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The Road to Pomp and Circumstance for ELL Students: The Perceived Ambivalent Schooling Experience of ELL Students with Mexican Ancestry in an Urban Midwestern High School

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THE ROAD TO POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE FOR ELL STUDENTS:  
THE PERCEIVED AMBIVALENT SCHOOLING EXPERIENCE OF ELL STUDENTS WITH MEXICAN ANCESTRY IN AN URBAN MIDWESTERN HIGH SCHOOL

By

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Perceptions of high school faculty and staff members about the graduation outcomes of English language learners of Mexican ancestry were explored. Throughout the course of one semester, observations were made and field notes taken in classrooms and other school locations. Interviews were conducted with 25 faculty/staff members and 7 students, all of whom were former or current English language learners of Mexican ancestry. The author used a mixed methods strategy; interviews were coded for themes to assess qualitative data, and SPSS was used to analyze quantitative data. Faculty/staff perceived the top three indicators of whether or not an ELL student graduates as family, employment and poverty. Perceptions and attitudes within the school created an ambivalent environment, as did the institutional constructs of the school. Finally, four key recommendations were proposed to promote ELL student graduation rates: 1) build relationships with students and their families, 2) make modifications for ELL students, 3) establish guidelines for intake/outtake processes, and 4) increase intercultural competence of the faculty, staff and students within the school.

Key words: English Language Learners, Mexican students, teacher perceptions, barriers for graduation, ambivalent environment
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Kristine Michelle Sudbeck
Chapter 1: Introduction

Upon walking through the clear glass entry doors of Liberty High to examine the schooling experience of English language learner (ELL) students, particularly those of Mexican ancestry, I observed that there was something more than just the mere learning of English going on for these students. This “something more” (Gitlin et al., 2003) that I noticed was not atypical among other research studies about immigrant or ELL students (Cummins et al., 2005; Gitlin et al., 2003; Olson, 1997; Valdés, 1998). However, the manner in which I delved into this phenomenon generated a deeper understanding of how faculty and staff members interacted with this particular group of students and how other contextual factors within the school, student body, and community influenced the schooling experience for ELL students of Mexican ancestry.

After hearing from multiple faculty and staff members in their definition of success for an ELL student as “ultimately, graduating from high school”, I began to dig deeper into what appeared to be a somewhat contradictory logic that was present within the educational institution of Liberty High—in its policies, practices, and attitudes—that may impede the process it takes for a student to get to that final educational attainment of graduating. This process or journey towards ‘Pomp and Circumstance’ was illustrated by a contradicting “welcoming-unwelcoming atmosphere” (Gitlin et al., 2003), in part marginalizing minority students within the school, including the population I was studying. English language learner (ELL) students nationwide are struggling to graduate high school (Driscoll, 1999; Faltis & Hudelson, 1994; Flores et al., 2009; Gibson, 1987; Michie, 1999; Olsen, 1997; Reeves, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001), with the lowest graduation rate coming from those of Mexican ancestry (Aud et al., 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011: 149).
Statement of the Problem

While, ELL students of Mexican ancestry continue to have the lowest graduation rates nationwide (Huntington, 2004), the number of ELL students in general that are in the K-12 school system of the United States continues to grow (Batt, 2009; Olsen, 1997; Reeves, 2004; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). The number of school-aged children from age 5 to age 17 who spoke a language other than English in the home rose dramatically between 1980 and 2009, from 4.7 million to 11.2 million (NCES 2011: 1). This change reflects an increase from 10 to 21 percent of the entire school-age population in the United States (NCES 2011: 1). Now, for the first time in history, half of those who are migrating to the United States speak a language that is not English (Huntington, 2004). Students who live in a home where a language other than English is spoken may be foreign- or native-born; regardless, ELL students are challenged to keep up with native English-speaking peers who graduate from high school in a timely manner (Faltis & Hudelson, 1994). This is an urgent matter for federal and state policy makers, as this demographic group is projected to become 40% of the total school-age population by the 2030s, and most schools in the United States are struggling to accommodate ELL students already (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

Latinos/Hispanics can be of any race, and the way which identifies him/her underscores the ambiguity or race and ethnic group definitions in the United States (Chadwick Center, 2012). Latinos, defined as individuals who originate in Latin America, are one of the largest student populations in U.S. schools today. Latin America includes regions such as Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean Islands. Latin America includes countries whose citizens may not necessarily speak Spanish (e.g. Trinidad, Brazil, French Guanine, and Haiti). In
contrast, the term ‘Hispanic’ includes those only descending from a land or culture with a Spanish-speaking background. While each term has its own specific meaning and can vary from one author to another, often the terms are used interchangeably. This is the case for individuals of Mexican ancestry who are included in the use of both terms. From 1989 to 2009, the percentage of U.S. public school students who self-identified as White, or of European ancestry, dropped from 68 to 55%, while those who identified as ‘Hispanic’ doubled from 11 to 22% (Aud et al., 2011: 28). By 2009, the national enrollment of Hispanic students in U.S. schools had exceeded 11 million students (Aud et al., 2011: 28). In recent years, an increasing number of Latinos settled either temporarily or permanently in locations of the United States that have not been traditional homes to Latino populations (Gouviea et al., 2005; Hamann & Harklau, 2010; Hamann, et al., 2002; Lukose, 2007; Singer et al., 2008; Wortham et al., 2009). Certainly the Midwest is one U.S. region with a renewed increase in the settlement of Spanish-speaking populations (Gouviea et al., 2005; Gouviea & Powell, 2007; Hamann & Harklau, 2010; Hamann et al., 2002; Kandel & Cromartie, 2004; Singer et al., 2008). Public high school teachers across the nation are now being challenged to teach a diverse and ever-growing population (Batt, 2009; Capps et al., 2005; Clair, 1995; Howard, 1999; Reeves, 2006). In an educational system that has been designed by and for the White majority (Huntington, 2004), the underlying question for teachers is how to adapt to such increasing diversity within their school system (Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Milner, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ogbu, 1982a; Valenzuela, 1999). Despite the many risk factors facing ELL students and most often those of Mexican ancestry in completing K-12 education, educators must address these challenges and strive to improve the graduation rates for both ELL students in general as well as those of Mexican ancestry.
American schools often concurrently ‘welcome’ and ‘unwelcome’ immigrant newcomer students (Gitlin et al., 2003). The following extended transcription from an interview illustrates how a White P.E. teacher who was born and raised in the city, Mr. Craig, was trying to make sense of the needs of ELL students, the role of physical education in welcoming newcomers in a high school setting, and the dilemma of the politically correct terminology for identifying such students. In short, the transcription portrays similar struggles faced by faculty and staff within my Midwestern study site, which also adequately parallels with the welcoming and unwelcoming nature of schools Gitlin et al. (2003) discussed. My research, like theirs, is primarily concerned with the educational circumstances of Spanish-speaking newcomers. It also similarly recognizes that the welcoming of newcomers occurs in a larger demographic milieu. Just as you can note in the example given here, there are other significant newcomer populations at Liberty High and the faculty and staff are mainly White and local. In addition to Mr. Craig’s interview, I offer an observation taken from my field notes with an interaction between native English-speaking students at Liberty High who are also trying to make sense of ELL students of Mexican ancestry at their school.

These vignettes also display my own presence within the research site itself and illustrate how I gathered data. One example of this can be found during my interview with PE teacher, Mr. Craig, in the Media Center where our conversation was one-on-one; however, the venue was not private and the teacher (or I) could readily include someone else in the conversation (as the teacher does with a student given the pseudonym Teresa) if/when that was relevant for highlighting or exemplifying a point. Ultimately, this is by far the longest quotation in this document. Following these vignettes, my tone will shift to be more analytical and systematic, but if one task of an ethnographer of schooling is to convince readers that the ethnographer was
‘really there’ (Erickson, 1984), this segment should help readers imagine my research experience at Liberty High.

I came here in 2003 when [Liberty High] first opened its doors, so nine years ago. And I’ve been here ever since.

I would say it changes here a little bit every year for whatever reason. There’s never a year where I felt it was exactly like the other. Sometimes good, sometimes not so good. But most of the time, it’s neither good or bad. It’s just different.

I think one contributing factor for ELL students to do well in class is comfort. I think it really depends with ELL depending on the level, but I’ve even had some Level I students in activity classes that have done really well, but I think it’s because they really are comfortable with making mistakes, maybe not knowing that those things aren’t so detrimental and that they weigh those—ya know the embarrassment of not knowing certain things and the ability of asking questions or just saying to me, ya know I’m not sure.

I think kids would say I’m pretty approachable. For the most part, I think ELL students do just fine. Sometimes giving them extra time or allowing them time after class to complete something or an extra day to finish a test, that’s what I’ve been doing a lot with ELL students this year. And it makes a big difference.

My classes right now are about 30-50% bilingual in any given classroom.

Ya know we’ve always talked about [how to define success for an ELL student], because I feel like we get Level I’s in classes where they may not be successful. That’s always concerning as a teacher, but then we continuously get reinforcement from ELL teachers. If they don’t pass the class, that’s not the #1 goal. The #1 goal is to get them at this point to learn the language, so that they will eventually be successful in school. Right now we are immersing them in the language in a class where they can be social and interact with their peers. We get a lot of ELL Level I’s in our P.E. classes because they’re allowed to communicate so freely with peers and work with them in a little bit less of a heavily supervised setting.

If I need to contact a parent, and the student is Vietnamese, I have to use a translator. But if it’s Spanish, and the conversation is pretty basic, I can do that on my own. I feel
comfortable doing that, even at parent-teacher conferences. I don’t need to use a translator for Spanish-speaking parents. Aside from that, if it’s anything else, we use a translator to communicate for us.

We can recognize through data, not so much for Latinas, but Latino males struggle to be successful. Not just in ELL, but in general. Maybe not discriminate, but more attention is placed on them because of that. Maybe that’s in a good way, maybe not. The intent is to recognize that they might need some additional support structures, but hopefully that’s the result.

By the way, what’s the preferred word? I’ve heard not to say Latino, I’ve heard not to say Latina. I’ve heard to say Hispanic, I’ve heard not to say Hispanic. I never really know, but I suppose it depends on the person on what to say.

I have always wondered with ELL why we don’t break it down based on home language. I mean I understand that there’s certain languages where there’s only one person speaking it in the whole school, but their Spanish-speaking population is big enough. I always wondered why we didn’t have a group of Spanish-speaking ELL students, that way we can get a teacher who is Spanish-speaking and then not needing more assistance in that regard. We do have, and this is something we never had at my other high school and maybe that’s because there wasn’t a big ELL population, but we do have a Spanish class for native speakers. I think that’s maybe helpful for them, because it’s kind of like their version of English for us, so um... so having both of those is probably pretty helpful.

[I took] just five years [of Spanish] in high school, I never took Spanish in college. It just stuck with me. But then I’ve been to South America, traveled there for a while, so... um... I have a good friend of mine that is from Chile, so I speak it a lot with him. I speak it a lot with our kids. The more you practice it with the students, the more I think they feel comfortable. I don’t know... [Teresa, Teresa]... Do I practice Spanish with you guys sometimes? See. Do you think that helps you think? Or not? It helps me, but does it help make you guys feel more comfortable? Okay, good. (Sitting in the Media Center, he asks a student seated at the computer desk next to us)

We have a nice [ELL] program here, but I’m sure that maybe, for some kids, there’s just a lack of understanding as far as what exactly is expected of them in particular classes. That would probably drive me crazy, you know... like if I was in another setting where they didn’t speak my language. Ya know, the individual teacher might be different. My English teacher said just focus on learning the language. And then my mathematics teacher said that, ya know, you need to focus on getting an ‘A’ in the class. That would be a challenge in and of itself, because you’re kind of getting conflicting goals, ya know,
from two different teachers within the same building. That would be one of the barriers that some of our students have to deal with.

(Interview with Mr. Craig, P.E. teacher)

* * * * * * *

One common theme derived from the interview with Mr. Craig is the school’s efforts and his own towards creating a welcoming environment for ELL students and students of Mexican ancestry within Liberty High. Mr. Craig perceived himself as “pretty approachable” and also allows for flexibility in teaching ELL students (e.g., more time to finish an assignment or exam). Mr. Craig also had the ability to speak Spanish. This capability permitted him to speak directly to Spanish-speaking parents, rather than using an interpreter. In addition, Mr. Craig believed that his use of Spanish with students could potentially create a sense of comfort for students with a Spanish-speaking heritage. This perception was reinforced by his conversation with a nearby student during the interview, Teresa, who agreed that she appreciated the effort he put forth in speaking Spanish with her.

Efforts to being approachable, offering flexibility and conversing with students in Spanish have the potential to create a welcoming environment for ELL students of Mexican ancestry. However, contradictory messages identified by Mr. Craig should not go unnoticed. For ELL students to do well in his class, Mr. Craig felt a contributing factor was their comfort level in any given classroom environment (i.e., ability to ask questions, comfort with making mistakes, recognition of uncertainty). In a safe, welcoming environment, he felt that ELL students may potentially be more willing to take risks and participate in class. The fundamental attribute recognized here is the environment, which can change from classroom to classroom and teacher to teacher. Another obstacle that Mr. Craig identified is the manner in which ELL students to
respond to “conflicting goals.” During the interview, he mentioned that some ELL students may have a “lack of understanding as far as what exactly is expected of them in particular classes.” In his own classroom, Mr. Craig identified his personal goals for ELL when he stated, “If they don’t pass the class, that’s not the #1 goal. The #1 goal is to get them at this point to learn the language, so that they will eventually be successful in school.” These same goals may not be shared by every teacher at Liberty High however. Goals may change from one teacher to the next (i.e., getting an ‘A’ in the class or learning English); these conflicting goals may create confusion for some ELL students, even though they are within the walls of the same school.

Mr. Craig further noted the complexities of Liberty High for ELL students of Mexican ancestry. As research continues to show Latinos males, “not just in ELL, but in general” struggling to graduate from high school, Mr. Craig stated that more attention has been placed on this particular group within Liberty High. As he stated, “maybe that’s good in a way, maybe not.” He recognized that the intent is to provide additional support for Latino male students to increase their academic success; however, he was also uncertain if that was the actual result of this added attention. Furthermore, Mr. Craig questioned the resources that were already in place at Liberty High. He supported the accessibility of ‘Spanish for Native Speakers’ courses, though still questioned why there currently is not a Spanish-speaking ELL cohort.

As I am standing outside of the ELL classroom, waiting for the next period to begin, a group of seven native English-speaking students gathered outside the Spanish classroom and were instructed to play a game using Spanish terms. The rest of the class was working on something they missed the day before. During the game, one young man states, “What? I don’t want to be Central American… I’d rather be Canadian!” Seconds later, another girl starts talking about a student from Mexico. “Ya know, the one with that long, disgusting, greasy a** hair? Ah, she pisses me off. I just want to start a fight
with her. Like... go back to Mexico already!” A roar of laughter starts up within the group. Another student questioned, “Whose turn is it even?”

(Field notes, January 20, 2012)

* * * * * * * * *

The female student in this vignette expressed anger and frustration towards the Mexican female student she had been talking about. While the context of this frustration is unknown to the researcher, the conversation between these seven students during their Spanish game displayed tension amid different groups of students. One male student expressed his preference of Canada over Central America, which displayed negative attitudes about native Spanish-speakers from these students. This was reiterated when the female student wished the other girl would “go back to Mexico already.” These negative attitudes may reinforce stereotypes about students within the classroom and school environment, distinguishing an unwelcoming atmosphere for ELL students of Mexican ancestry.

Positioning the Researcher

It is important to note that I, myself, am an outsider to this school. I have never been educated, nor have I taught at Liberty High. However, as a researcher I also bring with me particular perspectives. I have European ancestry and grew up in a rural setting within the same state that Liberty High is located. During my undergraduate academic career, I studied abroad in Costa Rica and lived with a host family. I took classes at the university there, all of which were in Spanish. I have been studying Spanish for ten years and continue to actively seek out interactions with the Spanish-speaking community. With this unique linguistic and cultural
infusion into my own life, I also began to interact with Liberty High a few years prior to the beginning of this study. During a teaching practicum experience, I observed the classroom of a former ELL teacher who is no longer at the school. In addition, I spent one year mentoring a Mexican-American student in the ELL program. These experiences have enhanced my interest in learning more about the schooling experiences other ELL students of Mexican ancestry have at Liberty High, as well as examining what the school is directly or inadvertently doing to influence these schooling experiences.

Much of the current literature focusing on ELL students emphasizes reasons for dropping out of high school (Faltis & Hudelson, 1994; Flores et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Other scholars have spent time researching the education of Latinos, or more specifically those of Mexican ancestry (Chapa & de la Rosa, 2004; Driscoll, 1999; McCarthy & Valdez, 1986; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Suárez-Orozco & Todarova, 2006; Suárez-Orozco et al., 1999; Wortham et al., 2009). The bulk of research including Latino high school students has been conducted in large urban settings (Ada, 1988; Bollin, 2003; Carger, 1996; Massey et al., 2003, Michie, 1999). To date, there is limited research aimed at accessing ELL students of Mexican ancestry in mid-sized cities or smaller towns in the Midwest.

Many scholars have used quantitative data to generalize information about ELL students to the entire nation (Aud et al., 2011; Capps et al., 2005; NCES, 2011; Suh & Suh, 2007). Still others have focused on the qualitative approach to data collection and analysis about immigrant and minority education (Ada, 1988; Chan, 2007; Hemmings, 1996; Lee, 1994; Rodriguez, 1982; Sarroub, 2001; Valdés, 1998). Few studies have incorporated the use of mixed methods to study ELL and/or Latino students (Olsen, 1997). By utilizing a mixed methods approach to study ELL
students of Mexican ancestry in a mid-sized city in the Midwest, information can be triangulated to determine whether or not a Midwestern setting parallels results found in other cities and regions of the U.S. Still, because the bulk of the study is qualitative in nature, generalizations cannot be made to the entire ELL student population or to the entire population of students with Mexican ancestry.

For the purpose of this study, students defined as having *Mexican ancestry* include not only first generation immigrants coming from Mexico, but also those who are second, third, fourth, or fifth generation. To be included in this study, one does not have to have lived all or part of their lives in Mexico. The group under examination simply has to have ancestral roots in the country of Mexico, however proximate or distant. The study includes a review of the literature currently available on ELL students of Mexican ancestry and educational attainment, an explanation of research questions guiding the study, a description of the utilization of the mixed methods approach, an in-depth examination of results, an analysis of the way in which findings relate to current literature, a discussion of the implications of the study, and conclusions about themes that emerged about the ambivalent environment ELL students of Mexican ancestry experienced on their journey to ‘Pomp and Circumstance’ at Liberty High.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Dropping Out of High School

The improvement of high school dropout rates continues to be a formidable challenge within the educational system of the United States (Ream & Rumburger, 2008). Each year, there are approximately one half million students who drop out of high school (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007: Table 7). Dropping out of high school is said to be “less an event than the culmination of a process of failure in school that begins early in a student’s academic career” (Astone & McLanahan, 1991: 310). The scholarly work on high school graduation rates and dropping out of high school has yielded a variety of potential causes, ranging from family background, to employment, to peer influence, and school factors (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Baker, 1999; Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999; Lee & Burkham, 2003; Ream & Rumburger, 2008; Suh & Suh, 2007; Warren & Cataldi, 2006). Researchers have found that the combination of two or more risk factors increases the likelihood of a student dropping out of high school before graduation (Suh & Suh, 2007: 297). After being exposed to multiple risk factors, the student becomes less motivated to complete school work, disengaged from the educational process and more likely to drop out all together (Suh & Suh, 2007: 297).

One common factor that is attributed to a student dropping out of high school is the student’s family background (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999). The characteristics of the family which have been determined to affect dropout rates include the educational level of the student’s mother, the educational level of the student’s father, how many parents live in the home, the number of siblings, and parental income (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999; 1328). Other scholars have suggested that parents’ educational expectations have an impact on student graduation rates (Hao & Bonestead-Bruns, 1998). Parenting styles, the absence of a
parent, and the presence of a step-parent have also been examined as possible causes for students to leave high school (Astone & McLanahan, 1991).

Additionally, individual factors such as a student’s employment while in school have been associated with increased dropout rates. High school students who work 20 hours or more per week are more likely to drop out of high school compared to peers who do not work or work less intensively (Warren & Cataldi, 2006: 122). Working intensively at a job or at home (e.g., providing childcare to siblings), can also take time away from homework, deprive the student of sleep, and increase the likelihood of absence from school (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999; Warren & Cataldi, 2006). Students with a lower socioeconomic status may be encouraged or forced by their family to contribute to the family income, and therefore employment may have to become a priority over the student’s education (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999).

Other individual factors that may increase the likelihood of a student dropping out are connected to the social aspects of development in peer relationships (Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Adolescence is a developmental stage that is characterized by an increase in peer social orientation and gradual autonomy from the parents and other family members (Ream & Rumberger, 2008: 110). Students then become more susceptible to influence by their peers during this time period. Having ‘school-oriented’ peer groups increases the likelihood of retention, while interaction with other high school dropouts negatively affects the student’s academic outcome (Ream & Rumberger, 2008: 110). In addition, students can be influenced by peers to become involved with gangs, illegal substances, or other risky behaviors (Suh & Suh, 2007: 303). Teen pregnancy may also be influenced by peer groups, and serves as another reason for students, primarily girls, to drop out of high school (Hao & Cherlin, 2004).
Characteristics of specific schools have also been studied as factors which affect student drop-out rates. For example, the instructional and administrative milieu of the school has been studied as a contributing factor affecting a student’s academic success (Baker, 1999: 57; Lee & Burkham, 2003). Schools that offer mainly academic courses and few nonacademic courses have been linked to a decrease in the likelihood of students dropping out (Lee & Burkham, 2003). Also, schools that enroll more than 1,500 students tend to have more students who do not graduate (Lee & Burkham, 2003: 353). In addition, student academic characteristics, including academic and personal competencies, low grade point averages, school suspensions, and grade retention negatively influence the academic achievement of students (Suh & Suh, 2007; Wang & Gordon, 1994). Students who are considered at risk of academic failure often become alienated from school and are typically more unsatisfied with their schooling, causing many to drop out (Baker, 1999: 65). The social context of the classroom appears to influence a student’s appraisal of school as a “likeable and satisfying environment” as early as the third grade (Baker, 1999: 65). As such, a student’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction with school can change the value one places on attending school and may contribute to an increase in truant behaviors (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999:1299). Modifying the classroom and learning environment may be more beneficial than attempting to alter the student (Baker, 1999).

ELL Students

Students who are learning English can face additional obstacles unique to their situation. In the past, explanations for low school achievement among minority students was linked to a genetic deficit, deeming minority students as inherently inferior, both intellectually and morally (Erickson, 1987). Proponents of the cultural deficit model attributed school failure among
minority students to being culturally deprived because they did not experience a cognitively stimulating environment (Erickson, 1987). In the mid-1960s, the anthropology of education became a distinct field; through this development, educational anthropologists were generally dissatisfied with the ethnocentric, biased nature of former explanations for the lower achievement of minority students (Erickson, 1987). Consequently, the cultural difference theory was proposed, which sought to explain low academic achievement of minority students through the inadvertent cultural misunderstandings that occurred between teachers and students (Erickson, 1987). Cultural capital and a sense of being part of a lower social status have been delineated as additional reasons for minority students to drop out of high school before graduation (Ogbu, 1987; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Sullivan, 2001). There are three categorical forms of capital that impact success in any sphere which are physical, human, and social. But there is also a fourth type of capital which is important to minority students, cultural capital. Cultural capital can be defined as the familiarity with the dominant culture within a society, with special attention to the ability to use ‘educated’ language (Sullivan, 2001: 3). The possession of cultural capital may vary along the social hierarchy that is already in place in any given society; however, educational institutions in the U.S. are designed with the assumption that all students have cultural capital, regardless of their social class (Sullivan, 2001). The lack of cultural capital makes it more challenging for people in the lower class to succeed in the U.S. education system:

“... the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture.”

(Bourdieu 1977: 494)
Cultural capital is something that is inherited at birth and continues through socialization within the family setting. Other factors of socialization may decrease the value of one’s cultural capital, increasing the overall effect it may have on a student’s educational attainment (Sullivan, 2001).

With regard to cultural difference, minority students may be compelled to believe that they have lesser status in comparison to their White majority peers (Ogbu, 1978). Race and ethnic differences play out in educational and economic achievement, whereby minority students are affected by their “caste-like minority status” which in turn has an effect on their motivation for academic achievement (Ogbu, 1978). Minority students have struggled in an attempt to adapt and survive in the school setting, such that:

“a subordinate group under colonial, caste, or racial stratification may be prohibited through legal or extralegal mechanisms from behaving in certain ways or denied access to privileges, rewards, or positions considered as prerogatives of the dominant group” (Ogbu, 1982:299).

Minorities are said to associate academic success with ‘Being White’, therefore propositioning that minority students purposely fail in order to “avoid taking on the perceived characteristics of their oppressors” (Lopez et al., 2002: 246). Others have contributed similar cross-cultural studies examining immigrant students and their depressed academic motivation and educational experiences within the United States (Olsen, 1997; Rong & Preissle, 1998; Warren, 1978).

ELL students also carry with them distinct characteristics that make their educational situation unique. Some examples of this would be that ELL students speak a language other than English, and generally have limited experience in using the English language. Some ELL
students have completed less education, may have been born outside of the United State, and perhaps have an undocumented status. All of these examples may be contributing factors to high dropout rates among immigrant students (Hakuta et al., 2000; Echevarria, et al., 2006; Espenshade & Fu, 1997; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). When immigrant students come from a language background that is not English, they experience a language deficiency in U.S. schools with the medium of instruction (Hakuta et al., 2000; Olsen, 1997; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). ELL students and their parents interact with U.S. schools using a vast number of languages. For example in 2005, approximately 85% of the foreign-born population used a language other than English at home (Martin & Midgley, 2006: 25). Scholars have studied the length of time necessary for language minority students to acquire a second language (Collier, 1989; Hakuta et al., 2000). English language learners take as long as three to five years to achieve oral proficiency, and up to four to seven years to acquire academic English (Hakuta et al., 2000: 13). These facts illustrate the daunting task ELL students have to acquire oral and academic English while in the K-12 system, whilst still keeping up with their native English-speaking peers (Hakuta et al., 2000). Five variables have been identified that may contribute to the time it takes to acquire a second language. These include first language acquisition, second language acquisition, the student’s age at the time of exposure to the second language, academic achievement, membership in a language majority or language minority group, and language(s) of instruction at the school (Collier, 1989: 509).

While student characteristics are important in explaining variation with English proficiency among ELL students, the schools that they attend are also significant in their acquisition of English and academic progress (Carhill et al., 2008; Echevarria et al., 2006). The exposure ELL students have with native English speakers at a given school and the quality of
instruction at that school are both important features in the speed with which a student learns English (Carhill et al., 2008: 1161). Furthermore, the acquisition of English requires many minority language students in the U.S. to take ELL courses, which takes time away from completing general education courses necessary for graduation. Once in those mainstream courses, ELL students may find it difficult to do well in their classes as the language of instruction is English rather than their native language (Carhill et al., 2008). Since the most recent educational reform, many states have required all students to pass specific subject-area exams in order to obtain their high school diploma (Echevarria et al., 2006). This can be detrimental to ELL students in particular as there is an increasing number who are not able to graduate from high school because they have failed these high stakes exams, regardless if they have fulfilled all other requirements for graduation (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003).

Another reason that ELL students may drop out of high school could be due to their former educational experience in their home country and the educational experience of their parents. A student’s former educational experience can inadvertently affect the acquisition of English as a second language, their overall study habits, and the ability to apply previous knowledge to what is being learned in the new environment (Espenshade & Fu, 1997: 291). Therefore, those ELL students with limited formal schooling experience would be at a deficit when they enroll in U.S. schools (Espenshade & Fu, 1997). In addition, the educational experience of parents in a former country or in the U.S. may also have repercussions for an ELL student. Those whose parents have graduated high school are more likely to finish high school than those whose parents did not graduate (Driscoll, 1999; Lee, 1994; Wojtkieqicz and Donato, 1995; Zhou, 1997). In a study of educational attainment among twenty five religious/ethnic groups in the United States, it was demonstrated that educational outcomes were not drastically
influenced by subsequent generations (Hirschman and Falcon, 1985). Rather, children of highly educated immigrants consistently managed to do better in school than those who were fourth or fifth generation descendents of poorly educated ancestors, in spite of their family background (Hirschman and Falcon, 1985). Higher levels of education may affect the way in which a parent assists his or her child with homework, but also motivates students to stay in school (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001: 151). The parents’ familiarity and interaction with the functions of the U.S. school system have also been found to affect an immigrant student’s educational experience (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001:151).

Birth in a country other than the U.S. may hinder an ELL student from graduating high school. This may mean that the educational institutions do not match up exactly to the school standards in the United States. Transcripts may then become problematic, forcing students to retake classes they have already completed in their former country (Olsen, 1997). This creates a discouraging atmosphere for students trying to complete enough credits to graduate. In addition, birth in a country other than the U.S. may mean that the family has had to separate and/or reunify, which can be very stressful for the student and his or her family (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001: 66). The psychological stress of immigrating may also be a difficult transition for ELL students and their families (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001: 69).

An ELL student’s undocumented status or the undocumented status of family members may also make the student more vulnerable to dropping out of high school (Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995: 561). The population of undocumented immigrants is larger now than at any other time since the early twentieth century when the U.S. began regulating immigration. While the United States represents just 5% of the world’s total population, approximately 20% of all unauthorized migrants in the world reside in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011: 439).
Furthermore, among the approximate 5.5 million children growing up with unauthorized parents, an estimated one million children themselves are undocumented (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011:440). Students with an unauthorized status may be the only ones in their family with English-speaking capabilities, and may consequently have to take on additional roles that their documented counterparts do not have to consider (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011). Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011) found that if the parents and/or children arrive in the U.S. without proper documentation and the student is struggling in a class or has problems with a teacher or fellow student, the student and their parents are more likely to avoid confrontation with teachers and other staff members. Having an unauthorized status may encumber one’s ability or support to proceed to the tertiary level of education; without the accessibility to colleges and universities beyond graduation, students may be more willing to drop out of high school (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001: 31). In addition, students with an undocumented status may live in constant fear, recognizing the potential risks of deportation or incarceration for themselves or a family member (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Historic and recent legislation have impacted the educational outcome of ELL students. For example, the 1974 Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols* made it clear that:

“...there is no equality of treatment merely by providing the same facilities, textbooks, teachers and curriculum... for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.”

[Supreme Court Case *Lau v. Nichols*, 1974]
This case brought about the implementation of more sources, training, and funds to support the education of ELL students (Olsen, 2008: 157). By doing so, ELL students were recognized as a marginalized group. The need to offer a more equitable educational system was acknowledged, not just for ELL students but all populations. Another Supreme Court case in 1982, *Plyler v. Doe*, also had an impact for ELL students in the nation. The ruling of *Plyler v. Doe* overturned a Texas statute denying the education of undocumented immigrants, as it violated the Equal Protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment (Olivas, 2004). The Supreme Court declared that all children have the same right to a free public education, including undocumented children. As such, they are obligated to attend school until they reach the age mandated by state law (Olivas, 2004). Based on this ruling, school officials were not allowed to ask for proof of a student’s legal documentation (Olivas, 2004). Both of these Supreme Court cases directly impacted the education of immigrant students in U.S. schools, and were fundamental in improving the school standards to meet the needs of ELL students.

One of the more recent changes in legislation pertaining to ELL students was the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ which was signed by President George W. Bush and implemented in 2001. While the No Child Left Behind Act educational reform promoted the education of immigrants and limited English-speaking children in several ways, this legislation has posed problems for schools with large immigrant and limited English proficient (LEP) students (Capps et al., 2005: 2; Abedi, 2004). Drawing on information gathered primarily from the 2000 U.S. Census of Population and Housing data, Capps et al. (2005) argue that the No Child Left Behind legislation poses challenges to schools with larger immigrant and LEP students due to ongoing residential and school segregation by race, ethnicity, and income. Over half (53%) of LEP students attend schools where over 30% of the student body consists of fellow classmates who
are also LEP; in contrast, 57% of students who are proficient in English attend schools that have less than 1% of their student enrollment is LEP students (Van Hook & Fix, 2000). In most instances, schools with large LEP populations also have substantial Hispanic, Asian, and low-income student populations, and schools serving several of these groups must meet performance standards for all groups involved or expect interventions to take place through the No Child Left Behind Act (Capps et al., 2005). The emphasis of this educational reform is testing based on standards. This may narrow the focus of what is taught in schools to the subjects most covered by standardized tests, especially for schools that experience difficulty in meeting the target standards of performance (Capps et al., 2005). Furthermore, students who perform poorly on these standardized tests (e.g. immigrant students who enter into ELL programs late) may become discouraged by their poor performance on these high stake tests and possibly drop out of high school (Abedi, 2004; Capps et al., 2005).

During the last decade, the number of LEP students in public schools rose 84%, as compared to a total enrollment increase of only 11% (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition [NCLEA], 2005). The same study showed that over five million LEP students were enrolled in pre-K-12 schools throughout the U.S., constituting almost 10% of the total enrollment nationwide (NCELA, 2005). While the geographic distribution of many immigrant families is concentrated in urban areas such as California (35%), Texas (11.3%), New York (11%), Florida (6.7%), Illinois (5%) and New Jersey (4%), it is also important to note that the number of immigrant children not located in these top six states has shifted with a 40% increase from 1.5 million to 2.1 million between 1990-1995 (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Beyond the top six states listed, the remaining states that were experiencing a dramatic shift in recent immigrant students were less likely to deliver language and other services that are
necessary for recent immigrant students (Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000). Even though the majority of ELL students live in large urban centers, now smaller metropolitan, suburban, and even rural areas have also experienced significant demographic shifts (Singer et al., 2008). Many of these new migrant destinations feature an increase in their ELL population, and many times do not have adequate support in the form of programs, teachers, and resources to sufficiently support the needs of ELL students (Echevarria et al., 2006; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

Students of Mexican Ancestry

Students of Mexican ancestry also face a unique set of factors that may potentially affect dropout rates. Over half of the foreign-born population in the U.S. was born in Latin America and the Caribbean (Capps et al., 2005). One third of this population was born in Mexico, a trend congruent at various levels, e.g. younger foreign-born children, older children, or immigrant parents with children (Capps et al., 2005: 8). With regard to this population, 68% of children with parents born in Mexico were low-income, 43% were limited in English proficiency, and 54% had parents without high school degrees (Capps et al., 2005:32). Students of Mexican ancestry differ from most immigrant groups because there has been a long-term migration history to the U.S (Huntington, 2004), and hence an established network system with social capital readily available to provide support once immigrants arrive (Massey, 1999: 43). In addition, many ELL students come from families who are transnational migrants and move back and forth between countries (Guerra, 1998). Mexico is in close proximity, which makes it more easily accessible to travel to and from the U.S. (Guerra, 1998; Huntington, 2004). Due to a variety of factors (e.g. contiguity, scale, illegality, regional concentration, persistence, and historical presence), Mexican immigration differs from past immigration to the U.S. and many other current patterns of immigration (Huntington, 2004). The combination of these factors
contributes to Mexico accounting for 27.6% of the total foreign-born population in the U.S. in 2000, as compared to its next largest sources of immigration, China and the Philippines, which only make up 4.9% and 4.3% respectively (Huntington, 2004: 3). It is also important to note that until 1848, the states of Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas and Utah, as well as parts of Wyoming and Colorado were all part of Mexico (Massey et al., 2003); this historical context distinguishes Mexico from any other source of immigration to the U.S.

It is also important to note that Mexico, like many other countries, is quite diverse in terms of ethnic groups and ecological zones, covering 31 states and one federal district. With over 30 languages spoken, Mexico is home to a variety of populations with different ancestral backgrounds (Adler, 2008; Cockcroft, 1996). There are several distinct geographical and cultural regions dispersed throughout the country. One of the most basic divisions is between the highlands and lowlands. There is very fertile soil in the highlands regions (e.g. the central plateau of Mexico, the mountainous Oaxaca regions, and the Chiapas basin), which has in turn led to more labor intensive agricultural and densely populated areas. In contrast the lowlands, made up of regions along the Pacific, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean coasts, have less fertile soil and scattered communities that have not experienced urbanization (Adler, 2008). In addition to geographical distinctions, Mexico features a large amount of cultural and social blending, also known as mezitaje, between people with indigenous and European ancestries (Adler, 2008). Certain communities such as rural areas of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Yucatán have high concentrations of people who speak indigenous languages and identify themselves as part of an indigenous community (Adler, 2008). Urban areas along with some central and western states and most northern states generally have lower concentrations of indigenous speakers, though migration of indigenous peoples to urban centers continues (Adler, 2008).
Discrimination is a potential factor that can affect students of Mexican ancestry in the U.S., as students continue to face an ongoing anti-immigrant sentiment (Spring, 2012; Wilson, 1999). Many are perceived to be in the U.S. illegally, even if they have legal documentation (Wilson, 1999). Other scholars note a different type of discrimination that has affected many minority groups, including those of Mexican ancestry (Meier & Stewart, 1991). Historically, Anglo attitudes about the education of the children of Mexicans was said to involve two conflicting positions (Spring, 2012). On one hand, farmers in the U.S. did not want children of Mexican heritage to attend school because it took them away from areas of intensive agriculture and labor shortages. At the same time, others wanted the children of Mexicans to go to school so that they could be properly “Americanized” (Spring, 2012: 94). In the past, Mexican families also appeared reluctant to have their children attend school, because it meant the loss of that child’s contribution to the family income (Spring, 2012). Discrimination occurred within the educational system for students of Mexican ancestry in two ways. First, Anglos used education as a method of social control by denying the population access to knowledge necessary for economic advancement and giving personal agency to combat social injustices (Spring, 2012). In addition, people in the United States wanted to keep people of Mexican ancestry ignorant in order to take advantage of the cheap labor resources. Those students of Mexican ancestry who chose to attend school faced deculturalization (i.e., a loss of language and culture) through segregation and an institutional design aimed for assimilation into the mainstream culture (Spring, 2012). In 1929, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was formed as many Latino community members protested the denial of education to children, the existence of school segregation, and the attempts by the Anglo communities to diminish familiarity with traditional culture (Spring, 2012: 96). In more contemporary times following LULAC’s mission
to combat discrimination, racism still occurs through resegregation. When certain schools take actions that positively affect minority students, the school can consequently experience Anglo student loss, or “White flight” (Meier & Stewart, 1991: 197). It has been argued that school district officials need to maintain political support and enrollment from the majority White students and their parents, so as not to allow resources to decrease like other schools who have experienced this “White flight” (Meier & Stewart, 1991: 197). Additionally, students of Mexican ancestry may experience a “subtractive process” of schooling when social and cultural resources are removed from their educational experience, which leaves them increasingly “vulnerable to academic failure” (Valenzuela, 1999: 3).

Social support has also been identified as a factor contributing to the development of self-esteem for students. Social support may be particularly significant in the lives of students of Mexican ancestry as they experience acculturative stress, in addition to the stress they are already experiencing in school (Lopez et al., 2002: 247). This support can come from family and friends, but support from within the school is also beneficial. In addition, as found among other historically marginalized populations (e.g., Native Americans), students tend to do better socially and academically when they have teachers that look like them (Vandergriff, 2006). Having adults present who possess a similar cultural heritage provides a means of support by potentially demonstrating professionalism and occupational success.

Teachers

Faculty and staff are major contributors to the education of students, but this is especially true for ELL students of Mexican ancestry. Teachers themselves may be barriers to the success of ELL students (Clair, 1995; Faltis & Hudelson, 1994; Stanosheck Youngs & Youngs, 2001).
The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that during the 2007-08 academic school year, 83% of public school teachers in the U.S. were White, 7% were Black or Hispanic, 1% each were Asian or of two or more races, and less than 1% each were Pacific Islander or American Indian/Alaska Native (NCES, 2012b). By looking at current trends of pre-service teacher education programs, which attract predominantly White, monocultural, English-speaking women, the future demographics of U.S. teachers will not likely change in any substantive way (Irizarry & Raible, 2011). This leaves an overwhelming majority of White teachers to face the task of teaching “culturally relevant pedagogy” (Ladson-Billings, 2009) in classrooms with diverse populations.

How then do teachers who are predominantly White middle-class women (NCES, 2012b) teach students who are from different ethnic and cultural, as well as socioeconomic backgrounds? Tatum (1992) examined attitudes of pre-service teachers and listed five working assumptions to guide her analysis of future educators:

1. **Racism,** defined as a “system of advantage based on race” (see Wellman, 1977) is a pervasive aspect of U.S. socialization.
2. **Prejudice,** defined as a “preconceived judgment or opinion, often based on limited information,” is clearly distinguished from racism (see Katz, 1978).
3. **In the context of U.S. society, the system of advantage clearly operates to benefit the Whites as a group.**
4. **Because of the prejudice and racism inherent in our environment when we were children, I assume that we cannot be blamed for learning what we were taught (intentionally or unintentionally).**
5. **It is assumed that change, both individual and institutional, is possible.**

(Derived from Tatum, 1992: 3-4)

Given these five assumptions, Tatum suggests that it is virtually impossible to live in contemporary U.S. society and not be exposed to some form of racism or prejudices. As a result, it is perceived that all people have been misinformed about groups that have historically been
oppressed through racism. In her third assumption, Tatum recognizes that in the United States, Whites are privileged by the racism which is prevalent in our society, a concept known for decades (Howard, 1999; McIntosh, 1989). However, it is also significant to note that racism has negative ramifications for everyone.

After recognizing these assumptions, future teachers can move beyond the “luxury of ignorance” (Howard, 2003; Howard, 1999), and onto further steps of White racial identity which involves both the abandonment of racism and the development of a nonracist White identity (Tatum, 1992). In order to accomplish the latter, Helms (1990) states that “he or she must accept his or her own Whiteness, the cultural implications of being White, and define a view of Self as a racial being that does not depend on the perceived superiority of one racial group over another” (p. 49). Furthermore, the perception of a color-blind society only masks a “dysconscious racism” (Paley, 1989), an “uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things given” (Ladson-Billings, 2009: 34-5). That is not to say that teachers with a ‘color-blind’ perspective consciously deprive or punish culturally and linguistically diverse students on the basis of their skin color; rather, their “dysconsciousness” is apparent when they fail to challenge the status quo, accepting the given as inevitable (Ladson-Billings, 2009). If not addressed, this “dysconsciousness” can provoke emotional responses that could potentially result in student resistance to oppression-related pedagogy and curriculum (Tatum, 1992).

Mainstream classroom teachers face the challenge in which they may feel no special training is necessary to work with ELL students (Clair, 1995). However, many schools experience a mismatch between ELL students’ needs and teacher preparation (Echevarria et al., 2006). While the No Child Left Behind Act called for highly qualified teachers in all classrooms, the supply of certified ESL and bilingual teachers still does not adequately fill the demand
(Echevarria et al., 2006). Less than 13% of teachers nationwide have received the professional development necessary to prepare them for culturally and linguistically diverse students such as the ELL population (NCES, 2002). Furthermore, federal guidelines regarding these higher qualifications for teachers are primarily centered on core content-area teachers, which requires them to have a deep understanding of the subject matter; however, there are no such requirements for teachers to be adequately trained for teaching ELL students in these mainstream classrooms, which leaves a gap in understanding second language acquisition in general, methods for teaching English language learners, or sheltered teaching methods (Echevarria et al., 2006). In a nationwide survey by NCES, 41.2% of 2,984,781 public school teachers reported teaching ELL students in their classrooms, yet only 12.5% of those teachers had eight or more hours of training in the three previous years (NCES, 2002). Even so, research shows that eight years is not even enough to compensate for learning the necessary strategies to teach ELL students (Borko, 2004; Gonzales & Darling-Hammond, 1997).

Additionally, mainstream teachers often possess misinformation about the cultures of origin for different students, which may negatively affect the student learning process (Clair, 1995). Mainstream teachers may find it difficult to create a truly welcoming atmosphere for ELL students (Faltis & Hudelson, 1994). Mainstream high school teachers expressed concern about the equitability of coursework modifications for ELL students (Reeves, 2006: 137). Moreover, the same teachers demonstrated ambivalence towards professional development for working with the ELL student population (Reeves, 2006: 137). Additionally, teachers were working under misconceptions about second language acquisition, and had discrepancies between general and specific attitudes toward ELL inclusion (Reeves, 2006: 137). Various predictors have also been suggested to affect the attitudes mainstream teachers have toward ELL
students. These include general education experience, specific ELL training, personal contact with diverse cultures, prior contact with ELL students, demographic characteristics, and personality (Stanosheck Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Pre-service teachers may enhance their multicultural attitudes and knowledge through fieldwork experiences in culturally and ethnically diverse settings, courses in multicultural and bilingual education, and experience with other classmates (Capella-Santana, 2003: 182).

Teachers’ perceptions of ELL programs themselves have also been studied. There is a short supply of educators with adequate training to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students (Batt, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Stone & Hamann, 2012). Three challenges were identified by teachers that affect ELL education: qualifications for educators, understaffing of ELL and bilingual educators, and the extra duties that ELL jobs entail (Batt, 2009: 41). The two major solutions identified were professional development and a restructuring of the ELL program (Batt, 2009). Of the professional development areas recommended, participants expressed a need for training in involving parents, developing the ELL curriculum, accessing Spanish language classes, studying first and second language literacy methods, enhancing sheltered English instruction, training in ELL teaching methods, and establishing a newcomer center (Batt, 2009: 41-2). The promotion of culturally relevant teaching within schools to assist minority students has been supported (Ladson-Billings, 2000), while others promote community and mentoring relationships as a way to enhance student graduation rates (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008: 84).

Another way in which teachers can adapt to the culturally and linguistically diverse populations within their schools is to incorporate the multi-faceted model of multicultural education within their schools. Sonia Nieto defines the multicultural education model as:
“... a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, gender, and sexual orientation, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates teachers, students, and families and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action (praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic principles of social justice.”

(Nieto & Bode, 2012: 42)

Nieto and Bode recognize seven basic characteristics of multicultural education and state that it is antiracist education, basic education, important for all students, pervasive, education for social justice, a process, and critical pedagogy. As such, multicultural education offers a model for faculty and staff to utilize as a “culturally responsive practice” (Dilworth & Brown, 2001).

Multicultural education is most often associated with the word ‘tolerance’ than any other term (Nieto, 1994). Nieto suggests that there are actually four levels of multiculturalism: 1) tolerance, 2) acceptance, 3) respect, and finally 4) affirmation, solidarity and critique (Nieto, 1994). Multicultural education, when practiced at its full potential in the last stage, goes beyond just celebrating heritage months and holidays (Menkart, 1998); rather, conflict is not avoided but accepted as part of the learning experience. During the affirmation, solidarity and critique stage, schools can incorporate innovative, long-range projects that result from interdisciplinary curriculum (Nieto, 1994). The metaphor Nieto used to describe schools in this stage is a “tapestry,” which symbolizes “through its knots, broken threads, and seeming jumble of colors
and patterns on the back, the tensions, conflicts, and dilemmas that a society needs to work out,”
illustrating both the spirit of collaboration and struggle evident within the school (Nieto, 1994: 6). Teachers can create this metaphorical “tapestry” within their own school by developing and using a multicultural pedagogy (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Research focused on cases of exemplary teachers for culturally and linguistically diverse students has yielded an array of positive outcomes (Irizarry & Raible, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009). There is a vital importance in recognizing how teacher caring is manifested in different ways across cultures (Noddings, 2001). The “caring teacher” (Noddings, 2001), however, does not necessarily need to be from the same background of the student in order to successfully teach them (Irizarry & Raible, 2011). Teachers can develop epistemologies and ontologies, or ways of being and knowing, that are informed by long-term immersion in and connection to the cultural and linguistic communities that they serve (Irizarry & Raible, 2011). In doing so, teachers may experience “transracialization” by which dominant identities may be reinscribed by incorporating information from the new knowledge base from a culture different than their own (Raible, 2005). The extent to which teacher knowledge can be enriched through personal involvement in and relationships with students, their families, and communities allow teachers to inform how they can improve educational experiences and outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Irizarry & Raible, 2011). It was said that “…teaching should never be about un-learning anything, it should always be about learning more” (Barone et al., 1996: 1135). When teachers believe that they are life-long learners, they can more adequately address the needs that arise in their constantly evolving classrooms. Culturally relevant teaching practices have been argued to be an integral part of schools by providing students with educational self-determination, honoring and respecting the students’ home culture, and helping
students understand the world as it is and equip them to change it for the better (Ladson-Billings, 2009: 149-152). After all, for a student’s academic success or failure, “Everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had” (Dewey, 1938: 27).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this ethnographic study is to describe the experiences English language learners of Mexican ancestry encounter during their educational process in an urban Midwestern high school. The central research query is focused on gaining an understanding of contradictory factors that either promote or hinder high school retention rates for ELL students of Mexican ancestry within this school setting. In addition to this central research question, the following issues were examined:

1. What views do ELL teachers, mainstream teachers, counselors, administrators and other faculty members have about whether or not an ELL student of Mexican ancestry graduates?

2. How do institutional constructs within the school shape the way an ELL student of Mexican ancestry fares academically?

3. What recommendations do faculty and staff members have to increase the retention and graduation of ELL students of Mexican ancestry?
Chapter 3: Methods

Site Selection

For the purpose of this inquiry, one of six high schools in a metropolitan area was selected as a study site based on the following criteria: the student body was diverse, a large percentage of Spanish speakers were present in ELL programs, and many of the student households were lower income. To maintain confidentiality, the selected high school site will be referred to using the pseudonym “Liberty High”. The researcher was already familiar with this particular high school and its ELL program and had mentored an ELL student of Mexican ancestry for one academic year prior to the onset of the study. Liberty High is one of two magnet schools in the city district with an ELL program and an ethnically diverse population.

Institutional Review Board

Prior to beginning the research process, it was necessary to obtain approval to conduct the project from both the Principal of Liberty High and the research administrator of the city school district. The principal and the district administrator were both contacted by phone and email to explain details of the project. Both entities tentatively approved the proposal, and the Institutional Review Board proposal was then submitted to and approved by the University of Nebraska’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) through an expedited review. The project was assigned the identification number 2011112006EP.

The informed consent process began with a discussion of the research project with each of those faculty and staff members of Liberty High selected to be a part of this study. Selection of school employees was made due to contact with ELL students. In addition, Liberty High
students of Mexican ancestry who had been in, or were currently enrolled in ELL classes, were recruited for the study. In order for students under the age of 19 to participate, parental consent was necessary. All forms were written in English and translated into Spanish by the researcher. A native speaker of Spanish from Mexico then reviewed all translated forms in a back-translation process. The translated forms were sent home to families who requested this option with their student. Parents were asked to note their preference for recording an interview with their child using a digital audio recording device. Parental consent forms included a list of sample questions that the student would be asked in the interview. This allowed the parents to make an informed decision about whether their child could participate in this research project (see Appendices E and F for samples of the informed consent forms). After completion of the interview, each student was given a copy of the informed consent form for their records. Students less than 19 years of age were also asked to read and sign a ‘Child Assent’ form in his/her preferred language (see Appendices C and D for the English and Spanish versions of these forms). All students 19 years of age or older were asked to read the adult or general informed consent form in their preferred language; after making a decision about whether or not to participate, he or she then provided approval for recording the interview with the digital audio recording device (see Appendices A and B for both English and Spanish versions of the adult informed consent forms) and signed the form, retaining one copy for their files. Because all faculty members were over the age of 19, they were required to read and sign an adult version of the general informed consent form and mark a preference for the use of an audio digital recording device (see Appendix G for the informed consent form used by Liberty High faculty and staff participants). These forms were provided in English and all interviewees were provided a copy of the informed consent form for their records.
To help minimize the potential negative consequences for participants, none of the survey instruments included questions about a specific student’s legal status, risk behavior, or illegal activity. In addition, pseudonyms were used in place of names to protect the identity of student participants and their families. Similarly, faculty and staff members of Liberty High were not asked about issues related to the work environment. Again, pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of faculty and staff who chose to participate in the project. All participants in the research received a $10 gift card at a variety of locations in the community. These gift cards were funded through a grant received from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Nebraska Lincoln, the Champe-Weakly Fund. At the close of the study, copies of the thesis were provided to Liberty High School and the city school district office.

When recruiting potential participants, it was stressed that participation was completely voluntary and that withdrawal from the study could occur at any time without consequence. It was also noted that participation in the research project would not affect a grade the student would receive in classes at Liberty High. These interviews would not affect the relationship with the University, the researcher, or Liberty High faculty and staff. Participants were given assurance that their individual responses would remain confidential and reporting would be done in aggregate. All project materials were stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s home. After the recorded interviews were transcribed, each audio recording was erased from the digital audio recorder and the researcher’s computer. Printed copies of field notes obtained during observations were also stored in the locked cabinet and shredded after one year.
Population

Liberty High is located in a mid-sized city in the Great Plains. In the year 2010, there were 1,826,641 people residing in this city, a 6.7% increase in population size since the last decennial survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). While the city is relatively homogenous with 82.1% of people self-identifying as ‘White non-Hispanic’ (Figure 1), those self-identifying as ‘Hispanic and Latino’ make up the largest minority at 9.2% of the city population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

(Data obtained from the 2010 US Census, http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/cats/education/educational_attainment.html)

In its first year, Liberty High enrolled 1,150 students in grades 9-12 and 250 students in grades 6-8 (School Website). Today, however, Liberty High is designated exclusively for grades 9-12. During the 2010-2011 academic year, Liberty High had 1,816 enrolled students. Approximately half of the high school’s students (51.10%) were eligible for free or reduced
lunch, indicating a lower level of income, and hence a lower socioeconomic status, for at least one half of Liberty High’s student body (NCES, 2012).

*Faculty and Staff*

Faculty and staff were recruited to participate in the study through a variety of means. Convenience non-probability sampling was used to contact faculty and staff who had direct contact with Spanish-speaking ELL students on a daily basis. In addition, using Liberty High’s faculty and staff webpage, the principal, ELL teachers, and all counselors were contacted. From these initial contacts, additional names of those who might be appropriate to interview were provided. Next, department chairs were contacted and other faculty members were asked for contact information of appropriate faculty and staff who could be interviewed through non-probability snowball sampling. Interviews were scheduled through email or in person and many took place in faculty and staff offices within the school, while others took place in empty classrooms, a coffee shop, and an individual’s home. Faculty interviews began February 22, 2012 and ended May 18, 2012, and ranged in duration from 26 minutes to 1 hour and 21 minutes. Of the 25 completed faculty and staff interviews, three participants did not wish to have the interview recorded. For all interviews that were not recorded, answers and additional information from notes were handwritten and later typed on a Word document. The remaining 22 participants authorized the use of an audio recording device. Due to technical difficulties, two interviews could not be recorded. The 20 interviews that were successfully recorded were then transcribed onto a Word document and later transposed into an Excel file, which accommodated the data collection from faculty and staff interviews.
**Students**

In contrast to the procedures used to recruit faculty and staff, students were contacted directly by the researcher through an announcement during multiple class periods. Through non-probability convenience sampling, the researcher selected five ELL classes, ranging from Level I to Level IV and included native Spanish speakers, as well as two ‘Spanish for Native Speakers’ classrooms (Levels I and II). Students were provided with two criteria for participating:

1) He/she must be a current or former member of ELL.
2) He/she is a native Spanish speaker with Mexican ancestry.

Students who expressed an interest in the study received two consent forms during the recruitment stage, one child assent form and one parental consent form. Students were then asked to sign and return these forms one week from the recruitment meeting so that an interview time could be selected. Student interviews began April 4, 2012 and ended May 16, 2012. Student interviews took place in the school’s media center and cafeteria. Most students were able to meet after the school day had ended; however, two student participants had work conflicts, so these interviews took place during class time. Student interviews ranged in duration from 20 minutes to 55 minutes in length. Students were asked which language they preferred for interviews; six students chose English while one student chose Spanish. This Spanish language interview was later translated into English. One student’s parent requested that no recording be made of the interview but approved an oral discussion. Additional notes were taken during this interview and notes were typed into a Word document. The remaining six student interviews were recorded and later transcribed into a Word document. All student interviews were then organized into an Excel file to code for themes.
Analytical Framework

This study was designed using a mixed methods approach, whereby data were collected, analyzed and mixed using qualitative and quantitative procedures (Creswell and Plano Clark 2011; Bernard 2011). The mixing of these two methodologies provides a strength that offsets the limitation of a single approach, and results in more comprehensive evidence to support a determined argument about a specific research problem. This research methodology is beneficial to the research in its ‘practical’ use, as the researcher can employ as many methods as possible to address the research problem at hand (Creswell, 2009: 10). In this mixed methods design, observations, field notes, and interviews with students, faculty, and staff were completed. All data were collected between January 20, 2012 and May 18, 2012. Observations and field notes took place in individual classrooms as well as in the gymnasium, hallways, media center, and cafeteria, beginning January 20, 2012 and ending May 3, 2012. Observations and field notes were typed in a Word document using two columns labeled ‘What I saw/heard’ and ‘Reactions/Comments/Questions’ (Appendix H). These data were coded for themes and used to provide further understanding of the context of the school environment. The SPSS computer program was utilized to analyze quantitative data. Since a smaller sample size was used in this study, non-parametric statistics were used.

Instrument Development- Qualitative and Quantitative

The researcher designed two questionnaires consisting of a series of questions and other prompts to gather information from the faculty/staff and student groups. These two questionnaires employed the use of both open-ended and close-ended questions. For faculty and staff, open-ended questions were used to gauge perceptions and attitudes about ELL students
with Mexican ancestry in their school. For students, open-ended questions allowed students to express their feelings and attitudes about certain topics. Since the researcher was unable to locate an appropriate instrument to measure perceived problems for ELL students with Mexican ancestry and opinions on potential solutions, she constructed exploratory questionnaire instruments for both faculty/staff and students (See Appendices I and J).

The questionnaire constructed for faculty and staff consisted of 31 questions. The interview guide was organized into 10 themes including perceived factors for students doing well in school, diversity of Liberty High, perceptions about dropout factors for ELL students, defining success for ELL students, language resources available to faculty and students, perceptions about discrimination towards ELL and Latino students, programs to facilitate student graduation, attitudes towards Spanish language heritage, barriers within the educational system, and recommended changes. In designing the survey, the researcher relied on research findings and suggestions for further research within relevant literature (Clair, 1995; Espenshade & Fu, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suh & Suh, 2007). Perceptions of mainstream classroom teacher’s professional development needs concerning ELL students were formerly explored (Clair, 1995). Lists of potential variables affecting ELL students were constructed (Espenshade & Fu, 1997; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suh & Suh, 2007). These lists were synthesized, and faculty and staff members were asked to rate the frequency of an ELL student dropping out of high school on a three point likert-type scale, ranking from ‘a little’, ‘sometimes’, and ‘a lot’ for 19 variables (See Appendix I). Demographic data about faculty and staff participants were collected, including age, gender, self-identified race or ethnicity, affiliation to the school, years working in education, years working at Liberty High, level of educational attainment, and any multicultural courses or additional training taken. The researcher
designed and piloted a questionnaire with one ELL teacher one year before the study began. The original 10 questions on the instrument were clarified to become more easily understood, and additional questions were added to become the 31 item questionnaire used in this study.

The second questionnaire was developed for ELL students of Mexican ancestry so that they could answer various closed-ended questions about whether or not certain risk factors were applicable in their lives. In addition, open-ended questions allowed students to tell stories about their lived experiences. Students were asked a series of 69 questions throughout the interview process. These questions were based on four themes, family life as it is lived in the U.S., language preferences at home and at school, personal opinions about alternative schooling methods, and life stories. Issues such as moving to the United States and other personal experiences were informed by previous research on the significance in recognizing student experiences (Chan, 2007; Hemmings, 1996). Additional information was gathered about the roles of family background, attitudes, and behavior to guide the structure of questions about family life (Fulingi, 1997). Demographic information was also collected from student participants including age, gender, grade, level of ELL, student’s birthplace, and time lived in the United States.
Chapter 4: Results

Faculty and Staff

I interviewed 25 faculty and staff members at Liberty High, 17 of which were female and eight of whom were male (Table 1). Participant ages spanned 40 years, with the youngest participant 22 years of age and the oldest 62. The average age of Liberty High faculty and staff participants was 42.32 years old; the median age was 40, while the mode was 35 years of age (Table 1). Although the age range was quite diverse for this sample, the race/ethnicity of faculty and staff remained relatively homogenous. Of the 25 participants interviewed, 20 self-identified as White (80%), three as Black/African American (12%), and two as Hispanic/Latino (8%) (Table 1).

Research participants varied by several factors including the departments for whom they worked, degree level, and experience in education. Two participants worked in administration, five worked in the ELL program, six were employed in the counseling center, eight worked within mainstream curriculum departments (e.g. art, English, math, physical education, science, and world languages), and four other positions involved professional support. Titles included Spanish cultural liaison, Community Learning Center Supervisor, School Social Worker, and In-School Suspension Coordinator (Table 1). Faculty and staff displayed a wide range of experience working in the field of education. Two faculty/staff participants were only in an eight week session of student teaching, while another teacher has been working in the school system for 39 years. Of the 25 research participants, 17 (68%) had worked for 10 years or more in some aspect or area of education (Table 1). It is also important to note that participating faculty and staff demonstrated a difference between years of experience and gender (Figure 2). Males held more years of experience in education than females interviewed. The mean number of years working
in education for males was 16.75, as compared with their female counterparts who had worked for an average of 11.24 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2- Faculty and Staff’s Years of Experience Compared by Gender**

In addition to years of experience in the general education realm, participants had a vast difference in the number of years working at this particular school. One administrator has been at the school since the planning stages in 2002, and four other teachers have been at Liberty High since the doors opened in 2003. Another four participants have been employed at Liberty High for just one academic year (Table 1). In addition to the variety of educational and specialty areas covered by participants, faculty and staff also differed by their in levels of education. Of the permanent faculty and staff interviewed (i.e., not including student teachers), 78% have completed a Master’s degree or higher (Table 1).
Table 1- Faculty and Staff Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years at Liberty High</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>EdD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Black/Af Am</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>EdD *IP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL Program</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ELL Teacher/ELL Program Coordinator</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL Teacher</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>MA *IP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>MA</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student ELL Teacher</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>BA *IP</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>Student teaching</td>
<td>BA *IP</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>MEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>White</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2x MA *IP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>43</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>MA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mainstream Teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Teacher</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>EdD *IP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English/Reading Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2x MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>White</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Teacher/Gifted Program Facilitator</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>JD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2x MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.E. Teacher/Coach</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>EdD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish for Native Speakers Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Twelve (48%) faculty and staff serve the entire ELL population, while others focus on particular levels of ELL instruction. Each ELL teacher, including those who are student teachers, is designated to work within two or three levels of ELL ranging from Level I-IV, but all continue serving the entire ELL population as a resource. Some mainstream teachers, such as art, physical education, and math, begin serving Levels I and II students in their classrooms through introductory courses, but also have ELL students present from all levels. Eight (32%) faculty and staff focus primarily on the upper levels of ELL, serving students who are in Levels IV or above. Two of the school’s staff members who were interviewed had very little contact with Liberty High’s ELL population; however they work primarily with exited ELL students (i.e., those who have completed all ELL levels). Despite this range in contact with ELL students, all participants had some form of contact with ELL students of Mexican ancestry.

Faculty and staff members held a variety of multicultural training experiences as they began working at Liberty High. There were 20 participants (80%) who mentioned taking a course or multiple courses dealing with multicultural education or English language learners during their college education (Figure 3). In addition, 13 faculty and staff member participants (52%) attended multicultural workshops provided by the school or district (Figure 3). Ten
faculty/staff (40%) stated that additional multicultural training had come from life experiences through either working with a diverse population, facilitating multicultural workshops, participating in a multicultural book club, or having a diverse set of co-workers (Figure 3). Only three participants (12%) shared that they had lived in another country and used their own personal experience living outside of the United States to better understand Liberty High’s ELL student population and their families (Figure 3). The number of multicultural training types for each participant ranged from one to three. Of the 25 participating faculty and staff members, 10 responded with one type of multicultural training, eight with two types, and seven with three types (Figure 3).

Participants were asked if they have made any alterations to their style of interacting with students based on ELL-related training. There were 21 participants (84%) who answered ‘yes’,
that they had changed or altered their teaching or interaction styles after receiving some form of multicultural training or education (Figure 4). For example, one counselor responded:

“Yes! I use lots of gestures, photos and drawings. It is also important to be sensitive to the fact that there are four dimensions of language. I am also learning new words through Rosetta Stone, using words these incoming students are familiar with... I want students to teach me the exact pronunciation for things, especially with their names. I want to get it right.”

This counselor stresses the value put on individual attention, for example learning the correct pronunciation of the student’s name. One administrator who also recognized an alteration to an interaction style shared:

“On the job training is the greatest alteration. I never really know what students’ lives are like outside of school. I have become not so quick to judge. A student’s background can vary greatly. Most teachers come from a middle-class background with their cars, houses, and other things. But we cannot relate the same [backgrounds] for a lot of these students. [...]”

Two participants indicated that they are still learning, still altering teaching styles. For them, it is an ongoing process to work with students who are from the minority rather than the majority.
While the majority (84%) of participants affirmed that they have altered the way they interact with ELL students, three (12%) participants indicated that they had not made changes (Figure 4). One administrator described difference that is not necessarily an alteration. “Cognizance and self-awareness maybe...how you were raised impacts how you see others.” Two other faculty/staff members simply responded “no,” while the final participant stated that it was “difficult to answer.”

**Perceived Positive Factors for Academic Success of ELL Students**

In discussing what may affect an ELL student’s success in their classes, faculty and staff brought attention to a variety of potentially positive factors including a relationship with one’s teachers (56%), prior knowledge or education (40%), self-motivation (32%), and family support (24%). Additionally, one administrator talked about the need for goals of the school to align with the goals of the students, and the importance of actually applying those goals within the school. Over half of all faculty and staff interviewed (14 participants) mentioned the relationship an ELL student has with his or her teachers can positively affect the student’s academic success. Five participants mentioned how teachers allow flexibility in time for tasks, assignments or exams. A
math teacher found it beneficial to seat students with the same language background close to one another if the ELL student’s English is not yet strong. Another mainstream teacher talked about allowing more time for independent study. A counselor explained that academic success for a student depends “100 percent [on the] relationship with the teacher or adult in the room. Language is not their biggest barrier; rather, it is accessibility and trust.” Six participants believed that building a strong relationship with the student is most beneficial, with one mainstream teacher sharing, “The better I get to know about them, the better they do in my class.” Another counselor added that the teacher should recognize an ELL student as a resource to the class that should be valued and respected, rather than singled out in a negative way.

An ELL student’s prior knowledge or education is also perceived to have a positive impact on their academic success, as identified by 10 faculty and staff members. One ELL student teacher shed light on the students’ backgrounds, by stating if there is no prior knowledge, it is hard for them to connect to what they are learning now. Three others explained that previous formal schooling gives students the tools to study, in contrast to students who have limited formal schooling experience. A counselor noted that prior educational experience can already give students tools to develop good habits of paying attention, thinking sequentially, and learning by listening.

Self-motivation was identified by eight faculty and staff members as an important component for an ELL student’s academic success. One counselor shared, “They typically have pretty good internal motivation. They generally also have a lot of value placed on education. They see it as an opportunity.” A fellow counselor added that this motivation pushes the student to identify what they want and where they see themselves going in the future. An ELL teacher found value when ELL students know their own sense of self and purpose. Two others tied this
self-motivation to a good work ethic, while another stated that this motivation can help them become their own self-advocate.

Family support was the final theme emerging among six participants. Home life and family expectations can be very different from student to student, as identified by two participants. Furthermore, one explained that some students are expected to work a lot, so education becomes secondary among a list of priorities. A counselor believed “if the parents are supportive and aware of what is going on in the school,” the family structure at home can be very beneficial for an ELL student to do well academically.

**School Diversity**

When prompted to explain the language diversity of their classroom or school composition, 16 respondents (64%) explained this diversity by quantity. Faculty and staff members estimated anywhere from three to ten languages in any given classroom. One ELL teacher stated, “There are currently 14 languages spoken in ELL classrooms [Levels I-IV] alone. School-wide, there are even more.” Others recognized that while students may not be completely fluent in a language other than English, family members such as parents and grandparents may be reliant upon a different language than their children or grandchildren speak. Three participants estimated 30-40 languages were spoken in the homes of students at Liberty High.

While discussing language diversity at Liberty High, 16 faculty/staff members (64%) listed a variety of ethnic or cultural groups they associated with different languages. In total, 26 different groups were listed; however the top three were Spanish with 15 or 60% of respondents providing this answer, Vietnamese with 11 or 44%, and Arabic with eight or 32% (Figure 5). Other commonly listed groups were Ukrainian, Chinese, and Russian (Figure 5). Some ethnic
groups mentioned by faculty and staff members did not represent a language, but rather a race, ethnicity, country or region of the world (e.g., Eastern European, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Iraqi, Central American, South American, Dominican, African) (Figure 5). Some terms defined a country rather than a culture group. For example, Sudanese was listed as a culture, but not as a country of origin, and none of the ethnic groups and their languages were mentioned as being from Sudan (e.g., the Dinka, Nuba, and Nuer).

Six faculty and staff members (24%) also brought up another aspect of language diversity within their school, the ability to speak more than one language. While some students are only fluent in one language, others have a range of fluency in two, three, or more languages. One counselor acknowledged that one student at Liberty High spoke six different languages. This may be one of the more unique cases; however, another mainstream teacher believed that “close to 50% are bilingual in any given classroom.” Another counselor even recognized that language diversity does not come only from the students’ native or household language background. Liberty High also provides a variety of world languages that students can learn in the school setting, including Spanish, Chinese, French, and German. With these world languages in addition to first languages or what is spoken in the household, the same counselor suggests that “…most of our students can understand another language.”
Other less common but still significant themes emerged while discussing language diversity at Liberty High. One counselor explained that the level of fluency in English varies among non-native English speakers; some students have just started learning English this year, some began studying English in kindergarten, and others began learning English at birth. Another mainstream teacher added that “English comes faster if prior language education is there.” Three faculty/staff discussed how the parents’ or other family members’ fluency level can affect how well the student progresses in learning English. Another less common but still important topic
was the change in size or existence of language groups over the years. One ELL teacher noted a change in the composition of the ELL classrooms at Liberty High. “At first, it was mainly Vietnamese, Spanish, and Sudanese. Now, there are fewer Spanish speakers from Mexico, no Sudanese. Arabic and Vietnamese are the largest groups [in ELL classrooms].” By contrast, three participants stated Hispanics were the largest minority group, and hence there are more Spanish speakers. In addition, one art teacher acknowledged a change in the school as a whole from one year to the next. “When [Liberty High] first opened its doors, there were a lot of Eastern European students... Now there are a lot of Spanish-speaking students, Middle Eastern, African and Ukrainian.”

Faculty and staff members were asked to describe any differences between language groups in terms of participation, performance, and learning style in their classrooms. Rather than language groups, many participants identified groups by region, such as African (Congolese), Asian (Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean), Hispanic (Mexican, Salvadorian, Guatemalan, Colombian, Puerto Rican, and Cuban), Middle Eastern (Iraqi and Burmese), and Russia-Ukrainian. African students were said to be really motivated academically, taking their assignments and books home with them to study more. Congolese girls were also noted to speak French with one another. Twelve participants included characteristics about Asians, stating that they are highly motivated academically. This motivation was attributed to their parents’ expectations. In terms of personality, Asians were said to be quiet, studious, and introverted. Students of Asian ancestry were collectively said to do well in reading, but not in conversation. Also, ELL teachers suggested that students of Asian origin tend to struggle most with listening and speaking. One teacher noted that Asian students tend to ask more questions individually, but not in the big group setting, that they will pick and choose words very carefully before speaking.
Asian students are perceived as liking to work alone, and persist longer when trying to solve a problem. Several faculty and staff members thought that Asian students do better because they are more of the “go-getter” types. One teacher did state that this was not applicable to all, adding that Asian students “take school more seriously and catch on to things a little more. Not all though. I have some Vietnamese [students] that aren’t motivated at all.”

Faculty and staff members said that Hispanics tend to struggle more, and are not used to the extra work outside of the classroom. One counselor said that some Mexican students do “great”, but this is not a characteristic that is generally held among the entire Spanish-speaking population. In terms of their English language acquisition, three participants offered that Hispanics converse in Spanish and English, but are challenged with reading. One ELL teacher noted that they are the best at listening, while another mentioned they may not respond in class because they are too embarrassed or do not know the answer. One teacher drew a comparison to white kids, saying that Hispanics focus more on other activities, not just academics. One participant added that “Spanish speakers are in great numbers, so other teachers and students are already familiar with them.” While this familiarity is significant, another teacher notes that not all Hispanic students can speak Spanish. The ‘Spanish for Native Speakers’ teacher stated that those speaking different dialects of Spanish would stick together within her classroom, as Spanish-speaking students come from many different world regions such as Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. This distinction between language dialects identifies a difference between groups. Another within-group distinction is between males and females. One mainstream teacher suggested that there are definite differences between these two groups. “[Hispanic] males resist authority and suggestions, whereas Hispanic females
take the instructions better.” This was the only student group where characteristics were explicitly described as different by gender.

Faculty and staff perceived students of Middle Eastern origin as another population that tends to struggle academically. With regard to their English acquisition, Middle Eastern students are said to be better with their speaking and listening. One mainstream teacher stated that they usually like to be helped out with the right words when they are speaking. One participant also distinguished the previous level of schooling by stating, “Some are limited formal schooling, so you have to start from the very beginning.” Another participant suggested that because some students may not have learned to write in their first language, it can be very challenging to learn a new language, as well as a new educational system in general. Middle Eastern students were said by three participants to be very familial, and less cautious about asking questions or asking for more time with their assignments if necessary.

Faculty and staff members described Russian and Ukrainian students as having high academic expectations and knowing how to study. For this population, it was suggested that with English language acquisition, they were said to speak even if they do not know the correct words, but overall are a bit shy with learning English. No other comments were made about this population of students. Finally, when drawing comparisons between groups, one teacher said, “The most successful are the Asian students. As for other places, some Mexicans do well. Some Africans do well, but for the most part, it’s the Asians.” This seemed to be a common perception among interviewed 10 faculty and staff members. Another counselor stated, “If the family doesn’t see the importance of education, those kids aren’t as driven.” Cultural values placed on education were perceived to vary by group. As mentioned earlier, African, Asian, and Russian-Ukrainian students were all categorized as groups who were academically motivated, with much
of it stemming from their family’s expectations. By contrast, Hispanic and Middle Eastern students were not perceived to have this same academic motivation from their families.

The ELL teachers also explained the context of their ELL classrooms. One ELL teacher stated that “You can’t teach assuming that everyone is at the same level.” Furthermore, it was noted that even though all ELL students may technically be tested for entrance into a certain level of ELL, each student works at his or her own pace. Some may simply be faster than others. Two ELL teachers explained that beginning ELL students have this comradery of ‘we’re in this together’. The same two ELL teachers then stated that this changes so that by the time they reach the upper levels of ELL, they use more English and group more by their personality rather than a native language.

**Perceived Dropout Factors for ELL Students**

In contrast to positive factors for academic success, faculty and staff expressed concern for multiple factors outside of the school environment that could affect a student’s performance in school and potentially lead them to dropping out. Nine factors were listed by faculty/staff members as affecting dropout rates for ELL students (Table 2).

**Table 2- Perceived Factors for ELL Students to Dropout in Rank Order**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Dropout Factors</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Family</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Work</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Transportation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>20%</td>
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Family life was the most prominent of these factors and was mentioned by 19 (76%) of the participating faculty and staff members (Table 2). Having a foundation at home is perceived to have a huge impact on how the student performs academically, as one teacher described that an “unstable atmosphere can be a big weight on how they do in school.” The lack of family support, parental involvement in school, and parental support at home were all said to have a role in the student’s educational experience. The parents’ work schedule and presence of both parents at home were also listed as potential factors by three respondents (Table 2). The number of siblings or additional family members living in the home can also be a stressor, limiting resources to the student, according to five participants. The language used in the home was also said to have an effect on the student’s academic performance, as the student may use their native language at home with family, yet all instruction is given in English at school (Table 2). This inconsistent language use may cause problems for parents too, as they may not be able to assist their students with homework. There may be confusion since parents may not be able to completely understand the U.S. educational system. As one teacher explained, “students know more about the educational system than their parents,” creating a cultural disconnect and potentially introducing more conflict and stress in the home.

Work (40%) and poverty (40%) tied for the second most common factors contributing to drop out rates and were mentioned by 10 faculty/staff interviewees each (Table 2). Ten participants recognized that some ELL students are required to work and contribute to the

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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Tragic Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peer Influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Risky Behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Barrier</td>
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</table>
household income and others choose to work so that they can make decisions about what they need/want (Table 2). Others have to take care of younger siblings or other family members while their parents work, as perceived by four participants. One participant noted that the time spent working each week can vary by student, but it can bring additional stress to the student’s life on top of schooling responsibilities. Priorities may also be different for students and their families. For some, school may be a less important priority than providing money or childcare for their family. Five faculty and staff members noted that a lower income level and consequently lower socioeconomic status can have detrimental effects on a student. One mainstream teacher suggested that ELL students may have to worry about even having a warm meal on the table. In addition, two other participants acknowledged that ELL students may not have the same access to technology or other resources.

Transportation was perceived to be an obstacle for ELL students to graduate by five (20%) of the interviewed faculty and staff (Table 2). One administrator expressed her concern for ELL students having problems getting to school because some students have to “ride the bus at 6 am in order to get here by 8 am, which eats up time and energy.” Another teacher spoke about how the region Liberty High serves is much larger, since it is one of two ELL magnet high schools in the district. Therefore, some students have to travel much farther than others. Some families may not be able to afford their own vehicle or obtain a driver’s license, which forces them to rely on public transportation, and such transport may not always be practical, efficient, or convenient.

In addition to transportation issues, 20% of faculty and staff members interviewed also felt that cultural barriers were an obstacle for ELL students to graduate (Table 2). One counselor explains this as a “disconnect between culture and school, with a sense of in-between-ness.” She
suggested that students should instead embrace both the similarities and differences among both cultures. The cultural values one places on education may also vary. One teacher explained this with the example that certain girls in the classroom want to get pregnant and become a wife and mother soon. Another teacher also expressed concern about Latino students in particular, feeling that it is hard for this group of students to successfully exit the ELL program by stating, 

“[Latino] Level V and Level VI students have been in ELL for years, some even born here. It is not as instilled in their culture to graduate. Levels I through III seem to do fine until adapting to Latino culture.”

Another obstacle recognized by four or 16% of the interviewees was that ELL students may face tragic events (Table 2). For example, one teacher shared that some ELL students are coming to the community as refugees, which can in and of itself be considered a tragedy. Refugees rely on assistance from the U.S. Government, and sometimes lose this funding which can then become another crisis faced by the family. The loss of a job was identified as another tragic event that is endured by some ELL students’ families, which creates a stressful environment for all. One teacher added that the death of a family member or other close individual can also be a stressful event for everyone in the family. A counselor described that what is going on in their home country and leaving family and friends behind may add psychological stress and sometimes even mental illness for the student or his/her family members.

Peer influence was another obstacle identified by four or 16% of interviewees (Table 2). One teacher explained that the influence peers have on ELL students can be detrimental while another teacher further clarified by saying, “Peers can either inspire or distract the student from doing well academically.” One counselor added that adolescents in general can be heavily
influenced by their peers, not just ELL students. One way this peer influence can affect students is through unlawful behavior. Behaviors that are considered risky were expressed as another potential barrier for ELL students by three or 12% of participants (Table 2). Gang involvement and the use of alcohol or drugs are risky behaviors that a student may participate in, and consequently suffer for academically.

ELL students also bring with them a language barrier. Three interviewees (12%) stated that a language barrier could be preventing ELL students from graduating high school (Table 2), and felt that if they are using a different language in the home, it may be more difficult to learn English. An English teacher expressed that this can create problems in an ELL student’s writing, e.g., with using syntax in order to produce the correct noun and adjective order in a sentence. Additionally, it can be difficult to code-switch when trying to communicate with different people. A student’s prior educational experience can serve as a reference for students to rely upon when trying to learn a new language.

Faculty and staff were then provided with a list of different variables, and asked to rank them on a three-point likert scale based upon their perceptions of why ELL students drop out of high school at high rates (See Appendix I). Nineteen variables were provided: parent-child conflict, aging out, pregnancy, employment, interpreting for relatives, providing childcare, relocation, transportation issues, lack of monetary resources, legal issues for parents, legal issues for student, a poor work ethic, gangs, health issues for a family member, health issues for the student, language barrier, deportation, dislike for the educational system, and a dislike for teachers (Appendix I). When prompted to rank these various factors for ELL students dropping out of high school, participating faculty and staff felt that the most prominent factors at Liberty High were aging out, having a language barrier, relocation, and employment (Table 3).
Table 3- Ranked Perceived Factors Contributing to ‘A Lot’ of ELL Students Dropping Out

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranked Factors Perceived</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents Replying It Happens ‘A Lot’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Aging Out</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Barrier</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Relocation</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Employment</td>
<td>24%</td>
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</table>

While faculty and staff members believed ‘a lot’ of ELL students dropped out due to the aforementioned factors, over half of the respondents believed that issues such as student’s health problems (72%), a family member’s health problems (72%), deportation (64%), interpreting for others (64%), parent-child conflict (56%), a dislike for teachers (56%), pregnancy (52%), legal issues for the parent(s) (52%), and gang activity (52%) had ‘little’ impact on whether ELL students drop out of high school.

After performing cross-tabulations between participating faculty and staff’s gender and their responses for ranking nineteen variables, the only variable with statistical significance was legal issues for the student (p= 0.002) (Figure 6). In addition, the ‘legal issues for the student’ variable also shows a Cramer’s V value of 0.608, demonstrating a positive correlation. This means that female participants had a greater probability of rating student’s legal issues as having a large impact on ELL student dropout rates.
Figure 6-Chi-Square Test of
Gender & Legal Issues for the Student

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>9.244²</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likelihood Ratio</td>
<td>12.22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear-by-Linear Association</td>
<td>7.456</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>25</td>
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(p< 0.05)

Symmetric Measures

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Approx. Sig.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nominal by Nominal Phi</td>
<td>.608</td>
<td>.010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cramer's V</td>
<td>.608</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Valid Cases</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
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Defining Success for ELL Students

Participating faculty and staff defined success for ELL students in a variety of ways, including graduating from high school (32%), learning the culture of the school and community (32%), learning English (24%), having success in other classes (24%), and having plans for the future (20%). Two thought that success was different for each person and should be defined for each individual separately. Two other participants felt that they would define success for an ELL student much like they would any other student. One ELL teacher also brought attention to the success of an ELL student as developmental, describing it as an ongoing process.
Graduation was a common answer for defining an ELL student’s success among eight participants. One specialized staff member felt that graduation was an adequate measure of an ELL student’s success because “they were able to learn the educational system of ‘how to do school’. [They were able to] talk to teachers, know about different resources and how to use them.” Seven faculty and staff members mentioned graduation as an ultimate accomplishment, but also listed other goals in combination with graduating.

One of the components recognized by participants in addition to graduating was being able to learn the culture of the school and community. Eight faculty and staff members felt that acquisition of school and host community culture was important in defining the success of ELL students. Three participants expressed that a student feeling comfortable in their school and community was being successful. One mainstream teacher felt that in order for an ELL student to be successful, they must be able to function effectively within school, and also in the community setting. A counselor pointed out that it is not only being able to function in these settings, but participating in clubs and activities. One administrator added that they should be able to contribute to society in one way or another. In comparison, one counselor mentioned that “adjusting to the school system alone can be a feat.”

In addition to learning the culture of the school and community, six participants believed that learning English was a key component for defining success for an ELL student. One math teacher explained that an ELL student’s success included the student understanding the language even if they were not excelling in math, but also having great success in learning English. Another counselor defined success for an ELL student as being able to master the language to a point of understanding and communicating. Finally, a specialized staff member believed that it
was not only learning the language that defined this success, but doing so in a timely manner as well.

Six participants felt that an ELL student’s success should be measured by how well they were doing in other classes. One ELL teacher felt that being able to integrate themselves into the mainstream classrooms is an accomplishment. A mainstream teacher added that understanding the concepts introduced in class is an achievement, and added that even if the student does not master the concepts, the skills learned and assessed in class are important. Another mainstream teacher simply states that a successful student is “someone who is learning and got something out of my class that they didn’t know before.”

Beyond the classroom, five participants believed that having future plans made an ELL student successful. Three faculty and staff members found having a plan for the next step after high school was important (e.g. entering college, getting a job). One ELL teacher expressed that a successful ELL student should be able “to set and determine their own path in life.” A mainstream teacher added that “gaining an education that can advance their life position” is important for ELL students, because they “succeed in a way that allows them choice” in future career paths.

**Language Resources**

When prompted to describe which languages the school or district provides translators or interpreters for, 96% of participating faculty and staff members named Spanish (Figure 7). This was the most frequently mentioned language resource by participants. Vietnamese was the second most frequently referenced language resource with 21 participants (84%) providing this response (Figure 7). In addition to Spanish and Vietnamese, Arabic was also a common response
among 20 faculty and staff members (80%) recognizing the use of translators and interpreters for this language (Figure 7). It is also important to note that in response to this prompt, not all faculty and staff members listed languages (e.g. Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Sudanese).

**Figure 7- Faculty/Staff’s Perception of Available Language Interpreters and Translators**

Of the 26 identified language resources, faculty and staff also acknowledged the presence of translators and interpreters for a variety of other languages. These included Russian (13), Ukrainian (9), Nuer (8), Kurdish (8), Chinese (7), Farsi (6), Karen (4), French (4), Burmese (4),
and Sudanese (3). Each of these responses was repeated by more than two participants (Figure 7).

Faculty and staff members were asked to share their opinion on which language resources they felt were used most frequently. Of the 25 participants, 23 (92%) responded with Spanish as the most frequently used languages for translators and interpreters. Seven individuals (28%) mentioned Vietnamese as highly used, while three others mentioned Arabic (12%), one mentioned Farsi (4%), and one listed Laotian (4%) as frequently used languages for interpreting at Liberty High. During three of the interviews, participants actually looked for a listing of available language resources provided by the district. Several other individuals mentioned they had a list somewhere, but did not use it to list languages for resources they thought were available.

Discrimination

Fourteen faculty and staff members interviewed (56%) felt that ELL students were discriminated against, while the remaining 11 (44%) did not. The ELL program coordinator explained that school-wide, Liberty High has 362 exited ELL students, plus approximately 140 students currently in ELL Levels I-VI. This is over one-fourth of Liberty High’s total population. Of the participants who believed ELL students were discriminated against in their school, eight faculty and staff (32%) felt the discrimination came from teachers, five (20%) thought it came from fellow students, four (16%) believed it came from the institution of Liberty High, and two or just 8% considered the discrimination to come from the district level.

Of those who considered teachers as the main source of discrimination for ELLs, one mainstream teacher felt that in general, teachers at Liberty High go overboard so as not to
discriminate against this group of students; however, a counselor added, “Some, not all, teachers think the student isn’t very bright due to their writing, but actually it’s just the language barrier.” In addition, one counselor stated, “I don’t think [ELL students] get treated as well as regular students… not given as much attention or help as needed, coming from every aspect.”

Another counselor felt that sometimes teachers may not be too excited about getting a new ELL student mid-semester, and see it as an obstacle that makes their job tougher. Furthermore, a mainstream teacher felt that some teachers can get frustrated by the situation, but do try to help. One teacher believed that some may underestimate what ELL students can do, while an ELL teacher thought that rather than becoming frustrated with the situation, “teachers should use [ELL students] as an attribute in their class.”

For those who believed students were a source of discrimination for ELL students, one teacher felt as though they were discriminated against “more so by students.” Another teacher stated, “They don’t always have fluency, so other students make fun of them for that.” One ELL teacher expressed that some ELL students felt alienated and were “scared to do presentations in their classes […] and have no one to hang out with at lunch.” In contrast, one counselor mentioned that ELL students tend to separate themselves from the general school population, and into their own language groups. Despite this alienation, one mainstream teacher noted that “native languages and multilingualism is celebrated, and I feel as though the rest of the students respect that.”

Four faculty and staff members felt as though ELL students were discriminated against from Liberty High as a whole. One counselor mentioned that ELL students face unnecessary barriers like transportation and differential access to resources, while another counselor expressed concern about how effective the school’s process of obtaining transcripts is by stating,
“They are required to get credits for courses they already took in their home country.” Two others felt optimistic about how Liberty High was treating ELL students. One felt as though the administration goes overboard to prevent discriminatory practices against ELL students, while another believed Liberty High “has done a really good job of accepting them.” In addition to the school, two others felt that the district was responsible for this discrimination. One mainstream teacher felt the district needed to change its policy for ELL students aging out, and adapt the required reading exam and language proficiency test. A counselor added that the district only has two ELL high schools in town and does not provide adequate transportation for those traveling to school from farther distances.

In addition to the belief that ELLs were discriminated against within Liberty High, more faculty and staff members believed that Latino students, above all others, were discriminated against in their school. Of the 25 participants, 17 faculty and staff members, 68%, felt that Latino students were discriminated against while the remaining eight (32%) did not. The ELL program coordinator explained that of the approximately 502 current and exited ELL students, the largest group is made up of Spanish speakers with 148 members (30%) (Figure 8). Spanish speakers make up the largest proportion of ELL students, however, only a small number of them are still enrolled in ELL courses Levels I-IV (Figure 8). The remaining 117 of Latino ELL students are beyond Level IV and no longer take ELL courses, but have yet to graduate the program to have an ‘exited’ status (Figure 8). When discussing reasons for believed discrimination against Latino students, nine faculty and staff (36%) felt that stereotypes were responsible, five (20%) thought it was due to the achievement gap, four (16%) believed it was because Latinos are a larger group, two (8%) felt it was for their use of Spanish language around others, and two (8%) believed it had to do with skin color.
Of the nine faculty and staff who felt stereotypes were responsible for the discrimination of Latinos within their school, one individual stated that discrimination comes from stereotypes, whether or not it is true. Another teacher felt that “Latinos get a bad rap,” and another counselor added that Latinos are stereotyped with gang affiliations, the cars they drive, and that they all play soccer. The same counselor continued, “If their look or name sounds Spanish, it does not mean that they know Spanish.” A mainstream teacher also shed light on the topic suggesting that even if they are not from Mexico, “the teacher misconceives that they are.” Another characteristic mentioned by an ELL teacher about Latinos that they generally hold a “stereotype of being ‘lazy’, and perception is reality.” One specialized staff member added, “Maybe sometimes in teachers’ minds- well they probably don’t speak English. I wonder if they’re even legal. They probably don’t value education.” One participant agreed, stating that people question the legal status of Latinos more often, but rarely question other groups.
The achievement gap was also believed to be a source of discrimination for Latinos within the school. One administrator stated, “Latinos have the lowest performance, and we are trying to figure out what we can do to change that.” Two participants agreed, noting that these same academic issues for Latinos are found nationwide. In addition, two individuals found a distinction between male and female Latino students when it comes to academic performance. One counselor stated, “We can recognize through data, not so much for Latinas, but Latino males struggle more.” Another teacher added that Latino males are viewed as not being good at school and have behavior problems, while Latina girls are viewed as quiet and well behaved.

Because Latinos make up such a large percentage of the total population at Liberty High, the population size was recognized as another reason for the occurrence of discrimination by four individuals. One specialized staff member stated, “Latinos have larger numbers, so [they] are probably more discriminated against than other populations.” One mainstream teacher explained that in the last couple of years, the Latino population has grown. She added, “For the white community, it is hard for them to process. I do appreciate the lengths the school has taken to reach out to this community in the last year though.” Two individuals felt more optimistic about this large population, by acknowledging that now they get more support with programs such as the Hispanic Empowerment Initiative, a program funded through a five year grant from the U.S. Department of Education which focuses on increasing the graduation rates for the Hispanic target population by the year 2015 (School District Website, 2012).

The final two perceived causes for this discrimination were language and skin color. Two faculty and staff members felt that use of the Spanish language around those who do not speak Spanish was a cause of discrimination for Latino students. One counselor expressed that “when Spanish is spoken in the classroom, teachers get more hair raised, which does not occur when,
let’s say two Arabic students talk in their own native language.” Another mainstream teacher added that other students may make fun if they speak in Spanish, and “I have no problem with them using Spanish; [however], some students I think get mad when [other students] use native languages that are not English.” In terms of skin color, one teacher felt that sometimes, other students make comments about another’s skin and may not even realize it. Another counselor pointed out that Latino students do not have very many faculty and staff members that look like them.

**Programs**

Faculty and staff were asked to share the names of any programs that would help ELL students graduate, either at former institutions they have worked within or at Liberty High. Given this wide array of programs, six programs were identified as the most successful (Figure 9). The most prominent programs mentioned among participants was the ELL program and counselors, with 32% of respondents citing this program. Next, the Cross-Cultural Mentoring Program constituted for 24% of the responses. Cultural clubs had 24% of participants mentioning this effort. The Community Learning Center had 12% of respondents listing this program. The remaining two programs, the Hispanic Empowerment Initiative and Family Literacy programs, each constituted for 8% of participants’ responses (Figure 9). In addition, one ELL student teacher felt that a local elementary school had a very effective program that combined a math teacher and an ELL support teacher to instruct math lessons (Figure 9). One counselor also believed the structure of parent/teacher conferences was most beneficial for ELL students and their families (Figure 9).
The most popular program among participating faculty and staff members to help ELL students graduate was the ELL Program itself (Figure 9). One ELL teacher notes that the program is flexible and “persistent in advocating the needs of students inside and outside of the classroom.” An administrator added that ELL teachers and the ELL counselor together really build lasting relationships, putting forth much of their efforts towards obtaining student transcripts and getting them to graduate before they age out. A mainstream teacher expressed that the ELL Program “assists students with all four dimensions of language. Once they acquire the skills, they can excel in all academic content areas.” Another mainstream teacher mentioned that the ELL Program has been in place since Liberty High opened its doors, and “they are constantly in touch with teachers, checking in on students too.” Furthermore, an ELL teacher stated that Liberty High’s program does an adequate job of gearing its students towards success.

The Cross-Cultural Mentoring Program, administered by faculty and students from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the ELL Counselor, was the second most common answer among participating faculty and staff members (Figure 9). This program pairs ELL students with
a college student, in which the pair meets for at least one hour per week for one full academic year. One ELL teacher stated,

“This program really integrates the family. Sometimes mentors even work with siblings, which really helps. They can work with the entire family [and] sometimes even go to their house. One student still talks about the college visit she went on with her mentor. It gives students a different outlook, pointing the student in the right direction, and also providing an advocate for the student to talk to teachers.”

A counselor added that the Cross-Cultural Mentoring Program is built on human relationships, which gives a positive impact. Two participants felt that the interaction these ELL students have with their mentor college students allows them to see what is possible for their future, a real model for a potential next step. One counselor added, “The more you get kids hooked in, making them feel a part of something, the more you can motivate them to stay here and get their diploma.” Another counselor felt that a lot of time and energy has been put into this program, and it provides ELL students with an opportunity to be given individual time and attention.

Cultural clubs were the next commonly mentioned program to help ELL students graduate and were listed by five participants (Figure 9). One counselor felt that a student’s participation in these cultural clubs reflects his or her interests. Two participants mentioned one cultural group in particular that they felt was beneficial to students of Mexican ancestry, the Latinos Sin Fronteras group, which involves social work, academic guidance, study skills, and time organization. One of the participants also added that those who previously participated in this group are the ones she now sees in college.
Working together with a variety of cultural clubs is the Community Learning Center (Figure 9). This center provides resources for after school programs, and is supervised by a member of the AmeriCorps team assigned to Liberty High. This center was identified as the most successful program by three participants. One mainstream teacher mentioned that the Community Learning Center provides many resources for students to take advantage of after school, such as Homework Zone. She continues by stating that this program applies to all students, not just athletes but everybody. In addition, one specialized staff member noted that the Community Learning Center deals with students on a one-on-one basis which is more effective. She continued to explain that staff “can see the individual student’s abilities and get to know them better.”

The Hispanic Empowerment Initiative was acknowledged by two participants as the most successful program, most especially for ELL students with Spanish-speaking backgrounds (Figure 9). This is a program unique to Liberty High and is in its first year of development. One ELL teacher stated that grant money has provided this initiative to not only work with students, but bring the school and family together. Another mainstream teacher felt as though this program motivates students to go to college, making it seem more attainable and giving them the belief that ‘I can do it.’ Six individuals also mentioned that, while the Hispanic Empowerment Initiative has done a number of things, such as offer Spanish-speaking students with assistance at Parent/Teacher Conferences and provide an opportunity for faculty/staff, students, and their families to see the documentary “When We Stop Counting”, some members acknowledge that this program is only in its first year. Some of the participants feel that it has potential for the future, but may not be the best program in place at this time.
Two faculty and staff members felt that family literacy programs were the best programs to help ELL students succeed (Figure 9). Family literacy programs provide students’ parents with English language skills, with direct application to their student’s work in school. There is currently no family literacy program in place at Liberty High; however, these two individuals have noted from past experience working at other schools that this seems to “go beyond connecting with only the student.” In one instance, an ELL teacher interacted with a family literacy program for Arabic mothers at a couple of elementary schools in the same school district. She noted that these programs are found more in elementary schools than at the high school level. One specialized staff member mentioned that while cultural liaisons provide an intermediary for families, family literacy programs could allow the school to invest resources for parents to become their own advocates in the school system over time.

Faculty and staff also expressed some changes to programs that should occur to help benefit the ELL population of Mexican ancestry even more. Eight participants felt that these programs should reach more students (32%), six believed in utilizing these programs to bridge the home-school gap (24%), and six thought there should be changes to the ELL program and curriculum (24%). The most prominent change requested by participating faculty and staff was for programs to reach more students while two participants felt as though there should be improvements to the new student welcoming/orientation. One counselor suggested that for this orientation, the school would provide a tour for the student by a student of the same language background. Two other faculty and staff members recommended Liberty High start a club day either once a month or once a quarter to increase participation for students who may have work or transportation conflicts. Increasing participation through provided transportation was also discussed by two participants as a way to better these programs. One individual also felt that the
Hispanic Empowerment Initiative should expand to help other large minority groups at the school, such as Arabic-speaking and Vietnamese-speaking populations.

In addition to reaching more students, participants wanted to utilize these programs to bridge the home-school gap that many ELL students experience. One counselor suggested that in the new student orientation, the student’s family could connect with other mentoring families of the same cultural or language background. Others mentioned how they wanted to increase family involvement with the school. A mainstream teacher felt that a literacy piece for the parents should be added, which could help establish trust for the parents in the school.

Finally, six participants felt that some changes needed to be implemented within the ELL program and curriculum. One ELL student teacher believed it was necessary to change textbooks, finding materials that are more relevant to their other classes. Two other individuals expressed that the state testing in place needs to be deleted. Another teacher felt students should not have tests alone; rather, the ELL program should have better benchmarks in place to show progress for students. A mainstream teacher felt that an intensive English program for six to eight weeks would be beneficial before students enter mainstream classes. An ELL teacher thought adding additional ELL support in mainstream classrooms would help students who are still learning to speak English. One mainstream teacher noted limited funding for the ELL program and staff, while an administrator felt the need to add more training for the staff to become more culturally proficient. These final two suggestions would require more resources to be allocated to the ELL Department within the school.
Spanish Language Heritage

When asked to describe what attributes might help Spanish speakers learn English, faculty and staff responded in five main categories: 1) The similarity in language structure between English and Spanish (36%); 2) Being bilingual (32%); 3) The familiarity of Spanish by other faculty, staff and students within the school (28%); 4) Cultural proficiency for this student population (24%); and 5) Spanish for Native Speakers courses being offered (20%). In addition, one mainstream teacher stated that Spanish speakers “work harder because they are already put at a disadvantage within a society who is okay with them staying at a disadvantage.” Nine participants believed that Spanish speakers have an advantage at learning the English language since there are many similarities between the two languages in the structure in which they are written. Five faculty and staff members mentioned the knowledge of cognates and false cognates, in which one ELL teacher believed that cognates helped ELL students move between the two languages, encouraging the speaking and listening to come about more rapidly. Another ELL teacher also discussed the physical writing of Spanish and English to be very similar, in contrast to the use of characters, e.g. Chinese. Three participants described the sentence structure as difficult for Spanish speakers learning English.

Bilingualism was the second most common answer among eight faculty and staff members. Five believed that Liberty High should consider bilingual instruction for Spanish speakers, though one explicitly stated that bilingual education can be beneficial only when done well. One ELL teacher gave an example of a successful bilingual program in a neighboring city, and compared it to that of some ELL students coming out of poor quality bilingual programs from other locations in the United States. Furthermore, she states that the students coming from these poor quality bilingual programs then “come out not fluent in either of the languages.”
One participant believed the ELL program should break down into certain language backgrounds, while two others recommended having more bilingual faculty and staff members.

Seven participants identified a familiarity with the Spanish language among not only faculty and staff, but other students as well. Three individuals shared that the United States has such a large Hispanic population now, which a lot of times accommodates for both languages and cultures in many ways. A counselor described that it is very common to hear Spanglish (i.e., a combination of Spanish and English words) in the hallways when she said:

“Yeah, real Spanglish happens, and it is becoming part of both languages… Many times they aren’t even actual words, but both make them up so all can communicate (e.g. chequear, lunche, emparquear). It’s a generational thing.”

One mainstream teacher noted his acquisition of Spanish and traveling abroad, and feels as though students feel more comfortable when teachers, like him, use Spanish in their classes. Another teacher added that when the teacher knows Spanish, they can explain why something is written incorrectly because they are familiar with the student’s native language.

Six faculty and staff members felt as though cultural proficiency benefits Spanish-speaking ELL students. Four participants mentioned using multicultural materials in their classrooms, as well as other multicultural training for faculty, staff, and students. With an understanding of the different cultures students come from, faculty and staff may be able to teach them more effectively. One teacher stated, “In Mexico, education is the teacher’s responsibility. Here it is different, as some responsibility is also placed on the family.” Another counselor was delighted to see that efforts have been made to resolve these differences in educational
expectations with the Hispanic Empowerment Initiative, which has promoted outreach efforts for these student’s families to connect with the school.

Finally, five participants shared the importance of offering ‘Spanish for Native Speakers’ courses at Liberty High. The ELL counselor explained that by taking these courses, native Spanish speakers can fulfill their world language requirement for graduation. In addition, another counselor stated that students who took these courses could then interact in both English and Spanish. Though students may come from a variety of locations around the globe, one mainstream teacher stated that these courses can help generate and foster better relationships between other Spanish-speaking classmates.

Barriers within the Educational System

When asked to identify any barriers within the educational system that keeps ELL students from graduating, faculty and staff mentioned a large number of variables. These included the structure of the ELL program, a lack of flexibility, the high school structure, aging out, teachers, detachment from school, the district-required ‘Graduation Demonstration Exams’, and the transfer of transcripts. Over a quarter of all participants expressed that the top three barriers are coming from within the academic institution itself. The top three barriers listed by faculty and staff members were the structure of the ELL program (36%), the lack of flexibility for ELL students (32%), and the high school structure (28%).

With nine individuals mentioning the structure of the ELL Program as a barrier, three interviewees expressed concern that ELL courses only counted as elective credits, which hinders students in completing the credits required for graduation. One teacher continued, “40 credits of English are required for graduation, with each class counting as 5 credits.” This requirement
results in eight straight semesters, or four full years of English courses that each student must complete in order to graduate. When a student is in the beginning levels of ELL, they are not able to start the required English courses which can sometimes seem defeating. Another teacher noticed “We don’t allow them to access certain classes until they reach a certain level.” This goes for many disciplines, however, lower level ELL students are expected to take less language intensive courses that are required for graduation such as introductory courses in art, physical education, and algebra. One ELL student teacher questioned this method, suggesting that rather than having three ELL courses, perhaps one of those could be focused with math vocabulary and connect it directly to the math class they will experience later that day.

The lack of flexibility within the educational system was also identified as a barrier for ELL students by eight faculty and staff members. One specialized staff member brought attention to the fact that many times, “we are blind to different situations of [an] ELL’s lifestyle at home.” Students may have a variety of things going on in their lives at home, and the same individual continued that we should “not be naïve” about students’ lives outside of school. A counselor added, “[the] system is not set up for these unique issues.” In addition, one science teacher expressed that the science department was not flexible enough. “Where that student should go, which classes to take… We need to fit their needs more at a particular time.” Furthermore, one specialized staff member expressed one key problem is that “The students adapt to the system, not [the] system adapting to the students.”

The structure of high school in and of itself can be a barrier, as identified by seven participants. One ELL teacher said, “Learning the system itself is a barrier. Whatever we can do to ease the process helps. This is doubly difficult for ELL parents.” Along with not fully understanding the U.S. education system, there may be a lack of understanding for what is
expected of ELL students in each class. There may be conflicting goals present within the school and between classes, which can create even more confusion. Another teacher noted, “ELLs have to work in a system that was designed for White middle-class majority students, not for ELL or minority students.” This design comes from the top down. However, staffing was also expressed as a concern by two of those interviewed. One teacher stated that not having staff speak their own language would be a hindrance, noting the difficulties an ELL student might have navigating the system of the school. Even the sheer size and location of the school could have detrimental effects on a student, as was stated by one of the administrators.

Aging out was also identified as a factor affecting ELL students by six (24%) participants. Nebraska’s policy for the age at which a student must complete high school in the public school system is 21. One counselor suggested that coming in at a certain age can be a barrier, since the student is still required to be in the ELL program and may not be able to access the graduation requirement courses before they turn 21. Another counselor further explained, “If they come here younger, their chances to graduate are so much greater. I do feel bad for students who come here at 17-18 [years old]. It just doesn’t work to have 23 year olds in the same classrooms as 14 year olds... It is what it is.” Again, participants asked for more flexibility in the time allowed for ELL students in order to give them a chance to complete all requirements for graduation.

Teachers themselves were considered an obstacle for ELL students within the educational system by five participants (12%). One respondent said that there are certain teachers who fail to acknowledge an ELL student’s position, while another said some teachers may tag a student with a disability, when really it is only a language barrier. One teacher shared that staffing was also a concern with such varying student language abilities, even within ELL Level I. Furthermore, the
same teacher added that if the student were in special education, they would have a para-educator available with more flexible assignments.

Five individuals (12%) suggested that feeling a sense of detachment from school was a barrier for ELL students. One teacher stated, “All of the extras at school are out of reach for ELL students. They miss out on other opportunities.” Another specialized staff member felt that it was hard for students to connect with the school. This disconnect from the school as an institution is further reiterated when the ELL students may not know of, or know how to obtain, the resources available to them. In addition, two other potential barriers were discussed among faculty and staff members, the Graduation Demonstration Exams and the transfer of transcripts. Two participants (8%) felt that the district requirement of Graduation Demonstration Exams was not suitable for all ELL students. One counselor expressed, “The student can do well in all of their classes, but if they don’t do well with these high-stakes tests, they will not graduate.” Another counselor mentioned how these exams are not mandatory in all districts in Nebraska. The Graduation Demonstration Exams are not the only requirement that keeps some students from graduating. Another barrier faced by ELL students is the transfer of credit from other schools the student may have attended prior to enrolling at Liberty High, particularly if they are from other countries. These transcripts may be requested at the time of enrollment, but even if they have been requested, not all are received in a timely manner. One counselor mentioned that transcripts can often times be a hindrance for ELL students, since it is a “longer process to not only get them from the original school, but translate them and figure out what courses they would be equivalent to here so they can get credits.”

Participating Liberty High faculty and staff did not agree about which approaches would work better at this school location or not. Eleven (44%) believed that Liberty High has a unique
setting; consequently certain approaches would only work at this particular location. Eight participants (32%) thought certain approaches would *not* work better at Liberty High, while six individuals were not sure. When prompted to explain why certain approaches would be more successful here and not in other places, faculty and staff members distinguished five unique characteristics for Liberty High. These five unique characteristics are great diversity (44%), presence of an ELL Program (20%), a welcoming atmosphere (20%), a large Latino population (8%), and its geographic location (8%). The most commonly mentioned trait was diversity, in which three participants talked about the language diversity present in Liberty High. A counselor stated, “*We are not homogenous in any way,*” which she felt can be appealing to some staff members. Three participants believed that with such diversity present in Liberty High, students and their families feel a sense of belonging because there are other families that look or speak like them. A counselor added that ELL students can see other kids like them and see that they are not the only ones going through this great undertaking. One respondent noted that ELL students can also look up to other ELL students who have graduated and see that there is hope for their future.

The second unique attribute of Liberty High is the presence of an ELL program. There are currently only two high schools in the district that have ELL programs, one of which is Liberty High. One administrator added that since it is one of two ELL magnet high schools in the district, it serves a vast area, creating a transportation problem for some students because bus transportation is not provided at the high school level. Two participants were also grateful for having an ELL program, since there is a team of ELL teachers to support mainstream teachers (e.g., an accelerated math class just for ELL students). Another counselor felt as though the ELL program at Liberty High as a whole is good for students who are learning English.
Since Liberty High is one of only two high schools in the district that has an ELL program, participants also expressed that this may be why there is such a welcoming atmosphere for minority students whose first language is not English. Three participants discussed the faculty and staff being accustomed to working with diverse student populations, which may also allow ELL students and their families to feel welcome. One of these participants added that the staff seems to be more culturally sensitive, while another believed the staff to be comfortable with students who do not speak English. One specialized staff member mentioned the use of cultural liaisons at Liberty High. Cultural liaisons are provided at the district level and serve as an interpreter for families whose first language is not English. This participant further explained that cultural liaisons have the ability to get to know the students individually and connect with the families personally.

Having a large Latino population present at Liberty High was also listed as a unique attribute to the school. Because of this large population, one mainstream teacher talked about the outreach Liberty High has done to connect with students and their families with the new Hispanic Empowerment Initiative. A counselor also felt that the large Latino population was unique to the school, as it can create a sense of community for the students. Finally, the last characteristic listed by participating faculty and staff was the geographic location of Liberty High. The vast area served by the school is also influenced by the neighboring middle schools from which many students come. One administrator mentioned that about half of all students qualify for free or reduce lunch, which shows a high level of poverty in the area. Another ELL student teacher also described that Nebraska is a unique location for ELL students. She explained that in Nebraska, it may be difficult for some ELL students since an overwhelming majority of the population is White. Furthermore, the same ELL student teacher added, “Some ELL students
hate Nebraska, comparing it to where they lived before.” She continued by saying that many Latinos have relocated from California, where the climate was much different and there were so many more activities to do.

**Recommended Changes**

If resources were available, the changes that interviewed faculty and staff members recommended fell within five categories. These included additional staff (64%), better intake/outtake processes (28%), time (28%), transportation (16%), technology and books (16%), and modified requirements for ELL students (16%). The single most recommended change, as described by 16 participants, was for the district to provide additional staff at Liberty High. Eight participants felt the necessity for more staff at Liberty High. One faculty member noted that the school should “*diminish class size, as we don’t have enough time to check on each individual student.*” Two faculty and staff members felt that more counselors were necessary, while two more wanted more cultural liaisons available. Six participants believed that having ELL teachers, co-teachers or additional ELL support in mainstream classrooms would be beneficial. One science teacher expressed that she would like to have “*help in my science classrooms with an ELL teacher available that has a background in the same discipline.*” Furthermore, two participants would like more staff development available so that they can be better trained to work with ELL students and their families. Another individual also wanted more employed staff members to be able to speak the various languages of ELL students.

If the resources were available, seven participants felt that changes should be made for the intake and outtake processes for ELL students. One counselor desires a better orientation for new students and their families, and partnering up families so that they can work together. An
ELL teacher added that she knows of a program in St. Paul, Minnesota where there is a preliminary course schedule in place for ELL students who arrive at any age. It provides something to follow for both students and teachers, and also facilitates graduation. She wishes that same program could be implemented at Liberty High. Along those same lines, a mainstream teacher felt that the school should provide a path for students if they are unable to graduate, so that they can continue with a free education to complete their general equivalency diploma, or GED. A person can obtain a GED by passing a group of five subject tests, which certifies that the individual has skills equivalent to that of a high school graduate in the U.S. The same mainstream teacher also suggested that more scholarships should be available for ELL students to continue beyond high school. Another mainstream teacher felt as though it would be beneficial to find a way to encourage students who are undocumented to be assured they could still get a job or go to college after high school, encouraging them to graduate.

Seven participants felt as though time could be more flexible given the inadequate resources. Three faculty and staff members believed that ELL students should be able to stay past the age of 21 in order to graduate. Two others felt as though the school year should be extended to go year round. One counselor stated, “The question of time is more important than anything, because then we could lengthen the school day to allow one more class. Students lose hope because they don’t think they can graduate on time.” Another mainstream teacher focused more within the classroom, and expressed that there should be more time allowed for assignments and tests for ELL students.

Given the additional resources necessary, participants also expressed the need for three additional changes to be made, transportation, technology and books, and modified requirements for ELL students. Four faculty and staff members (16%) believed that increased transportation
would greatly benefit the student and their families, which could then potentially increase participation by the parent or parents on behalf of their student. Four participants (16%) also mentioned that an increase in the number of reading materials and technologies should be available for students. Modifying the requirements for ELL students was expressed by four faculty and staff members (16%) as important. One administrator stated a desire to “take a closer look at the ELL program and its effectiveness.” A counselor believed that ELL classes should count for some type of English credits and count towards one’s graduation requirements, otherwise it can be very difficult for them to graduate on time. He also drew the comparison between other schools that allow four or five credits per ELL course, which he felt would be very effective for Liberty High to implement. A mainstream teacher felt that the graduation demonstration exam requirements should be modified for ELL students, as there are “other ways for students to show proficiency in the language.” Yet another mainstream teacher felt that the pass/fail option should be available for ELL students, as well as alternative assessment options (e.g., oral description rather than written response).

Students

For this study, seven students were interviewed despite several recruitment efforts in seven classrooms throughout the spring academic semester. Participants’ ages ranged from 14 to 18 years, and the average and median age of student participants was 16 years (Table 4). Three female and four male students were interviewed, representing freshman, sophomore, and senior classes (Table 4). Of the seven students interviewed, one student each was enrolled in ELL Levels II, III, IV, and V. Three students had formerly taken ELL courses but had since exited the program after completing ELL training (Table 4). Two of the students interviewed
were born in the United States, whereas the remaining five were born in various locations throughout Mexico (Table 4). In addition to the array of birthplaces, time spent living in the United States varied greatly. For one student, this was the first year living in the United States, while another had spent an entire lifetime in the U.S. (Table 4).

Table 4- Student Demographic Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>ELL Level</th>
<th>Student’s Birthplace</th>
<th>Time Lived in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sonia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>Lincoln, NE (USA)</td>
<td>1.5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>ExitEd</td>
<td>Norfolk, NE (USA)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chikis</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Level IV</td>
<td>Cuernavaca, Mexico</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancho</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>ExitEd</td>
<td>Chihuahua, Mexico</td>
<td>8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>ExitEd</td>
<td>Chihuahua, Mexico</td>
<td>16 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raphael</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>San Luis Potosi, Mexico</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Level V</td>
<td>Guerrero, Mexico</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Family Life

ELL students varied in terms of their household composition. Of the seven participating students, five noted having two parents in the home and two indicated that they were living with step-parents (Figure 10). One student’s mother lived at home with her four children while her husband worked in Pennsylvania (Figure 10). Another student’s mother was raising two children by herself, as she and her husband are separated and he remains in Mexico (Figure 10).
Participating students also noted a variety of total family sizes, having two to six siblings and an average of 4.5 children per family (Figure 10). The number of people living in the household of participants ranged from three to nine, which in some instances included relatives beyond the nuclear family such as nieces, nephews, aunts, uncles, and cousins (Figure 10). The number of English speakers in the household also varied greatly among students. For example, all eight of one participant’s family members speak English, while none of another’s family members can speak in English (Figure 10). Students also revealed that the large majority of their households (86%) still send money to family living back in Mexico (Figure 10).

Participating students revealed information about their fathers’ and mothers’ background. None of the participants’ fathers had graduated from high school (Figure 11). Students’ fathers worked in areas such as construction and other manual labor jobs (Figure 11), although one father was a businessman at a company (Figure 11). The level of English fluency also differed
Participants’ mothers were also reported as having a variety of educational experiences. Four had graduated from high school and three had dropped out (Figure 11). Four of the participants mothers worked in the cleaning industry, whether commercial or private (Figure 11). Sonia’s mother worked as an employee at a fast food restaurant chain, while Angel’s mother worked at a hospital as a nurse and interpreter (Figure 11). Students described their mothers as having a range of English fluency. Angel’s mother, who works as an interpreter, was the only one to have high fluency in English (Figure 11).
Language Preference

Participants demonstrated a pattern concerning language preference based upon who they were speaking to. All participants chose to speak in Spanish with their grandparents. Only one participant reported using both Spanish and English languages when speaking to parents. All others prefer to use Spanish exclusively. When communicating with siblings, participants shared split preferences. Two use Spanish, two use English, and three use both languages. When communicating with friends, participating students primarily use English, and occasionally both. Only one participant who is in ELL Level II uses Spanish when speaking to his friends.

![Figure 12- Student’s Language Preference by Group](image)

Students’ Opinions

Students were asked to provide input about certain approaches that could potentially be taken by the school. When prompted about a sheltered English-only experience before being
placed into mainstream classes, four participants believed it would be beneficial, two felt it was
unnecessary, and one was unsure. For those supporting an English-only instruction first, many
stated it would help to learn the language first so they can understand their teachers. One
participant felt that he would be able to communicate better in his other classes. For those
opposing the English-only sheltered instruction, one student shared that he was not even sure
why he was in ELL in middle school, and stated, “as long as they know the basics, they would
benefit from being in mainstream classes... get the knowledge of how to interact and learn
firsthand.” Another also felt that English-only instruction would be detrimental as one would not
“have time to communicate with others who speak English well, and get bored without the other
classes.” Another student expressed his uncertainty when he said that it could be helpful, but it
has its downfalls too, and noted “Sure, you can concentrate on English, but that puts them
farther behind for graduation.”

Again, students gave input about another potential idea for Liberty High to utilize, this
time focusing on additional ELL support within mainstream classrooms. Two agreed that it
would be advantageous to implement, while the remaining five did not. One student felt as
though it would be nice to have someone in her other classrooms, as they could help her
understand new vocabulary outside of the terms taught in class. In contrast, another believed that
it would be awkward having someone follow you around. Another student did not find this to be
beneficial unless the co-teacher knew Spanish and could translate for him.

Each of the students interviewed had already taken the district-required ‘Graduation
Demonstration Exams’ at least once. After being asked how these exams made them feel, one
student explained that it was “just another pointless test. They take like an hour and a half. At
first I was worried, but then I thought that I felt it was too easy and didn’t do well. I only had to
take the reading one twice.” Three others expressed that the exams were “pretty difficult”, and they felt confused and stressed. Two others described the exams as boring and have already passed them all. Another student believed that sometimes the exams are hard, “I have taken all three- math was easy, writing I passed, and reading is pretty hard and I still haven’t passed it yet.” While one participant has been exited from the ELL program since the 7th grade, he was empathetic for current ELL students, stating that there should be some sort of scale for ELL students to pass the required exams.

**Student Narratives**

In the following three stories, students’ personal experiences will be shared. The story of Raphael addresses the concerns of aging out at 21 due to the age at which he arrived, limited English proficiency, and knowing others who have dropped out. Sonia’s story addresses the realities of her family’s transnational lifestyle, the discomfort she experiences in mainstream classes, and the close proximity in relationships she has with others who did not graduate high school. The third and final story portrays the life of Pancho. While he has an intensive work schedule, and a father currently residing in another state for work, Pancho has still been able to do well academically and plans to graduate one year ahead of schedule.
Raphael’s Story

Raphael was born in San Luis Potosí, Mexico, a rural community in which he described as “muchas montañas, comida rica, y un lugar tranquilo [many mountains, great tasting food, and a calm place].” He is now 17 years old and a sophomore at Liberty High. Raphael came to the United States to have a surgery done in Houston, Texas, then traveled with his mother and older sister to this community. His father and three other siblings still remain living in Mexico.

Raphael is currently in ELL Level II, and expressed that he is still not comfortable speaking English after having lived here for one year. He preferred to complete his interview in Spanish, though every once in a while he would use English words or phrases to explain something to me.

In the ELL classroom, Raphael sits towards the back and remains very quiet, reserved, and obedient. There are fourteen students in the room, and only one other native Spanish speaker that sits two rows away. Raphael is seated next to a few Middle Eastern boys who like to disrupt the teacher, but Raphael refrains from speaking unless the teacher asks him a question.

The ELL teacher announced that the class was going to start reading a short story called Frijoles. The books were passed out to each student, and Raphael announces out loud “Fri-jo-les!” The teacher jokes with Raphael, thinking that he is getting mocked for his Spanish pronunciation. The ELL teacher explains he has never taken a Spanish class before in his life. Raphael responds, “What? Why not?” I sit next to Raphael as he then quietly reads the words of the story so that he can hear himself pronounce them. (Taken from Field Notes 03/21/2012)

Later, I asked Raphael if he has ever known anyone to drop out of school. He responded, “unos pocos. Mis primos- uno en grado tercero, y otro en ninth grade. [a few. My cousins- one in third grade, and another in ninth grade.]” He thought that his cousins dropped out because they did not want to study and were not good kids. His father never graduated high school, and he was unsure if his mother had or not. I then asked Raphael if he thought he would graduate high school, in which he responded “No, no estoy seguro. [No, I am not sure.]”

Despite his uncertainty, Raphael aspires to be a math teacher. He described his role model as one of his ELL teachers, who he described as “buena gente [good people].” Furthermore, Raphael talked about his mentor from the Cross-Cultural Mentoring Program and how it has been a beneficial experience working with another Spanish speaker who has helped him learn the meaning of new vocabulary words.
Raphael arrived in the United States when he was 16 years old, leaving him a total of five years to graduate from high school. Depending on how long it takes Raphael to move through his ELL courses, this allotted amount of time may not be enough. He has lived in the U.S. for one year, and in that time it appears as though his interaction with other native English speakers is limited. Raphael mentioned that outside of his ELL Level II courses, he only has three other mainstream classes: math, drawing, and a technology course. Additionally, he lives with his mother and sister who only speak Spanish. Raphael, therefore, may have to rely solely on the limited interactions he has with classmates and teachers in his three mainstream courses and his ELL teachers to learn English.

One unique aspect about Raphael’s life is that he has had health issues and had to take a year off from schooling in Mexico before he came to the U.S. This year was spent in and out of hospitals, as he has had to undergo many surgeries. He also had another surgery in Houston before moving to this community, and has had one other surgery since enrolling at Liberty High. Raphael estimated that he misses school about one day a month, which he contributes to not feeling well or having doctor appointments to go to. Raphael admitted that in addition to his health, sometimes he is not able to come to school on time because his mother had to work and was not able to drive him to Liberty High.

In addition to his health issues and limited time to graduate, Raphael comes from a split family. His parents are currently separated and plan to get a divorce. Although he has seven members in his nuclear family, his mother and sister are the only ones living with him while he attends school. Remittances are sent to family members who still reside in Mexico, limiting the financial resources available in his own household. Furthermore, high school dropouts are prevalent in Raphael’s life. His father, two of his cousins, and perhaps his mother did not
graduate high school. Despite having known multiple people who have dropped out of high school, Raphael still has aspirations of becoming a high school math teacher. He also has a role-model within the school, one of his ELL teachers, who he looks up to. Additionally, Raphael has found the relationship with his mentor to be helpful, especially since his mentor is able to communicate with him in Spanish while he still learns the English language.
Sonia’s Story

Sonia was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, but spent most of her life in a suburb of Mexico City, Mexico. She described her former home as having “...a lot of people there and not many jobs... Not a lot of people can go to school because of the money. It’s not safe, but it is beautiful.” Sonia is now 14 years old and is a freshman at Liberty High. She moved to this community one and one half years ago with her mother and older sister. She explained, “We knew we were going to move. We sold everything except for our clothes. My dad met us at the border and we drove all the way here. Dad was already living here with my older brother and sister.”

Sonia is currently in ELL Level III, and feels that in her ELL classes, the other students understand her well and she feels as though she can express her feelings better in English than she can in Spanish. In her other mainstream classes, Sonia sometimes feels uncomfortable speaking, worried that she is using the wrong words and not making any sense. Despite this discomfort in some other classes, in her ELL classes she displays herself as a very vibrant, talkative young girl. One day in class, she wrote on the whiteboard next to the date, ‘Happy birthday Justin Bieber!’ A couple other students comment on it, and Sonia responds, “Yep, it’s my husband’s birthday. See, I’m even wearing purple!... I won’t be in class tomorrow. I need to go visit him. He lives in California, right? Yeah, I’m going to California.”

Though she may not be heading to California tomorrow, she has made plans to travel back to Mexico for her Quincinérea celebration this summer. She and her mom already bought their tickets and have started planning for this key moment in her life. She is very excited to travel back to what she still considers ‘home’, and to see all of her friends and family she left behind.

After asking Sonia if she knew anyone who dropped out of high school, she first responded, “Well, my dad, because he had to work. My brother, too.” Then she explained how her oldest sister just dropped out of high school last year, got married, moved to Florida, and now she’s expecting a baby. She thought her brother and sister dropped out because they got bored and felt like they weren’t going to graduate. Sonia currently has another older sister attending the same high school two grades above her, and her mother did graduate from high school while still living in Mexico.

Sonia identified her mother as a role-model she looks up to. “She always tells me the truth and is there for me.” Sonia also explained how one of her teachers is very similar, informing her of what is good and bad, and always trying to help her and other students get their grades up. Sonia is optimistic and believes that she can graduate from high school, because she always tries her best, and “people, like teachers and family, think I will make it.” She clearly has a group supporting her throughout her journey, which can potentially affect her future aspirations. Sonia would like to go to college and hopes to become an actress one day.
In Sonia’s case, age does not appear to be a concern since she is 14 years old and is in the freshman class. At this age, she has seven years to complete high school before turning 21. Foreign birth also does not appear to be a problem for Sonia, as she was born in the United States. Even though she was born in the U.S., she spent most of her life living in Mexico. One obstacle Sonia has had to face is the separation and reunification of her family. Her father has spent most of Sonia’s lifetime living and working in the United States and traveling back to Mexico every so often. Her two oldest siblings joined their father and uncle two years before Sonia, her mother, and sister finally returned to the U.S.

Sonia also differs from Raphael in her English capabilities. Sonia is currently in Level III ELL and is very outgoing. Two of Sonia’s siblings speak English well, one sister is currently in ELL Level IV, and her parents also speak some English. Additionally, since Sonia is in Level III of the ELL program, she is able to take five mainstream courses, which are algebra, computer applications, body systems, reading, and English. While Sonia does feel comfortable speaking English in her ELL classes, sometimes she feels uncomfortable in her other classes afraid of what others might think of her accent or if she makes a mistake using the wrong words.

While Sonia does not have a permanent job, she does babysit her cousins frequently after school. Even though she babysits, Sonia reported spending about 30 minutes each night on homework at home. Sonia also knows three people very close to her that did not graduate from high school. Her father and two oldest siblings all dropped out of high school. Despite her babysitting duties and close proximity to others high school dropouts, Sonia feels optimistic that she will graduate high school. She currently does not have a mentor; however, she has a support system already in place that encourages her to stay in school and she displays self-efficacy believing that she can graduate from high school.
Pancho was born in Parral, Chihuahua, Mexico which is a rural community in the north central part of the country. He is 16 years old and is currently a sophomore at Liberty High. He is no longer in ELL as he graduated from the program in the second grade. Pancho does not remember when his family moved to the United States, as it happened when he was so young. Pancho and his family moved many different places before settling in this community, including Mississippi, Alabama, Pennsylvania, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Iowa, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Texas. He moved to this community five years ago to meet up with other relatives and has stayed ever since.

Pancho lives at home with his mother and three brothers, ages 20, 9 and 8. His father is currently living in Pennsylvania for work. All three of his brothers speak English; however, he still translates for his mother sometimes when his little brothers go in for checkups at the doctor’s office. While his mother graduated from high school, his father did not. He believes the reason for his father dropping out of high school back in Mexico was to find work.

Pancho does not really have the time to participate in any extra-curricular activities at school since he works 30 hours per week as a sales representative for a local newspaper. Though his time at school is limited outside the classroom, he was nominated for ’Mr. Liberty High’ for a fundraiser this spring along with only a dozen other male students at the high school. Because of his work schedule, he also does not have very much time to work on homework outside of school. Instead, he prefers to complete as many assignments as he can during class and does not waste time being distracted by other students.

When asked if he had a role-model, Pancho did not really believe that he did. Pancho does, however, believe that he will graduate high school “’cause I’m graduating early, so I’m pretty sure I will. I am a whole year ahead.” Pancho currently has a 3.6 GPA and is already looking forward to his plans for the future. He would like to go to college and pursue a degree in Business Marketing. He plans to start at a community college and later transfer to a larger university, and will pay for it with the money he has earned working through high school.

Pancho’s story is much different from that of Raphael and Sonia. He moved to the United States when he was young and exited the ELL program by the second grade. Raphael and Sonia, in contrast, are still currently in ELL courses at Liberty High. Pancho, like Sonia, has also experienced times in his life where his father resides in a different location for work. His family
also did not have a stable place of residence until five years ago when they moved to this community. While his father is currently working in Pennsylvania, Pancho is also employed at a local business working 30 hours per week. This really limits the time available to work on any homework outside of school. In addition, Pancho also translates for his mother who has limited English proficiency.

Something unique about Pancho was that he was able to exit the ELL program in the second grade. His academic English has had time to develop, which is much different than the experiences of Raphael and Sonia. His intensive work schedule does hinder his ability to do homework outside of school, yet he is still able to have a good grade point average with plans to graduate high school one year ahead of schedule. He has clearly identified what he would like to do in the future and has articulated the exact means of getting there.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Findings in this study may be particular to the location; however, the results do provide ideas about the contextual environment ELL students of Mexican ancestry encounter at Liberty High on their journey towards graduation. First, the attitudes and perceptions of Mexican ELL students within the school will be explored. Next, the institutional constructs of Liberty High will be examined. Finally, the recommendations of faculty and staff to increase retention and graduation rates for ELL students of Mexican ancestry will be revealed. The overarching theme that emerged from these three points of exploration was a perceived ambivalent environment that ELL students of Mexican ancestry experienced at Liberty High.

While this contradictory “welcoming-unwelcoming environment” has been documented in other schools (Gitlin et al., 2003), Liberty High is atypical in comparison. After the ruling of 

*Lau v. Nichols* in 1974, U.S. schools have had to make accommodations for their ELL student populations; many of these ELL programs were introduced into already existing schools (Gitlin et al., 2003; Olsen, 1997). Liberty High lacks the similar historical context that many other schools faced. Since it opened its doors in 2003-4 (nine years prior to the onset of this study) and was set up as an ELL magnet high school, faculty and staff were hired on with the expectation of serving culturally and linguistically diverse students. This creates a very different context for Liberty High, in which the ELL program was given adequate space and attention from the beginning. In addition, Liberty High was identified as unique by faculty, staff and students because it is one of only two high schools in the district that has an ELL program. Given this distinction, participants reported that Liberty High’s faculty, staff, and student body has already become accustomed to interacting with diverse student populations.
The community in which Liberty High is located is also atypical. As a current refugee resettlement location, the community has been experiencing even more diversity in terms of a migrant’s country of origin (Mitrofanova, 2004; Pipher, 2002). Along with the increasing number of sending countries for refugees and immigrants, there is also more language diversity within the community and its schools. This creates a unique situation for the city, as many other communities within the state have only had to accommodate ELL students from one or two different language backgrounds. Liberty High’s ELL classrooms, therefore, reflect a variety of different language groups (e.g. Vietnamese, Arabic, Spanish, Ukrainian, Chinese, Farsi, etc.). Even though Liberty High’s ELL classrooms can be considered a mosaic of language backgrounds, it is important to note the large Latino population present within the school. Not all Latino students are in the ELL program, nor are they all fluent in Spanish. With such a large Latino population, Liberty High has taken additional measures for familial support, bilingual staff, Spanish for Native Speakers courses, and other additional resources such as the Hispanic Empowerment Initiative.

Perceptions of ELL Students of Mexican Ancestry Graduating

The ambivalent environment is first illustrated through the perceptions of ELL students graduating from Liberty High. Faculty and staff believed that the top three indicators of whether or not an ELL student graduates were family, employment, and poverty (Table 3), all of which the researcher expected to see. Family life was identified by the faculty and staff as the most prominent of these factors. Previous research supports how the lack of parental involvement in school creates negative effects on a student’s academic performance (Ramirez, 2003; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). With the implementation of grant funds towards the Hispanic
Empowerment Initiative, Liberty High has seen some gains in increasing Hispanic parental involvement in particular within the school. Some examples of this are family film night and the presence of Spanish-speaking student ambassadors at parent-teacher conferences. In addition, cultural liaisons have been provided by the district to help cross cultural and linguistic lines between the teachers and families in order to increase parent involvement in the student’s schooling experience. The presence of both parents at home, a single parent or a step-parent are also determinants of how a student well a student does academically (Astone & McLanahan, 1991; Zhou, 1997). Two student narratives explored in this study, Pancho and Raphael, demonstrated an example that ELL students of Mexican ancestry were living with single parents. Two more students, Alicia and Angel, had a step-parent in their household. These cases illustrate that an array of family compositions exist for students of Mexican ancestry at Liberty High. Additionally, the higher the number of siblings a student has and the number of individuals living in a single household were found to negatively affect the resources parents are able to provide the student (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008:36-7). Students in this study had as few as two siblings to as many as six siblings, with an average of 4.5 children in the family (Figure 10). The number of people living in the household reported by students also varied, ranging from three to nine (Figure 10). This in part reflects the faculty and staff’s concern for family involvement, yet also shows variation between students. Some students may appear to be more “at-risk” by faculty and staff based on these familial factors; however, Pancho for instance did not fit this preconceived notion. He reported living with his mother and three other siblings while his dad worked in Pennsylvania, yet his mother attends parent teacher-conferences regularly and is very active in his schooling. José also noted that his parents were very involved in his academics and attended parent-teacher conferences regularly. José’s parents
were also reported as offering to him help with his homework and habitually checking to make sure he has completed all of his assignments.

Work (40%) and poverty (40%) tied for the second most common factors identified by faculty and staff for contributing to dropout rates for ELL students (Table 3). Just as some participants expressed concern for ELL students that struggled academically because they were required to work, others have found supporting evidence that working while in high school reduces the school performance students (Eckstein & Wolpin, 1999). However, it is also important to note the intensity of that student’s work schedule, as those who work more intensively with 20 hours or more per week are more likely to drop out of high school than their peers who do not work or work less intensively (Warren & Cataldi, 2006: 122). This did not coincide with one student who was featured in an earlier student narrative, Pancho. He worked 30 hours per week and was still able to do well academically, with a reported 3.6 GPA.

Participants described that for some students, school may be a less important priority than providing money or childcare for their family. Some attribute this difference in priority to poverty (Zhou, 1997). The level of poverty may range from one immigrant family to another, as one study showed immigrant children from middle-class backgrounds benefit from financially secure families, good schools, safe neighborhoods, and other supportive formal and informal organizations; in contrast, students coming from poorly educated and unskilled parents grow up in underprivileged neighborhoods subject to poor schools, violence, drugs, and a disruptive social environment (Zhou, 1997: 68). This was very similar to responses of participants in this study, who acknowledged that students living in poverty do not have the same access to technology or other resources, and may even be worrying about having a warm meal on the table each day.
Beyond perceived factors for ELL students dropping out, attitudes and perceptions of faculty and staff about ELL students may also influence their schooling experience (Chan, 2006; Hemmings, 1996; Reeves, 2006). When prompted, faculty and staff made distinctions between various language/regional groups throughout the school. For example, African students were said to be academically motivated, as were Asians. Students of Asian origin were said to excel in reading and writing in English, but often times felt uncomfortable speaking. Middle Eastern students were reported as having stronger speaking and listening skills in English, but struggle with reading and writing. As one teacher stated in the comparison between groups, “The most successful are the Asian students. As for other places, some Mexicans do well. Some Africans do well, but for the most part, it’s the Asians.” It is important to note that some of these faculty and staff participants did recognize intragroup variation, recognizing that generalizations cannot be made about an entire group. This finding correlates with former research that has focused on the variability of school performance of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Ogbu, 1987). However, Asian students were viewed by many as the “model minority”, being engaged and motivated academically, even though this may not always be the case (Lee, 1994).

Hispanics on the other hand, were generally viewed as having more of a struggle with their schooling experience. Students of Mexican ancestry were perceived as having lower academic achievement and acquiring English at a slower pace. In addition, for many students of Mexican ancestry, their first language is Spanish. With this language background came the perception that some of these students or their family members may be undocumented. However, following the ruling of Plyler v. Doe, school officials may not question the status of a student’s legal documentation status, and immigrant students have the right and obligation to be educated in U.S. schools (Olivas, 2004). Many times, participants noted that they did not hold personal
stereotypes about students (e.g., undocumented status, resistance to learning English, poor work ethic in school, etc.), however felt that other faculty, staff, or students might. In addition, a few faculty and staff noted that these perceived stereotypes may not apply to all. Rather, some faculty and staff members did mention differences among Latino students (e.g. males and females, Spanish dialects, countries of origin). This correlates with other studies which have found variability in academic performance, for example Padilla and Gonzalez (2001) who found that regardless of a student’s place of birth, students who received some schooling in Mexico reported higher grades than those who had not. Negative perceptions and attitudes of teachers about particular groups can be harmful to the student’s academic outcome (Nieto & Bode, 2012); as such, teachers need to become more aware of these attitudes and perceptions and confront them so as not to affect their teaching (Tatum, 1992).

A few participants even acknowledged that this education gap is apparent at the national level. Some contributed this to the difference in cultural values placed on education, with Mexican students having lower academic motivation from their families as compared to other groups. Despite this perceived lack of engagement and motivation of families in their students schooling, one study showed that Latino parents desired to be involved in their children’s education, but forces within the school prevented them from doing so (Ramirez, 2003). In addition, the perceived future for students of Mexican ancestry by the general population is not optimistic, especially in this particular state (Gouviea & Powell, 2007). The state in which the study was located is reported to lack some elements conducive for the positive adaptation for such large populations of labor immigrants, such as those of Mexican ancestry, and their children (Gouviea & Powell, 2007). The state features relatively limited experience with immigration, it lacks jobs at the upper employment level, it is predominately White, and much of its new
immigrant population “lacks the level of social capital and political power associated with older immigrant destinations” (Gouviea & Powell, 2007: 2). In the present condition, expectations for high school completion and future employment for students of Mexican ancestry appear to remain low in the state.

Another negative stereotype for students of Mexican ancestry is the assumption that most or all are undocumented. While the researcher was not able to ask students about the student or his/her family’s legal status, faculty and staff did mention that they believed other teachers may automatically assume the Mexican student in their classroom or his/her family is undocumented. There is an estimated 11 to 12 million individuals who are undocumented in the U.S. today (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008: 205). However, this assumption of undocumented status for students and families of Mexican descent may or may not be accurate at this school; very few participants personally knew of a student or student’s family member being deported.

Additional perceptions for students of Mexican ancestry revealed in this study were with regard to their English language acquisition. One ELL teacher noted how such a large group of Spanish-speakers moved through the ELL levels that require courses (Levels I-IV), but still has yet to exit the program completely. Others noted the capabilities of Spanish-speaking ELL students to converse with one another in English more easily than they can read or write. Previous work has highlighted the 4-7 years it takes for someone to obtain academic English (Hakuta et al., 2000: 13), yet faculty/staff expressed concern for Spanish-speakers not learning English as efficiently as other language minority groups. Others have documented similar anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, influencing the perception of newly arrived immigrants as being unwilling or unable to learn English as quickly as past waves of immigrants (Espenshade & Fu, 1997).
Having a Spanish language heritage was perceived as both beneficial and detrimental to the student’s academic success, which creates another contradictory message as to what is acceptable within the school and society. Many faculty and staff noted that they celebrate multiculturalism and the use of other languages in their classrooms, though felt that some other teachers may not feel the same way. Some believed that there are teachers in Liberty High that do not allow students to speak languages other than English in their classrooms. Additionally, some students have been witnessed being made fun of by other fellow students for using a language that is not English. The negative effects of this banter may be illustrated by the level of comfort student participants revealed about their ELL courses as opposed to mainstream courses. Faculty, staff, and student participants all acknowledged the “Spanglish” that happens in Liberty High, which was further supported through observations in ELL classrooms, mainstream classrooms, the hallways, the counselor’s office, the main office, in front of school, the cafeteria, and the gymnasium.

Past research provided the idea that immigrants were resisting acculturation to the host society by keeping their first language (Gordon, 1964), however recent research indicates that bilingualism can benefit a person’s metalinguistic awareness and cognitive processing (Bialystok, 2001). While some worry students would experience confusion with exposure to two languages, one study showed that the ability to switch back and forth between languages (i.e., code-switching) is a sign of mastery of the two language systems, not a sign of linguistic confusion (Lanza, 1992). Student participants demonstrated this code-switching when discussing the language they preferred to use, dependent on whom they were talking to. Another example of this was during student interviews, as a couple of them would use Spanish words during an otherwise predominately English interview. This could perhaps have been in part due to the
students’ knowledge of the researcher’s fluency in Spanish. Children even as young as two years have been documented as having the capability of code-switching in socially appropriate ways (Lanza, 1992). Furthermore, researchers recommend that professionals should warmly encourage multiple language use, as it can become an important resource for the student, family, and the wider community (King & Fogle, 2006: 2).

Since there is such a large Spanish-speaking population at Liberty High and throughout the U.S., the familiarity of the Spanish language is quite high among other students and teachers at the school. Just as the aforementioned “Spanglish” was mentioned by faculty and staff and confirmed through observation by the researcher, some faculty and staff told of their own Spanish language fluency. One example of this can be found in the first vignette in the beginning of this study featuring P.E. teacher, Mr. Craig. His Spanish fluency has enabled him to speak one-on-one with Spanish-speaking parents without the use of a translator, student or interpreter. During his interview, he even affirmed his belief of bringing a sense of comfort to Spanish-speaking students when he communicates with them in their native language by speaking to Teresa, a student sitting nearby during the interview. The familiarity with the Spanish language within Liberty High and its community creates more of a welcoming environment, which grants native Spanish-speakers access to additional resources and accommodations that other language groups may not have. Some examples of additional resources would be the Spanish-speaking students available at parent-teacher conferences, the ‘Spanish for Native Speakers’ courses, the Latinos Sin Fronteras group, the Latino Dance Club, and multiple faculty and staff members like Mr. Craig who can communicate to Spanish-speaking families in their first language.

It is also important to note the significance of other students’ perceptions within Liberty High. As shared in the second vignette at the beginning of this study, other students may not
always have pleasant perceptions of students of Mexican ancestry. The female student in the second vignette expressed anger and frustration towards the Mexican female student she had been talking about. There were also other negative attitudes shared about students of Mexican ancestry throughout that conversation, distinguishing between ‘us’ and ‘them’, casting students of Mexican ancestry as ‘the other’. This, however, was not always the case. As we saw in the student narrative of Pancho, he was not cast out as ‘the other’. Rather, he was very involved in the school community and was even nominated among a dozen other male students to become Mr. Liberty High.

ELL students of Mexican ancestry may also become subject to contradictory messages about the ‘ELL label’ itself. There was a notable change in perception by interviewed students according to their progress within the ELL program. For those who were in still in ELL classes, the ELL label meant a lot to these students. The ELL program and even specific teachers provided a “haven” or a “safe place” within the school where ELL students could be themselves, much like that found in other studies (Harklau, 1999; Olsen, 1997). The ELL students who were still in classes felt that being surrounded by other ELL students enabled a comforting feeling. This was supported through observations around the school (e.g., pep rally held in the gymnasium, as well as other observations in hallways and mainstream classrooms), as lower level ELL students tended to congregate with one another. ELL teachers also noted a sense of oneness and comradery in their ELL classrooms, with a “we’re in this together” mentality. The ELL classrooms served as a vital link not only in the students’ adaptation to U.S. high schools, but also in developing a support system and peer network (Harklau, 1999).

This positive connotation of the ‘ELL label’ is not shared by all however. For the student participants who had already exited the program, their comments toward having this label was an
insult to one’s intelligence. While one student drew parallels between being in ELL and being a kid learning new words for the first time, another student felt that this label meant that “you are stupid”. This perception might be enabled through the documented overrepresentation of ELL students in special education courses (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Others suggest that ELL students are socialized academically and linguistically into lower-track classes, which may also relate to this perception. In addition, student participants expressed the difficulties of having so many ELL courses to take before being allowed to take more mainstream courses that are required for graduation. Other research has examined the length of retention for ELL students within ELL courses, noting better academic progress for students who have exited the program by eighth grade (Flores et al., 2009). Therefore, students who have the ‘ELL label’ beyond eighth grade (i.e. all current ELL students at Liberty High, grades 9-12) are at a distinct disadvantage.

Regardless of negative or positive perceptions for ELL students of Mexican ancestry, over half of all faculty and staff interviewed believed that the relationship a student has with his or her teachers can positively affect the student’s academic success. This is sustained through further research, which has delved into the attitudes of teachers about language minority students (Clair, 1995; Reeves, 2006; Stanoscheck Youngs & Youngs, 2001). The roles of the school in general have also been studied and attributed to as a factor in a student’s academic achievement (Lee & Burkham, 2003). In addition, four of the seven students interviewed mentioned having a close relationship with one or more faculty/staff members in the school. This is significant, because students who perceive a positive relationship with teachers have been found to be more intrinsically motivated to feel more competent and have a higher self-esteem than those with more pessimistic views of their student-teacher relationship (Ryan et al., 1994: 231).
Institutional Constructs

The environment within Liberty High is further illustrated through the institutional constructs encountered by ELL students of Mexican ancestry. Faculty and staff identified three main barriers that ELL students encounter within Liberty High’s school structure itself. These top three barriers were: the composition of the ELL program, the lack of flexibility for ELL students, and the high school structure in general. Even though the ELL program earlier was perceived by some faculty, staff and students as a “haven” or a “safe place” for ELL students within the school (Harklau, 1999; Olsen, 1997), nine faculty and staff also found the structure of the ELL program to be a barrier for its students. Some felt as though the ELL program was an obstacle due to its insufficiencies towards graduation requirements. While Liberty High is atypical in that it has been an ELL magnet high school in the district since it opened its doors, it is also atypical in the region because ELL courses do not count towards graduation requirements. Faculty and staff noted that other high schools that serve ELL students nearby allow for ELL courses to count at least as partial credit or more for their English course graduation requirement. At Liberty High though, ELL courses can only count as elective credits. Since ELL students are granted access to certain classes only after reaching a certain level of ELL, this hinders the process of taking courses required for graduation.

Another conflicting ideology within Liberty High is the flexibility to serve individual needs. For ELL students in particular, faculty and staff noted the adaptations they have made in their own classrooms to allow for more flexibility (e.g., extra time given for the completion of assignments, meetings after school, tutoring support). Student participants also shared attributes of their favorite teachers as a resource that is more understanding and really wants the student to succeed. Despite the accommodations for flexibility by some faculty and staff, some institutional
constructs send mixed messages to ELL students. One example of this is the Graduation Demonstration Exams, implemented by the district as part of each student’s graduation requirements. Some faculty and staff noted how the three standardized tests can be problematic for ELL students, as they are not familiar with some of the jargon or cultural attributes within U.S. society. The exclusion of considering ELL students during the development of forming these standardized tests is one major criticism (Abedi, 2004), which was also supported by lower level ELL student participants who described the tests as “confusing” and “hard”. There is currently no flexibility for students whose first language is not English in taking these exams. One specialized staff member reiterated how the students were having to adapt to the system, rather than the other way around with the system adapting to the students. One administrator exemplified this as problematic, as each individual student’s needs should be taken into account.

Furthermore, the constructs of Liberty High as an institution has created a structure that provides inconsistent messages to ELL students. Students may not fully be aware of how the U.S. education system operates, and faculty and staff stated how this may be even more difficult when they have to keep up with different expectations according to which classroom they are in. One teacher was quoted saying that “ELLs have to work in a system that was designed for white middle-class majority students, not for ELL or minority students.” This is further supported by current research which argues for the academic success of minority students who have diverse teachers and administrators who look like their students (Vandergriff, 2006). In 2008, 83% of public school teachers being White nationwide (NCES, 2012), which is very similar in comparison to the 80% of faculty and staff sample I interviewed at Liberty High. Not only was the school designed for the majority White middle-class students, but the current faculty and staff employed at the school also follow this same trajectory of being able to best serve students
who look like them (Vandergriff, 2006). It is important to note that there have been recent efforts
both at the school and district level to increase “intercultural competence” among teachers in
serving ELL students within their school (Nieto, 1994). One example of this is through the
district workshops and professional development exercises faculty and staff noted, which
included the use of two texts: “Courageous Conversations about Race” by Singleton and Linton
and “Culturally Proficient Leadership” by Terrell and Lindsay. Despite the percentage of
teachers at Liberty High who are predominately White, these efforts may counteract the
“subtractive process of schooling” culturally and linguistically diverse students, such as ELL
students of Mexican ancestry, can face when social and cultural resources are removed
(Valenzuela, 1999). Rather, these social and cultural resources can be exemplified through the
enhancement of culturally relevant pedagogy necessary to reach this group of students (Irizarry
& Raible, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Recommendations to Increase Retention and Graduation

In recognizing the unwelcoming aspects (Gitlin et al., 2003) of the school, faculty and
staff at Liberty High noted areas of improvement they felt could create more of a welcoming
environment that fosters the retention and potential graduation for ELL students of Mexican
ancestry. There were four significant recommendations that emerged from the study: 1) build
relationships with students and their families, 2) make modifications for ELL students, 3)
establish guidelines for the intake and outtake processes of ELL students, and 4) increase
intercultural competence of faculty, staff and students. Three of these recommendations were
expected to be found in this study; however the researcher did not anticipate so many to share
their desire for a better transition process when ELL students arrived and left the school.
Building Relationships

Faculty and staff interviewed noted the importance of building relationships with their students in order to increase student retention rates, just as students discussed role-models they had within and outside of the school. Having a caring, supportive relationship with a teacher (Noddings, 2001), in addition to an encouraging classroom environment were positively correlated with a student’s school satisfaction, even as early as the third grade (Baker, 1999). A student’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction in their schooling experience was found to directly affect the academic outcomes for the student (Baker, 1999). Increasing school staff, establishing connections with families, and providing mentoring relationships were all listed as potential ways to build relationships with students by faculty and staff at Liberty High.

First, increasing school staff was single most recommended change by 64% faculty and staff members to increase the graduation of ELL students. During the 2011-12 academic school year, Liberty High’s student to teacher ratio was 15.16 (NCES, 2011), which was very similar compared to the national average for all public schools of 15.8 in 2008 (NCES, 2011). There are notable differences in teachers’ responses to student requests for academic assistance, with students having poor school satisfaction receiving help when they asked about three times more often than those who expressed greater school satisfaction (Baker, 1999). It was also noted that teachers provided more punishment in the form of verbal reprimands for negative classroom behavior to those same students with poor satisfaction (Baker, 1999). By increasing staff, more time could be focused on individual students, which is precisely why one mainstream teacher believed in diminishing class size. The desire for more staff to help ELL students was suggested to come through a variety of forms, from hiring additional counselors, to increasing the number
of cultural liaisons, and adding to the numbers of ELL teachers or co-teachers. With more staff available, there would be a better chance of getting to know the students individually.

Establishing family connections was another suggestion promoted by faculty and staff members. There are current programs already in place at Liberty High, such as the Community Learning Center, the Cross-Cultural Mentoring Program and the Hispanic Empowerment Initiative, which were recognized for building a link between families and schools. Immigrant and minority students often live two very separate lives- one at home and one at school (Chan, 2007; Ek, 2009; Hemmings, 1996; Sarroub, 2001). Increasing communication, promoting family involvement and personal interaction between families and the school can all help a student’s academic performance (Suárez-Orozco, 2008). Two faculty and staff participants noted previous interactions with family literacy programs, something that Liberty High currently does not have. One explained it as going beyond connecting with only the student, while another mentioned how family literacy programs allow the school to invest resources for parents to become their own advocates in the school system over time. These family literacy ideas are supported by previous research. In one such study, parents expressed gratitude not only for being taught how to read and write, but to also be able to interact with their students at home and help them with their studies (Ada, 1988).

The last key relationship building piece recommended by participants was for mentoring programs to be more accessible. Two of the seven student participants were currently involved in a mentoring program, in which they were paired with a college student at a nearby university. Both students expressed their appreciation of this mentoring experience, as mentors were able to help them with new vocabulary words, teach them about college, and assist them in many other ways throughout their schooling experience. One specific mentoring program implemented by
the school is the Cross-Cultural Mentoring Program, which focuses solely on ELL students. As this was the second most prominent answer among faculty and staff members for programs to help ELL students graduate, it is important to note many of the participants expressed significance in the relationship between ELL students and their college student mentors. The program was said to provide an advocate for the students, a motivation to do well in school, and a role-model to look up to. Furthermore, this mentoring program also provided students with individual time and attention, while also integrating the family. One study on a nationally based mentoring program supports this claim and demonstrated that mentored adolescents experienced improved parental relationships and scholastic competence (Rhodes, 2000). Other research notes the tremendous difference mentoring relationships can make on adolescent immigrant lives (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). For example, mentors can alleviate pressures on a family that may already be limited in social resources (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). By doing so, they can help establish a healthier family environment with more support, and perhaps even bridge the gap between cultural differences the student encounters between home and school. Mentors can also provide immigrant students with a sense of guidance, and for those who have a college education, mentors can provide the student with informed advice on access to tertiary education (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). By establishing these relationships, mentors can also decrease instances for immigrant students to be involved in substance abuse, aggressive behavior, and delinquency (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008).

Multiculturally sensitive and perhaps bilingual mentors may come in a variety of forms, such as: a school counselor, home visitor, social worker, mentor, and cultural liaison (Davison Avilés, 1999: 471). In addition to working as advocates for the students, these people can also serve as easily accessible and credible resources. Provided that they are biculturally competent,
they can successfully relay messages from the school to the family, and from the family back to the school. Further research shows that it is not only important for the mentoring program to be accessible, but also for the program to reach a level of quality (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Adolescents who participated in a mentoring relationship that lasted one year or longer reported the largest number of improvements, while those who had shorter mentoring relationships had progressively fewer effects (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Both the length and quality of the mentoring relationship, therefore, have the greatest impact on mentored students (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

**Making Modifications for ELL Students**

Faculty and staff members felt that the barriers within the educational system for ELL students need to be accounted for. This perception is supported by other studies whereby, “In a multilingual and multicultural world, the best education cannot be one standardized to a neutral image of students as English monolinguals” (Reeves, 2004: 62). Students are not the same, as was further expressed by one administrator who noted that she would, “definitely work on some ways to meet [the] needs of individual students...tailoring it to them individually.” The types of modifications for ELL students suggested by faculty and staff ranged from coursework modifications to graduation requirements.

In recent studies, coursework modifications have been brought up as a potential change that would be beneficial for ELL students (Gebhard, 2003; Reeves, 2006). Twenty-eight percent of faculty and staff interviewed discussed how time should be flexible for ELL students. A mainstream teacher stated that she personally allowed students extra time for assignments and
tests if necessary. Allowing more time for the completion of coursework was found widely acceptable as a good practice, while altering or abbreviating coursework standards were not (Gebhard, 2003). It is believed that the appropriate, equitable instruction for ELLs should neither be watered down nor unmodified (Gebhard, 2003; Reeves, 2006). In order to increase fairness in educating ELL students, schools must provide the necessary support for ELL students to engage in challenging content-based learning tasks (Gebhard, 2003: 35). Equitable instruction, therefore, maintains the level of content standards while simultaneously presenting the content materials in a linguistically appropriate manner (Reeves, 2006: 138). In addition, other participants recommended that changes be made to the graduation requirements for ELL students. Several participants discussed the obstacle faced by ELL students when their ELL courses only counted as elective credits, and not towards what is required for them to graduate. One counselor noted how other schools allow four or five English credits per ELL course, and believed it would be very effective for Liberty High to implement this change. As the ELL program and its credits are determined by each school or school district, it was difficult to locate any research in direct alignment with this problem; however, quality ELL programs that implement content from mainstream courses have been found to close about half of the total achievement gap for ELL students (Thomas & Collier, 2002: 320). Given this ability, programs should be evaluated and those ranked of high quality should be considered for at least partial credit for graduation requirements.

Several faculty and staff members offered the possibility of providing modifications or alternative assessment options in place of the ‘Graduation Demonstration Exams’ required by the school district. Of the student participants interviewed, those who had already exited the ELL program did not have many problems passing these exams; however, those in lower levels of
ELL found these exams, especially in reading and writing, to be very difficult and stressful. Time constraints and language barriers were mentioned as reasons for this level of anxiety by students, and one mainstream teacher noted that there are “other ways for students to show proficiency in the language.” This perception aligns with recent studies which resulted in the idea that often times, English language tests do not adequately measure the achievement of ELL students (Datnow et al., 2003: 166). It is vital to recognize other key outcomes such as the development of language skills, critical thinking skills, positive ethnic identities, civic virtue, and understanding the value of learning (Datnow et al., 2003).

**Establishing Guidelines for Intake/Outtake Processes**

Another recommendation by faculty and staff was for there to be a better way to process ELL students as they come in and out of the high school. For incoming ELL students, one counselor wished for a better new student orientation to be in place for new students and their families. In addition, this orientation would partner up families with similar language or cultural backgrounds so that they can work together. In trying to negotiate between the host culture and their own, newcomer families with similar language or cultural backgrounds can work together to navigate the new educational system and break down these unnecessary hurdles. Another participant proposed the idea of a welcoming center at the district level to help newcomer students and their families to navigate the schools in the district, as well as additional resources that are available to them in the community. Another idea to ease the process of an ELL student’s arrival would be to create a preliminary course schedule to follow in order to graduate on time. One ELL teacher described her knowledge of a program that implemented these
guidelines which were designed for students coming in at every age, and she thought it would be beneficial to implement them at Liberty High in a similar fashion. Getting newcomer ELL student’s transcripts in a timely manner was also a concern for participants, especially those who worked in the ELL program and the counselor’s office. Other research has featured similar difficulties in receiving and processing transcripts (Olsen, 1997), and this obstacle is significant for ELL students as it delays the progress towards graduation even more when courses they already took are not accounted for.

In addition to better processes for handle incoming ELL students and their families, participants also wished for a more thorough plan devised for ELL students after they leave Liberty High. Similar transition plans have been developed for students in Special Education courses (Heaston & Foley, 2009; New Hampshire Department of Education, n.d.). For those who graduated from high school, one mainstream teacher suggested more scholarships become available in order for ELL students to continue their education beyond high school. Another mainstream teacher felt as though it would be beneficial to find a way to encourage students who are undocumented to be assured they could still get a job or go to college after high school, which may consequently motivate them to graduate. For those ELL students who were unable to graduate from high school, one mainstream teacher believed a similar guide should be available for students to work towards their GED. This would allow students, especially those who aged out, to realize the other options still available to them after leaving Liberty High. Other support networks should be drawn upon for additional English language courses if the student still wishes to pursue their English language acquisition.
Increase Intercultural Competence

The desire for increased intercultural competence was also a key recommendation to help ELL students graduate from high school. This knowledge and awareness can apply to educators, administrators and other fellow students. Of the 25 faculty and staff participants interviewed, 80% had taken one course or multiple courses about multicultural education or ELL education. In addition, 52% of participants reported having attended multicultural workshops provided by the district or school. Positive multicultural attitudes by teachers has been documented to be influenced by fieldwork experiences in culturally/ethnically diverse settings, and taking courses about multicultural and bilingual education (Capella-Santana, 2003; Stanosheck Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Although all faculty and staff at Liberty High are offered multicultural or ELL workshops and additional training several times throughout the year, it is significant that barely over half of participating respondents noted their participation in this form of training. Despite this relatively low reported participation among respondents, two faculty and staff members requested that more staff development be available so that they can be better trained to work with ELL students and their families. Another participant wished for more employed staff members to be able to speak the various languages of ELL students throughout the school, which may be arranged either through language lessons for current faculty and staff or the hiring of additional bilingual employees. These training experiences enable better intercultural competence, by which teachers can more effectively connect and understand ELL students in their classrooms (Ayers, 1992).

In addition to training, other scholars have documented the completion of foreign language courses, experience living abroad, and previous work with diverse ELL student populations to promote intercultural competence (Stanosheck Youngs & Youngs, 2001). Only
12% of participating faculty and staff mentioned time spent living outside the United States, which is a very small portion of the sample interviewed. Five participants provided that they were fluent in Spanish, while three others had intermediate Spanish fluency. There was no known documentation of currently employed faculty and staff’s bilingual or multilingual capabilities outside of cultural liaisons.

As noted earlier, many faculty and staff participants self-identified as White (80%). District-wide, schools have employed 2,575 teachers; 2,495 of these teachers self-identified as White (97%), with only 41 Hispanic (1.6%) (NDE, 2011). This pattern of having few teachers and administrators of color is also found nationwide (Gordon, 1994; NCES 2012). Some contribute this shortage of minority teachers to the context of school desegregation, higher education elitism, racism, poverty, and urban decay (Gordon, 1994: 346). Additionally, others have noted a discrepancy for minorities, those learning English in particular, to be marginalized in U.S. colleges (Harklau, 2000), leaving a void in minority college students who are able to attain their teaching degree.

With the historic and continuing void in the numbers of pre-service teachers of color, teacher educators need to educate their predominantly White middle-class students (NCES, 2012b) to combat the racism and prejudices to which they were socialized in the United States (Tatum, 1992) and recognize the unearned “White privilege” that is instilled in this society (McIntosh, 1989; Tatum, 1992). Faculty and staff participants noted the presence of some discrimination for both ELL students and Latino students. This perceived discrimination was said to come from multiple factors within the school (e.g., administration, teachers, and other students). Reported discrimination ranged from discrete to overt. It is significant to note that not all faculty and staff interviewed agreed that discrimination was present for one or both parties in
Liberty High. Pre-service and in-service teachers should move beyond the “luxury of ignorance” (Howard, 2003; Howard, 1999), and interrupt the cycle of oppression (Tatum, 1992). As children, we may have been taught to become a color-blind society (Ladson-Billings, 2009); however, as adults, we must re-educate ourselves to contest the “dysconscious racism” in play (Paley, 1989). Teachers should not accept generalizations about student groups as being inevitable; rather, they should challenge the status quo by believing any student can succeed academically (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Regardless the type of training involved to achieve this cultural knowledge and awareness, scholars believe that exposure is key (Stanosheck Youngs & Youngs, 2001). They argue that pre-service and in-service teachers should have increased opportunities for exposure to cultural diversity:

“If the goal is to promote positive attitudes toward ESL students on the part of mainstream teachers, exposure to cultural diversity appears likely to enhance appreciation for cultural diversity” (Stanosheck Youngs & Youngs, 2001: 117).

The more exposure pre-service and in-service teachers have to diversity through foreign language courses, courses in multicultural education, ESL training, and work with culturally diverse ESL students, the more positive teachers are likely to be about working with ELL students (Stanosheck Youngs & Youngs, 2001: 117).
Chapter 6: Conclusion

Limitations

Since the depth of this study was confined by the constraint of time, one limitation of this study is its short duration. It is not a longitudinal study following the progression of students from the beginning to end of their high school career. With a longitudinal study, more precise factors could have been determined for each individual case, understanding why they were able to graduate or not. Another limitation of this study was the sample size with which interviews were held. Only 25 faculty and staff members and seven students participated. In addition, the quantitative data collection and analysis of the student sample would have benefited from a larger sample to draw comparisons between perceptions. Participants were only recruited from faculty/staff members and students, neglecting to include parents or other family members in the study. The information gained from family members could have potentially altered the way in which we understand ELL students with Mexican ancestry’s schooling experience and decision of dropout or retention. However, due to time and resource constraints, the researcher was only able to interview two groups. Moreover, the researcher was also unable to ask questions about documented or undocumented status to the students to protect them from any harm. Very little research has been done on this area due to its potentially detrimental effects (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011); however, the status of the student and his or her family would have been very beneficial in the understanding of these students’ schooling experiences.

There were also limitations to the instruments used in the study. A pilot study was implemented a year before this research began, and one participant took part in both the pilot and the actual study. While the instrument was significantly altered, he had prior knowledge of the types of questions the researcher would ask which may have construed his answers, making his
responses not as reliable in comparison. Further, due to time constraints, the instruments were not tested in a separate location for others to critique. One problem encountered during the interviews with faculty and staff was the three-point likert scale. There were several instances where participants chose answers in-between or not on the scale; these answers were later left out of data analysis.

**Future Research**

Much research remains for the work that explores ELL students with Mexican ancestry. This study featured a small sample of students; however future studies could focus more on a narrative inquiry of one or two students or a more quantitative aspect with a larger student sample. Additional research could follow a similar group of students throughout their entire high school career in a longitudinal study. Another longitudinal study could explore the changes in teacher perceptions about language minority students over time. In addition, it was noted that Liberty High had very diverse language backgrounds for students currently enrolled in ELL classes; however the overwhelming majority of students who were in Level V and never exited were Spanish-speakers. Factors causing this phenomenon of Spanish-speaking ELL students not exiting the program should be further explored. Future research could also focus on the components necessary for a successful mentoring program, and perhaps with an even more in-depth look at what mentoring program components benefit ELL students specifically. Furthermore, new legislation has passed for undocumented students to be able to apply for a green card after having lived in the U.S. for five years and be able to legally get a job or attend college in the United States. It would be interesting to follow the effects of this legislation and see how that impacts the schooling experience of ELL students of Mexican ancestry.
Implications of the Study

In 2010-11, the State’s high school dropout rate was 1.46% for all students, while the dropout rate for ELL students was 6.72% (NDE 2011: 1). This education gap is also found for Hispanic students within the state with a 15.1% dropout rate (NCES, 2011), which is also a trend reflected among students of Mexican ancestry nationwide (Aud et al., 2011; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011: 149). Beyond these numbers, it was clear that “something more” (Gitlin et al., 2003) was going on for the ELL students of Mexican ancestry at Liberty High. After hearing several faculty and staff members define success for this population as “ultimately graduating high school”, the process of schooling experienced by ELL students of Mexican ancestry on their journey to “Pomp and Circumstance” was explored.

Through the triangulation of data from multiple sources, the experience of schooling for ELL students of Mexican ancestry towards the ultimate goal of graduation was explored through three main questions. First, the perceptions and attitudes about this particular population were examined within Liberty High. Faculty and staff members perceived the top three indicators of whether or not an ELL student graduates as family, employment and poverty. Common stereotypes about this group of students were further explored within the school, which competed against expectations faculty and staff had. ELL students of Mexican ancestry also received mixed messages about the use of Spanish within the school context. In certain instances it was celebrated, while in others it was discouraged. The ELL label was also found to hold both positive and negative connotations, providing a “safe place” for some while also prompting the stigma of having less intelligence for others.

Second, the institutional constructs of Liberty High were studied under a critical lens. Though some faculty, staff, and students viewed the ELL program as beneficial to the process of
schooling for an ELL student, others felt that the ELL program in its current state was also a barrier. One prominent barrier becomes apparent when examining the credit hours required for graduation, none of which can be obtained through ELL courses. Rather, ELL students have to pass a certain level of ELL before even beginning their English core required courses. Instead, ELL courses only count as elective credits at this time. In addition, flexibility for ELL students displayed conflicting ideologies. While some faculty and staff noted the manners in which they accommodated and became more flexible with ELL students within their own classrooms, other realms of the school did not carry over this philosophy. Standardized tests instituted by the district can account for one of these contradictions, as the ideology of flexible accommodation was not reflected for students whose first language is not English. Individual needs were therefore overlooked, as students were having to adapt to the system instead of the system adapting to the students.

Finally, four key recommendations were proposed to promote ELL student graduation rates: 1) build relationships with students and their families, 2) make modifications for ELL students, 3) establish transition guidelines for intake/outtake processes, and 4) increase intercultural competence of the faculty, staff and students within the school. Current faculty and staff at Liberty High have already acknowledged the need to improve graduation rates for ELL students of Mexican ancestry in their school, especially through the allocation of funds towards the Hispanic Empowerment Initiative. As current trends of pre-service teacher education programs typically attract predominantly White, monocultural, English-speaking women, the demographics of U.S. teachers in the future will not likely change (Irizarry & Raible, 2011). This is significant for teacher educators as well as pre-service teachers, as culturally and linguistically diverse student populations continue to grow within this locale in particular, and the United
States as a whole. The manner in which schools respond to the changes in demographics can ultimately impact how the student performs academically (Chan, 2006; Irizarry & Raible, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Reeves, 2006; Suárez-Orozco, 2008).

Liberty High was an atypical high school that did not hold the same historical context of having to transition in order to accommodate for the ELL student population that other high schools have faced (Gitlin et al., 2006; Olsen, 1997). Despite what may appear as an advantage, Liberty High still struggles to adequately serve the needs of ELL students within its doors. The “welcoming-unwelcoming” environment experienced by ELL students of Mexican ancestry at Liberty High is significant. Through the illustrations of student narratives, we examined the current situations of Raphael, Sonia and Pancho. Each of these students experienced Liberty High differently, according to their own individual situations. While perceptions and attitudes about ELL students of Mexican ancestry can be negative at times (i.e., vignette featuring students outside their Spanish classroom) and institutional constructs can get in the way, interviews and observations throughout the school have led me to conclude that Liberty High has recognized deficiencies in the way ELL students of Mexican ancestry were being educated. Conscious efforts have been made and continue to be implemented throughout the school, which can eventually deconstruct the ambivalent environment. Instead, student diversity can be affirmed, and Liberty High can become the welcoming environment necessary to successfully attain the goal of “Pomp and Circumstance.”
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Stone, Jamalee with Edmund T. Hamann
Suárez-Orozco, Carola

Suárez-Orozco, Carola with Francisco X. Gaytán, Hee Jin Bang, Juliana Pakes, Erin O’Connor and Jean Rhodes

Suárez-Orozco, Carola with Marie Onaga and Cécile de Lardemelle.

Suárez-Orozco, Carola with Allyson Pimentel and Margary Martin
2009 The Significance of Relationships: Academic Engagement and Achievement among Newcomer Immigrant Youth. Teachers College Record, 111(3): 712-749.

Suárez-Orozco, Carola with Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco


Suárez-Orozco, Carola with Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Irina Todorova

Suárez-Orozco, Carola with Irina L. Todarova

Suárez-Orozco, Carola with Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Robert T. Teranishi and Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco

Suárez-Orozco, Marcelo with Peter D. Roos and Carola Suárez-Orozco
Suh, Suhyun and Jingyo Suh

Tashakkori, Abbas and Charles Teddlie (eds)

Tatum, Beverly Daniel

Thomas, Wayne and Virginia Collier

Tran, MyLuong T. with Russell L. Young and Joseph D. DiLella

Tse, Lucy

U.S. Census Bureau


Valdés, Guadalupe

Valenzuela, Angela
Vandergriff, Jim

Van Hook, Jennifer and Michael Fix

Varghese, Manka M.

Villamil Tinajero, Josefina with Judith Hope Munter and Blanca Araujo

Viney, Rebecca and Judy McKimm

Wang, Margaret C. and E.W. Gordon

Warren, John Robert and Emily Forrest Cataldi

Weisskirch, Robert S.

Whittemore, Robin with Susan K. Chase and Carol L. Mandle
2001 Validity in Qualitative Research. Qualitative Health Research, 11: 522-537.

Wiggan, Greg
Wiley, Terrence G. and Marguerite Lukes

Wilson, Kenneth L. and Alejandro Portes

Wilson, Tamar Diana

Wojtkiewicz, Roger A., and Katharine M. Donato

Wong-Fillmore, Lily

Wortham, Stanton with Katherine Mortimer and Elaine Allard

Zhou, Min

Zimmerman, Barry J. with Albert Bandura and Manuel Martinez-Pons
Appendix A- Informed Consent Form for Students 19 or Older (English)
Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:

[Signature]

Date

Name and Contact Information for investigators

Kristine Sudbeck, MA student, Principal Investigator  
kristinesudbeck@gmail.com  
402-472-7955

Mary Willis, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator  
mwillis2@unl.edu  
402-472-9677

810 Oldfather Hall / P.O. Box 880368 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0368 / (402) 472-2411 / FAX (402) 472-9642
LA FORMA DEL PERMISO INFORMADO

Los estudiantes latinos del idioma inglés

Usted está invitado participar en este estudio de investigación. Usted ha sido escogido a participar en este estudio porque usted es un estudiante del idioma inglés y latino. La información siguiente sirve para ayudarle tomar una decisión informado si quisiera participar en este estudio o no.

El propósito: El propósito de esta investigación es explorar los factores que contribuyan a los ríos bajos de la graduación de la escuela secundaria con los estudiantes latinos, y también darse una voz a estos estudiantes.

Los procedimientos: Este estudio durará aproximadamente una hora. Si posible, este entrevista ocurrirá entre la casa del estudiante. Sin embargo, si esta ubicación no es preferida, la reunión ocurrirá en una oficina o aula privada adentro de la escuela.

Ejemplo de preguntas:
1. ¿Cuál nivel de ELL es usted?
2. ¿Por cuánto tiempo ha vivido en los estados unidos?
3. ¿Dígame sobre cuando usted/ su familia se mudó a los estados unidos?
4. ¿Conoce alguien que deje los estudios?
5. ¿Has necesitado sus padres a contacta la escuela sobre un problema?

Los beneficios: Mientras no hay los beneficios directos a usted, una copia de la investigación terminado estará donado a la biblioteca de Lincoln North Star para el uso de la escuela. También, una copia digital estará donada a la oficina del distrito de las escuelas públicas de Lincoln.

Los riesgos posibles: Puede ser cierto que algunos estudiantes y/o sus familias tengan un estado indocumentado. Las investigadores no tienen interés saber esta información. Por eso, no hay preguntas directas sobre el estado de inmigración del estudiante o su familia.

La confidencialidad: Alguna información obtenida durante este estudio lo cual pueda identificar a usted o su familia continuará estrictamente confidencial. El dato almacenará en un archivero con un contraseña y una computadora protegido con contraseña adentro de la oficina de la investigadora. Esta información solamente será vista por la investigadora durante el estudio y por la duración de un año después del estudio es terminado. La información obtenida durante este estudio puede ser publicado en una publicación académica o quizás puede ser presentado a una conferencia académica.

La oportunidad preguntar: Usted puede preguntarnos sobre esta investigación y pueden recibir estas respuestas antes del consentimiento de participación o durante el estudio. También, se puede poner en contacto los investigadores con la información contacto al fin de esta forma. Por favor, ponga en contacto el consejo de revisión institucional de la universidad de Nebraska a Lincoln a 402.272.6965 para preguntar algún o expresar algún asunto sobre los derechos de su hijo como una participante de esta investigación.
La libertad de retirar: La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Ustedes pueden rechazar participar o retirar el estudio a algún tiempo sin hacerle daño a su relación con los investigadores a la universidad de Nebraska a Lincoln, el distrito de Lincoln Public Schools o la escuela secundaria de Lincoln North Star.

El consento para el uso de una grabadora portátil: Por favor, indiquen si usted autoriza el uso de una grabadora portátil durante la entrevista. El archivo de audio es por el propósito de notas y estará conservado por un año después de la colección de datos.

- Autorizo el uso de una grabadora portátil durante esta entrevista. [ ]
- No autorizo el uso de una grabadora portátil durante esta entrevista. [ ]

El derecho recibir una copia: Usted está decidido voluntariamente si quisiera participar en este estudio o no. Su firma significa que usted ha decidido participar después de leer y entender toda la información presentada. Usted recibirá una copia de esta forma del consentimiento para guardar.

_________________________  __________________________
La firma del estudiante     La fecha

Los investigadores y la información de contacto
Kristine Sudbeck, MA estudiante, La investigadora principal   kristinesudbeck@gmail.com   402-472-7955
Mary Willis, Ph.D., La investigadora secundaria               mwillis2@unl.edu          402-472-9677
Appendix C - Child Assent Form (English)

CHILD ASSENT FORM

Title: Latino English Language Learners

You are invited to participate in this research study. You are being asked to participate because you are an English language learner (ELL) and are Latino. The purpose of this study is to explore factors that may contribute to lower graduation rates for Latino ELLs at Lincoln North Star High School.

Procedures: This study will take approximately one hour. If possible, the interview will take place within your home. However, if you prefer to do the interview at school, we can set up a meeting time and place within a private room at the school.

Sample Questions:
1. Which level of ELL are you?
2. How long have you lived in the United States?
3. Tell me about when you/ your family moved to the United States.
4. Do you know someone who has dropped out of high school?
5. Have your parents ever needed/wanted to contact the school about an issue?

Benefits: While there are no direct benefits to you, a copy of the completed research will be donated to the Lincoln North Star library. A digital copy will also be provided to the Lincoln Public Schools district office.

Potential Risks: Some students and/or their families may have an undocumented immigrant status. The investigator does not wish to know this information. Therefore, no direct questions will be asked about legal status of the student and his/her family.

Confidentiality: Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet and a password protected computer in the investigator’s office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for one year after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as summative data.

Your parents will also be asked to give their permission for you to participate in this study. Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may stop the interview at any time. If you have any questions, please ask one of the researchers.
IF YOU SIGN THIS FORM, IT MEANS THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE AND HAVE READ EVERYTHING THAT IS ON THIS FORM. YOU AND YOUR PARENTS WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS FORM TO KEEP.

__________________________________________
Signature of Student

__________________________________________
Signature of Investigator

Date

Date

Name and Contact Information for Investigators
Kristine Sudbeck, MA student, Principal Investigator
Mary Willis, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator

kristinesudbeck@gmail.com 402-472-7955
mwillis2@unl.edu 402-472-9677
LA FORMA DE LA CONFORMIDAD DE LOS HIJOS

Los estudiantes latinos del idioma inglés

Usted está invitado participar en este estudio de investigación. Usted ha sido escogido a participar en este estudio porque usted es un estudiante latino del idioma inglés. La información siguiente sirve para ayudarle tomar una decisión informado si quisiera participar o no.

El propósito: El propósito de esta investigación es explorar los factores que contribuyen a los ratos bajos de la graduación de la escuela secundaria con los estudiantes latinos, y también darse una voz a estos estudiantes.

Los procedimientos: Este estudio durará aproximadamente una hora. Si posible, este entrevista ocurrirá entre la casa del estudiante. Sin embargo, si esta ubicación no es preferida, la reunión ocurrirá en una oficina o aula privada adentro de la escuela.

Ejemplo de preguntas:
1. ¿Cuál nivel de ELL es usted?
2. ¿Por cuánto tiempo ha vivido en los estados unidos?
3. ¿Dígame sobre cuando usted/ su familia se mudó a los estados unidos?
4. ¿Conoce alguien que deje los estudios?
5. ¿Han necesitado sus padres a contactar la escuela sobre un problema?

Los beneficios: Mientras no haya beneficios directos a usted, una copia de la investigación terminado estará donado a la biblioteca de Lincoln North Star. También, una copia digital estará donada a la oficina del distrito de las escuelas públicas de Lincoln.

Los riesgos posibles: Puede ser cierto que algunos estudiantes y/o sus familias tengan un estado indocumentado. Las investigadores no tienen interés saber esta información. Por eso, no hay preguntas directas sobre el estado de inmigración del estudiante o su familia.

La confidencialidad: Alguna información obtenido durante este estudio la cual pueda identificar a usted o su familia continuará estrictamente confidencial. El dato almacenará en un archivado con un cerrojo y una computadora protegido con contraseña adentro de la oficina de la investigadora. Esta información solamente será vista por la investigadora durante el estudio y por la duración de un año después del estudio es terminado. La información obtenida durante este estudio puede ser publicado en una publicación académica o quizás puede ser presentado a una conferencia académica.
También, sus padres estarán preguntados a dar su permiso para usted participar en este estudio. Por favor, hablé con sus padres antes de decidir si quisiera participar o no. No es necesario participar en este estudio si usted no quisiera participar. Usted puede parar la entrevista en cualquier momento. Si tiene alguna pregunta, por favor pregúntele una de las investigadoras.

SI FIRMA ESTA FORMA, SIGNIFICA QUE USTED HA DECIDIDO PARTICIPAR Y USTED HA LEIDO TODO QUE ESTÁ EN ESTA FORMA. USTED Y SUS PADRES RECIBIRÁN UNA COPIA DE ESTA FORMA PARA GUARDAR.

La firma del estudiante

La fecha

La firma de la investigadora

La fecha

Los investigadores y la información de contacto
Kristine Sudbeck, MA estudiante, La investigadora principal
Mary Willis, Ph.D., La investigadora secundaria

kristine.sudbeck@gmail.com  402-472-7955
mwillis2@unl.edu  402-472-9677
Appendix E - Parental Consent Form (English)

Title: Latino English Language Learners

Purpose: Studies have shown that English language learners (ELLs) in the United States are struggling to graduate, with the lowest graduation rate coming from those of Latino origin. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore factors that contribute to low high school graduation rates among Latino ELLs and give a voice to these students.

Procedures: This study will take approximately one hour of your child’s time. If possible, the interview will take place within the student’s home. However, if this location is not preferred, a meeting can be set up at a mutually convenient time and place within a private room at the school. A list of potential interview questions has been provided for your convenience.

Sample Questions:
1. Which level of ELL are you?
2. How long have you lived in the United States?
3. Tell me about when you/ your family moved to the United States.
4. Do you know someone who has dropped out of high school?
5. Have your parents ever needed/wanted to contact the school about an issue?

Benefits: While there are no direct benefits to you or your child, a copy of the completed thesis will be donated to the Lincoln North Star library to use at their discretion. A digital copy will also be provided to the Lincoln Public Schools district office.

Potential Risks: Some students and/or their families may have an undocumented immigrant status. The investigator does not wish to know this information. Therefore, no direct questions will be asked about legal status of the student and his/her family.

Confidentiality: Any information obtained during this study which could identify your child or his/her family will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet and a password protected computer in the investigator’s office and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for one year after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Opportunity to Ask Questions: You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the investigator(s) at the contact information below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant.
Freedom to Withdraw: Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the Lincoln Public School District or Lincoln North Star High School.

Consent for Use of Audio Recorder: Please indicate whether or not you authorize the use of audio recording materials during the interview. The audio file is for note taking purposes and will be kept for one year after data collection.

- I authorize the use of audio recording materials.
- I do not authorize the use of audio recording materials.

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT
YOU ARE VOLUNTARILY MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE CERTIFIES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE HAVING READ AND UNDERSTOOD THE INFORMATION PRESENTED. YOU WILL BE GIVEN A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM TO KEEP.

__________________________
Child's Name

__________________________  __________________________
Signature of Parent             Date

IN MY JUDGEMENT THE PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN IS VOLUNTARILY AND KNOWINGLY GIVING INFORMED CONSENT AND POSSESS THE LEGAL CAPACITY TO GIVE INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY.

__________________________  __________________________
Signature of Investigator              Date

Name and Contact Information for Investigators
Kristine Sudbeck, MA student, Principal Investigator   kristinesudbeck@gmail.com   402-472-7955
Mary Willis, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator   mwillis2@unl.edu   402-472-9677

810 Oldfather Hall / P.O. Box 880368 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0368 / (402) 472-2411 / FAX (402) 472-9642
LA FORMA DE PERMISO INFORMADO DE LOS PADRES

Los estudiantes latinos del idioma inglés

Ustedes están invitados permitir su hijo/a participar en este estudio de investigación. La información siguiente sirve para ayudarles tomar una decisión informado si su hijo/a participe o no. Si tiene algunas preguntas, no vacilen preguntarnos.

El propósito: Estudios pasados han mostrado que los estudiantes del idioma inglés en los estados unidos batallan con el rato más bajo de graduación son los con origen latino. El propósito de esta investigación es explorar los factores que contribuyen a los ratos bajos de la graduación de la escuela secundaria con los estudiantes latinos, y también darse una voz a estos estudiantes.

Los procedimientos: Este estudio durará aproximadamente una hora del tiempo de su hijo/a. Si posible, este entrevista ocurrirá entre la casa del estudiante. Sin embargo, si esta ubicación no es preferida, la reunión ocurrirá en una oficina o aula privada entre la escuela. Una lista de preguntas posibles han sido proveído para su conveniencia.

Ejemplo de preguntas:
1. ¿Cuál nivel de ELL es usted?
2. ¿Por cuánto tiempo ha vivido en los estados unidos?
3. ¿Dígame sobre cuando usted/ su familia se mudó a los estados unidos?
4. ¿Conoce alguien que deje los estudios?
5. ¿Han necesitado sus padres a contactar la escuela sobre un problema?

Los beneficios: Mientras no hay los beneficios directos a ustedes o su hijo/a, una copia de la investigación terminado estará donado a la biblioteca de Lincoln North Star para el uso de la escuela. También, una copia digital estará donada a la oficina del director de las escuelas públicas de Lincoln.

Los riesgos posibles: Puede ser cierto que algunos estudiantes y/o sus familias tengan un estado indocumentado. Las investigadores no tienen interés saber esta información. Por eso, no hay preguntas directas sobre el estado de inmigración del estudiante o su familia.

La confidencialidad: Alguna información obtenido durante este estudio lo cual pueda identificar su hijo/a o su familia continuará estrictamente confidencial. El dato almacenará en un archiver con un cerrojo y una computadora protegido con contraseña adentro de la oficina de la investigadora. Esta información solamente será vista por la investigadora durante el estudio y por la duración de un año después del estudio es terminado. La información obtenido durante este estudio puede ser publicado en una publicación académica o quizás puede ser presentado a una conferencia académica.

La oportunidad preguntarnos: Ustedes pueden preguntarnos sobre esta investigación y pueden recibir estas respuestas antes del consentimiento de participación o durante el estudio. También, se puede poner en contacto los investigadores con la información contacto al fin de esta forma. Por favor, pongan en contacto el consejo de
La libertad de retirar: La participación en este estudio es completamente voluntaria. Ustedes pueden rechazar participar o retirar el estudio a algún tiempo sin hacerle daño a su relación con los investigadores a la universidad de Nebraska a Lincoln, el distrito de Lincoln Public Schools o la escuela secundaria de Lincoln North Star.

El consento para el uso de una grabadora portátil: Por favor, indiquen si ustedes autorizan el uso de una grabadora portátil durante la entrevista. El archivo de audio es por el propósito de notas y estará conservado por un año después de la colección de datos.

  Autorizo el uso de una grabadora portátil durante esta entrevista. □
  No autorizo el uso de una grabadora portátil durante esta entrevista. □

LA DOCUMENTACION DE CONSENSO INFORMADO
USTED ESTÁ TOMANDO UNA DECISIÓN VOLUNTARIA SI QUIISIERA SU HIJO/A PARTICIPA EN ESTE ESTUDIO O NO. SU FIRMA CERTIFICA QUE USTED HA DECIDIDO PERMITIR SU HIJO/A A PARTICIPAR Y QUE USTED HA LEÍDO Y HA ENTENDIDO LA INFORMACIÓN PRESENTADO. USTED RECIBE UNA COPIA DE ESTA FORMA DE CONSENSO PARA GUARDAR.

______________________________
El nombre del estudiante

______________________________
La firma de uno de los padres

______________________________
La fecha

______________________________
La firma de la investigadora

______________________________
La fecha

Los investigadores y la información de contacto

Kristine Sudbeck, MA estudiante, La investigadora principal  kristinesudbeck@gmail.com  402-472-7955

Mary Willis, Ph.D., La investigadora secundaria  mwillis2@unl.edu  402-472-9677

810 Oldfather Hall / P.O. Box 880368 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0368 / (402) 472-2411 / FAX (402) 472-9642
Appendix G- Faculty and Staff Informed Consent Form
Consent, Right to Receive a Copy: You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Participant:

Name and Contact Information for Investigators
Kristine Sudbeck, MA student, Principal Investigator
Mary Willis, Ph.D., Secondary Investigator

kristinesudbeck@gmail.com
mwillis2@unl.edu
402-472-7955
402-472-9677
Appendix H- Observation Protocol

Date: 
Time: 
Location: 
Class: 
Total ELL Students: 
Total Students: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I saw, heard</th>
<th>Reactions, Comments, Questions</th>
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Appendix I- Faculty Interview Protocol

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<tr>
<th>Time of Interview:</th>
<th>Audio Recording Preference: Y/N</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>Age:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>Male/Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviewee:</td>
<td>Pseudonym:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation:</td>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction:** Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me. You may read the informed consent form at this time. You may sign your name and date the bottom if you are willing to participate in this study. Also, please check “Yes” or “No” at the bottom of the form if you prefer to have this interview recorded. Thank you for choosing to participate in this study. With these questions, please feel free to elaborate as much as you’d like. I would love to hear great detail from your first-hand perspective.

**Questions:**

1. I’m interested in hearing about your experience as an ELL teacher/liaison/counselor. How long have you been teaching?
2. Can you give me the sequence of your teaching history? Please include location (city, state), subject matter, and level for each school. What did you teach and for how long?
   a. If you changed areas, why did you change?
3. Which ELL level/subject/language do you serve?
4. In your opinion, what do you think are factors that may contribute to an ELL student doing well in your class?
5. What criteria must ELL students have (in your class) in order to move onto the next level?
6. Explain the language diversity of your classroom/school composition.
7. Do you notice any distinctions between students from different language groups and their participation/performance in class? Differences in learning styles?
8. What factors or situations outside of school affect a student’s performance in (your) class?
9. In your experience, how often are ELL students not able to graduate high school due to...
   a. Parent-Child Conflict A little Sometimes A lot
   b. Aging Out A little Sometimes A lot
   c. Pregnancy A little Sometimes A lot
   d. Employment A little Sometimes A lot
   e. Interpreting for Relatives A little Sometimes A lot
   f. Providing Child Care A little Sometimes A lot
   g. Relocation A little Sometimes A lot
   h. Transportation Issues A little Sometimes A lot
   i. Lack of Monetary Resources A little Sometimes A lot
   j. Legal Issues for Parents A little Sometimes A lot
   k. Legal Issues for Student A little Sometimes A lot
   l. Poor Work Ethic A little Sometimes A lot
   m. Gangs A little Sometimes A lot
   n. Health Issues for Family Member A little Sometimes A lot
   o. Health Issues for Student A little Sometimes A lot
p. Language Barrier
   A little  Sometimes  A lot 
q. Deportation
   A little  Sometimes  A lot 
r. Dislike for the Educational System
   A little  Sometimes  A lot 
s. Dislike for Teacher(s)
   A little  Sometimes  A lot 
t. Other influences__________________

10. How do you define “success” for an ELL student?

11. If a student is having academic/attendance/behavioral problems, which way do you prefer to communicate with the parents- if the parents do understand English?
   a. Phone Call   b. Written Letter  c. Meeting in Person  d. Other___________

12. If a student is having academic/attendance/behavioral problems, which way do you prefer to communicate with the parents- if the parents do not understand English?
   a. Phone Call   b. Written Letter  c. Meeting in Person  d. Other___________

13. During parent-teacher conferences, how frequently do ELL parents attend?
   a. A little   b. Sometimes   c. A lot 

14. How often are translators used during parent-teacher conferences?
   a. A little   b. Sometimes   c. A lot 

15. As far as you know, which languages does the school provide translators for? (Circle and write in additional)
   Spanish   Vietnamese   Arabic   Mandarin   Cantonese   Japanese   Korean   Russian   Kurdish   Dinka   Nuer   Tagalog   French   German   Thai

16. Of these languages, which is used most frequently in your opinion?__________________

17. Do you feel that ELL students are discriminated against within your school? Y N
   a. Do you think that there are any differences for students of Latino origin? Y N
   b. Please explain

18. Can you list some programs (past or present) that have been implemented to help ELL students graduate from North Star?

19. Can you think of any programs used at previous schools where you have worked?

20. Of these programs, which do you consider to be most successful?
   a. Why?
   b. Is this program still being used?   Y  N
21. Would you like to *add or change* anything for the programs that are in place at your school now? Please explain.

22. Is there anything that you would like to *delete* from current programs that are not effective? Please explain.

23. ELL programs are often designed to be generic in order to serve the *total* ELL population. Can you think of anything that would benefit Spanish speakers learning English?

24. Do you feel that there is there anything unique about the English language acquisition of students from Latin America? Please explain.

25. Much of this interview has emanated from factors *outside* the school that may impede a student’s academic success. What barriers for ELL students do you feel come from *within* the educational system? (ELL curriculum? District Administration? North Star?)

26. Do you feel that there are certain approaches that may work better in this particular location (Region/District/School) that might not be as successful in others? Y N
   a. If yes, please explain.

27. What is your educational background?
   a. Degree(s) __________________________________________
   b. Academic Institution ________________________________
   c. Additional Certificate(s): __________________________
   d. Additional Training: _______________________________

28. What type of ELL/ multicultural education training have you had?

29. Is there anything that you have altered in your teaching style to accommodate ELL students since your training?

30. If resources were available to you, what changes would you make in order to ensure high school completion for ELL students?

31. Is there anything else that you have thought about throughout this interview that you would like to add?
Appendix J- Student Interview Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time of Interview:</th>
<th>Audio Recording Preference: Y/N</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
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<td>Location:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Name of Interviewee:</td>
<td>Pseudonym:</td>
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Demographic Information
1. Age ______ Gender _______ Grade ______ GPA ______
2. Where were you born (city, state, country)? __________________
   a. Rural/ urban

School
3. When was the last time you took an ELL class? _____________
4. Which level of ELL are you now? 1 2 3 4 5 6 exited
5. How many classes are you taking that are not ELL? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
   a. What are they?
   b. Are there any differences between your ELL classes and other classes you are taking?
6. What does having an ‘ELL’ label mean to you?
7. What type of transportation do you use to get to school?
   e. Come with a Friend   f. Bike   g. Other _____________
8. Do you have problems attending school sometimes? Y N
   a. About how many school days do you miss each quarter? 0-2 3-5 6 or +
   b. What are some reasons that you could not attend school?

Heritage
9. How long have you lived in the United States?
   a. 0-6 months   b. 7-12 months   c. 1-3 years   d. 4-6 years
   e. 7-10 years   f. More than 10 years   g. Entire Life   h. Other _____________
10. Tell me about when you/ your family moved to the United States.
11. Have you always lived in Nebraska? Y N
    a. If not, where else in the U.S. have you lived? _____________
12. How many years have you lived in Nebraska?
    a. 0-3 years   b. 4-6 years   c. 7-9 years   d. 10 or more years
13. Why did you/your family move to Lincoln?
    a. Family   b. Job Opportunity   c. Other _____________
14. What town/city is your family from? Tell me about it.
    a. Country: ______________________
    b. State: ______________________
    c. Town/City: ____________________
15. Since you’ve been in Nebraska, have you ever traveled back to your home country? Y N

Parents
16. What country was your mother born? ______________________
17. From what state was your mother? ______________________
18. From what city/nearest city is your mother? __________________________
   a. Rural          b. Urban
19. Did your mother graduate from high school?  Y   N
20. What does she do for a living? ___________________________________________________________________
21. Does she speak English fluently?
   a. A lot          b. Somewhat    c. A little          d. None at all
22. What country was your father born? ___________________________________________________________________
23. From what state is your father? ___________________________________________________________________
24. From what city/nearest city is your father? __________________________
   a. Rural          b. Urban
25. Did your father graduate from high school?  Y   N
26. What does he do for a living? __________________________
27. Does he speak English fluently?
   a. A lot          b. Somewhat    c. A little          d. None at all
28. Does anyone else in your house speak English fluently?  Y   N ______________

**Parental Involvement**

29. Have your parents attended parent-teacher conferences at North Star?  Y  N
   a. If so, did they use a translator?  Y  N
   b. Did you go along?  Y  N
   c. Did you translate for your parents?  Y  N
30. Has the school ever contacted your parents about an issue? Y  N
   a. If so, what form did that contact take?
      a. Phone Call   b. Written Letter   c. Meeting in Person   d. Other___________
31. Have your parents ever needed/wanted to contact the school about an issue? Y  N
   a. If so, what form did that contact take?
      a. Phone Call   b. Written Letter   c. Meeting in Person   d. Other___________
32. Have you ever asked your parents for help with your homework?    Y   N
33. Have your parents ever offered to help you with your homework?   Y   N
34. Do your parents check to see if you have completed your homework?   Y   N
35. What do you think your parents want you to do when you get older?

**Family Life**

36. Do both of your parents live in your home?____________________
   a. If not, where does your mother/father live? __________________________
37. How many people live in your home? ______
   a. Relationship and age for each
38. How many siblings do you have? ______
   a. What are their ages?
39. Do you have to take care of any younger brothers/sisters after school? Y  N
40. How many people in your house work outside the home?_____
41. Do members of your family send money back to family living in another country? Y  N

**Language**

42. What language do you usually use to speak with your grandparents?
a. Spanish      b. English      c. Other ______________

43. What language do you usually use to speak with your parents?
   a. Spanish      b. English      c. Other ______________

44. What language do you usually use to speak with your brothers and sisters?
   a. Spanish      b. English      c. Other ______________

45. What language do you most commonly use to speak with your friends?
   a. Spanish      b. English      c. Other ______________

46. Do you feel comfortable speaking English in your ELL classes? Y  N
   a. Why?

47. Do you feel comfortable speaking English in your other classes? Y  N
   a. Why?

Individual

48. Do you ever translate for your family members? Y  N
   a. If so, for whom?
   b. What kind of situations?
      e. Other ______________
   c. How often?
      a. A lot      b. Sometimes      c. A little
      d. Can you give me an example?

49. Do you know someone who has dropped out of high school? None   A few      Some      A lot
   a. Can you give me an example of someone who dropped out of high school?
   b. Why do you think they dropped out?

50. Do you have a job? Y  N
   a. What do you do?_____________________

51. Do you have your driver’s license? Y  N
   a. How many days per week do you drive?
      a. 1-2 days      b. 3-4 days      c. 5-6 days      d. Everyday
   b. Do you drive for other family members? Y  N
      a. For whom?
         a. Mother      b. Father      c. Sibling(s)      d. Other ______________
      b. For what reasons?

52. Are you able to take advantage of after school programs, like CLC, clubs or tutoring? Y  N

53. Approximately how much time do you spend on homework outside of school each day?
   a. Less than 30 minutes      b. 30 minutes-1 hour      c. More than 1 hour

54. Do you participate in any activities in/outside of school? Y  N
   a. Sports_____________________
   b. Arts_____________________
   c. Clubs_____________________
   d. Other ___________________
55. Do you have a mentor? Y N
   a. If so, from what program does your mentor come? ________________
   b. What has been beneficial about this mentoring experience?
   c. If you could change something about this mentoring program, what would it be?
56. Can you name different groups of students in your school (Who hangs out with whom)?
57. Which group do you hang out with? ________________
58. What do you think others think about members of this group?
59. Who would you consider to be a good role-model? ________________
   a. Why?
   b. Is there someone like this in your school? Y N
60. Do you have a favorite teacher? Why is he/she your favorite?
61. Do you think ELL students would benefit from having an intensive English program before
    they enter other mainstream classrooms? Y N Why?
62. Would having an ELL teacher present in your other classes help you do better? Y N Why?
63. What do you think of the Graduation Demonstration Exams?
   a. Have you taken them before? Y N
   b. How did they make you feel?
64. What makes your school different than other schools?
65. What can North Star do to help you succeed?

Future
66. Do you think you will be able to graduate from high school? Y N
   a. Can you tell me why you feel this way?
67. What type of job would you like to have in the future? ________________
68. What are your plans after high school?
   a. College b. Military c. Work d. Vocational School e. Other ________________
   a. If you plan to go to college, where?
   b. How will you pay for college?
69. Is there anything else that we haven’t talked about already in this interview that you would like to add?