs to encompass the student voice. The state counseling task force could revise the model to incorporate the student voice throughout the framework. While this study does not provide specific means by which teachers or the task force should integrate the student voice into the classroom, it does address how listening to K–12 students may support more learners in their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education and how the framework should be adjusted to include the student voice.

### **Emergent Themes**

The theoretical significance of this study is that the student voice plays a major role in helping educators develop ways by which to increase student achievement within the three components of education: academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. The inclusion or lack of the student voice emerged through the themes found in this study: K–12 educational experiences were either supportive or non-supportive and student transition, students who were prepared or unprepared for the real world, keywords of advice for educators, and hearing the student voice.

This study found that within the emergent themes there was a tapering off of participants' perception of support or preparedness with each individual component of education. First, the component of academics was perceived as the main focus of the participants' K–12 educational experiences. Secondly, the findings found that the participants' perceptions of their personal/social behavior support or preparedness occurred but were not as solid in delivery as their academic education. Thirdly, the participants perceived their career education was almost nonexistent. Figure 5.2 provides an illustration of how the participants perceived a narrowing of the preparation they received in regard to the three components education. Academically, 60% of the participants believed their K–12 school experience prepared them for their future. Only 40% of the participants reported that their K–12 school experience prepared them with their personal/social behavior education. Little instruction occurred with the participants' career education as only 24% believed they had experienced career education instruction.

Figure 5.2: Participants' Perceptions of their Overall Preparedness with the Three Components of Education



This finding stresses the importance of how the student voice should be included with the implementation of three components. While K–12 teachers strive to attend to student need,



an awareness that students may possibly be lacking in their overall educational experiences needs to be brought to the forefront. Most people might regard the purpose of K–12 schooling to be focused on academics and not understand the state requirements of incorporating the other two components into a child’s K–12 educational path.

This study found that the perceptions of the participants might reflect the general idea that a school’s main focus is academic driven. As a result, the framework this study was grounded in needs include the study voice in its review. The overall outcomes for students will show minimal change if the student voice continues to be absent from the framework.

### **K–12 Educational Experiences were either Supportive or Non-Supportive**

This first theme emerged when some of the participants spoke of how they perceived their K–12 school experience as fostering a sense of enjoyment but this had no identified effect on how they transitioned to adult life. However, other participants reported that they felt inhibited in school and struggled to transition into adulthood. Supportive or non-supportive K–12 educational experiences expressed by the participants both pointed to the need for students to have their voices heard by their classroom teachers.

The participants who felt their K–12 education was supportive emerged when they believed that, academically, school was easy for them. While 15 of the 25 participants, or 60% these individuals could not identify the exact instruction that made them feel supported, their perceptions of support solely relied on the fact that school was easy for them. As the literature of this study suggested, students who were connected to school may have had the opportunity to be better connected to the classroom, thus creating higher academic engagement for these individuals (Marin & Brown, 2008). The participants who felt support also had the confidence to succeed academically. As Hoy et al. (2006) discovered, students

who believed themselves to be academically capable also believed that teachers provided more academic assistance.

Participants that perceived K–12 school as non-supportive often believed that their voice went unheard in the classroom. As Hall (2006) pointed out, when the student voice is not heard, students often fail to connect to school and so struggle academically. Of the 25 participants, 10, or 40%, reported struggling with feeling supported within their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. The findings from this study indicated that non-supportive school experiences can deflate student confidence in school, distancing students from their learning and, perhaps, making students feel like outcasts in the classroom. As Beckett (2008) pointed out, students who are provided with support can overcome barriers and better their chances of academic and personal/social behavior growth. Support can then foster growth with students and their career goals.

This study found that the educational level of the participants ranged from talented and gifted to special needs and did not affect their perceptions of feeling supported or unsupported in their K–12 educational experience. The findings from this study also contribute to the literature on the three components of education and the student voice, in that the inclusion of the student voice will support students in receiving a more affirming education with their academics, personal/social behavior, and career education. Also, this study offers teachers an insight into how to better support student needs with the three components of education.

### **Being Prepared or Unprepared for the Real World**

The second theme to emerge from this study was the perception of the participants concerning whether they were prepared or unprepared for the real world. The participants

perceived that their K–12 school experience either provided or did not provide them with the foundational knowledge to support them within the three components of education needed for real-world application: academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education.

This theme was important to the study in that it provided information for teachers to better understand whether their efforts in teaching the three components of education were being absorbed by students or were forgotten. The connection to student learning is initiated by the classroom teacher. Students who are unable to voice their educational needs often go unnoticed in the classroom, which can result in these students being unprepared for the real world. As the literature found, it is necessary for teachers to pay attention to students (Palmer, 1998). Failure to prepare students with the three components of education can eventually be costly, for unprepared students are more likely to become incarcerated as adults (Settersten et al., 2005; Western et al., 2003). This theme confirmed the need for students to develop a stronger connection to school to help them increase their knowledge and abilities with their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education and to be better prepared for real-world applications.

### **Key Words of Advice for Educators**

This study identified a third theme that emerged from the participants' interviews. Keywords of Advice provided evidence of how K–12 teachers might better prepare students in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. This study has contributed to the literature by highlighting that an understanding of what students need from their teachers may result in more students being connected to their school. As Marin & Brown (2008) reported, students who are connected to their school may improve their opportunities to be heard in the classroom, thus creating greater academic

engagement. Personalizing education requires teachers to communicate with students. This communication can only occur if, in return, teachers listen to the student voice. The keywords of advice for teachers helps them understand the need to create a classroom environment in which students' interpersonal and intrapersonal skills can be developed in order to prepare them for the postsecondary world (Bangser, 2008). As Mitra (2008) found in her research, effective teacher–student communication can create a sense of partnership that provides students with the platform to be heard by their teachers, thus increasing their connection to school. This study helps affirm the importance of the student voice through the keywords of advice captured by the participants' interviews, in that the keywords point to actions that teachers can implement immediately within their classrooms.

### **Hear the Student Voice**

The last theme to emerge from this study emerged from the overall perception that the participants were not being heard by their K–12 teachers. Over half, 52%, of the participants reported that their teachers did not listen to them in regard to their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. Astonishingly, all 25, or 100%, of the participants reported that their teachers did not take time to understand them as students. The perception was that understanding a student meant that a teacher would listen to the student voice to offer better support to the student. As the literature found, providing students with a structure within the classroom can assist students with developing their academics, personal/social behaviors and career education (Mitra, 2004). However, teachers need to communicate with students about the ways in which the classroom structure can provide them a setting in which they can have their young voices heard by the teacher.

This study supports the literature in that it established the need for teachers to hear their students' voices so that students would be more apt to connect with their teachers, increasing their achievement with their academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. As Bridgeland et al., (2006) reported, the interaction between teachers and students improves when students take on an active voice in their education, for they are more likely to connect with their teacher. This study also confirms the need for teachers to set up classroom structures in which students feel able to speak about their learning in a caring and safe environment so that growth in the three components of education can occur with all students.

### **Discussion of Research Questions**

The participants in this study represented a population of students who would have benefitted from improvement of the three components of education. Moreover, the voices of these incarcerated students offered a future warning to teachers: if struggling student voices continue to be ignored, students will stay disengaged in their learning. As a result, the students will continue to fail, both as students and as young adults trying to transition to adulthood, which may in some cases lead to their incarceration. Some students will continue to struggle in their efforts to connect with school, which will result in life hardships that place many of these struggling students at a higher risk of incarceration (Hirschfield, 2008). The findings from this study revealed the importance of hearing the student voice in the delivery of a student's academic, personal/social behavior, and career education. The answers to this study's research questions support the practical implications discussed later in this chapter.

## Research Questions

### *(1) How do the participants describe their learning experiences in K–12 school?*

Analysis of research question one provided an overview of the K–12 learning experience of incarcerated young people in relation to the three components of education. The study’s findings determined that the K–12 learning experience does not always lead to an outcome in which students graduate from high school and move on to college; in fact, the contrary result is more likely. The literature of this study stated that students who are more engaged in school are more apt to avoid incarceration (Pettit & Western, 2004). However, the literature also reported that neglecting the student voice could lead to gaps in a student’s overall education. These gaps may reveal that students have not yet mastered the different components of their academics, personal/social behaviors, and/or career education (Lehr et al., 2005). As a result of these findings, this study determined that even though some of the participants perceived themselves as being engaged in school, they also perceived that their voice was not heard by their teachers, resulting in their not being truly connected to school.

This study focused on the student voice in relation to the three components of education and not merely student engagement. K–12 students can be very involved with school but remain silent within the classroom. For example, a student who earns good grades and participates in activities may simply know how to “play school.” Gaps in K–12 students’ academic, personal/social behavior, and/or career education might occur when teachers neglect to include the student voice. The outcome of not listening to students in the classroom could possibly decrease student engagement and participation (Lehr et al., 2005). The participants were representative of K–12 students who are talented and gifted, general

education, special education, or at-risk. Their perceptions reveal how avoiding the student voice in the classroom can lead to gaps in a student's overall education.

***2. To what extent did participants perceive their education prepared them in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behavior, and career education?***

Research question two was answered by analyzing responses to selected interview questions six through eight (see Appendix A for Interview Questions) and by examining the tables on the academic, personal/social behavior, and career education perceptions of the participants (see Appendix J for Perceived Academic Preparedness of participants ; Appendix K for Perceived Personal/Social Behavior Preparedness of participants ; and Appendix L for Perceived Career Education Preparedness of participants ). Being prepared or unprepared with the three components of education was the emergent theme that answered research question two.

Academically, 15, or 60%, of the participants felt that their K–12 education prepared them for life after high school. Osgood et al. (2010) found that academic achievement is only one part of a student's education that is needed to be successful in adulthood. This study agrees with the literature because, while some of the participants perceived they had the academic knowledge needed for adult life, they were missing other components of their education.

This study's literature review found that students who are connected to school have a better chance of increasing their learning (Hill & Nave, 2009). Bangser (2008) stated that when schools provide students with a supportive environment, they can develop stronger interpersonal and intrapersonal skills needed for adult life. This study concurs with the

literature, in that only 10, (40%) of the participants believed that their K–12 education provided them with the skills necessary to support their personal/social behaviors. As Western et al. (2003) reported, students who are hampered in developing their personal/social behaviors may find themselves at higher risk of incarceration. This study agrees with the literature in that findings, again, indicate that there may have been gaps in the participants' education that might have led to their incarceration.

This study found that only 6, (24%) of the participants believed their K–12 school provided them with the career education needed to be prepared for adult life. Mortimer and Shanahan (2004) stated that no matter what subject area a teacher is charged with implementing, the teacher must connect students to that curricular area and future careers. These findings conclude that not all of the participants were exposed to career education, thus leading to gaps in their overall education.

Orchestrating students' learning with the three components of education can provide them with the necessary skills to become productive adults. The literature of this study found that when schools emphasize expanding not only academic but personal/social behavior and career education as well, students receive a more well-rounded education (Young et al., 2010). This study's findings indicated that some of the participants perceived themselves as having been prepared with the three components of education. However, the findings also suggested that there were gaps among the participants, as their voices were not part of the three components of education. The differences in the participants' experiences demonstrated whether or not the participants believed their K–12 experience had prepared them for adult life. The participants who described themselves as being prepared for the real world shared they had some sense of connection with at least one component of their



learning, but not necessarily because the teacher listened to their voice. Those participants who did not feel prepared through the three components of education reported that they struggled to engage with their learning largely because they felt unheard by their teacher(s).

***3. What Did Participants Think Their Schools Could Have Done Differently To Better Prepare Them in the Three Components of Education: Academics, Personal/Social, and Career Education?***

Research question three was answered by identifying the keywords found throughout the participants' interviews. Interview question 10, "What is it that you needed from your teachers?" provided this study with keywords used by the participants to describe their needs (see Appendix A for Interview Questions). In coding the participants' interviews, the words that transpired from interview question 10 were words of advice from the participants. Hence, the keywords of advice suggest how K–12 teachers might better prepare students in the three components of education: academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. The six keywords of advice allowed the voice of the participants to be heard in reference to the ways in which the three components of education could be better supported to meet the needs of future K–12 students.

The literature from this study supports the Keywords of Advice in that teachers who allow students a voice in the classroom help students become actively engaged in their learning and perhaps increase their connectedness to school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Mitra (2008) found that when teachers are open to the student voice, a stronger curriculum can be delivered to students because the teacher has a better understanding of student need. This study supports the research in that the Keywords of Advice are ways in which teachers

improve their practice of hearing the student voice and help students achieve at higher levels with the three components of education.

***4. Did the Participants Perceive Their Voice to have been Heard by Their Teachers During Their K–12 Experience?***

As the literature from this study found, the student voice in regard to academics, personal/social behavior, and career education can come in various forms. Mitra (2008) examined Whitman High School and concluded that student forums, among other venues, provided students a platform in which their voice could be heard. Other avenues for the student voice being projected have included student councils and various school clubs such as a mock trial. This study found that while the literature addresses schools that promote the student voice, not all schools allow students the ability to do so. Research question four found that many of the participants perceived they had not been heard by their teachers, yet there were those who reported their voice was heard, producing more of a connection to school. The keywords of advice found in this study might provide students a forum in which their voice can be heard, helping their sense of self-confidence, and thereby increasing their overall enjoyment of school. The end result of research question four is that when student voices are heard, they are more apt to connect with teachers, resulting in better outcomes from their understanding of the three components of education.

This study's findings indicated that students who believed themselves to have succeeded academically perceived their overall K–12 educational experience as having been supportive, and that those who could not get the academic support they perceived themselves needing found their experience to have been non-supportive. Regardless of the participants' K–12 learning experiences, the answers to this study's research questions provide teachers

with information that their current students might benefit from, in that it can support teacher instruction to be more meaningful for students. The most important finding from this study is that teaching should embrace what students say they need from their teachers and learning, which also includes understanding, care, and knowledge of them as people.

Education literature clearly indicates that including the student voice empowers students: they perceive that their schools care about them and their well-being, and they develop deeper connections to their learning in hopes of becoming a knowledgeable adult in regard to their intellect, emotional actions, and future career (Lehr & Lange, 2003; Swanson, 2010). This final theme is a simple yet powerful reminder of the emotional and psychological impact educators can have: K–12 students need school personnel to hear what they are not saying, see them for who they are, respect their student voice, and show them care. If students receive that care, their chances of success, at least in terms of academics and social behaviors, may very well increase.

### **Practical Significance**

Teachers can play a major role in developing supports that allow students the opportunities to be key players in the design and implementation of their education. As a result of this study's findings and discussion, four recommendations to K–12 teachers are offered. In order for teachers to meet the academic, personal/social behavior, and career educational needs of K–12 students, teachers must: 1) Provide opportunities for the student voice to be heard in the classroom; 2) Participate in professional development to gain a better understanding of student needs; 3) Continually examine student data to determine the needs of students; and 4) Assist school leaders in developing structures that include the student voice and that support all students.

**Recommendation 1:**

*Provide the opportunity for the student voice to be heard in the classroom*

Supportive school experiences of the participants may be driven by their academics, personal/social behavior, and/or career education interactions within the classroom setting. Generally, when the participants professed a connection to their school, they perceived their teachers to have heard them or acknowledged them as an individual. Understanding what students have to say within the educational setting might help students connect to the teacher, possibly supporting their enjoyment of school (Covington, 1992). Activities that provide students a voice help them become contributing members of their school.

The three components of education offer students a variety of skills needed for adult life. Academically, students can expand their knowledge to better support their efforts as adults. Reading, mathematics, and other academic curricular areas prepare students for their future. Classrooms that are constructed to empower students to participate in their own education also assist teachers in developing better curriculum and instruction (Mitra, 2004). By providing the opportunity for the student voice to be heard in the educational setting, teachers gain better insight so that their students' frustrations are addressed and needs met in the three components of education.

Teachers are the collectors and interpreters of a student's performance in the classroom. Using evidence-based programs that produce student data determines how a teacher will implement instruction with students (Lehr et al., 2005). This study found that the participants wanted to be heard by their teachers. Due to teachers' involvement with the delivery of academics, personal/social behavior, and career education, it is recommended that teachers be brought to the table with school leaders when developing new policies that

support learners beyond academic learning. The teaming of teacher and student will create the best possible scenario for students to excel with the three components of their education. Without the inclusion of teachers in the development of school policy, advancements in student learning might be minimal. The alternative is that nothing is done and conditions remain the same, and students will continue to be left out of the curricular equation. Restricting students from being heard can result in their disengaging from school, thus increasing their chances of being incarcerated (Pettit & Western, 2004). On the contrary, students who team with teachers on sharing their learning perspectives are apt to be more engaged with and committed to school (Mitra, 2008). These participants are an example of the importance of teachers' educating and acknowledging a student's personal/social behaviors.

As previous literature has noted, improving students' personal/social skills may deepen their competencies in working through emotional obstacles but may also help them develop an awareness of how to engage properly with others (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010; Meece & Eccles, 2010). This study found that the participants who felt support and a connection to a teacher reported that they felt knowledgeable in tackling their problems because they believed they possessed the personal/social skills to do so. Those participants who struggled to work through personal issues stated that they often failed to connect to a teacher, which might have contributed to their struggles with personal/social behaviors. Teachers who are more aware of the importance of their students' personal/social behaviors might be better suited to support a student, thus creating an environment where the student develops the feeling of "I matter" to the teacher and the class.

Support from teachers with student academic and personal/social behavior growth can support youth in their career education development. Students that have developed a sound academic background and personal/social behaviors will be better prepared with those soft and hard skills needed for future careers. The participants in this study reported that very few had the experience of career education while in the K–12 setting. It is recommended that teachers incorporate career exploration into their curricular areas in the hope that students will develop a better understanding of possible future career desires, become key players in their career exploration, instill a passion for success, and make connections between their learning and their future. While K–12 schools do not always incorporate the student voice in the decision-making process, the literature and findings related to this study provide evidence that the student voice needs to be heard by teachers. Integration of the student voice can increase academic achievement and student engagement (Mitra, 2008). Students who develop the ability to be participants in their education can also develop life-long skills that will assist them for life (Kochhar-Bryant & Heishman, 2010; Meece & Eccles, 2010).

This study acknowledges a sense of responsibility that needs to be initiated by the K–12 student. As found with the participants' interviews, some students blame their school or teachers for not knowing to ask about their well-being. This study does not imply that K–12 students need their hand held in order to navigate school. This study suggests that teachers need to acknowledge that their students might not have developed the abilities to voice their concerns, questions, or needs. Therefore, this study recommends that teachers incorporate the student voice with the three components of education to ensure that students develop their ability to communicate effectively.

**Recommendation 2:**

*Provide Teachers Professional Development to Gain a Better Understanding of Student Needs.*

Earning a high school diploma or developing one's personal/social skills will not keep K–12 students from possible incarceration (Swanson, 2004). Rather, the amalgamation of skills and resources from K–12 school provides a solid foundation for students with which to transition into adult life. Students' perception of the support or lack of support they receive from their teachers with the three components of education is vital for teachers to understand. Thus, it is recommended that the three components of education serve as a framework for future teacher professional development.

As this study found, teachers can provide instruction in all three components of education through professional development and the support of their district. Neumark (2007) agreed that teachers can address the three components throughout the curriculum to ensure that students receive the education necessary to becoming an employable person. This study recommends that a framework of the three components of education be used to support teachers in their knowledge and instruction of students in relation to their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education. The literature indicated that the use of a framework such as the Framework of Academic, Personal/Social, and Career Development Skill (Iowa Department of Education, 2008) might provide a guide for schools in implementing a comprehensive model not only for counselors but also for teachers and school administrators. Bandura (1997) agreed that when teachers can complement students' academic development with personal/social skills and career education, the students have a better chance of becoming productive adults.

Today's students often need support with their personal/social behaviors because understanding how to follow rules, develop friendships, and participate within a community are factors that many struggling students do not understand (Resnick, 2000). Students do not always learn how to navigate their personal/social behaviors at home (Britt et al., 2005). To support students, teachers need the opportunity to develop and incorporate methods to better meet a student's personal/social behavior education. Support such as a problem-solving group that integrates non-traditional programming for students might assist students in understanding the importance of the proper personal/social behaviors needed for the workforce (Oakes & Saunders, 2007). As the participants in this study reported, often teachers appeared insensitive to their needs, which in fact may have been the teacher not understanding student need or having access to programming that would support student need. To combat the potential disengagement of K-12 students, professional development for teachers might involve reviewing student data such as the *Iowa Youth Survey* (Iowa Department of Education, 2012), which collects data every five years from students in grades six, eight, and eleven to determine the overall social and emotional state of Iowa students. Understanding how students perceive their emotional and social health, along with developing knowledge of how to assist students, will help teachers better meet their students' personal/social behaviors and provide the education needed to support this component of education. It should not be assumed that students misbehave simply for the sake of misbehaving. There is presumably an underlying reason why the students' behavior is as such. As the participants pointed out, only 40% of them experienced support with their personal/social behavior education. Exploring student personal/social behavior data would support teachers in deepening their understanding of which students need support. This data



might also identify needed professional development to assist teachers in knowing how to help students with their personal/social behavior education.

As this study found, the participants were seldom, 40%, given the opportunity to explore future careers. Those participants who did engage in some type of career education identified the experience as more hands-on learning, such as vocational classes (e.g., automotive or foods courses), and that these occurred for a brief period of time. Professional development that provides teachers with the methods to incorporate curricula relevant to future careers will better meet students' educational needs.

**Recommendation 3:**

*Provide teachers the opportunity to examine student data continually to determine needs of students.*

Supporting disadvantaged students in “overcoming obstacles and succeeding in school is a central challenge facing many K–12 teachers. Simply providing students with a completion grade so they may advance to the next grade and eventually earn a diploma does not always mean that a teacher has sufficiently educated his or her students with the three components of education. The participants in this study provided an opportunity to understand the K–12 student needs better. In order for teachers to meet these student needs, the opportunity to examine student data on a continual basis must be provided.

While classroom teachers' main objective is academic achievement in different curricular areas, time must provide teachers with the opportunity to develop skills and strategies based on student data that meets not only the students' academic needs but also their personal/social behavior and career education. Teachers cannot focus merely on academic data; they also need to examine personal/social behavioral data to determine how

to better understand and meet student need. Teachers who show students that they care about them as individuals create a learning environment that fosters not only academic but emotional growth as well (Noddings, 1984). As instructional leaders, teachers must review student data and incorporate their students' voice to determine their readiness. Working with school counselors and school resource supports, and collaborating with parents will support teachers in analyzing and developing programming tailored to student personal/social behavior needs.

In examining the participants' perceptions of K–12 schools, students such as Amber might have benefitted from a classroom that incorporated her voice along with the instruction of her academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. As Amber stated: "I am all about that one-on-one thing with the teacher." This description of learning one-on-one would have provided Amber a more private setting in which she could share her learning needs with her teacher. As Amber went on to describe: "If I would have not been so shy and all that, you know, asked for help when I needed it instead of acting like I didn't, that teacher would have known that, hey, she is struggling." Amber knew she needed to have a voice but struggled to overcome her shyness and ask for help, which meant that she did not have a voice in her education, resulting in her not being engaged with her education. Students need a venue in which their voices are heard so that they can begin to take responsibility for their learning. This can occur by positioning the student as a partner with the teacher. Therefore, when teachers listen to the student voice, along with the examination of a student's formative assessments, they might uncover programmatic obstacles or shortcomings, such as a student's refusal to work. These programmatic obstacles or shortcomings are then better understood and maybe eliminated because the teacher now has the student's perspective to

better understand what the student needs.. The student perspective opens doors to needed change in all three areas of academic, personal/social behaviors, and career education.

### **Implications for K–12 Practitioners**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the K–12 educational experiences of participants to capture their perceptions of their K–12 school experience. This study was to develop an understanding of how a sample of K–12 students might perceive their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education. The intention was for educators to better understand how K–12 schools might adapt and improve education for all students in regard to academic, personal/social behavior, and career education.

While the findings of this study did not portray much difference between a supportive or non-supportive experience, the study did raise awareness of what K–12 practitioners can do to assist students with their wants and needs in the classroom. According to the participants, students want to be heard by their teachers. Being heard was described as a teacher's understanding, caring, asking, listening, helping, and paying attention to students. Educators need to comprehend that these findings do not mean teachers are not implementing their interpersonal skills. The important lesson from the participants' keywords is for teachers to understand that what teachers believe they are communicating to students might not always be received. Likewise, some students do not have the ability to communicate their need to be heard. The findings of this study reinforce the research shared in Chapter 2, and articulate how teachers can create a classroom environment that addresses a student's academic, personal/social behaviors, and career educational needs. The study's conceptual framework assembles many skills that K–12 students need to possess before exiting high school. Knowing that academics are the main focus of a school, student-centered classrooms

based on individual student need might strengthen academic achievement (Schmoker, 2011). As the participants stated, when teachers listen to students, students feel more connected to the classroom. Likewise, teachers can then adjust their instruction to adopt a more student-centered approach. The efforts to educate must incorporate a team of players who hear what students are saying and thus meet their educational needs.

The perceptions of these participants are not only a lens through which educational practitioners can examine the classroom experience, but also a view that can support all students within the K–12 structure. School leaders can use this study as a guide for determining professional development for school personnel and possibly future school policy regarding student personnel. Understanding why students display behaviors such as poor attendance may result in school leaders' changing student personnel policies to be more supportive than punitive. This would provide programming that offers students support with the three components of education. Professional development addressing supportive programming that affirms policy would then need to be provided to staff.

Professional development should incorporate ways to assist students and their families to understand the importance of school and how to take action in meeting student needs. Information from this study's literature review and findings indicates that K–12 practitioners can bridge the gap by providing 1) community partnerships with K–12 schools; 2) student forums within K–12 schools, all of which will continue to evaluate student data and build support for all K–12 students with their academic, personal/social behavior, and career education.

*Community partnerships with K–12 schools.*

K–12 practitioners can set the stage for community members by providing data on K–12 student performance. Areas such as career education might be better met when the community participates in developing methods to teach career education (Lehr et al., 2005). Whether through internships, job shadowing, or community members' sharing their career experiences with K–12 students, a school's community is an important aspect in educating students.

A school's community can also support students' personal/social behaviors through mentoring and understanding behavioral expectations. Many schools have mentoring programs in which community members are assigned a K–12 student. Lehr et al. (2005) stated that community members can provide mentoring programs that offer students activities and work study programs that are connected to caring adults. A mentoring relationship could provide K–12 students an adult whom they can trust and talk to about situations within their lives. The connections built through mentorships can also support a student's future academic and career education.

*Student forums within K–12 schools.*

As the literature stated (Mittra, 2008), student forums are a path that schools can take to bring the student voice to the forefront. Student forums can also develop stronger relationship between teachers, administrators, and students, thus allowing students to take ownership of their learning with the three components of education. Student forums may also provide a voice for those students reluctant to share their views individually with school personnel. Bjorklund (2011) stated that a child's school environment can have a lasting effect on students. To combat students' feeling unable to use their voice with their teachers,

teachers need to make a concerted effort to listen to students or else the delivery of the three components of education will remain static. Through the modeling of healthy relationships and proper communications, students can gain knowledge of how to navigate their world (Lehr et al., 2005). Arum and LaFree (2008) found that providing a setting in which students feel empowered to share and connect with their teachers can help avoid incarceration as adults.

### **Practical Implications of Using the Three Components of Education and the Student Voice**

As Mitra (2008) discovered, the climate of a school changes when students are given a voice in what happens to them with their academics, personal/social behavior, and career education. The student voice helps increase student engagement, which in turn can enhance academic achievement. Personal/social behaviors are better addressed when the student voice is included in the learning process. An awareness of how to improve personal/social behaviors will ultimately affect a student's career decisions.

The incorporation of the student voice, whether through interpersonal or structural instruction, has implications for K–12 schools. One role of the K–12 school is to help students develop skills that support their future (Deming, 2011). The development of competent academic, personal/social behaviors, and career skills may deter students from future criminal behavior. The findings of this study provide the possibility to produce change within the K–12 school system by merging the three components of education along with the recommendations from the student voice.

K–12 schools continue to reinvent themselves in hopes of better supporting their students (Sweeten, 2006). From flipped classrooms to integrating technology to student

forums, teachers want to find methods to help their students to succeed. As the Coleman Report (1966) found, the accomplishment of student success is met by today's teachers understanding the importance of the school environment and setting the stage for student success. The training and implementation by teachers of the three components of education can provide students the needed environment to achieve success in the classroom and beyond school. When the student voice is incorporated, students will perhaps become more engaged in their learning, resulting in their being better prepared for the future.

Incorporating the student voice with the three components of education can occur through school activities within and outside the classroom. As the data from this study indicated, classrooms need to be structured in ways that allow K–12 students the opportunity to be heard through teacher initiation. Likewise, K–12 schools can also set the stage for students to engage in school activities that provide them with the opportunity to develop life skills. Activities can range from student council to chess club to music and sports. As was the case with Mitra (2008), this study indicated the need for schools to provide the platform into which students can project their voice while developing their skills with the three components of education.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research needs to be conducted with K–12 struggling students who often fail to connect with teachers and their learning. A qualitative study with a K–12 school district that has a significant number of identified struggling learners could be conducted to help the district determine what three components of education need to be further developed for students. Iowa's *Guidelines for Serving At-Risk Students* (Iowa Department of Education, 2007) could help identify the risk criteria for students, and the *Iowa School Counseling, A*

*Program Framework: One Vision, One Voice* (Iowa Department of Education, 2008) could provide the framework within which a district could ground the research. For example, follow-up surveys from seniors or dropouts could provide a better understanding of their overall perception of the education they received from the school district, which would provide a stronger focus on how to improve professional development for teachers in the areas of the three components of education.

Another recommendation is for teachers to do an analysis of data from past and present years of struggling students identified through the *Guidelines for Serving At-Risk Students* (Iowa Department of Education, 2007) to determine whether professional development has an effect on better implementation of student academic, personal/social behavior, and career education. When teachers view the “what and how” of student data, they can support the needed changes (Bloom, 2010; Yoon, et al., 2007). Analyzing data developed specifically from such professional research might also hold teachers more accountable to implementing their new learning. This analysis would also allow teachers and school leaders an understanding of programming needs that support struggling students with the three components of education. This information would be more detailed in that a larger population of students would be studied.

This study only provided the participants’ perceptions of their K–12 school experience with the three components of education. A study that includes a larger population would better focus on school programming that is specific in nature. Studying a larger population might offer ways to better meet the needs of more diverse learners within a K–12 school.



## Conclusion

As the literature found, there may be a link between K–12 students who struggle with school and the possibility of their being incarcerated as adults (Kim et al, 2010). With the Iowa prison population continuing to rise (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2011), it is imperative that K–12 educators analyze how they are addressing the academic, personal/social behavior, and career education of their students. This study acknowledges the existence of outside factors such as substance abuse and poverty that contribute to reasons for which individuals become incarcerated. However, this study challenges K–12 educators to shift their foci to how they deliver instruction to students by making the student voice part of the process.

The average educational level completed by Iowa prisoners is reported at the eleventh grade, and the average Iowa prisoner reads at the ninth-grade level (Iowa Department of Corrections, 2010). This information alone shows the importance of addressing how K–12 education is delivering to students. Students' perceive their education in a variety of ways but this study suggests that the overarching need to be understood can be accomplished if teachers listen more to the student voice. Without a shift in K–12 educator thinking, the trend of incarceration rising among younger adults could continue and the result will have an economic and civic effect on society (Mitra, 2004; Settersten et al., 2005).

Understanding and allowing the student voice in the K–12 classroom could alter the course for struggling students by reconnecting them to school and their teachers (Bloom, 2010). As such, this study concludes that the efforts of K–12 educators who reform their practices with the three components of education will assist schools in developing effective

systems of support, and provide students with an education that increases their chances of a worthwhile life.

This study provides educators with recommendations that might change the shape of curriculum with the three components of education: academics, personal/social behaviors, and career education. The inclusion of the student voice in the development and implementation of the three components of education might create learning possibilities for both teachers and students by bridging connections within the classroom. Students given opportunities to be key players in their education have greater potential to affect their values of education, because teaching and learning are done with them, not to them. As this study reported, students with strong connections to school have a better potential to blossom and learn to value knowledge in ways that support their chances of success. This study suggests that such connections could also possibly decrease the risks of students becoming incarcerated.

This study, then, suggests that educators consider the voice of the K–12 students as a lens for developing a deeper understanding the K–12 student world. The perceptions of the participants' K–12 educational experiences thus provide insight into improving the three components of education by including the student voice in the educational process. The possibility of teachers' affecting K–12 students during, and long after, their transition to adulthood cannot be understated. The results of the students' being allowed a voice in the delivery of their academic, personal/social behavior, and career goals might not only prevent possible incarceration, but might also (1) enable them to develop a sense of citizenship, (2) support their successful navigation into the adult world, and thereby (3) support the next generation of children (Blankstein, 2004, Deming, 2011, Hill & Nave, 2009). K–12 students

who do not have the opportunity to use their voice in shaping how they develop their academic, personal/social behavior, and career skills are at a disadvantage. This study suggests that K–12 educators begin to incorporate the student voice with the three components of education in hope of deepening students' connection to school and their overall education.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview Questions

- 1) Tell me about yourself and your school experiences.
- 2) How did you view yourself as a learner in school?
- 3) How were you viewed as a student by your teachers?
- 4) What did you like about your educational experience?
  - a) Dislike?
- 5) What about your school experience worked for you?
  - a) What did not?
- 6) What educational programs did you participate in that supported you with your:
  - a) Academics,
  - b) Personal/social behaviors, and/or;
  - c) Career education?
- 7) How did your education help you grow with your:
  - a) Academics,
  - b) Personal/social behaviors, and/or;
  - c) Career Education?
- 8) What about your educational experience helped prepare you for life after leaving high school?
- 9) What, if anything, would you change about your educational experience?
- 10) What is it that you needed from your teachers?
- 11) How could teachers better support students in the areas of:
  - a) Academics,

b) Personal/social behaviors, and;

c) Career education?

12) Were you on track to graduate with your class?

a) Did you graduate?

13) What are your goals for your future?

14) Is there anything else you would like to say about your educational experience that was not covered in this interview?

## APPENDIX B: PARTICIPATION SELECTION LETTER

Iowa State University

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Ames, Iowa

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

My name is Lisa Hill and I am a graduate student from the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University. I would like to invite you to participate in my research project: *Breaking through the bars: Understanding the K-12 education experiences through the voice of individuals who are incarcerated.*

I would like to interview you to ask about your experience in your high school. I would like to sit with you for a 30–60 minute audio taped interviews that will take place over a 3 month period. Please do not agree to participate if you will be leaving an Iowa Department of Corrections facility during that 6 month period.

There are no probable risks to participating in this research study. The only possible risk might include embarrassment from answering questions during the interview. Also, there are

no direct benefits from participating in this study. However, you may learn more about yourself as learner. You will not be compensated for your participation.

If you would like to participate in this research study, please notify your counselor who will then contact me. I will be following the guidelines outlined in the State of Iowa Department of Corrections Policy and procedures No. Ad-IS-04.

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. During your interviews, you can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Records identifying you will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable laws and regulations. Records will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies such as the Iowa Department of Corrections, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the ISU Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. You will be assigned a matchless number to be used on forms instead of your name.

2. All interview notes, audio recordings, and observations notes will be destroyed at the end of the study.
3. Only two persons will have access to the study records: Lisa Hill and Dr. Joanne Marshall.
4. Records from this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the study.
5. If the results from this study are published, your identity and identifying characteristic will remain confidential.

If you have any questions now please see your counselor who will contact me.

Sincerely,

Lisa A. Hill

Graduate Student

Iowa State University

## APPENDIX C: QUESTION AND ANSWER CONSENT DOCUMENT

Consent Form for: *Breaking through the bars: Understanding the K–12 education through the voice of individuals who are incarcerated*

This form describes the research project. It has information to help you decide whether or not you wish to participate. Research studies include only people who choose to take part—your participation is completely voluntary. Please discuss any questions you have about the study or about this form with the researcher before deciding to participate.

**Who is conducting this study?**

This study is being conducted by Lisa A. Hill, a doctoral student at Iowa State University.

**Why am I invited to participate in this study?**

You are being asked to take part in this study because you are currently incarcerated and we are interested in your educational experiences. You should not participate if you do not wish to reflect upon your experiences as a student.

**What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of this phenomenology will be to examine the experiences current Iowa Department of Corrections prisoners had while in high school.

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sit for at least one 30–60 minute interview that will take place over a 6 month period. With your permission, your interview will be audio taped. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to reflect on your experiences as a high school student.

You may request to pass on any question you do not wish to answer during the interview.

You may also chose to withdraw from the study at any point in time. The interview

questions you will be asked to recall include the following:

- 1) Tell me about yourself and your school experiences.
- 2) How did you view yourself as a learner in school?
- 3) How were you viewed as a student by your teachers?
- 4) What did you like about your educational experience?
  - a) Dislike?
- 5) What about your school experience worked for you?
  - a) What did not?
- 6) What educational programs did you participate in that supported you with your:
  - a) Academics,
  - b) Personal/social behaviors, and/or;
  - c) Career education?
- 7) How did your educational experience help you grow with your:
  - a) Academics,
  - b) Personal/social behaviors, and;
  - c) Career education?
- 8) What about your educational experience helped you prepare for life after leaving school?
- 9) What, if anything, would you change about your educational experience?
- 10) What is it that you needed from your teachers?
- 11) How could teachers better support students in the areas of:

- a) Academics,
  - b) Personal/social behaviors, and;
  - c) Career education?
- 12) Were you on track to graduate with your class?
- a) Did you graduate?
- 13) What are your goals for your future?
- 14) Is there anything else you would like to say about your educational experience that was not covered in this interview?

**What are the possible risks and benefits of my participation?**

Risks – There are no risks to participating in this research study. The only possible risk might include embarrassment from answering questions during the interview. Participation is strictly voluntary. Interview questions will only address how you viewed your academic experience in high school. If you do not wish to answer a question you may request to pass and move on to the next question or withdraw from the study.

Benefits – You may not receive any direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, you may learn more about yourself a learner. Society will be served by the information collected for this phenomenology which will assist schools in providing proficient at-risk programming to its identified students so that they may become successful adults. Areas of deficit in high school at-risk programming may be identified as a result of your information.



### **How will the information I provide be used?**

The information you provide will be used for the following purposes:

- 1) To give a voice to students who are now incarcerated.
- 2) To examine what areas of K–12 school might be lacking.
- 3) To make recommendations to improve the school experience of all students.

Information collected will be shared with Iowa State University and the Iowa Department of Corrections. The information could also be shared with Iowa school administrators to help them gain an understanding of ways they might better serve all students.

### **What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the data or to protect my privacy?**

Records identifying you will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by applicable laws and regulations. Records will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies such as the Iowa Department of Corrections, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the ISU Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies with human subjects) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent allowed by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. You will be assigned a matchless number to be used on forms instead of your name.

2. All interview notes, audio recordings, and observations notes will be destroyed at the end of the study.
3. Only two persons will have access to the study records: Lisa Hill and Dr. Joanne Marshall.
4. Records from this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the study.
5. If the results from this study are published, your identity and identifying characteristics will remain confidential.

**Will I incur any costs from participating or will I be compensated?**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

**What are my rights as a human research Incarcerated Individual?**

Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part in the study or to stop participating at any time, for any reason, without penalty or negative consequences. During your interviews, you can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

You may be a former student of the researcher. If you feel this would be a conflict or too embarrassing, you may withdraw from the study. However, all measure to ensure your confidentiality will be taken. The awareness of your comfort level will also be addressed throughout the interview process. Your choice of whether or not to participate will have no impact on you in any way.

**What if I am injured as a result of participating in this study?**

There is no foreseen risk of being injured for participating in this study.

**Whom can I call if I have questions or problems?**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- For further information about the study your questions may directed to Lisa Hill, principal investigator or Dr. Joanne Marshall, professor at Iowa State University.
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

## APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Title of Study:** *Breaking through the bars: Understanding K–12 education experiences through the voice of individuals who are incarcerated*

**Investigators:** Lisa A. Hill

This is a research phenomenology. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study will be to look at what education teaches students before they leave high school. Iowa prisoners who attended high school will be interviewed. The study will look at information from the individual interviews. The study will be done through a phenomenology that 1) looks at the lives of students who are now in prison and 2) examine perceptions about their education experience. Data will be collected from individual interviews of students the researcher may have taught in high school or the researcher did not know before the study. The overall question to be answered will be if the academic, behavioral, and/or career education students received helped prepare them for life after high school.

You are being invited to participate in this study because you attended high school. I would like to interview you to find out if you think your education prepared you for the real world and how education can help future students.

## **DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES**

This study is strictly voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to meet with me face-to-face to:

- 1) Answer questions during a 30–60 minute recorded interviews about:
  - a) your experiences as a high school student.
  - b) how education effected your life whether it be positively or negatively.
  - c) what do you think was missing from your education that held back your success.
  - d) what recommendation for changes in today’s schools would you suggest.
- 2) You will need to be available for interviewing throughout the research period.
- 3) You may request to pass on any question you do not wish to answer during the interview.
- 4) You may chose to withdraw from the study at any point in time.
- 5) There will only be two people in the room during the interview; the Incarcerated Individual and the researcher.

It should be noted that our meeting time is at the discretion of the Iowa Department of Corrections. Your participation will last for a 30–60 minute recorded interviews over three month period.

## **RISKS**

There are no probable risks expected for participating in this study. Participation is strictly voluntary. Interview questions will only address how you viewed your educational experience in school. If you do not wish to answer a question you may request to pass and

move on to the next question or withdraw from the study. However, you will be asked to reflect back on your past educational experiences as a youth.

### **BENEFITS**

If you decide to participate in this study there will be no direct benefit to you. However, you may learn more about yourself as learners and possible future goals. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by improving school academic, personal/social, and career programming and provide the Iowa Department of Corrections information about how their residents function as learners.

### **COSTS AND COMPENSATION**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

### **PARICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. During the interview process you can request to skip any questions that you do not wish to answer.

If you leave the Iowa Correctional Facility before the study is completed your participation will be terminated.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, the Iowa Department of Corrections, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken:

1. Subjects will be assigned a matchless number to be used on forms instead of their name.
2. All interview notes and audio recordings will be destroyed at the end of the study.
3. Only two persons will have access to the study records: Lisa Hill and Dr. Joanne Marshall.
4. Records from this study will be stored in a locked file cabinet for the duration of the study.

5. If the results from this study are published, the identity of participants. Individuals who are incarcerated

will remain confidential. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

### QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

- Please speak with a Correctional Facility staff member if there are any questions or concerns regarding this study. This person will then contact me, my Iowa my Iowa State University Professor, Dr. Marshall, or the Institutional Review Board.
- For further information about the study your questions may be directed to Lisa Hill at [lisa.hill@ankenyschools.org](mailto:lisa.hill@ankenyschools.org) or Dr. Joanne Marshall at [jmars@iastate.edu](mailto:jmars@iastate.edu).
- If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [IRB@iastate.edu](mailto:IRB@iastate.edu), or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

\*\*\*\*\*



**PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document, and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Incarcerated Individual's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(Incarcerated Individual's Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Signature of Parent/Guardian or

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date)

Legally Authorized Representative)

## APPENDIX E: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
 OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

 Institutional Review Board  
 Office for Responsible Research  
 Vice President for Research  
 1138 Pearson Hall  
 Ames, Iowa 50011-2207  
 515 294-4566  
 FAX 515 294-4267

**Date:** 8/31/2011

**To:** Lisa Ann Hill  
 6821 Northglenn Way  
 Johnston, IA 50131

**CC:** Dr. Joanne Marshall  
 N229D Lagomarcino

**From:** Office for Responsible Research

**Title:** Incarcerated Students. Why does Education Sometimes Fail?

**IRB Num:** 11-225

**Approval Date:** 8/30/2011

**Continuing Review Date:** 8/15/2012

**Submission Type:** New

**Review Type:** Full Committee

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

Your study has been approved according to the dates shown above. To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by submitting the "Continuing Review and/or Modification" form.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems** involving risks to subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Research investigators are expected to comply with the principles of the Belmont Report, and state and federal regulations regarding the involvement of humans in research. These documents are located on the Office for Responsible Research website <http://www.compliance.iastate.edu/irb/forms/> or available by calling (515) 294-4566.

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 1138 Pearson Hall, to officially close the project.

APPENDIX F: RESEARCH SITE PERMISSION FORM



STATE OF IOWA

TERRY E. BRANSTAD, GOVERNOR  
KIM REYNOLDS, LT. GOVERNOR

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS  
JOHN BALDWIN, DIRECTOR

May 9, 2011

Ms. Lisa Hill  
Assistant Principal  
Ankeny High School  
1302 North Ankeny Boulevard  
Ankeny, IA 50023

RE: Request to Conduct Research

Dear Ms. Hill:

I have reviewed your proposal to interview up to 12 currently incarcerated offenders within the state prison system; some may have worked with you while in high school. I generally support research that analyzes the effects of educational programming on corrections offenders because those efforts appear to hold promise for reducing the numbers of offenders admitted to prison in the future.

I hereby approve your request to conduct these interviews, assuming your project receives final approval by your IRB and assuming all offender participants sign a voluntary consent form prior to being interviewed. I have requested our Director of Research, Lettie Prell, to assist you in identifying which of your former students are incarcerated, and helping you get in touch with the wardens/superintendents of the selected institutions, who will coordinate your visits to their institutions.

I look forward to receiving a summary of your findings when they are available.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. Baldwin".

John R. Baldwin, Director

JRB/ifo

The mission of the Iowa Department of Corrections is:  
To advance successful offender reentry to protect the public, staff and offenders from victimization.

(Office) 515-725-5701 - 510 East 12th Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50319 - (FAX) 515-725-5799

[www.doc.state.ia.us](http://www.doc.state.ia.us)

## APPENDIX G: IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS CONFIDENTIALITY

AGREEMENT TO RECEIVE  IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS DATA

Agency Name: \_\_\_\_\_

(hereafter cited as "Agency") understands and agrees that information listed as confidential as per Iowa Code Section 904.602 shall be kept confidential. The Agency further understands and agrees that this confidential data remains subject to those confidentiality laws and regulations pursuant to Iowa Code Sections 904.601 through 904.603, and that they can be held both criminally and civilly liable for the unauthorized release of confidential information.

The Agency agrees to preserve the confidentiality of such data, which are made available to the Agency for research purposes, and shall maintain procedures for safeguarding the confidential information, including the shredding and proper disposal of documents after the research is completed.

In the event federal and/or state laws and regulations governing the confidentiality of the data provided to the Agency under this agreement changes, the Department of Corrections will notify the Agency of such changes so that the Agency may adopt appropriate procedures for safeguarding any information that is confidential under federal and/or state laws or regulations.

Type Agency Contact Name, Address, and Phone Number in the space below. Then the Agency Contact must sign and date, retain a copy and send the original to the Iowa Department of Corrections.

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 Signature

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 Date

Origination Date: June 2005. Revised March 2007. Reviewed: March 2008, October 2008, October 2009.

AD-IS-04 F-1

APPENDIX H: STATE OF IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS:  
POLICY AND PROCEDURES: RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

<b>STATE OF IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS</b>  <b>POLICY AND PROCEDURES</b>	Policy Number  AD-IS-04	Applicability FORMCHECKBOX DOC FORMCHECKBOX CBC	
	Policy Code  2	Iowa Code Reference  904.602, 904.603	
Chapter 1  ADMINISTRATION & MANAGEMENT	Sub Chapter  INFORMATION SYSTEMS/RESEAR CH	Related DOC Policies  AD-CR-04	Administrative Code Reference  N/A
Subject  RESEARCH ACTIVITIES	ACA Standards  4-4108, 4-4109, 4-4110, 4-4111, 4-4112, 4-4113,	Responsibility  Lettie Prell	
Effective Date  October 2009	Authority EMBED PBrush		

### **I. PURPOSE**

To describe the manner in which research activities shall be regulated in the Iowa Department of Corrections (IDOC) institutions and community corrections district departments.

### **II. POLICY**

It is the policy of the IDOC to permit research activities in its institutions, community corrections district departments and in the IDOC in general, when such activities are conducted according to generally recognized professional standards and have a reasonable prospect of advancing the state of professional knowledge of corrections or specific management practices.

### III. DEFINITIONS – As used in this document.

External Research – Research requested or initiated by individuals, research firms, or other agencies who are not employees of the IDOC and which may be funded by public or private sources.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) – A panel established by research organizations, such as universities, to provide human subjects review of research proposals. Human subjects review ensures that research proposals meet commonly accepted standards of research ethics, and identifies possible areas where research proposals could cause harm to persons.

Research Activities – A project, paper, or study designed primarily to produce new data, information and/or understanding of corrections, criminal justice, management or other issues of relevance to the IDOC. The use of interviews, questionnaires, reviews of case records, and data extractions from automated information systems (existing IDOC datasets) may supplement such research. Research does not include any study that will expose research subjects to the possibility of physical, psychological, or other harm as a consequence of their participation in the study.

Research Coordinator – The individual appointed by the Director to oversee implementation of this policy.

See Policy **AD-GA-16** for additional Definitions.

### IV. PROCEDURES

#### Research Guidelines

The IDOC supports and conducts research activities in its institutions and community corrections districts when that research is relevant to its programs, services and operations, or those of corrections as a whole, and when the research is ethical, methodically sound, and feasible. The use of offenders for medical, pharmaceutical, or cosmetic experiments is prohibited. **(4-4108)**

The Director will appoint an individual at Central Office who will serve as the IDOC's research coordinator.

Individual Wardens/Superintendents and District Directors may commission and cooperate in research projects with notification to the Director.

The IDOC will engage in research activities that assist in establishing future agency goals, objectives and plans, and that contribute to more effective and efficient institutional and community-based corrections operations.

The Director, Wardens/Superintendents, District Directors and agency researchers should regularly discuss opportunities for research projects, as well as specific research and evaluation needs of the IDOC and its institutions, with institutions of higher learning and other outside professionals. **(4-4109)**

External research activities that will be considered for approval in IDOC institutions and community corrections district departments must use generally recognized research methodology, must not expose research subjects to the possibility of physical, psychological or other harm as a consequence of their participation in the study, and must have a reasonable prospect of advancing the state of professional knowledge in a recognized correctional subject area.

#### Steps for Approving Research

The following general structure will apply to all external research requests received by the IDOC and to IDOC employee proposals for independent research:

Proposals for research projects must be submitted in writing to the research coordinator if the research involves more than one institution or community corrections district department, or to the Warden/ Superintendent or District Director where the proposed research activities will take place.

The written proposal should include the following elements:

Title of the proposed study.

A summary of the goals of the study and the justification for the research.

Names, addresses, and telephone numbers of the principal researcher and all research staff.

An endorsement by a recognized research organization such as a university, college, private foundation, consulting firm, or public department that has a mandate to perform research, certifying that the research proposal is for valid scientific, educational or other public purposes. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval or description of status of IRB process will fulfill this requirement.

Information on whether the research findings are to be published and if so, where.

Information that will assist in estimating the level of disruption to operations, and the availability of staff and other agency resources required to support the research. If offender interviews are to be conducted, a summary of the total number of offenders to be interviewed, how long each interview will take, and the total number of interviewers will be submitted.

Sampling procedures for selecting offender subjects or offender records for the research, as well as criteria that will be used for the sample selection.

Procedures for data collection and copies of research instruments to be used, including interview guides, questionnaires, data collection forms, and tests. If the data are to be extracted from automated information systems, a list of requested data items will be submitted.

Confidentiality and security procedures to be followed to protect the privacy of participants which will comport with IDOC policy on offender privacy rights.

IDOC staff may assist in carrying out research with the approval of the Director, Warden/Superintendent, or District Director. **(4-4110)**

The research coordinator will review each proposal received and recommend to the Director whether or not the research should



be approved. If the proposal involves a single institution or community corrections district department, the Warden/Superintendent or District Director shall review the proposal, and may consult with the research coordinator prior to granting approval or denial. **(4-4112)**

All research proposals will be answered within 30 days. Approvals shall outline any conditions of approval; denials will include the reasons.

#### Additional Requirements

Where applicable, persons conducting research will be informed of, and agree in writing to conform to, statutes and policies governing the confidentiality of information, and any other relevant policies.

In any report of results, researchers will not use the names of subjects or describe any offender in such detail that he/she might be identified.

Research data of a confidential nature will be kept confidential by researchers and all staff assisting in the research. Written documents, records and other information of a confidential nature will be kept in locked files in a secure area, and care will be taken to ensure computer files containing confidential information are inaccessible to other than the persons conducting or assisting in the research.

The accuracy of all research data collected may be reviewed and verified by the IDOC prior to publication of research findings.

Offender participation in non-medical, non-pharmaceutical, and non-cosmetic research will be voluntary. Informed consent will be obtained by researchers prior to administering surveys, questionnaires, assessments, or conducting interviews with offenders. **(4-4113)**

Research conducted will comply with any applicable state and federal guidelines for the use and dissemination of research findings and with accepted professional and scientific ethics. **(4-4111)**

#### Research Reporting Requirements

Where requested, the principal researcher will prepare a brief summary report that includes the tentative findings, and send a copy to the research coordinator (in the case of department-wide research), or to the Warden/Superintendent or District Director.

When the entire project is completed and prior to its release, the principal researcher will send a copy of the final research report to the research coordinator (in the case of department-wide research), or to the Warden/Superintendent or District Director.

The Warden/Superintendent or District Director will forward a copy of all final research reports conducted in their institution or community corrections district department to the research coordinator.

#### Violations of Research Regulations

Permission to conduct the current study and any further research may be withdrawn for violation of this policy, or of other IDOC statutes or policies, in the course of the research.

Violations of the regulations with regard to criminal offender record information may subject the violator to civil or criminal liability.

#### Employee Research and Employment-Related Publications

Research conducted by employees of the IDOC or community corrections district departments as part of their assigned tasks shall follow generally recognized professional standards.

Employees of the IDOC or community corrections district departments wishing to conduct independent research will submit a written proposal using the instructions for submission of external research proposals prior to the beginning of the project.

Research activities conducted by employees under this section are subject to the same requirements as external research.

Employees wishing to publish original material that includes information gained through employment with the IDOC or community corrections district department will submit to the

Warden/Superintendent or District Director, and the research coordinator, prior to beginning the project, a written request that gives the following information:

Purpose of the project.

Planned contents of the material.

Detailed outline of the project and proposed release forms if the proposal involves disclosure of information about specific offenders or staff.

Identification of any proposed publisher(s) or others who will receive the material or who might release the contents of the material.

Proposed release date of the material, if known.

Written approval must be obtained from the Warden/Superintendent or District Director, and the research coordinator, prior to submission of the materials to publishers or others who might release the contents when that material is specific to IDOC operations.

A copy of all approved material will be retained in the IDOC Central Office by the research coordinator.

Contents envisioned under this section includes operations, activities, or practices of the IDOC or its staff; identifiable offenders or records; and any other documents, records, information, etc. gathered or maintained by the IDOC or any other related agency.

#### Other Considerations

Normally offenders will not receive compensation, remunerations, or payment of any kind in connection with a research study. However, if the evaluator/researcher provides reason that remuneration should be given, the research coordinator will review the proposal to determine appropriateness, and make a recommendation to the Director. If approved, the criteria and format for payment will be determined.

No IDOC employee will receive compensation, remunerations, or payment of any kind for participation or assistance in a research project, other than their normal salary.

Unless otherwise approved prior to the commencement of the project, access to research data collected will be limited to the researchers, staff members charged with filing or evaluating the data, the Warden/Superintendent or District Director, and IDOC Central Office staff.

- PAGE 1 -

AD-IS-04

Replaces Policy AD-I-44.

Effective: June 2005, Revised March 2007, March 2008, October 2009

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AD-IS-04

## APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANTS' INTERVIEWS: CODING TABLE

Emergent Theme	Incarcerated Individual	What was captured from Interview	Number of Themes were stated
Active	Hannah	<i>It's just for teachers to be more <u>active</u> with the students.</i> <i>That got me more <u>active</u> with people.</i> <i>Like I said, them guys be more <u>active</u> with us.</i> <i>Become <u>active</u> with, with other people.</i>	4
	Stephanie	<i>Be more interactive in our lives.</i>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	8%		
Ask	Curtis	<i>They never really <u>asked</u> me any questions.</i> <i>Call them to side and <u>ask</u> them what is wrong.</i> <i>Getting a lot more attention and <u>ask</u> question.</i>	3
	Kirk	<i>That is what they could do, <u>ask</u> them.</i>	1
	David	<i>They need to go and research more and <u>ask</u> more questions.</i>	1
	Jamie	<i><u>Ask</u> them what is going on.</i> <i>Sit down and <u>ask</u> them what is going on at home</i> <i>*It would help if teacher would <u>ask</u> is one of them.</i>	3
	John	<i><u>Ask</u> them what they like.</i>	1
	Stephanie	<i>I don't want to <u>ask</u> for help in front of everybody because I just feel stupid.</i>	1
	Tina	<i>No one <u>asked</u> me.</i> <i>No one really <u>asked</u>.</i>	3

	<i>Just <u>ask</u>.</i>	
Marc	<i>Nobody really <u>asked</u> me. I am not a great one to go <u>ask</u> the teacher for something.</i>	1
Carrie	<i>I didn't want to have to <u>ask</u> for extra help.</i>	1
Molly	<i>You know, <u>ask</u> them.</i>	1
Jacob	<i>I always asked <u>questions</u>.</i>	1
Tim	<i><u>Asking</u> if I wanted help or <u>asking</u> why.</i>	2
Natalie	<i>But nobody would <u>ask</u>. Just having teachers <u>ask</u> if they need help. <u>Ask</u> their students if there was anything that they can help them with.</i>	3
Anna	<i>If they would have <u>asked</u> my opinion and worked with me.</i>	1
Matt	<i>You can <u>ask</u> me.</i>	1
Kirk	<i>Not really because I probably never really <u>asked</u>. * <u>ask</u> them if that is what, if they would like to do.</i>	2
Susan	<i>After she found a note she <u>asked</u> me what was going. I am pushing them <u>asking</u> all kinds of crazy questions and getting and getting, getting to it.</i>	2
Joe	<i>All she did was sit at a computer and play with her computer and when a child, if one of <u>asked</u> for help "figure r it out yourself; it's not that hard.</i>	1

	Nick	<i>Even if she <u>asked</u> I would say I did the home work and she would believe me because you know I am smart.</i>	1
	Tim	<i>I would say them probably reaching out and <u>asking</u> if I wanted help or <u>asking</u> why I was going down that path.</i>	2
	Hannah	<i>It was hard to <u>ask</u> for help. As far as talking, <u>asking</u> for help. I didn't like to <u>ask</u> for help because I was so shy. I really it was hard to <u>ask</u> for help.</i>	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>		<b>34</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>84%</b>		
Aware	Cam	<i>They have just got to <u>aware</u>, be <u>aware</u> of their student. Be just, be a little bit more <u>aware</u> of him.</i>	3
	Tina	<i>Just to be more <u>aware</u>, pay attention. *I know there have been a lot of teachers who was <u>aware</u>.</i>	2
	Marc	<i>They should probably be more <u>aware</u>.</i>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>6</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>12%</b>		
Care	Kenny	<i>If you <u>care</u>, if you have a heart. I think a lot of them, they <u>cared</u>, you know, because you really can't be a teacher if you don't <u>care</u>, you know.</i>	3

David	<i>Showed them that you <u>cared</u> they would eventually come around. It's like they tell you like they wouldn't <u>care</u>. If you didn't, they obviously didn't <u>care</u>.</i>	2
Tina	<i>The people who really didn't <u>care</u> about that because we had advance classes.</i>	1
Carrie	<i>It was somebody that acted like she <u>cared</u>. If they noticed, they didn't <u>care</u>.</i>	2
Hannah	<i>I feel like the teacher doesn't <u>care</u> then why should I <u>care</u>. <u>Care</u> more.</i>	3
Joe	<i>The teachers were <u>caring</u>.</i>	1
Mike	<i>She <u>cared</u>.</i>	1
Cam	<i>I mean, as far as the teachers showing me that they <u>cared</u> and stuff.</i>	1
Stephanie	<i>And she didn't <u>care</u> about what us kids did. If I cared more about myself, I think I would have tried to do more for myself.</i>	2
Molly	<i>The teacher would not pay attention if you were asleep, didn't <u>care</u>. I think if they showed if they <u>cared</u>.</i>	2
Jamie	<i>That helped somebody that <u>cared</u>.</i>	1
Matt	<i>I never felt like a teacher would <u>care</u> or show true interest. If they showed true interest and <u>cared</u>, you know, we're, we see that</i>	2



	Tim	<i>something is going on. It seemed like they really <u>cared</u>.</i>	1
	Susan	<i>When I was a number, when they didn't <u>care</u>. Oh, God, you should have got this by now or when they don't really <u>care</u>. It didn't seem like the teachers really <u>cared</u>. I don't think they <u>cared</u>. I was picking up that teachers <u>cared</u>, and I think that's the most important is knowing that you really <u>cared</u>. She seemed like she kind of <u>cared</u> that she knew something wasn't right.</i>	7
	Natalie	<i>Didn't really <u>care</u> for school that much. Some of them just don't really <u>care</u>. Some of them I do feel, I do believe truly they do <u>care</u> about your education. Teachers do <u>care</u> about their students a lot more. Just having people not pay attention to what was going on with me so didn't really <u>care</u> for school that much.</i>	5
	Anna	<i>They could have <u>cared</u> more, they could have acted like they <u>cared</u> more.</i>	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>35</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>64%</b>	
<hr/>			
Connect	Kenny	<i>They need to be able to have a <u>connection</u> with the student.</i>	2

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		<i>You are not going to be able to <u>connect</u> that well, you know.</i>	
	Mike	<i>Getting me <u>connected</u> so by <u>connected</u> you are meaning what would kept me out of trouble.</i>	2
	Stephanie	<i>But I feel like if I had that <u>connection</u> with her if something was going on there.</i>	1
	Kameron	<i>I <u>connect</u> better, I will open up.</i>	1
	Susan	<i>Anything hands on that gets the class <u>connected</u>. I felt more <u>connected</u>, proud of my school, you know.</i>	3
		<i>Just with that <u>connection</u> and helping each other out and feeling more comfortable with classes and stuff.</i>	
	Matt	<i>If I could <u>connect</u> more with teachers.</i>	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>24%</b>	

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Fun	Cam	<i>Make <u>fun</u> for them if it were <u>fun</u> for them.</i>	2
	Kirk	<i>Just make it a little <u>fun</u>. I mean, not all life is going to be <u>fun</u>, but some things have got to be <u>fun</u>, but me, I like to have <u>fun</u>, I guess. I liked school. It was <u>fun</u>. I had more <u>fun</u> then, I was going, doing good, got good grades. I mean, make it fun, try to make it more <u>fun</u>. Make it more <u>fun</u>, make it to where it's—you know-- or give them a goal to</i>	9

		<i>like.</i>	
		<i>What you have to do to make work <u>fun</u>, how to make it not look like its work.</i>	
	Anna	<i>Lot <u>funner</u>. It's got to be <u>funner</u>. I know it sounds funny, but <u>funner</u> for school to want to go to school. I know it's not supposed to be about <u>fun</u> all a time but it does now more so than even when I was in school.</i>	4
	Joe	<i>But other than that I think school was <u>fun</u>.</i>	1
	Jamie	<i>If they would show that how <u>fun</u> it is to get good grades.</i>	2
		<i>If they didn't make learning so boring, made step in and make everything <u>fun</u>.</i>	
	Susan	<i>Whenever they made it <u>fun</u>, that was when I was all in it.</i>	1
	Molly	<i>It taught us all kind of how to have <u>fun</u> together.</i>	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>20</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>28%</b>	
Hands-on	Cam	<i>They[class] was actually <u>hands-on</u>.</i>	1
	John	<i>I think getting to use like my <u>hands</u>.</i>	1
	Kameron	<i>More <u>hands on</u>. If I would have had more <u>hands-on</u> type stuff.</i>	2
	Joe	<i>The <u>hands-on</u>,</i>	1
	Hannah	<i>I think they could have done more <u>hands-on</u> stuff.</i>	5

		<i>Be more <u>hands-on</u>, have more <u>hands-on</u> stuff.</i>	
		<i><u>Hands-on</u>, you learn better when you have <u>hands-on</u> rather than just paper work all the time.</i>	
Tim		<i>But I like more <u>hands-on</u> work.</i>	1
Anna		<i>I think more <u>hands-on</u> doing.</i>	2
		<i>* I like a lot of <u>hands-on</u> and it helps you learn better.</i>	
Jamie		<i>There is <u>hands-on</u>. You know, there is different learners.</i>	3
		<i><u>Hands-on</u> learner.</i>	
		<i><u>Hands-on</u>, sit down <u>hands-on</u> with him, let him know.</i>	
Susan		<i>Anything <u>hands-on</u> that gets the class connected.</i>	3
		<i>More visuals, <u>hands-on</u>.</i>	
		<i>Finding good answers or projects for visuals, more visuals, <u>hands-on</u>, I just soaked that up.</i>	
Amber		<i>I am more <u>hands-on</u>.</i>	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>		<b>15</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	40%		
Help	Marc	<i>Reach out and <u>help</u> some. Can we can we <u>help</u> you, I think that would have probably been more <u>helpful</u>.</i>	8
		<i>I need <u>help</u> here or I need <u>help</u> there.</i>	
		<i>I would probably say what <u>helped</u> me grow was memory.</i>	
		<i>Just bring people together to try and <u>help</u> one</i>	

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	<i>another.</i>	
	<i>They can try and <u>help</u> you to the best they can.</i>	
Hannah	<i>I see your struggling do you need some <u>help</u>. My teacher doesn't care about <u>helping</u> me. I didn't like to ask for <u>help</u> because I was so shy. Yeah, it always <u>helps</u>. It was hard to ask for <u>help</u>. I really it was hard to ask for <u>help</u>. As far as talking, asking for <u>help</u>. Think it was just really just being around, being able to <u>help</u> somebody. It should be important to teachers to <u>help</u> their student get good grades. Should have, want to <u>help</u> their student get to school.</i>	10
Kirk	<i>Maybe <u>help</u> me out to where I could understand stuff. Had they was there to <u>help</u> me. They would just try to <u>help</u>. Ffamily-wise and teacher-wise and you know with <u>help</u> and stuff. It <u>helped</u> me. They <u>helped</u> me.</i>	6
Jacob	<i>The program at school that <u>helped</u> me get my scholarship. I think it <u>helped</u> me grow academically. I think that <u>helped</u> you with your people skills You had to talk to them and they would <u>help</u> you.</i>	7

	<i>I think maybe school <u>helped</u> me with my study habits.</i>	
	<i>I don't think that really <u>helped</u> me, you know, get anywhere.</i>	
	<i>Being a minority, I guess, you know what I am saying, which <u>helped</u> me quite a bit.</i>	
Carrie	<i>A different teacher that would <u>help</u> with all subject.</i>	2
	<i>* I remember her <u>helping</u> me study for a social studies test.</i>	
Cam	<i>He tried to <u>help</u> me out a lot.</i>	1
Tim	<i>Offering them [students] <u>help</u>.</i>	7
	<i>Really didn't do anything to <u>help</u>.</i>	
	<i>I was <u>helping</u> out the janitor and I got credit for that, going and <u>helping</u> her for an hour. If you would like <u>help</u> maybe do a intervention to <u>help</u> you get away from that group then maybe.</i>	
	<i>I think they would have more that would have <u>helped</u> you know.</i>	
Jamie	<i>She just <u>helped</u> me and I got my diploma in honorary absence.</i>	8
	<i>But I also <u>helped</u> her with community service.</i>	
	<i>My teacher, who <u>helped</u> me graduate.</i>	
	<i>She was able to sit down with me and whatever I needed <u>help</u> on.</i>	
	<i>That <u>helped</u>, somebody that cared.</i>	

	<p><i>Ms. Madison absolutely <u>helped</u> me with grammar and stuff.</i></p> <p><i>It would <u>help</u> if teacher would ask is one of them.</i></p> <p><i>Even if it was an elective she always <u>helped</u> me.</i></p>	
Stephanie	<p><i>She would <u>help</u> me and there is a couple staff like that.</i></p> <p><i>But some of them have <u>helped</u> me grow up.</i></p>	2
Curtis	<p><i>Who would help me?</i></p>	1
Matt	<p><i>We just really want to <u>help</u>.</i></p> <p><i>I felt like they were more into punishing me rather than <u>helping</u> me.</i></p> <p><i>I will be here to <u>help</u> you.</i></p> <p><i>To try to <u>help</u>.</i></p> <p><i><u>Help</u> us to trust you to see that this is what we need.</i></p> <p><i>But something has got to <u>help</u>, something has got to change and here is how I am willing.</i></p> <p><i>She <u>helps</u> with things like that.</i></p>	8
Kenny	<p><i>I get frustrated and then I don't want nothing to do with it and it <u>helped</u> me understand that.</i></p> <p><i>It was like it <u>helped</u> me a little bit.</i></p> <p><i>He <u>helped</u> me with it and so I knew that they knew that I knew what I was doing.</i></p> <p><i>Everyone trying to <u>help</u> Come up with the best ideas of how to be able to sit back and <u>help</u> this child.</i></p>	8

	<p><i>I didn't really get the <u>help</u> I needed at home.</i></p> <p><i>You <u>helped</u> me get it going.</i></p> <p><i>You know I don't mind having somebody else <u>help</u> me do my bookwork or cover, covers if for me when I am gone.</i></p>	
Tina	<i>It helps you deal with your feelings.</i>	1
Nick	<i>They <u>helped</u> you know, they were really good to <u>help</u> me.</i>	2
Mike	<p><i>Public Schools were required to <u>help</u> me with my education so they sent me a bunch work.</i></p> <p><i>I learned a lot of that I also did printing and stuff like so I <u>helped</u> him.</i></p> <p><i>It helped me be organized, personal and social behaviors.</i></p>	3
Molly	<p><i>I could go to that classroom and that <u>helped</u> with people who had maybe ADHD.</i></p> <p><i>They <u>helped</u> us, helped the girls that were in that group.</i></p> <p><i><u>Helped</u> them learn how to focus a little more.</i></p> <p><i>He <u>helped</u> me find a lot of information on college and look at some of the other viewpoint.</i></p> <p><i>Like the Young Women's' Resource and stuff <u>helped</u> you.</i></p> <p><i><u>Helped</u> me learn to how to trust people.</i></p> <p><i>It <u>helped</u> me focus on because like being in high school.</i></p>	16



*It helped me like with health class knowing when something is wrong  
It helped me look at not judging people.*

*He goes way out of his way to help us and it is awesome.*

*I would have got more involved, asked for more help when I was struggling.*

*Do you need help. I see that you are doing this?*

*Come in for that little bit if they need help or offering tutors.*

*I am not getting this, would you help me with it?*

*Because it is stuff that could help a lot of kids to get them involved.*

*I think if they paid more attention to things like that and give them extra help.*

Natalie

*Wish they would have seen what was going on and offered to help.*

6

*Just having teachers ask if they need help.*

*Ask their students if there was anything that they can help them with.*

*Why they wouldn't help or what was going on with them.*

*They are taking the time to help us over this stump.*

*Help them work out their problem.*

Joe

*All she did was sit at a computer and play with her computer and when a*

17

child, if one of asked for help “figure it out yourself; it’s not that hard.

Would bend over backwards to help you. And help them focus.

Somebody come over and help me all the time and have to take notes.

The school helped me grow.

Stuff like that that actually helped get student jobs.

That it did it helped you get you ready for junior high.

I think that it would help them focus more on, I guess what is getting to be my last, my last four years of school.

Think it would help it. It helped me figure out a little bit more who and what was ahead of me.

Find help, well, if I don’t find help, guess what I am going to keep coming back.

Instead of helping the kids and walk around and help the kids, all she did was sit at a computer and play with her computer.

How can you help me understand this?

Excuse me, can I get some help.

Anna

They would help me like with math and stuff.

2

I really it was hard to ask for help because there was such big classes it seemed

- like you know.
- Kameron *If they had been helping me.* 1
- John *Help out the teens or youth that are kind of behavioral issues.  
You can't reach them, can't help them.  
Students would need more attention or more help.*
- David *You ain't getting as much help as you was like in the first beginning of school.  
It helped you a lot because not only did it helped you motivate, it motivated to keep thinking and you keep wanting to be doing stuff.  
She never had the help of like the principal.  
The principal was on our side in our freshman year they helped.  
She do wanted to help but due to principal telling her to start doing her job.  
It is like when you need extra help and when you feel like you get it.  
I want you to point out to me to help me figure out a better way to help myself and stop, Ume out to stop smoking.* 8
- Susan *That we built bonds when we worked together and stuff and that way later on in life helped.  
I tried to figure out a way that would have helped me.  
You know, you helped a lot.  
Just with that connection* 4

and helping each other out and feeling more comfortable with classes and stuff.

Total	23		132
Percentage	92%		
Listen	Cam	<i>I think if they [teachers] <u>listen</u>.</i> <i>I would just <u>listened</u> to him and stuff.</i>	2
	Curtis	<i>By <u>listening</u> to what I have to say.</i> <i>I <u>listened</u> to what other students had to say, <u>listened</u> to teachers and stuff.</i>	3
	David	<i>They weren't trying to <u>listen</u>.</i> <i>Just doing a job. If you <u>listen</u>, you <u>listen</u>.</i>	2
	Sam	<i>Just try to learn more, <u>listen</u>.</i> <i>It was hard for me to <u>listen</u> when I am upset about something.</i>	2
	Jacob	<i>I think when a teacher <u>listens</u> to a student, it makes a student more vocal.</i> <i>The key to learning is <u>listening</u>.</i> <i>If you don't <u>listen</u>, you don't learn.</i> <i>I think my teachers at my high school were pretty cool on <u>listening</u> to the kids.</i>	4
	Kameron	<i>If they would have <u>listened</u> more.</i> <i>If I <u>listened</u> I could learn but when I didn't <u>listen</u>, I usually didn't apply myself to the <u>listening</u>.</i>	5

	<i>Like they would get strict with me and I would totally just break off from <u>listening</u> to them.</i>	
Matt	<i>I think that they would have <u>listened</u> to me if I would have taken the situation differently. She <u>listened</u> to me a lot. We are going to be more likely to <u>listen</u> to them.</i>	3
Molly	<i><u>Listen</u>, if you see that something they are struggling with. If they had <u>listened</u> to them. Because you have made it this far so why should we stop and <u>listen</u> now. Some of them just needed to <u>listen</u> more.</i>	4
Kenny	<i>There were a few select teachers that actually cared to sit down and talk to me, you know, or <u>listen</u> to me.</i>	1
Nick	<i>The principal wouldn't <u>listen</u>.</i>	1
Jamie	<i>They also have to know that are the other half of the class that are <u>listening</u> that are wanting them to interact.</i>	1
Kirk	<i>But it would be nice to be <u>heard</u> (Listen). He would want me to <u>listen</u>. I wish I would have <u>listened</u> to them.</i>	3
Anna	<i>They need to be more observant and more <u>open ears</u> (listen).</i>	1
Mike	<i>He <u>listened</u>.</i>	1

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>		<b>33</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>56%</b>		
One-on-One	Kenny	<p><i>More of a <u>one-on-one</u>, you know.</i></p> <p><i>But if they would have given more <u>one-on-one</u>, time.</i></p> <p><i>I was afraid to ask the teacher for <u>one-on-one</u>, help because I felt stupid.</i></p> <p><i>Let him tell a joke—even if he is cursing, it is a <u>one-on-one</u>.</i></p> <p><i>Whether it <u>be one-on-one</u> or as a group.</i></p>	5
	Matt	<p><i>It is hard to work with every student <u>one-on-one</u>.</i></p> <p><i>More <u>one-on-one</u>.</i></p> <p><i>It is hard to work with every student <u>one-on-one</u>.</i></p> <p><i>If we had more like <u>one-on-one</u> time of if they were going to do it as, as a whole.</i></p>	4
	Carrie	<p><i>To find somehow, find <u>one-on-one</u> with you.</i></p> <p><i>That teacher loved me because she spent <u>one-on-one</u> time with me.</i></p>	2
	Nick	<p><i><u>On- on-one</u> explanation of the importance of what the school is.</i></p>	1
	Stephanie	<p><i>They were more like <u>one-on-one</u> with him.</i></p>	1
	Anna	<p><i>I would get nervous a lot when there was a lot of people around so more <u>one-on-one</u>.</i></p> <p><i><u>One-on-one</u> is a big thing because it makes you feel more in your comfort zone.</i></p>	2

	Jamie	<i>The teacher feels willing to have the time to sit down <u>one-on-one</u>.</i>	1
	Kirk	<i><u>One-On-One</u> with the teachers and stuff.</i>	1
	Kameron	<i>*They would give you <u>one-on-one</u> time. Just more <u>one-on-one</u> type things.</i>	2
	Natalie	<i>I strongly believe that if teacher did more <u>one-on-one</u>. We sit <u>one-on-one</u> and she talks to me, I really I strongly believe that if teacher did more <u>one-on-one</u>.</i>	3
	Amber	<i>I am all about <u>that one-o-one</u> thing.</i>	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	44%	
Pay Attention	Cam	<i>I needed more <u>attention</u>.</i>	1
	John	<i>Maybe attract their <u>attention</u>. Didn't <u>pay attention</u> to the task at hand, you know.</i>	2
	Carrie	<i>They wouldn't <u>pay any attention</u> to me at all. They gave special <u>attention</u> to the others Just <u>pay attention</u> more and when they notice things. I just couldn't <u>pay attention</u> to follow what they were saying.</i>	4
	Molly	<i>If they [teachers] really turned and <u>paid attention</u> and watched behaviors. The teacher would not <u>pay attention</u> if you were asleep, didn't care.</i>	3

	<i>I think if they <u>paid more attention to things like that and give them extra help.</u></i>	
David	<i>They <u>paid attention to all the bad things you had done.</u></i>	2
	<i>You are not <u>paying attention to them.</u></i>	
Kenny	<i>My opinion of <u>pay attention</u> understands or <u>pay attention</u> means, you know what I mean, you kind of, you see the little things that they do and you just, you <u>pay attention to it.</u></i>	4
	<i>If somebody would have sat back and <u>paid attention on what was going.</u></i>	
	<i>You have just got to be able to understand and <u>pay attention</u> you know.</i>	
Jamie	<i>She was, she was very, very <u>attentive</u> when I talked to her.</i>	1
Curtis	<i>Paying a lot more attention.</i>	2
	<i>Getting a lot more <u>attention and ask question.</u></i>	
Natalie	<i>*Then just having people not <u>pay attention to what was going on with me.</u></i>	5
	<i>It hurt a lot but I couldn't get nobody to <u>pay attention to me.</u></i>	
	<i>Some of my teachers didn't really <u>pay attention</u> that much.</i>	
	<i>I think teachers should <u>pay attention</u>, well not <u>pay attention</u> but ask their students if there was</i>	



	Tina	<i>anything that they can help them with. Just to be more aware, <u>pay attention.</u></i>	1
	Cam	<i>Like being able to observe this student may need a little more <u>attention</u> to this person.</i>	1
	Anna	<i>They need to <u>pay more attention</u> really.</i>	1
	Susan	<i>And I as long as I am, it was hard for me to <u>pay attention.</u> I just couldn't <u>pay attention</u> to the reading.</i>	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>29</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	52%		
<hr/>			
Reach Out	Marc	<i><u>Reach out</u> and help some.</i>	1
	Tim	<i>I would say them probably <u>reaching out.</u></i>	1
	Stephanie	<i>If they would have <u>reached out</u> to me.</i>	1
	Kenny	<i>I don't think that I was really trying to <u>reach out.</u></i>	1
	Susan	<i>There is different things you can <u>reach out</u> for.</i>	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>		<b>5</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	20%		
<hr/>			
Small Groups	David	<i>I like to work as a <u>group.</u></i>	1
	Tim	<i><u>Team up</u> with different partner, more use of socializing, interacting (small group).</i>	1
	Amber	<i>Being in a <u>group</u> you can get other people's outlooks, maybe.</i>	1
	Nick	<i>Smaller, smaller attendance population</i>	1

		(Group).	
	Stephanie	<u>Smaller groups</u> , too, like 10 to 20 students, man.	1
	Hannah	If we had <u>smaller classrooms</u> (Group).	1
	Susan	*Maybe break down in <u>little groups</u> (small). * they need to break down into <u>smaller classes</u> and stuff.	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>		<b>8</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	28%		
Support	David	If they just <u>support</u> each student, each student the way they <u>supported</u> this family. <u>Support.</u>	3
	Natalie	I really think the positive <u>support</u> .	1
	Joe	I think they could be there more <u>supportive</u> .	1
	Susan	Anything that would have helped you and <u>support</u> you in school.	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>6</b>
<b>Percentage</b>	16%		
Understand	Sam	Try to <u>understand</u> them [students].	1
	Jacob	Get better <u>understanding</u> from the students.	1
	Matt	They just didn't <u>understand</u> . But I didn't <u>understand</u> that stuff. <u>Make them understand</u> you know. More on the right path toward learning and <u>understanding</u> how and why I am going to need these things in my life.	4

Susan	<p><i>That <u>understanding</u>, you didn't even have to really know what was going on, but your <u>understanding</u>. She would get really frustrated because we weren't <u>understanding</u>. Just an <u>understanding</u>, like, letting them know, Hey, I <u>understand</u> home life is not right. It mattered if you got it or not you know and if you didn't <u>understand</u>.</i></p>	6
Jamie	<p><i>They couldn't <u>understand</u> why some of us were getting bad grades, well, we all learned differently. They don't <u>understand</u> how great knowledge is.</i></p>	2
Nick	<p><i>They know their parent think school is important but they don't <u>understand</u> why.</i></p>	1
Cam	<p><i>I don't know, some, some might do <u>understand</u> where I am coming from.</i></p>	1
John	<p><i>I would like to say just <u>understanding</u> of going to that extra mile trying to <u>understand</u> them maybe going back to pressing the issue.</i></p>	2
Kenny	<p><i>I <u>understand</u> it. I really, really enjoy it but when I don't, I get frustrated and then I don't want nothing to do with it and it helped me <u>understand</u> that. I think that they just need to <u>understand</u> a little bit more before they start acting like what they say is true.</i></p>	4

Joe	<i>You have just got to be able to <u>understand</u> and pay attention you know. I don't <u>understand</u>, how can you help me <u>understand</u> this?</i>	2
Molly	<i>It just means there could be something you are not <u>understanding</u> or you are having trouble with. Something is going on with them or they are not <u>understanding</u> it because being, down there is a lot like school.</i>	2
Amber	<i>If there is something I don't <u>understand</u> so I were to raise my hand you are trying to get through a learning process with that whole group, so maybe that individual time.</i>	1
Natalie	<i>Sometimes and then when I would go in and try to explain a situation they would just look at me as I was one of their troublemakers; they didn't <u>understand</u>.</i>	1
Anna	<i><u>Understand</u> I need help, the class and stuff or maybe go over, back over the information to help them learn.</i>	1
Stephanie	<i>Yeah, to talk to us and to get to know us, <u>understand</u> us, and like they can just tell by the way we act or react what is going on in my life and my education.</i>	1
Tina	<i>If they just didn't take the time to sit a kid down and try to figure out, I mean—<u>understand</u> them.</i>	1

David	<i>I want you to point out to me to help me figure out a better way to help myself and stop, helping me out to stop smoking. Listen to what I'm doing and <u>understand</u> that you can help me.</i>	1
Tim	<i>I was smoking a marijuana and seen my assistant principal and he looked over at me and just shook his head, gave us suspensions and no more trips to Burger King. He never really took the time to help or <u>understand</u> why we did it.</i>	1
Curtis	<i>I think if they would, I would have seen this I would have been all right. So I [the teacher] <u>understand</u> what you are saying.</i>	1
Carrie	<i>I didn't think that they had time to sit and teach it to me on my own because they didn't <u>understand</u> me. That is why I would go and copy off other people's work.</i>	1
Hanna	<i>It shouldn't be just important to student to have good grades, but it should be important to teachers to help their student get good grades. Ya know, to <u>understand</u> how they learn.</i>	1
Kirk	<i>If you had a problem, Mr. L, he always said if you had a problem you could</i>	1

		<i>come to him and he would work with you. He tried to <u>understand</u> kids.</i>	
	Kameron	<i>like you come here and I seen like Mr. Johnston, you know, he came up and talked to me. He tried to <u>understand</u> how I was doing. I mean, and I know at that time he seen me, I probably weighed like a hundred pounds, everythin.g</i>	1
	Mark	<i>Who knows if they did or they didn't because they never said? They never took the time to get to know me or <u>understand</u> me.</i>	1
	Mike	<i>I would have reacted different and they, then they would have. I think they were good teachers, they just didn't <u>understand</u>.</i>	1
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>40</b>
	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>100%</b>	

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## Appendix J

## Perceived Academic Preparedness of Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>TAG</b>	<b>SPED</b>	<b>REG</b>	<b>At-risk</b>	<b>Overall perception</b>
Amber	0	0	0	1	no
Natalie	0	0	1	0	no
Susan	1	0	0	1	yes
Molly	0	0	0	1	yes
Anna	0	0	1	0	yes
Stephanie	1	0	0	1	yes
Tina	0	0	1	0	no
Jamie	1	0	0	0	yes
Carrie	0	1	0	0	no
Hanna	0	1	0	0	no
Kenny	0	0	0	1	yes
Kirk	0	1	0	0	yes
Jacob	1	0	0	0	yes
Matt	0	0	0	1	no
Kameron	0	0	1	0	yes
Marc	0	0	1	0	no
Mike	0	0	0	1	no

Cam	0	1	0	0	yes
Nick	0	0	1	0	yes
Steve	0	0	1	0	yes
Tim	0	0	1	0	yes
Curtis	0	1	0	0	no
John	0	0	1	0	yes
Sam	0	0	0	1	no
Joe	0	1	0	0	yes
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<i>60% or 15–yes</i>
					<i>40% or 10–no</i>



## Appendix K

## Perceived Personal/Social Behavior Preparedness of Participants

Name	School	Home	Agency	Activity	Overall perception
Amber	1	0	1	1	yes
Natalie	0	0	0	1	no
Susan	1	1	0	1	yes
Molly	1	0	1	1	yes
Anna	0	0	0	1	yes
Stephanie	0	0	0	1	no
Tina	0	0	0	0	no
Jamie	1	0	0	1	no
Carrie	0	0	0	0	no
Hanna	0	0	0	0	no
Kenny	1	0	0	1	yes
Kirk	1	0	0	0	yes
Jacob	1	1	0	1	yes
Matt	0	0	0	0	no
Kameron	0	0	0	1	no
Marc	0	0	1	0	no
Mike	0	0	0	1	no
Cam	1	0	0	1	yes

Nick	0	0	0	1	no
David	0	0	0	1	no
Tim	0	0	0	0	no
Curtis	0	0	0	0	no
John	0	0	1	0	no
Sam	1	0	0	1	no
Joe	1	0	0	1	no
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>40% or 10–yes</b>

*60% or 15–no*

## Appendix L

## Perceived Career Education Preparedness of Participants

<b>Name</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Home</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Overall perception</b>
Amber	1	0	0	0	yes
Natalie	0	0	0	0	no
Susan	0	0	0	0	no
Molly	1	0	0	0	no
Anna	0	0	0	0	no
Stephanie	0	0	0	0	no
Tina	1	0	0	0	yes
Jamie	0	0	0	0	no
Carrie	0	0	0	0	no
Hanna	0	0	0	0	no
Kenny	0	0	0	0	no
Kirk	1	0	0	0	yes
Jacob	0	0	0	0	no
Matt	0	0	0	0	no
Kameron	0	0	0	0	no
Marc	0	0	0	0	no
Mike	1	1	0	0	yes
Cam	0	0	0	0	no
Nick	0	0	0	0	no
David	0	0	0	0	no
Tim	1	0	0	0	yes
Curtis	0	0	0	0	no

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John	0	0	0	0	no
Sam	0	0	0	0	no
Joe	1	0	0	0	yes
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>24% or 6-yes</b>
					<b>76% or 19-no</b>