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Lived Experiences of Six High School Graduates Who Received Assistance from Graduation Coach Facilitation

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Lived Experiences of Six High School Graduates Who Received Assistance from Graduation

Coach Facilitation

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A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

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In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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by

Gayle Arlene Gragg

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ABSTRACT

Lived Experiences of Six High School Graduates Who Received Assistance from Graduation

Coach Facilitation

by

Gayle Arlene Gragg

The purpose of this study was to understand the obstacles faced as well as strategies used by 6

graduates of a small rural high school in Southern Middle Tennessee. Specifically, this study

was an examination of the life experiences of 6 graduates, identifying the major obstacles faced

and the successful strategies used to complete the requirements for a high school diploma.

Qualitative methodology guided this study. This approach allowed for the lived experiences to

be examined and the voices of 6 participants be heard. Data collected included participant

stories using semistructured interviews conducted using an interview protocol, drawing of a

concept map, and prioritization of influences according to their perspective regarding their

diploma completion. Other valuable data included researcher field notes and graduation coach

file notes.

Findings are presented in 6 themes pertaining directly to the interview questions regarding key

elements—circumstances leading to a relationship with a graduation coach, discussions during

grad coach sessions, nongrad parent influences, parent expectations, grade retention, and

strategies implemented by the graduation coach.

After the collection and analysis of all data, the researcher coded the data to determine emerging themes. Much of the researcher's work consisted of processing the data to discover categories and patterns among the stories told by the 6 graduate participants, as presented in the qualitative narrative analysis methodology.

Through the narrative inquiry method of this study, the examination of the stories of 6 graduates reveals that a relationship with at least 1 caring adult in the high school setting is imperative to successful high school completion. This adult may offer assistance through a variety of ways such as developing an academic plan of action, building confidence, arranging tutoring sessions, or tracking progress.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents Robert Earl and Grace Beasley Gragg. Although they are no longer with us physically, the strength and love for education they instilled in me is undying. I am forever grateful for the values they taught me, the encouragement they gave me, and the way they unconditionally loved me. I wish you were here to celebrate this milestone with me. I miss you both every day.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Four Background Characteristics

Numerous factors contribute to students dropping out of high school. There are four thematic areas addressed by scholars conducting research related to background characteristics of high school nongraduates. The first background characteristic identified in the literature is economic background. Students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds are less prepared academically. Moreover, Hirsch (2007) suggests that low income is a strong predictor of low educational performance. A primary cause of child poverty is generational cycles of poverty. Parents are less likely to work, or if they do work, are more likely to have low earnings. Balancing financial demands of a family and finding quality time to spend with family is much harder for people in low-paying jobs or working long hours. Typically, youth from disadvantaged households will continue to be disadvantaged into adulthood. Closing the opportunity gap in education is an integral part of breaking the poverty cycle as well as addressing the attitudes and experiences that lie behind social differences in education (Hirsch, 2007).

A second background characteristic of high school nongraduates is absenteeism. Balfanz and Chang (2013) reference a Baltimore study that suggests there is a strong relationship between sixth grade attendance and the likelihood of on-time graduation. Additionally, a study in Utah found that students who were chronically absent in any year between the 8th and 12th grades were 7.5 times more likely to drop out of high school (Balfanz & Chang, 2013). Warfield, writes that truancy is the main reason students do not graduate on time, or in some

cases do not graduate at all. Only 1% of ninth grade students with 35 to 40 absences will go on to graduate from high school. (Alabama Department of Education, 2014).

A third characteristic of background characteristic of high school nongraduates is the absence of a caring adult to offer direction. To combat this issue school counselors and graduation coaches strive to build relationships with students to offer services to enable students to be academically successful and to find out why students are absent from school (Alabama Department of Education, 2014).

The fourth background characteristic for high school nongraduates is lack of academic achievement. During his first week in office during 2001, President Bush urged schools to have as a mission to build the mind and character of every child, from every background, in every part of America, subsequently leading to *No Child Left Behind (NCLB).* All schools were encouraged to close the academic achievement gap between rich and poor and were held accountable to do so *(No Child Left Behind:* A Desktop Reference, 2014).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the cornerstone of *NCLB.* Schools and school systems can meet AYP by using the current year data, the most current two-year averages, or their 3-year rolling averages. The school or school system can do this in two ways: a.) meet all AYP conditions (one of which is graduation rate), or b.) safe harbor. Safe harbor is

> when a school district does not meet AYP for either reading/language arts or math
> in a particular year, it can make AYP the following year if the subgroup or
> subgroups not making AYP have a reduction of 10 percent in the percentage of
> students who scored below proficient the previous year; a 19 percent reduction in
> the percentage of students who tested below proficient from two years ago; or a
> 27 percent reduction in the percentage of students that tested below proficient
> from three years ago. In addition, the student population must meet the
> performance objective for attendance (elementary/middle) or **graduation rate**
> (high school) (TSBA, 2004, p. 6).

Among programs being launched were school dropout prevention programs in an effort to combat a national dropout average of approximately 11%. Grants were awarded to school systems to implement effective dropout prevention and reentry efforts including the counseling and mentoring of at-risk students. Funds may also be used to identify students at risk of not graduating from high school, as well as to support activities at middle schools that feed into high schools with dropout rates exceeding the state average   (*No Child Left Behind:* A Desktop Reference, 2014).

Addressing the Issues

From the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* of 1965, to *NCLB* of 2001, to *Race To The Top (RTTT)* of 2009, to the American Diploma Project (ADP), which Tennessee joined in 2007, graduation rates have been an area of emphasis. The Tennessee Dropout Policy Scan indicates that dropout prevention programs are major themes across the field of education (Burgette, King, Lee, & Park, 2011). President Obama provided a blueprint for the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* to provide several recommendations for improving the graduation rate including:

- "Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader;

- Providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools, and to educators to help them improve student learning;

- Implementing college- and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards; and

- Improving student learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions" (United Way of the Mid-South, Memphis, 2014, para 3).

Graduation Coaches—Caring Adults

Prior to Obama's direction to improve graduation rates, Georgia in 2006 became the first southeastern state to promote a statewide initiative to improve graduation rates ('Graduation Coach' Initiatives at the State Level, 2008*).* The Georgia Department of Education, through funding from the Georgia General Assembly, addressed dropout issues during the 2006 - 2007 school year by placing a full-time high school graduation coach in each high school. In 2007 – 2008 the funding was expanded to include graduation coaches at each Georgia middle school and high school with graduation rates less than 95%. (Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative 2007-2008 Report, 2014).

The background of graduation coaches during the 2007 – 2008 school year ranged from classroom teacher to school counselor to paraprofessional. The average number of years of prior work experience in education was approximately 14. Realizing the importance of coordinating all stakeholders, the Georgia Department of Education offered training and support in large- and small-group sessions with four statewide training sessions in addition to on-going support regionally. Brainstorming sessions, as well as customized training sessions, were offered as needed (Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative 2007-2008 Report, 2014).

The duties of the graduation coach included but were not limited to providing assistance to students individually or in groups regarding high school graduation. To accomplish this the graduation coach planned, implemented, and tracked individual high school graduation plans and

identifying and resolving barriers to graduation (Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative 2007-2008 Report, 2014).

Early Identification

To identify at-risk students Georgia graduation coaches used a profile of characteristics of potential dropouts. Target characteristics for students included but were not limited to, history of school failure, grade retention, and credit deficiency; attendance issues; behavior problems and suspensions; disengagement from school; low expectations; lack of extracurricular involvement; economically disadvantaged; high mobility; and pregnancy, among other social and personal factors (Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative 2007-2008 Report, 2014).

Success of Early Graduation Coaches

The first 2 years of Georgia's graduation coach program proved quite successful, adding thousands of high school graduates. In fact, during 2007 – 2008 19 high schools achieved a graduation rate of 95% or greater, with that number increasing to 21 schools during 2008 – 2009. These new graduates enrolled in higher education and entered the world of work, contributing directly to Georgia's economy. By 2008 Georgia experienced an increase in their graduation rate from 65.4% in 2004, to 75.4% in 2008. In 2007-2008 the state's dropout rate decreased from 4.1% to 3.7%. According to the 2007 Bureau of Statistics the 3.1% increase of graduates represented 8,277 Georgia students who graduated during the 2007-08 school year, with those individuals potentially adding more than $75 million dollars in revenue per year to Georgia's economy. By 2008 Georgia graduation coaches were "leading the nation in implementing innovative strategies to support at-risk students" (Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative 2007-2008 Report, 2014, p. 3).

In comparison to Georgia's 2008 graduation rate, Tennessee's graduation rate for 2008 was 82.2%, with Crossroad High School's (CHS) (pseudonym) graduation rate of 84.2% (Tennessee Department of Education, 2014). During the years of CHS's employment of a graduation coach and incorporating intervention strategies, graduation rates have been 86.8% for 2011, 90.6% for 2012, and 87.0% in 2013, respectively (Tennessee Department of Education, 2014). Effective with the class of 2013, the State of Tennessee increased minimum graduation requirements from 20 credits to 22 credits, increasing credits in mathematics from three credits to four, requiring Algebra II to be included in the four credits. The other credits involved in the expansion were one half credit in Personal Finance and one half credit additional in physical activity (State Board of Education High School Transition Policy, 2013).

According to the American Institutes for Research, Alabama established the use of graduation coaches in 2008 (The American Institutes for Research, 2014). Within 2 years Alabama graduated an additional 4,800 students resulting in more students attending college, starting careers, and becoming productive, tax-paying citizens. More specifically, during 2011 the state graduation rate was 72%, in 2012 the rate was 75%, and up to 80% in 2013. Graduation Tracking System (GTS) strategies included early warning identification of at-risk students based on ABCs (Attendance, Behavior, and Course Credit) (Alabama Department of Education, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

In 2013 a profile released by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) indicates that Buford County (pseudonym) had 22% of adult residents attaining less than a high school education. Similarly, the county's population in poverty rate was just under 20% with the median household income at $39,480 (THEC, 2014). Consequently, "Inadequate education and increased dropout rates affect children's academic achievement, perpetuating the low

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Socioeconomic Status (SES) of the community. Improving school systems and early intervention programs may help to reduce these risk factors, and thus additional research on the correlation between SES and education is essential" (Education and Socioecomic Status Fact Sheet, 2014, para. 3).

Brussow (2007) suggests "further research might aid in improving student graduation rates as well as concentrating on the areas of the school culture that students found most beneficial. Identifying these areas of school culture to better inform teachers and administrators about the positive impact of this type of culture" is also a consideration (Brussow, 2007, p. v). Burger (2009) contends that "addressing the dropout issue requires critical review of current educational practices, personal interactions with students, and educational policies" (Burger, 2009, p. 3).

Furthermore, Brussow (2007) and Burger (2009) indicate that graduation rates and dropout issues need to be addressed. This research is a qualitative study that explores the obstacles faced by six CHS graduates and the strategies used to help them overcome their obstacles and receive a high school diploma. Not only are these six graduates representative of the THEC profile, their stories provide examples of early intervention strategies that were successful for high school completion. Their stories are worthy of investigation. Other students and their families could benefit from knowing such strategies and success stories. The purpose of this narrative analysis study, therefore, was to describe lived experiences of the graduates who received assistance from a graduation coach. Exploring the impact of the graduation coach program on the participants included in the study can provide valuable information to educators regarding dropout intervention. Examining the experiences will provide a rich, thick description of events leading to the successful high school completion.

Conceptual Framework

Collective literature by Rumberger (2001, 2007), Rumberger and Lim (2008), and Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) discussed further in this chapter and Chapter 2, provide the framework for this study. Rumberger suggests that students drop out of high school as a result of reciprocal relationships between the factors of *individual* perspective and *institutional* prospective. The individual perspective is focused on student attributes such as background characteristics (gender, poverty, etc.), engagement in school, and educational performance. The institutional perspective includes school characteristics (school size, resources available, high quality teachers, etc.), school policies (discipline—being overage in grade often leads to suspensions; attendance; rules governing low grades, etc.), and school practices. He indicates that a student's relationship in regard to these two perspectives might change throughout the course of his or her high school career. In addition, the literature also suggests strong predictors of school success include poor academic achievement in lower and upper grades (specifically a successful ninth grade year), high absenteeism, student discipline issues, and student mobility. Using these factors, Rumberger encourages early identification of students at risk regarding high school graduation with multiple intervention opportunities when possible (Rumberger, 2001, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Bridgeland et al. (2006) contend that students are more successful in school when they have a strong relationship with at least one caring adult in the school. This viewpoint combined with points of advocacy by Rumberger provide a crucial framework for this study. Telling the stories of six CHS graduates is an attempt to further the research suggested in the aforementioned theories. Data were collected in this study during graduate interviews and drawing of concept maps.

Research Questions

The overarching question for this study was: "What are student perspectives and expectations of the graduation coach's advocacy and facilitation to satisfy graduation requirements?" Subquestions guiding the study were:

1. What were some of the **obstacles** students were able to overcome in order to complete their requirements for a high school diploma?

2. What were the **characteristics** of the graduation coach's facilitation that students cited as being important to completion of high school requirements?

As each interview progressed, I expanded on the questions to probe and gather a deeper understanding of each graduate's experiences (see Appendix A). Creswell (2009) encourages the use of field notes that include descriptive notes of the interview as well as reflective notes (of the researcher). He also encourages follow-up questions after the interview, as necessary, for deeper understanding of the data (Creswell, 2009, p. 183).

Significance of the Study

This study is a narrative analysis of six graduates of CHS who received assistance from a graduation coach. Data collected through in-depth interviews with the graduates provide rich, thick descriptions of experiences of these participants. More importantly, there is limited literature existing regarding graduation coach programs in Tennessee. This study is necessary to help fill in gaps of prior studies conducted in other states. No other scholar has examined the lived experiences of these six individuals and their success. The data collected reveals participant strategies that proved effective and appropriate for on-time completion of their high school graduation requirements.

Definition of Terms

Following are definitions and terms as used in this study.

At-risk Students. High-need students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support such as students who are living in poverty, who are far below grade level, who are in danger of leaving school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, or who have been incarcerated (*Race to The Top*, 2014).

Credit Recovery. When a student makes a grade of at least 50 for semester one and at least 50 for semester two, the student may participate in credit recovery to acquire the needed credit (State Board of Education High School Transition Policy, 2013). Reclaiming the credit circumvents the need to repeat the entire course (Georgia Graduation Coach Initiative 2007-2008 Report, 2014).

Graduation Coach. Graduation coaches identify at-risk students and help them succeed in school by keeping them on track academically before they consider dropping out. The coaches identify, recruit, and engage parents and concerned adults, organizations, and government agencies to serve in a variety of ancillary roles (Georgia Department of Education, 2014).

Graduation Rate Calculation. Consistent with federal guidelines, Tennessee uses a 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. Students are placed in a cohort based on the year the student entered ninth grade. Graduates must receive a regular on-time diploma. On-time is defined as receiving a diploma in 4 years and the subsequent summer. The cohort may be adjusted if a student transfers out of a cohort; however, districts must submit documentation that supports removal from the cohort. Graduation rate is calculated using the following formula:

Graduation Rate equals the number of students receiving a regular, on-time diploma divided by the number of students in the cohort (District Accountability Frequently Asked Questions Summer 2013, 2014). The Tennessee graduation rate does not include students who obtain a GED, a special education diploma, or a certificate of attendance (TSBA, 2004).

       AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress). A measure of year-over-year achievement with additional indicators of graduation rate in high schools (TSBA, 2004).

       Socioeconomic Status (SES). A common measure of a combination of education, income, and occupation that is often conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual (Education and Socioeconomic Status Fact Sheet, 2014).

       Success. For the purposes of this study, the term success means graduating from high school in four years or less. (Summer graduates are also included as on-time graduates.)   "High school graduation is a major milestone on a youth's path to successful adulthood and is the single most powerful predictor of whether a young person coming out of generations of poverty will break the cycle" (United Way of the Mid-South, Memphis, 2014, para. 1).

       Truancy. A student who has been absent an aggregate of 3 days without adequate excuse may be deemed habitually truant (Justia US Law, 2010, para. 7).(Tennessee Children Laws 2011 Edition, 2014).

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

       This study is delimited to six graduates of CHS who received assistance from a graduation coach. As the graduation coach who advocated for these participants, I may have a bias in their favor and a limitation might be created by the relationship already established. Despite these limitations, this research was important to conduct. In addition, interviews were used to explore obstacles and strategies implemented to enable students to graduate from high

school. The participants interviewed have overcome obstacles which future students experiencing comparable circumstances may gain benefit by trying similar strategies. A closer look at the obstacles that the graduates faced, as well as the strategies they used that made their time in high school successful, is valuable. Wayman (2002) suggests that resilient teenagers and their persistence in completing the necessary requirements to receive a high school diploma also warrant more research. Results of the study may promote discussion among educators in school districts exploring programs that allow at-risk students to be successful regarding achieving a high school diploma (Wayman, 2002).

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study of six graduates of CHS is presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction, statement of the problem, conceptual framework, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, delimitations and limitations of the study, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 consists of a review of literature related to family factors, student connectedness to school, student persistence, early warning indicators of dropouts, indicators in elementary school, indicators in high school, why students drop out, high school student perception, generational influences, impact of nongraduates on society and economic impact of education, repercussions for schools, the graduation coach program, and summary. Chapter 3 presents research methods and procedures used in the study, including the focus of the study, research design, instrumentation, researcher's role, population, data collection and recording, data analysis, trustworthiness of data, ethical considerations, and a summary. Chapter 4 provides findings from the data collected during in-depth interviews with six CHS graduates and the examination of artifacts from the graduation coach's file. The chapter includes an introduction, data collection, data analysis, participant profiles, researcher's notes and memos,

findings from the interview questions, and a summary. Chapter 5 includes a summary of

findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The chapter includes an introduction, a summary

examination of each of the research questions, conclusions, and recommendations for further

practice, in addition to recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature related to keeping students engaged in high school and graduating has

generally been focused on single indicators, with far less research exploring the links between

dropouts and student achievement, student beliefs, values, and attitudes (Rumberger & Lim,

2008). Similarly, Bridgeland et al. (2006) report that high school dropout rates are epidemic in

numbers and should be addressed as a top priority in our nation. The voices of young people

should be heard (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Family Factors

According to the American Psychological Association (2014) website, "Inadequate

education and increased dropout rates affect children's academic achievement, perpetuating low

SES of the community. Improving school systems and early intervention programs may help to

reduce these risk factors. Families from low-SES communities are less likely to have the

financial resources or time availability to provide children with academic support" (Education

and Socioeconomic Status Fact Sheet, 2014, para. 4).

Similar issues discussed in a workshop presentation by Schafft (2009) on the Impact of

Mobility and Change on the Lives of Young Children, Schools, and Neighborhoods held in

Washington, DC, was focused on the community and student transiency. Student transiency and

chronic residential mobility of low income families are challenges for rural and small town areas.

In areas of New York, transient students have been considered an "unidentified population."

Transient students in rural areas are often neither migrant students, nor homeless students, yet

they represent a large, at-risk population (Schafft, 2009).

Furthermore, Rumberger and Lim (2008) contend that students in homes with more family resources such as parental education and income are less likely to drop out of school. Other parenting practices that have shown to reduce the odds of dropping out of school include (a) having high educational aspirations for their child, (b) monitoring their teenager's progress in school, (c) appropriate communication with the school, and (d) knowing the parents of their children's friends (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

<center>*Student Connectedness to School*</center>

Bridgeland et al. (2006) explain that students are more successful in school when they have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school. When a staff member fosters a caring attitude toward a student, offers an opportunity to talk with the student about personal problems, or can assist by tutoring, the student senses the compassion being offered and feels a connectedness to the school environment. Adult advocates can help students find the support they need (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Brown (personal communication, July 28, 2014) concurs that relationships, relevance, and rigor are crucial to student success. She suggests that "a square peg in a round hole does not care about rules"; and students will work for you if they like you. Teachers must figure out what engages the student and tap into that motivation. Caring adults should emphasize to students that while they "may be products of their past, they are not prisoners of their past" (Tara Brown, personal communication, July 28, 2014).

Student Persistence

Three factors appear critical to student persistence: goal orientation, willingness to play the game, and meaningful connections—relationships with teachers who believe students could graduate and provided support and caring (Knesting & Waldron, 2006). Although caring

teachers may be ready to offer support, students are not always open to receiving it. For students who were willing to accept the support, however, they felt more connected to completing their high school diploma. Ultimately Knesting and Waldron impress the importance of emphasizing people not programs. The focus should be on how the student can effectively complete high school as opposed to consideration of reasons for dropping out. Students recognize that as much as their school experiences made them want to drop out, there were also school personnel who wanted them to stay and who would help them to stay (Knesting & Waldron, 2006).

Students are habitually absent from school for a variety of reasons. According to Blevins (2009) student perceptions of reasons for truancy include but are not limited to, "peer pressure, poor relationships with teachers and administrators, a disconnectedness from their schools, not being interested in the curriculum, bullying, low self-esteem, substance abuse, language barriers, lack of appropriate social skills, and sexual activity or consequences thereof (pregnancy, teen parenting)" (Blevins, 2009, p. 2).

Early Warning Indicators of Drop Outs

Demographic indicators of at-risk students include coming from a low-income family and being older than the average student in the cohort. Performance indicators associated with dropping out of high school include lack of credits earned and poor attendance. Balfanz and Herzog (2006) further contend that performance indicators can identify students at risk of dropping out of high school as early as eighth grade with a high degree of certainty, especially if failing English and/or math during the eighth grade year. Similarly, Neild and Balfanz (2006) report that Philadelphia eighth grade students who miss at least 5 weeks of school have at least a 75% probability of dropping out of school. Balfanz and Legters (2004) found a commonality

between poverty and the dropout rate, contending that poverty seems to be one of the strongest, if not the strongest, predictor of a school's dropout rate.

Rumberger (2007) relates a longitudinal study of eighth graders conducted by Ingels, Curtin, Kaufman, Alt, and Chen in 1988. The study revealed that only 50% of students with three or more demographic risk factors went on to graduate from high school. Those risk factors included (a) being from a single-parent household, (b) having parents who did not graduate from high school, (c) having an older sibling who dropped out of high school, (d) spending 3 or more hours at home alone after school per day, (f) being a limited English proficient student, and (g) coming from a low-income family. Regarding academic performance factors, the same study found that only 67% of students with the lowest math achievement grades and test scores graduated from high school as compared to 85% of students with average achievement (Rumberger, 2007).

Rumberger (2007) also wrote about a Philadelphia study conducted by Balfanz and Herzog in 2006 that explored four school-related risk factors of sixth grade students. Those factors associated with an increased risk of not completing high school included (a) course failure in English, (b) course failure in math, (c) unsatisfactory behavior, and (d) poor attendance (Balfanz & Herzog, 2006; Rumberger, 2007).

In a third study Rumberger (2007) discussed risk assessment in sixth grade using a teacher rating scale evaluating (a) need for supervision, (b) level of motivation, (c) academic potential, (d) social interaction skill, (e) difficulty to teach, and (f) need for special education services. He contends that classroom teachers, especially elementary teachers who typically spend the entire day with students, have a very good idea of which students are likely to do well in school (Rumberger, 2007). Thornton suggested that a composite measure of the six

aforementioned classroom behaviors was highly predictive of student performance in the middle

and high school years (Larson & Rumberger, 1995).

Indicators in Elementary School

Extensive research regarding participation in preschool has shown to not only improve

school readiness and early school success but also affects a wide range of teenage and young

adult outcomes including but not limited to, high school completion, crime, welfare, and teen

parenting (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Early childhood experiences are the foundation for

educational success through information learned, strong vocabulary, and familiarity with letters

and numbers (United Way of the Mid-South, Memphis, 2014). Teachers of young children

wrestle with whether or not to retain a student. The Light's Retention Scale is an aid to help

educators determine if repeating a grade will be of benefit to the student.

> The scale includes 19 criteria: sex, age, knowledge of the English language,
> physical size, present grade placement, previous grade retentions, number of
> siblings, parents' school participation, experiential background, transiency, school
> attendance, estimates of intelligence, history of learning disabilities, present level
> of academic achievement, attitude towards possible retention, motivation to
> complete school tasks, immature behavior, emotional problems, and history of
> delinquency. Parents and/or teachers rate the potential candidate from 0 to 5 on
> the 19 items; a score of 0 indicates a strong belief that the child would benefit
> from retention and 5 indicates a strong belief that he or she would not. The sum of
> the ratings is used to categorize the student's suitability for retention as excellent,
> good, fair, marginal, poor, or unsuitable (Westbury, 1999, para. 2).

Conversely, Draper (John Draper, personal communication, July 27, 2014) insists that retention

is not a valid form of remediation.

Jensen (2009) discusses that "the giving-up process known as *learned helplessness* is not

genetic; it is an adaptive response to life conditions. Sadly, it frequently takes hold as early as

first grade. Many kids with learned helplessness become fatalistic about their lives and are more

likely to drop out of school or become pregnant while in their teens" (Jensen, 2009, para. 45).

A key benchmark indicating that children are on the path to graduating from high school is if the student is reading proficiently by third grade. Students not reading at this minimum level are four times less likely to graduate from high school on time (United Way of the Mid-South, Memphis, 2014). According to the State of Ohio Department of Education website (2014), in Ohio during the 2013-2014 school year, a student was required to score at least 392 on the Grade 3 Reading Ohio Achievement Assessment (OAA) to move on to the fourth grade (Ohio Department of Education, 2014), thus, experiencing success in grade school.

While middle school students must be proficient in math (United Way of the Mid-South, Memphis, 2014), multiple factors in elementary and middle school may influence attitudes, behaviors, and performance in high school prior to dropping out according to Rumberger and Lim (2008). Typically, individual factors predicting whether students drop out or graduate from high school fall into four categories: (a) educational performance, (b) behaviors, (c) attitudes, and (d) background (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Similarly, United Way of the Mid-South in Memphis has joined community partners with mutual goals to improve education by "(a) increasing school readiness; (b) increasing third grade reading proficiency; and (c) increasing middle school math proficiency" (United Way of the Mid-South, Memphis, 2014, para 9).

Indicators in High School

Educational performance serving as strong predictors of dropping out or graduating from high school include test scores and grades while in high school in addition to academic achievement in elementary and middle school, with grades seeming to be a more consistent predictor than test scores. Factors of consideration include student mobility and school changes during middle and high school as well as being retained in elementary and/or middle school years (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Other significant factors include poverty, the lack of quality

early childhood experiences, deficiencies in reading and math skills, and high teen pregnancy rates (United Way of the Mid-South, Memphis, 2014).

Furthermore, Rumberger and Lim (2008) indicate that behaviors in and out of school which contribute to dropping out of school include absenteeism, delinquency, and substance abuse. Specific behaviors mentioned that impede student engagement at school include high absenteeism, delinquent behavior outside of school (as well as having friends who have criminal involvement), drug or alcohol use, teenage parenting, and working more than 20 hours per week. Likewise, a stable home environment and access to social and financial resources strongly influence the likelihood of high school graduation (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). In a joint report by U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice (2000), school-age children and teens who are unsupervised during the hours after school are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco; engage in criminal and other high-risk behaviors; receive poor grades; display more behavior problems; and drop out of school than those children who have the opportunity to benefit from constructive activities supervised by responsible adults (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Justice, 2000). In addition, a Surgeon General's Report (2014) indicates that significant differences in tobacco use are evident among groups defined by educational level and socioeconomic status with 88% of smokers starting to smoke prior to age 18 (The Health Consequences of Smoking--50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General, 2014).

Sources with SAMSHA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Association) reported in 2013 that

> overall current illicit drug use among dropouts was considerably higher than for those in school (31.4 percent versus 18.2 percent). Dropouts were more likely to be current marijuana users than those in school (27.3 percent versus 15.3 percent), and more likely to be current non-medical users of prescription drugs (9.5 percent

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versus 5.1 percent). Similarly, there were significant differences in the levels of alcohol use between dropouts and those in school. Dropouts had higher overall levels of current alcohol use than students (41.6 percent versus 35.3 percent) and higher rates of current binge drinking (32.3 percent versus 23.8 percent).   Binge drinking is defined as drinking five or more drinks on the same occasion on at least one day in the past 30 days (SAMSHA, 2013, para. 3, 4).

Regarding work opportunity for youth in Tennessee, the *Child Labor Act* prohibits students who are 16 or 17 years of age from working "during the hours required to attend class" and "between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., Sunday through Thursday evenings preceding a school day, except with parental or guardian consent. Then the minor may work until midnight no more than 3 nights Sunday through Thursday" (*Child Labor Act*, 2014, para. 3). In Tennessee, a minor is any person under the age of 18. When an individual turns 18 all of the rights and responsibilities of an adult apply regarding employment (Your Rights and Responsibilities as a Minor, 2014).

Why Students Drop Out

While there is no single reason why students drop out of high school, Bridgeland et al. (2006) found in their study that a lack of connection to the school environment; a perception that school is boring; feeling unmotivated; academics being too challenging; and personal events happening outside of school were top responses. When students perceive that classes are boring they become disengaged from school and unmotivated to do their work. Students who had to repeat classes were more inclined to drop out (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Johnson (1981) contends that low SES students are more likely to give up or become passive and uninterested in school.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) further indicate absenteeism as often a clear early sign of dropping out of school. Each absence leads to a pattern of poor attendance, leading to being

referred to a truant officer. When students are forced to return to the same school environment, they become further disengaged and disinterested in finishing school (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

The American Psychological Association (2014) reports that "families from low SES communities are less likely to have the financial resources or time availability to provide children with academic support" (Education and Socioeconomic Status Fact Sheet, 2014, para. 4). Rumberger and Lim (2008) concur that family structure, resources, and practices are huge factors predicting dropout or graduation. Changes in family structure along with potentially stressful events such as a family move, illness, death, adults entering or leaving the household, and marital disruptions all increase the odds of dropping out. Similarly, students are more likely to drop out if a sibling has dropped out (Rumberger & Lim, 2008) or parents who did not graduate from high school (Rumberger, 2007).

High School Student Perception

In Tennessee, if the student makes a grade of at least 50 for semester one and at least 50 for semester two, the student may participate in credit recovery to acquire the needed credit (State Board of Education High School Transition Policy, 2013). Jones (2011) claims that online credit recovery programs are growing in popularity across the nation as an effective intervention strategy, allowing students to work at their own pace. His study revealed that the students "perceived that they would continue to experience success if they were allowed to take other courses through the online credit recovery program" (Jones, 2011, p. 13). Simcox (2011) agrees that "students' perceptions did affect their success rate" in her study in Johnson County, Tennessee, as well (p. 3).

Brown (2014) insists that under resourced students rarely experience success. They want to believe that they can do the work. Big tasks often are overwhelming making students feel

defeated before even starting. When they do experience a small success, however, they feel encouraged and want to try again for another success (Brown, 2014).

Similarly, Hirsch (2007) points out that children from a deprived background are more inclined to feel anxious and unconfident about school. Disadvantaged youth are more apt to feel a lack of control over their learning. Such influences and diversity in background leads to the development of different attitudes (as compared to attitudes of their classmates who are not disadvantaged) toward education and how they perceive their socioeconomic status (Hirsch, 2007).

Generational Influences

In additional to individual differences of home background and learning styles, Speer (2011) points out that learners in this millennium exhibit different values. Students graduating from high school in the realm of this study were born in the mid- to late-1990s, making them members of Generation Y (also known as Millennials, Nexters, or the Internet Generation) (Speer, 2011). Pinder-Grover and Groscurth (2009) contend that Millennials (born between 1982 and 2002) are "technoliterate" and "digital natives" growing up in the era of the Internet and social media, with capabilities of staying in touch with family and friends through social networking on their cell phones. These tools for sharing, connecting, and exploring were not available for prior generations. Such technologies have shaped students' views of information, learning, and collaboration permitting students the opportunity to stay connected and participate in collaborative learning (Pinder-Grover & Groscurth, 2009).

Twenge (2006) labeled this age group as Generation Me (GenMe) with their views of confidence, assertiveness, and entitlement. Interestingly enough, she further contends that about three quarters of high school students of GenMe cheat (Twenge, 2006). Twenge (2013) indicates

that GenMe students thrive on frequent feedback, thorough explanation of why the material is important, shorter texts to read, and use of video images and clips, instead (Twenge, 2013). Speer (2011) points out that Generation Y's are largely *on demand* learners, wanting to figure things out as they go but, in contrast, are often viewed by their teachers as using a "*fly by the seat of the pants*" approach.

<center>*Impact of Nongraduates on Society*</center>

Economic Impact of Education

An individual's educational attainment plays a significant role in determining the household's economic value and standard of living. D'Andrea (2010) states that in Tennessee during 2007 high school dropouts earned on the average $9,000 less than their high school graduate counterparts. Less income means fewer dollars to contribute to the economy. Furthermore, each dropout costs Tennessee approximately $750 each year in lost revenue from areas such as sales tax and motor vehicle taxes. In Tennessee the majority of residents who are either unemployed, in need of Medicaid assistance, or incarcerated are high school dropouts. High school dropouts are more likely to need assistance with health care coverage, creating a yearly burden of approximately $1,100 per dropout on the state portion of Medicaid. Similarly, the odds of a high school dropout becoming incarcerated, as compared to high school graduates, greatly increases. Annually, each dropout costs the Tennessee Department of Corrections more than $950 in *additional* incarceration costs (D'Andrea, 2010). According to Alliance for Excellent Education reports (2006) on average high school graduates live 6 to 9 years longer than nongraduates.

In Pennsylvania as reported by Pennsylvania Dropout Prevention Network, if half of the dropouts in 2012 had graduated from high school, Pennsylvania could possibly have experienced

$103 million in increased earnings, $38 million in increased spending, as well as potentially

$226 million in increased home sales and $5 million in increased tax revenue. Essentially, high

school dropouts affect everyone in every community (Succeed in PA, 2014).

Repercussions for Schools

Swanson (2004) discusses the importance of accurate accountability under *No Child Left*

Behind (NCLB) guidelines. *NCLB* defines a graduate included in the graduation rate specifically

as a student who receives a regular diploma on time with his/her class. Prior to this designation

states and schools were inconsistently reporting graduates using a variety of definitions and

strategies, including GEDs, certificates of attendance, or graduates who took longer than 4 years

to finish (Swanson, 2004). Convincingly, the more uniform method of calculating graduation

rates involves using a 4-year cohort formula that provides a more consistent view of America's

high school graduation rate (Alabama Department of Education, 2014).

Ultimately, each Tennessee School strives to meet AYP regarding graduation rates.

According to a report issued by the Tennessee School Boards Association (TSBA) in 2004,

> if a school misses the proficiency benchmarks in any of the subgroups or if
> NCLB's required 95 percent of each subgroup does not participate in the testing
> process, the school will not meet AYP, meaning the school will be on a "target"
> list and face increasing scrutiny and sanctions in subsequent years if improvement
> is not made (TSBA, 2004, p. 8).

NCLB requires performance of students who belong to nine different subgroups to be

measured separately for AYP purposes. The nine subgroups (of which there must be a minimum

number of 45 students to qualify as a subgroup) include the "all students" category, in addition to

students with disabilities; students who are limited English proficient; economically

disadvantaged students (free or reduced lunch); and students from five major racial or ethnic

groups---African American, Asian, Hawaiian Pacific Islander, Native American, and White

(Tennessee Department of Education, 2014). If the required percentage of students in one of

these subgroups does not meet AYP, the entire school will be identified as not making AYP,

even though the school may be otherwise successful regarding school wide achievement (TSBA,

2004).

The Tennessee School Board Association (TSBA) continues to note:

It is important to note that different sanctions apply to schools based on whether
they are a Title I or a non-Title I school. Both types of schools implement
sanctions under Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-602, while only Title I schools
implement sanctions under NCLB. This is due to the fact that the Tennessee
General Assembly has the ultimate authority to set sanctions for schools not
receiving federal dollars through the Title I program (TSBA, 2004, p. 8).

Adding:

One thing is almost a certainty. By 2014, because of the 100 percent proficiency
requirement, every school system will have had at least one school that has not
made AYP and great attention will be focused on these schools. Those that fail to
meet the standard for two or more consecutive years will be under increased
scrutiny due to the sanctions associated with such results (TSBA, 2004, p.10).

According to a report from the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) retrieved
from the Smith County Board of Education website:

To be removed from the High Priority list, a school or district must meet AYP for
two consecutive years in the same cell that got the school or district on the list
originally. If the school or district failed AYP in another cell for two consecutive
years or more during the time it was identified as high priority, then it would
remain on the high priority list but be reclassified at a lower level (Smith County
BOE, 2014, para. 16).

The Graduation Coach Program

According to Amos (2012) the "primary purpose for Graduation Coach intervention is to

increase the graduation rate and help schools produce a student that can be a productive citizen"

(p. 2).   McKeever (2010) reports that "the Graduation Coach Initiative was employed as a

strategy for addressing chronically low graduation rates in Georgia high schools" (p. 13).

Hunter's study (2011) indicates that "graduation rates were statistically significant [sic] higher after the induction of the graduation coach program when compared to the period prior to the induction of the graduation coach program" (p. 2).

In BCS the graduation rate for the class of 2009 was 84.5% which was slightly above Tennessee's average of 83.2%. The rate for CHS was 86.3% (Tennessee Department of Education, 2014). Realizing that the State of Tennessee would soon be encouraging a target rate of 90%, the school system proactively added two graduation coach positions to serve the three high schools in the system beginning in the fall of 2010. One coach was hired to serve the largest high school in the system while the other coach (myself) was hired to split her time between the two smaller rural high schools (Robert Ralston, personal communication, July 28, 2014).

Summary

When working with students at-risk of graduating from high school, a positive approach of encouragement offered by a graduation coach can be very effective. Dwelling on the reasons why a student may drop out of school is a negative approach which is not a common strategy supported by the sources included in this literature review. According to the literature reviewed, reasons students may have to *not* successfully complete high school become criteria for selection for inclusion in a graduation coach program, ultimately serving as a springboard into action versus a dagger of defeat.

Dropping out is more of a process than an event; and for many students, the process begins in early elementary school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to examine the life stories of six graduates of a small rural high school in Southern Middle Tennessee. I identified major obstacles that they faced prior to completing their high school requirements. This qualitative study is based on interviews concentrating on how each individual overcame his/her obstacles to successfully obtain a regular high school diploma. The purpose of interviewing is to enter into the other person's perspective. Stories and narratives offer especially translucent windows into cultural and social meanings. Interviewing provides an opportunity to find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories (Patton, 2002). Similarly, gathering data from interview participants who are comfortable with us usually yields data that are more representative (Krathwohl, 1998).

According to Denzin the story is analyzed in terms of the importance and influence of life events and turning point experiences in the participant's life (Denzin, 1989). We arrive at a better understanding when we examine through the lens of the individual (Merriam, 2002). The voices of young people should be heard (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Qualitative research in the field of education is interpretive; that is, the goal of the research is to understand the phenomenon and the meaning it has for the participants (Merriam, 2002).

Focus of the Study

The focus of this study is the life and circumstances surrounding 6 CHS graduates. A narrative analysis approach, this study was an exploration of the background of the former students and a report of the events leading to their success in their final months of high school. In-depth interviews were conducted to gather rich, thick descriptions of their educational experiences (Creswell, 2009).

Research Design

Successful qualitative studies depend primarily on the interpersonal skills of the researcher in ways of building trust, maintaining good relations and mutual respect, and exhibiting an awareness of ethical issues.   Being an active and thoughtful listener while having empathetic understanding and profound respect for the perspectives of others are paramount factors in building interpersonal skills with participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Creswell, Hanson, Plano, and Morales (2007) point out that narrative research procedures consist of "studying one or two individuals, gathering data through collecting their stories, reporting individual differences, and chronologically ordering the meaning of those experiences" (p. 240).

Instrumentation

In the qualitative tradition the researcher is the "instrument." Whether the presence of the researcher is relatively brief but personal, as in in-depth interview studies, the researcher enters into the lives of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Creswell et al. (2007) suggest asking "story-oriented questions about life experiences of an individual and how they unfold over time." When the research questions have been well-developed in advance of the interview, the researcher's role is efficiently managed to ensure good use of the available time with the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 61).

An interview protocol included in Appendix A was followed as a basic checklist during the interview to make sure relevant topics were covered. As the interview progressed, I was able to build conversation within a particular subject area. The interview protocol ensured that interview time was spent efficiently while allowing the interview to remain fairly conversational. Logical gaps were anticipated and closed (Patton, 2002).

This study addresses the following research questions as outlined in Table 1:

Table 1

Research Questions, Interview Questions, and Data Collection Protocol Alignment

Research/Interview Question	Interview	Concept Map	Index Card Arrangement
RQ #1: What were some of the **obstacles** students were able to overcome in order to complete their requirements for a high school diploma? 1. Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach. Describe what was going on in your life at that time.	X	X	X
RQ: #2: What were the **characteristics** of the graduation coach's facilitation that students cited as being important to completion of high school requirements? 2. What happened in your grad coach session?	X		
Obstacles 3. Did your parents graduate from high school?	X		
4. Was it expected (by your parents) that you would graduate from high school?	X		
5. Have you been retained?	X		X
Characteristics 6. What were some factors that led to your success?	X	X	X

Immediately after each interview, notes were made in the field notebook. For instances that needed clarification, a follow-up phone call was made as soon as possible while the data were still fresh on the participant's mind. The data collected was organized and reviewed to determine if core meanings called patterns or themes exist (Patton, 2002).

Researcher's Role

The researcher examined how six students who graduated from CHS with facilitation by a graduation coach overcame personal obstacles to receive a high school diploma. Seiber and Tolich (2013) indicate that the lack of rapport indicates disrespect. The prior professional relationships that I hold with each participant including the considerable amount of time spent with the former students as graduation coach served as a foundation for in-depth interviewing. A level of trust has already been established; therefore, an introductory period was not necessary, saving time during the study.

For some of the graduates included in the study, I was also their high school counselor. In October 2010 I became graduation coach. Most of my advisement (regarding graduation requirements) with these former students took place in my role as graduation coach. Ultimately, my experience of working with high school students for 32 years enabled me to gain immediate insight of obstacles that were overcome to achieve a regular high school diploma. Because these experiences are tacit knowledge for me, I was able to spontaneously expand interview questions to probe further into circumstances revealing rich, thick descriptions of each participant's situation.

As the researcher I was able to circumvent the bias of my experiences to focus on the perspectives of the graduates to shape the narrative. From the beginning of the interview process, I was able to bracket my prior knowledge and experiences with the former students in an effort to minimize any bias. It was my intention as researcher to maintain an objective perspective throughout the research with the use of a field notebook and member checking.

A major component of the study was to interview former students who were assisted by graduation coach facilitation at CHS during some point between the fall of 2010 and May 2014. The concept of purposeful sampling is allowable in qualitative research, meaning I can select individuals for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and overarching question of the study (Creswell, 2007).   The graduates included in this study were chosen using a criterion sampling strategy suggested by Patton (2002) among former students who had participated in a minimum of 5 hours of academic counseling and/or interaction with the graduation coach and met three of six of the following criteria:

1. Behind peers at least 1 year academically prior to graduation coach intervention.

2. At least age 19 at the end of 4-year high school career.

3. Expecting or parenting a child.

4. First generation high school graduate.

5. Participated in the credit recovery program at CHS.

6. Attended Buford County Learning Academy (BCLA) (pseudonym)--our alternative school.

Considering the aforementioned criteria, as suggested by Creswell et al. (2007), the researcher made a careful attempt to describe what all participants have in common.

The goal was to identify six participants who fit the criteria, were available for interviewing during the research time frame, were willing to tell their rich, thick story of earning their high school diploma, and would agree to sign informed consent (see Appendix B). Once the participants were chosen they were contacted to determine if they would be available and willing to be included in the study. After the study was explained, if they were interested in

participating in the study, a tentative schedule was set to conduct the interviews. Artifacts from the graduation coach's files for the six potential participants were accessible for reference during the interviews.

<p align="center">*Data Collection and Recording*</p>

Data sources included artifacts from the graduation coach's files. The graduation coach's notes were abundant with data including but not limited to artifacts such as the high school transcript, notes from academic counseling, academic options discussed, plan of action determined, and notes regarding extenuating circumstances.

The data collected in this study through personal interviews provided rich, thick descriptions of experiences that occurred during their academic career. Each interview was audio recorded and field notes were taken during the interview. As suggested by Creswell (2009), field notes included descriptive notes of the interview as well as reflective notes (by the researcher). Follow-up questions within a few days of the interview were asked as needed for deeper understanding of the data as if "peeling back the layers of an onion" (Creswell, 2009, p. 183). The interviews were expected to be 30 minutes to 1 hour in length. The recordings, field notes, concept maps, index card arrangements, and artifacts were examined during data analysis. Qualitative documents in some cases included private documents such personal notes, letters, and e-mails (Creswell, 2009). In this study, however, the main source of qualitative documents included graduation checklists and notes from grad coach sessions. Merriam (2002) suggested including personal reflections in the field notebook to record the researcher's feelings, attitudes, and subjectivities during data collection. The record of personal reflections allows the researcher opportunities to review her personal reactions and determine if there are experiences that may have potentially influenced her data collection (Merriam, 2002).

Concept maps provide a graphic representation of ways in which people organize thoughts and, likewise, are helpful when analyzing relationships (Radcliff, Jensen, Salem, Burhanna, & Gedeon, 2007). In this study, concept maps were used to allow each graduate an opportunity during the interview to depict their role regarding their interaction with other individuals while completing their high school requirements. The participant was asked to identify individuals and/or circumstances within his/her own circle of acquaintances and label connecting lines to indicate the relationship between him/herself and the other people and/or circumstances. The proximity of these individuals to the graduate in the center circle might be an indication of the level of influence toward the graduate reaching his/her goal. A sample concept map is shown in Figure 1.
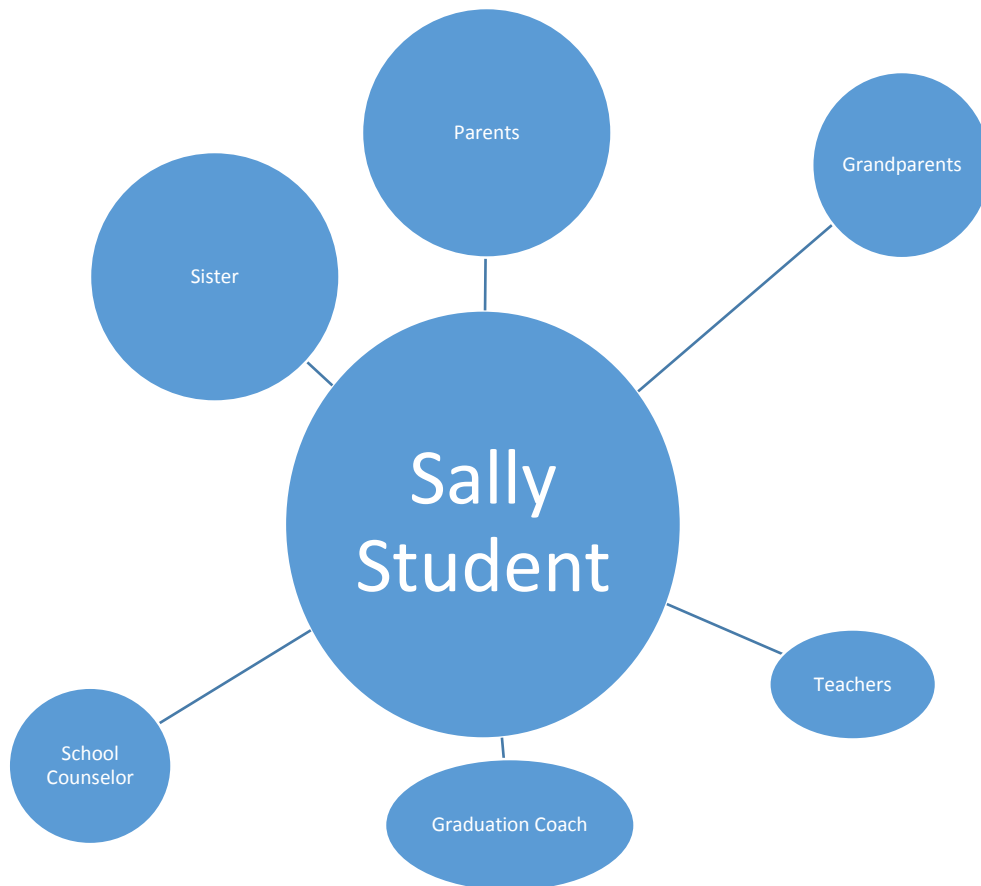
Figure 1. Sample Concept Map

Data Analysis

Each interview was preserved by audio recording and field notes allowing for review as necessary and analysis. Participant responses were revisited and clarified as needed. The responses were reviewed for patterns among the participants, summary, recommendations, and continued analysis.

A pattern is a descriptive finding recognized through thematic analysis. Patterns make up a theme (category). The content analysis reveals a pattern of participants reporting similar responses. Inductive analysis involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in the data. Qualitative analysis is typically inductive in early stages when developing a codebook for content analysis (figuring out possible categories, patterns, or themes) (Patton, 2002). A Participant Selection Chart depicting four prevalent at-risk themes and the number of graduates exhibiting each factor is included in Appendix C.

The participants were specifically chosen according to set criteria in which rich, thick descriptions were anticipated. Multiple sources of data collection methods of interviews, documents, and review of artifacts are a means of triangulation. Data were analyzed throughout the study. Data were coded and recoded, as necessary. Member checks were conducted to confirm that I accurately summarized the experiences of the interviewees (Merriam, 2002).

Trustworthiness of Data

Merriam (2002) suggests the importance of employing strategies for promoting validity and reliability. Strategies used for this study include triangulation, researcher reflexivity, member checks, and use of rich, thick descriptions (Merriam, 2002). The interviews revealed stories of six recent CHS graduates who were assisted by a graduation coach.

Construct validity is crucial when creating credibility (internal validity) for the reader. A construct is a characteristic that is presumed to exist but not easy to measure, such as self-esteem or anxiety. Krathwohl further suggests that construct validity is the unifying framework for all evidence of validity (Krathwohl, 1998).

To assure dependability of the study, triangulation was used. Triangulation, a validity procedure, employs multiple data sources including interview protocol, concepts maps (and artifacts), and observation protocol (field notebook) to obtain a complete picture (Krathwohl, 1998).

As a narrative researcher I should foster reflection and restorying on the part of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 1989).   Extreme effort was made to circumvent any biases of the researcher by bracketing any prior assumptions, worldview, or relationship to the study that may potentially affect the outcome (Merriam, 2002). Even though the researcher has prior rapport with each participant, Malterud (2001) contends that "preconceptions are not the same as bias, *unless* the researcher fails to mention them" (p. 484). According to Merriam (2002) strategies such as those mentioned--prior assumptions, world view, or relationship--enhance internal validity, reliability, and external validity. Mills (2011) suggests that the reliability of the study is justified if the data would be consistently collected using the same techniques over time.

After interviews were completed, a field notebook was used to make personal reflection notes as soon as thoughts came to mind as well as during review of the audio recording. Researcher reflexivity is important in regard to potential bias. Member checks were conducted, with revisions made as warranted, to affirm data collected (Merriam, 2002). An audit trail of thoughts and procedures noted in the field notebook provide a "trail of bread crumbs to show our

path of inquiry" (Conrad & Serlin, 2014) and ultimately to the findings, eventual conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality, anonymity, and informed consent are core ethical considerations (Sieber & Tolich, 2013). While the genuine relationship between each participant and the graduation coach (researcher) reinforces the importance of the personalization of the study, pseudonyms were used to protect the individuals interviewed. Guarding each identity provided a comfort zone for each participant who may have included sensitive personal information during the interview. Clandinin and Connelly (1989) suggest as researcher I should be sensitive to alternative stories that might be told as I collect data for the purpose of my research. With the growing popularity of Internet people searches, protecting the privacy of the participants is crucial. Permission to conduct the interviews was requested and granted from the East Tennessee State University (ETSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB).

As interviewer and researcher, I did not personally harm nor intentionally deceive the participants in any way. The interview sessions were intended to flow as smoothly as possible in an effort to respect the time and privacy of each participant. Within a few days of the interviews, each participant was supplied a copy of the interview transcript and a computer graphic interpretation of his/her concept map. Member checks were conducted as an effort to confirm accuracy of transcription and interpretation to ensure creditability. Because each participant was not personally vested in this study and most likely participated as a favor to me, I agreed not to include any sensitive data collected from participants. Additionally, care was given not to abuse the employment privilege of access to data that is part of my daily work duties.

Summary

The methods and procedures used in this narrative method of qualitative research design were focused on telling the stories of six CHS graduates who received assistance from a graduation coach. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1989) deliberately storying and restorying experiences is a fundamental method of personal and social growth. Interviewing the graduates provided rich, thick descriptions of their personal growth as they completed their high school requirements through the facilitation and advocacy of a graduation coach.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of six graduates who received assistance from a graduation coach at a small rural high school in Southern Middle Tennessee. The unique interaction and impact of the facilitation by the graduation coach was also explored among the participants included in the study. The overarching question, "What are student perspectives and expectations of the graduation coach's advocacy and facilitation to satisfy their graduation requirements" was addressed retrospectively by interviewing the six graduates. Examining experiences of graduates provides a rich, thick description of events leading to their successful completion of necessary requirements for a high school diploma.

Findings of this qualitative study were gathered throughout the process of narrative inquiry. Personal interviews allowed each graduate the opportunity to recount events occurring both in school and out of school that had direct influence on their path toward achieving his/her high school diploma. During interviews conducted using an interview protocol, each graduate was asked to construct a concept map showing specific influential individuals and circumstances regarding attaining their goal of a diploma. The graduates were also asked to prioritize influential circumstances affecting their educational process.

In an effort to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 2002), during the interviews each participant was asked to suggest ways in which he/she could have been more effectively assisted while in high school as they faced their individual challenges and obstacles toward graduation. Similarly, Merriam (2002) suggests that we arrive at a better understanding when we examine through the lens of the individual. Qualitative research, while interpretive, is

designed to reach the goal of understanding the phenomenon and the meaning it has for participants (Merriam, 2002). Analysis of the research findings are presented in Chapter 4.

Ethical issues were considered according to standards in place by the IRB of ETSU. Each of the six participants understood the interview process and his/her option to stop participation in the research at any point. Each participant was provided informed consent (see Appendix B). Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of each research participant.

Credibility of the study comes from the triangulation of interview responses, researcher notes, field notes, review of concept maps, ranking of pertinent circumstances, and member checks. Interview responses, researcher notes, field notes, concept maps, and rankings (social artifact exercises) were continuously reviewed throughout the iterative coding process of the study (see Appendix D). Data analysis began with triangulation before implementing member checking.

The six semistructured interviews occurring during the month of January 2015 produced data used in interpreting and analyzing the phenomenon of graduate struggles among the purposive sample. All participants received a copy of their interview transcript and concept map and were encouraged to review the document for accuracy, thus increasing the credibility of the study. Member checking was easy to implement and was found to be an effective and efficient method of confirming the facts of the research. Through member checking each participant was encouraged to review his/her own response as well as the interpretation of the principal investigator. The graduates were assigned gender-appropriate pseudonyms of Ashley, Brianna, Candy, David, Eric, and Franklin. Concept maps for each interviewee are included with each participant profile. Interview transcripts can be found in Appendices E, F, G, H, I, and J, respectively.

Data Collection

Data collection took place during six individual interview sessions held in January 2015. The interview protocol can be found in Appendix A. While interviewing the six subjects of this qualitative study, the significance of major life events came up consistently with regard to each participant's challenges and obstacles faced in pursuit of a high school diploma.

During the interviews graduates were asked to construct a concept map to illustrate the relationship between themselves and factors that affected their completion of high school requirements. Concept mapping is particularly effective for brainstorming, organizing, and structuring ideas. For this study interviewees were asked to include people and/or circumstances that either positively *or* negatively influenced the journey to graduation. Use of a graphic organizer format allowed each participant to convey his/her thoughts regarding those relationships using their own words, ideas, and concepts (Teaching and Learning with Concept Maps, 2015).

I collected all data in this study, personally transcribing all interviews, which yielded approximately 58 pages of data. After collection, the data were combined and reviewed for recurring themes.

Data Analysis

Early data analysis began by compiling lists of graduates who had received assistance from a graduation coach while pursuing a high school diploma. Graduates from each of four classes (2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013) were considered for inclusion in the study. Preliminary tallies for at-risk factors are shown in the Participant Selection Chart in Appendix C. While attending high school each participant received at least 5 hours of academic counseling from the

graduation coach. All participants were economically disadvantaged. Categories and themes mentioned below were priorities:

- Behind peers at least 1 year

- Being age 19 or older when graduating (or would have been age 19 if had followed the traditional 4-year plan to graduate)

- Either expecting or parenting a child at the time of graduation

- A first generation high school graduate

- Participated in credit recovery

- Participated in online classes

- Attended alternative school at some point during middle or high school years

After collection analysis of data occurred by further study of interactive interview transcripts, social artifact exercises (participant concept maps and situational rankings), and field notes. Much of my work consisted of analysis to discover patterns and themes among participants and to identify strategies employed by each participant to overcome obstacles to complete requirements for a high school diploma. My goal was to present these characteristics in the form of qualitative narrative inquiry methodology and form reasonable conclusions grounded in the data.

Participant Profiles

The six participants chosen for the purposeful sample in this study were graduates of CHS during the years of 2012 and 2013.   Each participant received assistance while in high school from a graduation coach, who is also the principal investigator of the study. Ashley, Brianna, Candy, David, Eric, and Franklin collectively represent the low-achieving economically disadvantaged student with multiple at-risk factors including absenteeism, expecting or parenting

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a child, or recovering failed credits during their journey toward graduating from high school. All

participants were White and from a rural area. None of the participants received services under

an IEP (Individualized Education Plan, through special education services) or a 504 Plan (student

with disabilities) while in high school.

"Ashley" was retained in one of her middle school grades. During her junior year she

became pregnant. Her goal was to graduate before her baby was to be born in January of her

senior year. Although Ashley's mother graduated, Ashley's daddy did not graduate from high

school. Ashley needed to complete credit recovery for some failed credits that occurred early in

her high school career. Ashley also benefited from online class opportunities and tutoring. The

complete interview transcript for Ashley can be found in Appendix E, while the concept map

Ashley for is shown below in Figure 2.
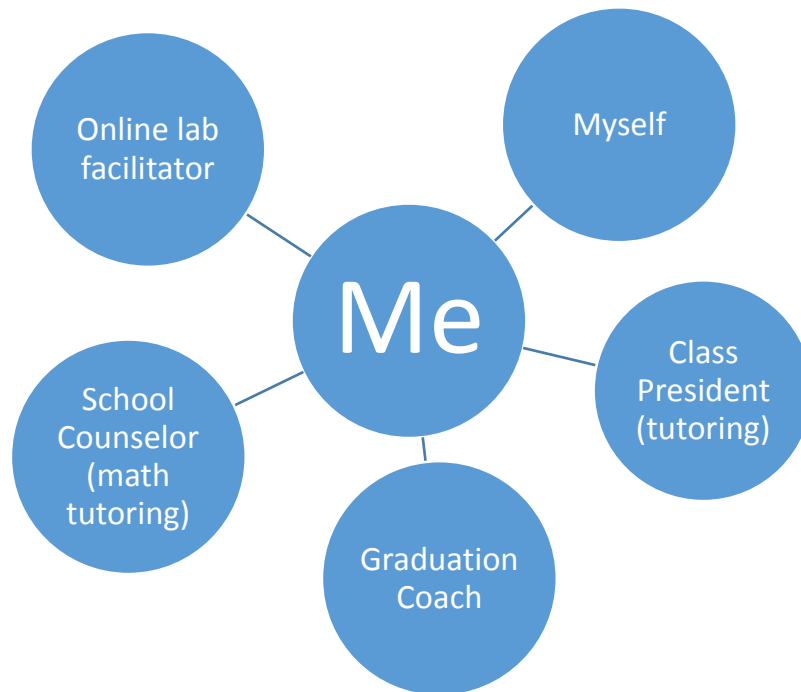
Figure 2. Concept Map for Ashley

"Brianna" was retained in seventh grade. During her sophomore year, she had a baby. Her self-confidence regarding academics was low. Neither of Brianna's parents graduated from high school. She refused to spend 2 more full years in high school to graduate—a plan that would have had her be 19 years of age when graduating. Brianna credits online classes, credit recovery, and tutoring for her academic success. The complete interview transcript for Brianna can be found in Appendix F, while the concept map for Brianna is shown below in Figure 3.
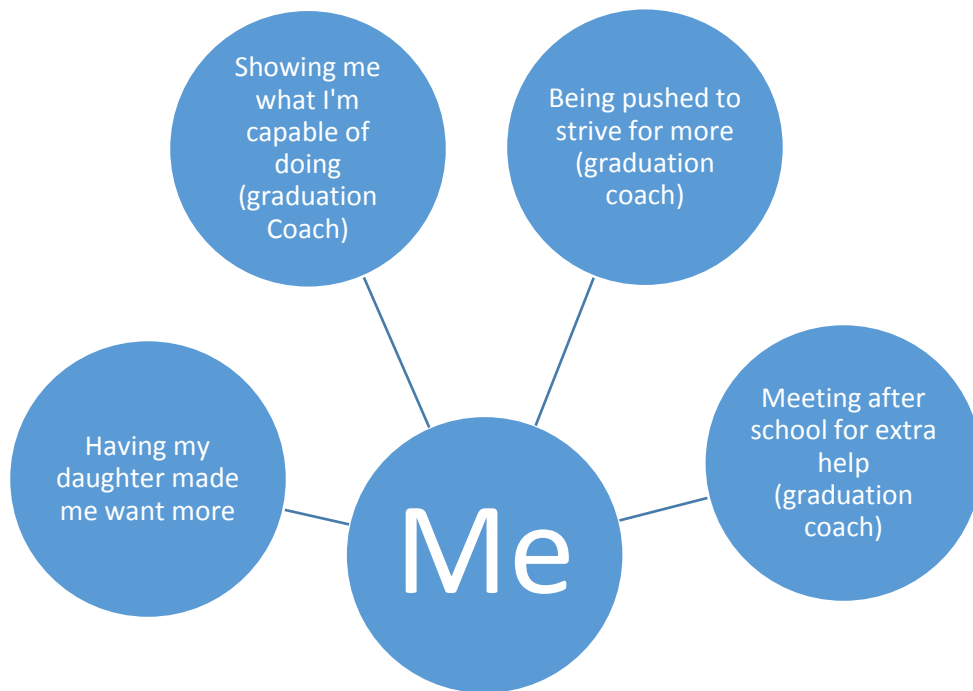
Figure 3. Concept Map for Brianna

"Candy" also had a baby during her sophomore year. While her mother is a high school graduate, Candy's daddy did not receive a high school diploma. She participated in online classes and received tutoring, especially in math, to expedite graduating ahead of schedule. The complete interview transcript for Candy can be found in Appendix G, while the Concept Map for Candy is shown below in Figure 4.
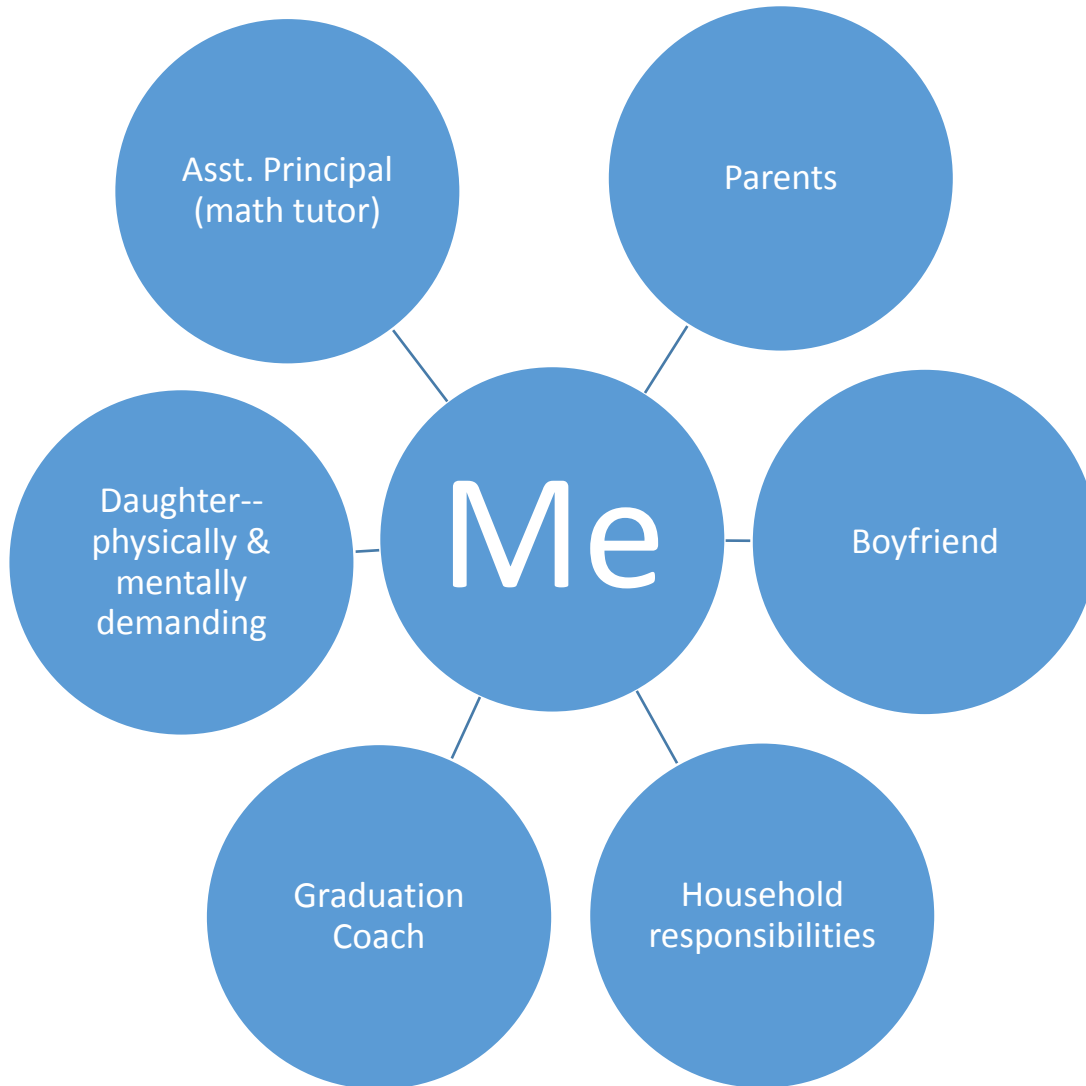
Figure 4. Concept Map for Candy

"David" was retained in grades 4 and 7. Neither of his parents graduated from high school. David completed credit recovery, online classes, and received tutoring to complete the necessary credits to graduate from high school. The complete interview transcript for David can be found in Appendix H, while the concept map for David is shown below in Figure 5.
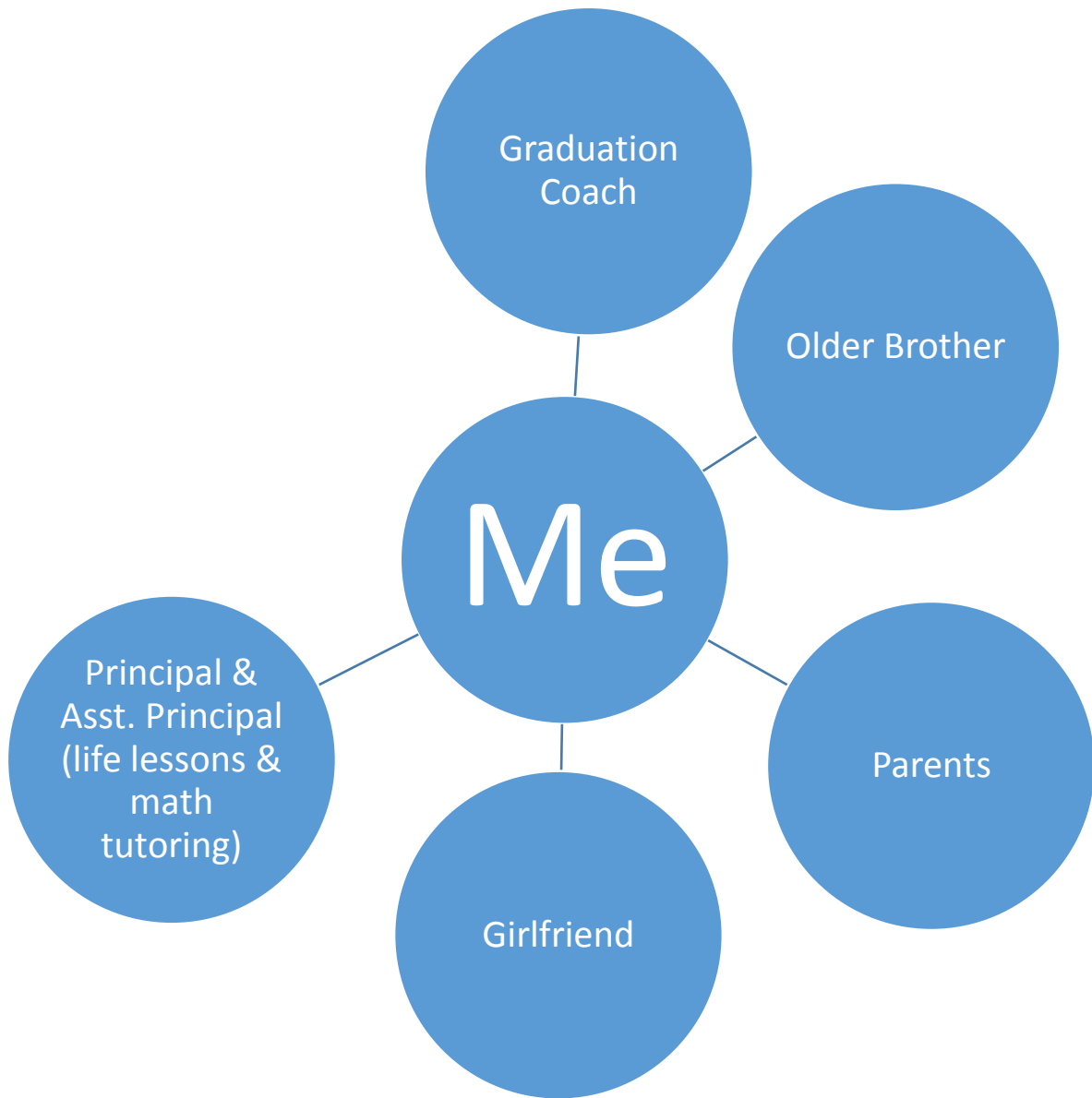
Figure 5. Concept Map for David

"Eric" was retained in both sixth and seventh grades. Although neither of his parents graduated from high school, his mother did receive a GED. During his senior year Eric was arrested twice within a month—eye opening experiences. He participated in credit recovery, online classes, and tutoring sessions to complete his high school requirements. The complete interview transcript for Eric can be found in Appendix I, while the concept map for Eric is shown below in Figure 6.
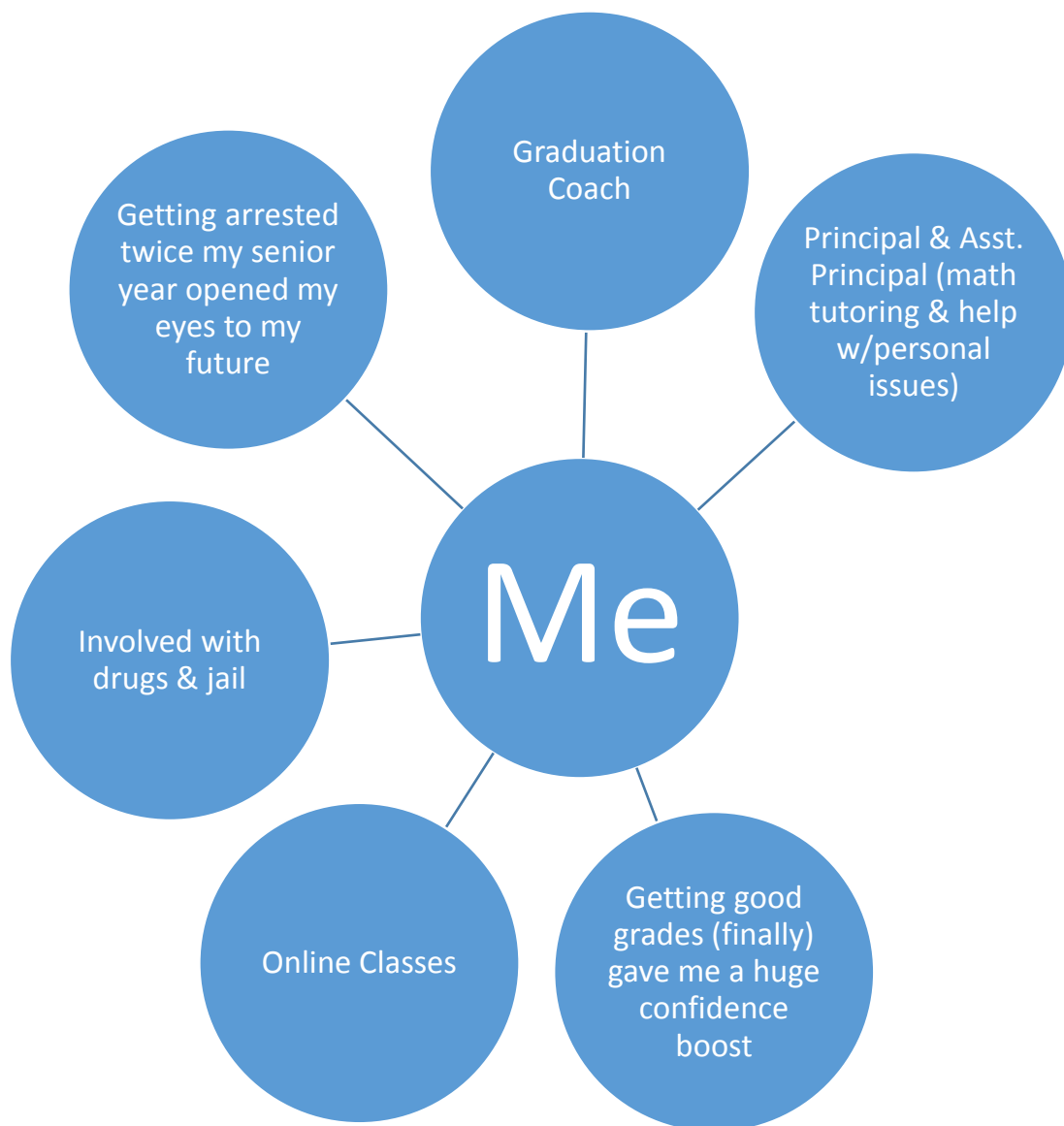
Figure 6. Concept Map for Eric

"Franklin" intensely pursued his high school diploma upon learning that his girlfriend was pregnant. While Franklin's mother did not graduate from high school, his daddy does have a high school diploma. He completed credit recovery, online classes, and received tutoring to complete his high school requirements. The complete interview transcript for Franklin can be found in Appendix J, while the concept map for Franklin is shown below in Figure 7.
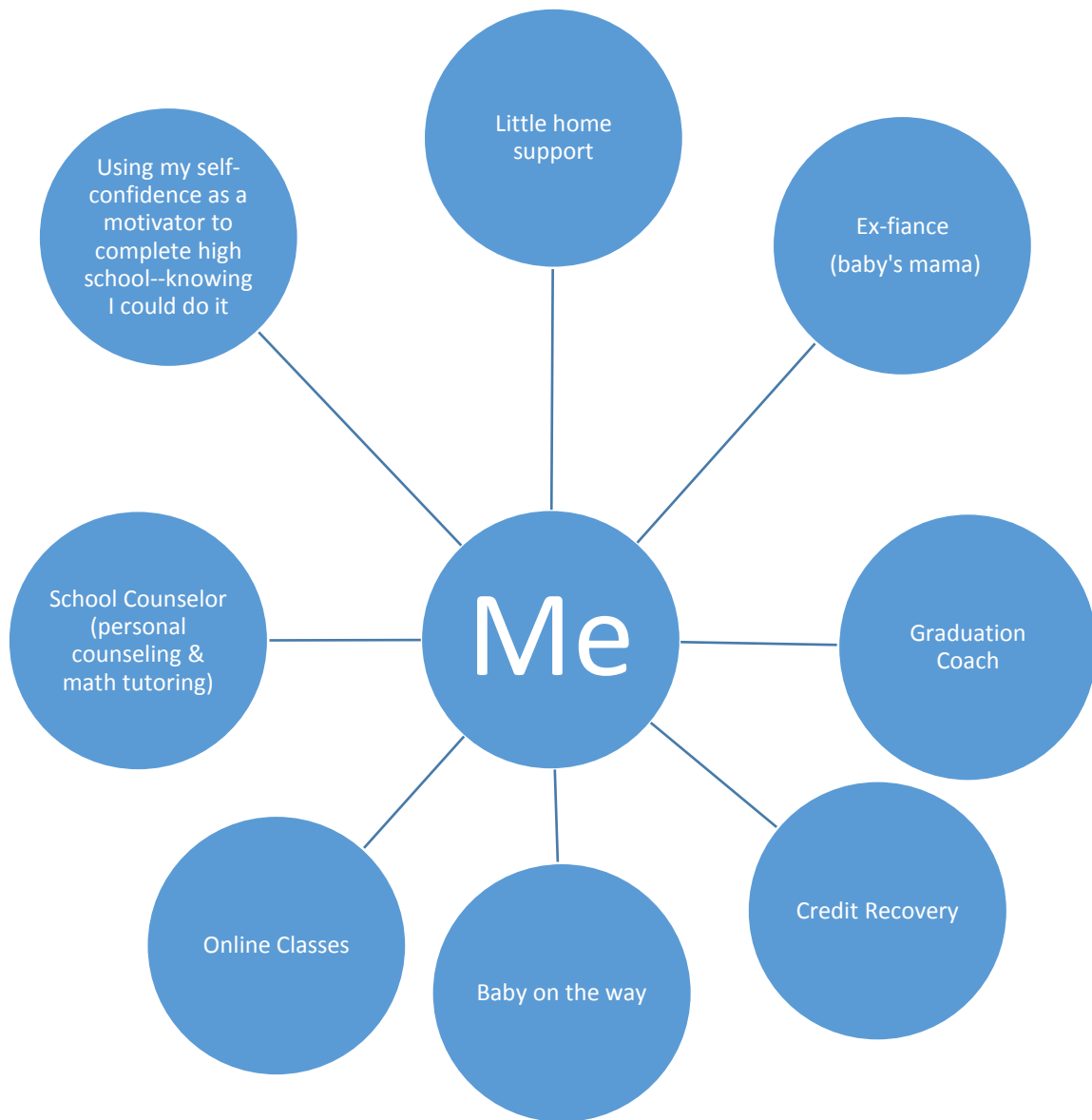

Figure 7. Concept Map for Franklin

All participants in this study were considered economically disadvantaged. Financial hardship combined with the at-risk factors mentioned above for each graduate made each of them candidates to receive ongoing facilitation while in high school from the graduation coach—the principal investigator of the study.

Researcher's Notes and Memos

The researcher began reviewing notes from grad coach sessions during the timeframe that the graduates were to graduate from high school. Interviews were conducted during January 2015. While transcribing tapes from interviews, journaling field notes, analyzing concept maps, and examining situational influences, the research was coded into distinct themes and categories. Such notes detail the concept mapping by the participants in which they noted the relationships of individuals who influenced--whether positively or negatively--their path toward graduating from high school. Additionally, some participants chose to include influential circumstances on the concept maps. Mapping was essential to the investigation of each participant's perception of how he/she was facilitated to meet the goal of achieving a high school diploma. The researcher found that the six graduates included in the study were prideful of attaining their high school diploma. Participants enjoyed interaction with the researcher during the interview.

Findings

The findings are categorized and presented in themes derived from data collected from the research questions of the study. Individual interviews are the key source of the data. During these interviews, graduates were also asked to complete a concept map showing influential people and circumstances, as well as asked to prioritize the situations that in their perspective were most influential in their trek toward graduation. Chapter 4 includes detailed discussions of

the findings for each of the research questions. Summarization and interpretation of the findings

as well as conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5.

Interview Results

- Research Question #1--What were some of the **obstacles** students were able to overcome in order to complete their requirements for a high school diploma?

One of two themes emerging regarding *highest* priority of obstacles, which ultimately

became influences in the pursuit of a high school diploma, was teen parenthood. Of the six

participants in the study, four of them were either expecting or parenting a child when they

graduated. All four of them ranked having their child as the highest priority in their quest for

graduating from high school. The following data were discovered through the interview

discussion prompted by the researcher:

Interviewer--Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach. Describe what was going on in your life at that time.

Ashley—To graduate early [was my goal]. I wanted to be out of school at least a little after I turned 18 and I had a baby on the way and I wanted to be out before he was here. I wanted to make sure that I was gonna be out of high school, where I wouldn't have have to do the struggle of having the baby and going to school. I was afraid it was going to mess me up with school.

Brianna—Well, I was struggling in several classes so I came to you and told you that I needed help. And throughout the year I met you quite a lot of times. And you helped me every time. . .I was pregnant and that could have slowed me down. And some of the classes. . .I just needed someone to actually break it down and show me how it was worked.

Candy—I started my relationship with my graduation coach in order to graduate early because I was becoming a teen mom.

Franklin—I had a baby on the way. And just more unexpectancy. It was just hard for me to focus and I knew it would be hard for me to pay attention to anything in class. I figured the best option would be online classes that I could take at any time. . .so it was just easy enough to get it done and over with that way.

Interviewer—Having a baby on the way definitely changes your perspective and. . .

Franklin—Definitely . . .about everything. . . not just school itself. . .

Interviewer--. . . but life in general?

Franklin—Yes, everything!

Interviewer—So your thoughts were. . .that you weren't getting an education for yourself. There was somebody else involved or you wanted to be able to provide a future. . .tell me your thoughts about how the baby on the way influenced basically everything you did.

Franklin—It was just that you knew that everything you did you had to do it right and you had to *not* screw up. Like it's every step you take you have to make an example for yourself and the one to come. You just can't step into something and not expect anything less than helping yourself *and* somebody else; it's not just beneficial to me, it was beneficial to the baby. It just. . .what I had to do in school, I had to get educated on so I can take this knowledge and pass this on. Not just from school. But there's just extra things that I've learned through school that's just not "academic-wise" in any classes. There's just certain things that you learn as a person through the daily events that go through your life that just teach you anyway. There's daily teaching. It's not just schooling.

Interviewer—Did any of your friends not graduate from high school?

Franklin—Yes. . .baby's mama. She was a big push [for me to graduate] because she did not graduate because. . .the baby. She dropped out because of that. And she still never got her GED. She pushed me to get mine done, then she dropped out. They're [she and others are] gonna have a hard time going and getting their GED if they wait so much longer. . .they're gonna lose half their memory of school.

Four graduates included in at least their top two rankings the circumstance of recovering

failed credits.

Interviewer—Thinking back to your freshman year, Ashley, you did have some "do over" things. . .some things you had to get caught back up on?

Ashley—I was being lazy in school. Hanging out with my friends. Not paying attention to classes at all. I wasn't worried about graduating. So I messed up my whole freshman year. And then I ended up. . .freshman/sophomore, junior, a little bit of my senior year—I finished up what I messed up freshman [year]. Yea, [with] credit recovery, I caught back up on them pretty good.

Interviewer—Brianna, I remember some of the early meetings that we had, and that we found answers for ways that we could do something through credit recovery rather than repeating

the class. . .I can just remember how that would brighten your spirit and how you realized that there were options that you didn't know about before you came to grad coach sessions.

Brianna—Yes. I always wondered what credit recovery was and then whenever you told me that I could be in that and do online classes, I realized that I could actually get done on time. Because I did look at it before I met with you [as if] that I was never gonna get through high school. Because I didn't know how to do what I was doing every day. . .and I was behind anyway.

Interviewer—Eric, out of the factors affecting your high school completion, which one do you think is most important?

Eric—Most important? I'd say failed credits, because that's where it all started. I mean. . .that was in like 6th. . .7th grade. 'Cause once I failed two years in a row, I failed 6th grade, I done 6th grade over, went to 7th grade, then had to do 7th grade over. I done that and it tore my self-esteem down. It just made me feel stupid, I guess.

Interviewer—Franklin, what were some factors at school which led to your success. . .credit recovery?

Franklin—Definite yes!!! [ranked after graduating with a child].

Interviewer—In your opinion, the online classes were a big part of your program?

Franklin—That was a big part of my graduation. If not for the online courses, I would have never. . .I probably would have never graduated because it was so hard for me to pay attention in a classroom with everything that was going on, opposed to just doing it, ya know? It was just. . .I knew I had to do something. And I knew I couldn't pay attention. It was just. . .I had too much going on so online classes allowed me to do what I needed to do and get done.

In addition to lack of credits earned, poor attendance is associated with dropping out of

high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Rumberger & Lim, 2008). When

the participants were asked about how absenteeism affected their high school progress, Ashley

replied:

Interviewer—[Regarding absenteeism] Was that because you just didn't like school?

Ashley—Yea, that was my freshman year. I was just being young. If I could have a "do over", I would do it again. I wouldn't miss school. I would come to school and do my work and have better grades. . .pay attention. It ain't that hard. . .work's really easy. . .if you just pay attention.

Students from homes with more family resources such as parental education and income are less likely to drop out of school. Other parenting practices shown to reduce the odds of dropping out of school include (a) having high educational aspirations for their child, (b) monitoring their teenager's progress in school, and (c) appropriate communication with the school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008).

Of the six participants included in the study, all of them had at least one parent who did not graduate from high school. Three of the participants responded that *neither* parent received a high school diploma, which prompted the interview question:

Interviewer—Franklin, was it expected by your parents that you would graduate from high school?

Franklin—Nooo. . . .

Interviewer—No? Tell me a little about that.

Franklin—I just got in a lot of trouble at school; they just thought I was headed down the wrong path.

Interviewer—So they didn't think you would make it happen, but as far as when you were growing up 8th, 9th, 10th grade. . . did they speak about "yea, you're gonna graduate from high school"?

Franklin—I never got told whether I was gonna graduate or not. They just looked at me like I was in trouble all the time . . .so. . .never thought. . .I knew. . .they didn't just have to come out and say it, but I already knew their expectations that I wasn't gonna graduate, so I stepped up and proved 'em wrong!!!

Interviewer—Good!!!

Franklin—It's what I do best. . .I just prove 'em wrong!!!

In Candy's situation, she had support at home from her parents when she lived with them. During her high school years after having her baby, however, she moved in with her boyfriend. She noted support at home as a defining factor influencing her high school career. She explains:

Candy—I had support at home. But I moved out, so it wasn't the same.

Interviewer—You mentioned that you were with your boyfriend and had your child. . .so when the support was different, was he still encouraging you to finish school?

Candy—Definitely. . .he was in school himself.

Interviewer—But, it's just different when you're with your parents, don't you think?

Candy—Yes. Your parents are hounding you and your boyfriend isn't.

Interviewer—Your boyfriend is not to be a parent. He's supposed to be an equal. So I can understand that.

Although only one of Ashley's parents graduated from high school, they had expectations

for her to complete her requirements and graduate.

Interviewer—Was it expected (by your parents) that you would graduate from high school?

Ashley—With me getting pregnant, it was "iffy." I knew I would graduate either way. But they didn't know if I could.

Interviewer—So, did they encourage you to, but when you realized you were pregnant, they were going to be understanding if it didn't work out that way?

Ashley—I don't know if they were going to be understanding. They were just clear. . .they just wanted me to finish high school.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) contend that students are more successful in school when they

have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school. Perhaps in the absence of

adequate support at home, caring adults at school should step up and assist students by instilling

confidence, coordinating tutoring, fostering a caring attitude toward the student, or offering an

opportunity to talk with the student about personal problems. When an adult advocate helps the

student find the support the student needs, the student senses the compassion being offered and

feels a connectedness to the school environment (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

[Franklin comments on caring adults who assisted him]

Franklin—[Tutoring] The staff members that wanted to help me. . .they actually gave a helping hand. They broke it down to where it was necessary for me to get it done and understand it. [Regarding the academic advisement or personal counseling sessions with the grad coach] . . .it helped me to push myself as a person to get my goals done and with someone else there to help make it all better. . .pssst. . .a breeze. . .was just a breeze!

Interviewer--So would you consider the influence valuable?

Franklin—Yes. . .{chuckle} very valuable

- Research Question #2—What were the **characteristics** of the graduation coach's facilitation that students cited as being important to completion of high school requirements?

Interviewer—Ashley, describe some things that happened in the grad coach sessions.

[Ashley stated]

Ashley—We reviewed the classes and went over what we thought we could do during the summer. . .during the winter.

Interviewer—So the classes that you would take over the summer. . .what type of classes were those? Did you go to summer school for that? Explain a little about those classes.

Ashley—It was online. I did the online English IV during the summer. I did [U.S.] History over the summer. The rest I think I did during school.

Interviewer—And you had Internet access at your house for some of that, right?

Ashley—Yes.

Interviewer—So you reached your goal of graduating early?

Ashley—Yes, everything was done ahead of time. I got everything done before. . .I graduated ahead of time.

Interviewer—If I remember correctly, you were shooting for December graduation and you were able to graduate a couple of months early. I think you set a good example for people that were wanting to pursue something similar with a program. I don't know if you had

conversations with other people that might have wanted to be like you. . .to get your program finished. Do you remember having anyone ask you about it?

        Ashley—Yes. Afterwards. . .after I graduated, I had a couple of other people ask me that were doing online classes.

        Interviewer—What adjustments could be made to the graduation coach program that would have positively assisted you getting out?

        Ashley—I think everything went pretty good. I don't think it could have been done any better.

        Interviewer—[You] were able to get the online classes appropriately at the time that you needed them to reach the goal. . .the timeline that you set for yourself. I think time management was a big deal for you, realizing that you were under the gun because you wanted to get it done before the baby came.

        Interviewer—Brianna, what are some things that happened in your grad coach sessions?

[Brianna shared]

        Brianna—I know that we had talked about which classes I would rather sit in and be able to ask questions in class and the other classes that I took online, you know, you [Ms. Gragg would] have to be able to be my person to go to [in order] to understand the work that I'm not understanding.

        Interviewer—Would you consider that our sessions were mostly academic advisement in nature or were personal counseling sessions?

        Brianna—No, I've gotten so much help. . .like academically . . .I mean, I've actually got so much more confidence since all that we've went through, as far as each time I met with you.

        Interviewer—And I've seen that. I've seen your confidence boost and you blossom as a young lady as we had talked. And my next question was "What did you gain from your grad coach sessions?" and I think you just answered that. The confidence level was. . .good. So would you consider that influence valuable or not valuable?

        Brianna—Yes, very valuable.

        Interviewer—You mentioned just a minute ago that after meeting in some grad coach sessions and we set a plan for you, you got the confidence realizing that you could graduate from high school. Sometimes at some points when you doubted that, you still got the confidence from our sessions that you would graduate from high school . . .but at what point do you think things turned around for you?

Brianna—I know I came to you and we talked about my options with the online classes and how many credits I needed and how I could get them accomplished. And when you actually broke it down and showed me what all I had to do and what all I needed to pick up in, and I knew that I could come to you at any time and ask you for help on something or where I was slacking in them I knew that you would tell me. And before that I didn't have that, I didn't really know I was failing until I had got the failing grade. And it's just a lot of help having someone to go to. . .to help you. And then whenever I didn't understand something I knew I could come to you and you would help me the best you could. With asking for help, and knowing that you would come tell me, "hey, you're slacking. . ." I knew, even though I turned in a test and wasn't sure about it, if it showed up on my grade then you'd be like. . . "you need to see what you're doing and see what you can do to pull your grade up." And I knew I couldn't fail the classes I was taking and still [manage to] be taking online classes.

Interviewer—Because we had to get some of that checked off so that we could have room in your daily schedule to take some online classes. And also, I think during the time that you were in high school, [we got] our PowerSchool program, where we could click on and see what assignments had been turned in and see what grade you got in those assignments.

Brianna—Yea. That was a lot of help. A lot of confidence, too, knowing that you made a good passing grade and that encouraged you to keep going with it. Because if you were failing, you're not feeling like you're getting through.

[Further discussion with Brianna about how her confidence grew, her perception changed, and how her parents began to have confidence that she would graduate.]

Interviewer—Sometimes it's helpful to have another adult in the building to encourage you to go speak to a teacher and ask for extra help.

Brianna—As far as going to teachers, you don't feel like they're going to break it down . . .to get what they're saying. And I knew that you could. So you helped me through a lot. [continuing] They [my parents] pushed me and whenever I would go home and know that I was having to meet back up with you, either on the weekend or after school, that they [parents] were glad that I had that extra help. And they [parents] were confident that I would graduate.

Interviewer—Do you think that was mainly through the graduation coach program or do you associate that with someone else here at school?

Brianna—I actually feel like I really wouldn't have graduated had it not been for you, because the teachers, they were good as far as teaching class, but to know that you've got somebody to go to and they'll help you no matter what, and even coming back after school to help in any way, that they will make sure that you graduate; that's how I felt that you done. I really don't know that I would have graduated if it hadn't been for you. Because I feel like before we met the first time I was at the point to where I was just ready to go ahead and quit and then after I realized there was someone that was there to help, then, you know. . .I knew I could do it.

Interviewer—Some times when you doubted, you still got confidence from our sessions that you would graduate from high school. I can remember that when we were working on some things, especially your presentation, [that] sometimes being in front of a group of other students or a class was not really something that you looked forward to doing.

Brianna—No. And we had an option, actually. I can remember, you had helped me do the whole presentation and then I had an option to either do it in front of the class or just turn it in and if you hadn't pushed me to [haha] do it in front of the class, too, I wouldn't have. I would have just taken the points off [hahahaha].

Interviewer—Sometimes you need somebody just to give you that. . .first of all, that extra push, and second of all, an extra vote of confidence.

Brianna—Right.

[Discussion with Franklin regarding self-confidence]

Franklin—I don't know. . .even if I think I can't do something. . .there's still something that tells me, "hey, you've gotta get your head in there! You can do this! Because, if somebody else can do it, you can do it!" So it's just. . .I guess it's just that mind brainpower just telling me that's just my brain working against me so I can't do it. . .my brain tells me I can! The confidence played a big part all through high school, really. When I didn't think I could do anything. . .down and out, I did it, I picked myself up and got focused on what I needed to do and got it done. Confidence! If I didn't have confidence, I would have never made it through. I guess it's just one of those things. . .one of those factors about me that if I wasn't confident, I wouldn't be the same person.

Interviewer—Candy, what did you gain, if anything, from the grad coach sessions?

[Candy responded]

Candy—Just that I could do it. . .and that I needed to keep my mind set that I was gonna get through high school.

Interviewer—So, when we talked, and I was able to remind you and keep you focused on which classes we were going to do next and check off what you had completed . . .are you saying that that was a confidence builder?

Candy—Yes. Just being helped as much as I was. . .just everybody. All the teachers from CHS knew I was graduating early and knew that I was a teen mom, and they would just throw in a helping hand whenever they could.

Interviewer—David, what were some of the things that you talked about in those grad coach sessions, especially the early ones?

[David replied]

David—What my goals outside of school in the future would be, how I wanted to accomplish those goals, and where I wanted to go in life. . .and how to get there.

Interviewer—What were some things that worked for you to reach those goals?

David—Online class was probably the best because it worked around my schedule. So I could work and come home and knock out some of the online class whenever I had the chance.

Interviewer—Did you have to do some credit recovery?

David—Yes. I was in credit recovery almost every year. It helped me get to where online classes were actually an option.

Interviewer—So what did you gain from these [grad coach] sessions? We met multiple times. . .what did you gain?

David—It was good to kinda get a foundation of where I needed to be and how I needed to get there. And it was nice to know that somebody actually cared if I made it through school or not.

Interviewer—Eric, during the grad coach sessions that you and I had together, some of the topics that we discussed {as mentioned prior} would have been credit recovery opportunities and the online classes.

[Eric explained]

Eric—One of the first few times that we ever talked, you asked why I think it is so hard for me to do it right. I guess, or be able to get the good grades to graduate. And it was just the way. . .doing the work. . . it was just in the classroom setting. . .it just wouldn't work for me. And whenever the first online class or credit recovery, it was, I took in summer school. I took it. . . and as soon as I took it, it just. . .I realized I knew all the work. I knew how to do it. I knew how to learn; it was easy to learn, I just had to figure out my own way for me to do it, and when--I think it was my junior year, after my summer school. . . I believe I took my first credit recovery and online during school hours. I liked it just as much as I did during the summer school, and it worked just as good for me and I done about five to six classes, maybe up to seven senior year. And all of them but like one, I had pretty much all A's on. Even my Algebra II EOC. I liked that score. . .it was a 96, I think.

Interviewer—You had a really good Algebra II EOC score. We were very proud of you for that!

Eric—I like to talk about it a lot!

Interviewer—Good. I would, too, if I were you! {transitioning to next question} In our grad coach sessions, we set a plan which sometimes involved face-to-face classes or traditional

classes where you went in a classroom and had the teacher. And then some times we chose the online classes.

Eric—I think I was able to actually have a mixture of a few real classes. . .which was like social studies (World Geography) and Family and Consumer Science classes. And those classes I can. . . they're alright. It was math and science and all that I have troubles with but. . .I got many opportunities to try classes, to actually see which ones would help me the most.

Interviewer—So when we chose the online classes, we kinda handpicked those because, as you said, there were some classes that were effective when you went in the actual classroom, but some of them you like to go at your own pace and you could do those classes when you wanted to. Did you do any of those away from school, or did you do those all here in our online lab?

Eric—Actually, I had 4 – 5 periods of the day my senior year I was in the online lab, and then for about three months straight, usually about two, sometimes three days out of the week— any days that one of the principals or somebody could stay with me, I was up. . .some days, six/seven o'clock at night still working on it here. But, at home, no, because I didn't have a computer that worked good enough on it. . .I had one, but it wasn't fast enough. But I have stayed after school many, many, many, many, many hours to work on it.

Interviewer—From our grad coach sessions, what are some things that you gained from that?

Eric—I was able to realize that I didn't have to give up. . .that there's other options that. . .just because I wasn't able to do it perfectly in a classroom setting didn't mean I was stupid, or I just couldn't learn, or I wasn't smart, it just means I have my own unique way of doing it and I've met a few other people that the way they explain classroom work is like the same exact way I feel about it. They've had to do online classes, too, and I've seen people since that I graduated with that I done online classes with and they still talk about it all the time about how, if it wasn't for online classes and credit recovery that they didn't know if they ever would have graduated and I've told them I don't think I would have either. If it wasn't for the online classes, I don't think I would have graduated. . .If I could do it on my own pace. . .pretty much as long as I can see it in my own head and be able to focus on it and do it my own way, without having to keep up with a teacher *and* try to figure it out in my own way at the same time.

Interviewer—The principal and assistant principal and I have spoken about this on occasion, just over the years. . .the last two or three years, and we think that, too. We think the online program and credit recovery are *MAJOR* factors for people to graduate from high school.

Eric—Oh, yea.

Interviewer—In your case, the online instruction was a good alternative for you. After we realized that, we wanted to give you the opportunity to finish your high school career that way.

Eric—That was my favorite thing about my senior year, is I actually enjoyed doing online classes, it was fun doing it, I enjoyed. .. I scored more [credits] my senior year than I did my last. . .first three years!

Interviewer—The principal and I base our decisions knowing the effectiveness the program was for you [and the others] that started early with us. That's important. That's helpd us a lot in our planning.

Eric—I'm glad. My senior year there was a bunch of us that really did a good job with it. Every since I started my online classes and started getting my good grades up, I felt a lot better about myself. I felt smart, for once. I think whenever I realized that somebody else cared or not that I graduated. . .I think. . .[that's] what helped a lot, besides just online classes themselves was seeing that there's people that actually care or not if I graduated. . .that didn't have to care. . .like wasn't obligated to care. . .like Mom, Dad, family, stuff like that. . .it was people like that. . .it didn't make no difference in the world to them whether or not I graduated, but that's how they wanted to look at it. And those same people went above and beyond, out of the way to help me graduate. Like you, [assistant principal], [principal], the teachers. . .everybody. And so I thank God for this school because if it wasn't. . .if I went to any other school, or any other county that didn't offer the programs and the help that this school has, then I don't think I would have graduated. [continuing] I just wanted to say "thank you" with how much you really helped me a lot. I've told many, many, many people since I've graduated that if it was not for you and the principals and some of the other teachers, and mostly you, I wouldn't have graduated. If it was not for CHS, I don't think I would have graduated. If it was not for the kindness of y'all have in me, that y'all have more determination to have me graduated than I did at the beginning, then once I buckled down on myself as hard as everybody else was trying to get me to buckle down on myself, I was able to get going. It was a little bumpy at first; I struggled a little bit, but I toughed it out and I worked hard and I got through it, and if it wasn't for y'all, I don't think I would have graduated, if it wasn't for y'all and online classes.

Interviewer—Franklin, what happened in your grad coach sessions? Describe some things we talked about in your grad coach sessions.

[Franklin commented]

Franklin—Everything about the credentials to get done. We set a goal. We worked on it and we got it done! Whatever we needed to talk about. . .whatever we needed to say to get it done. . .got done.

Interviewer—And when we met in your grad coach sessions, we set more like a plan of action and chose the online classes that would best suit what you needed at that time.

Franklin—Yes. That's exactly right. I got a huge benefit from all that. A huge benefit. Now I mean, not just school itself, but the help that comes from someone actually sitting down and helping me. . .and showed me. It was just a huge benefit thing to go through school and have these people here to help me and know what I was going through. And made it so much easier. It all folded in together. It all came together.

The relationship of key interview questions to the findings is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Key Interview Questions and Findings

Key Interview Questions	Findings
1. Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach.	• Parenting or expecting a child—4 of 6 participants • Failed credits—5 of 6 participants
2. What happened in your grad coach sessions?	• Academic plan was set—6 of 6 participants • Enrollment in credit recovery—5 of 6 participants • Strategized if and how online classes would expedite graduating—6 of 6 participants
3. Did your parents graduate from high school?	• At least one parent did not graduate--6 of 6 participants • *Neither* parent graduated—3 of 6 participants
4. Was it expected (by your parents) that you would graduate from high school?	• Yes—4 of 6 participants • No—2 of 6 participants; 2 participants had little support at home • Low self-esteem/confidence issues—3 of 6 participants
5. Have you been retained?	• Yes—4 of 6 participants; 2 of the 4 had been retained twice
6. What were some factors which led to your success?	• Tutoring—5 of 6 participants • Feeling empowered by the graduation coach—5 of 6 participants believed having a caring adult check on their progress made a difference; 2 of 6 believed they would not have graduated had it *NOT* been for the assistance of the graduation coach

Summary of Grad Coach Strategies

A listing of grad coach strategies with corresponding desired results are presented in

Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Grad Coach Strategies

Strategy	Desired Results
1. Setting academic plan	• Encourages time management • Confirms exact credits lacking • Informs student/parents of timeline for completion
2. Arranging credit recovery	• Quick method of completing the credit • Alternative to repeating the course
3. Scheduling online classes	• Allows flexibility of timeframe in completing assignments, etc. • Offers alternate format of instruction • Oftentimes involves less social interaction among students within a class
4. Review of available data on student data management computer program (Power School)	• Allows monitoring of academic progress • Allows closer monitoring of attendance • Allows review of disciplinary infractions
5. Setting an abbreviated schedule	• Reduces attendance requirements to fewer hours of the day or fewer days of the week • Allows student to work more hours at a part-time job • Allows student relief regarding child care arrangements • Allows extra time for tutoring or assistance with class projects
6. "Confidence coaching"	• Builds/instills confidence academically, as well as in personal life • Encourages students to request extra help from teachers, as needed • Greater level of perceived self-confidence provides a springboard to continue education into post-secondary level

Chapter Summary

The overarching question of this study, "What are student perspectives and expectations of the graduation coach's advocacy and facilitation to satisfy their graduation requirements" was addressed in retrospect by interviewing six graduates. The interviews yielded rich, thick descriptions, collecting valuable data for this study. During the interviews, conducted and transcribed personally by the principal investigator, each participant was afforded the

opportunity to discuss particular **obstacles** and specific **strategies** that were most effective to achieve a high school diploma.

The findings of this qualitative study indicate that the six participants completed requirements for their high school diploma by overcoming **obstacles** through the facilitation of a variety of **strategies** suggested by their graduation coach. The **obstacles** included recovering failed credits, managing the demands of expecting or parenting a child, overcoming a home background of economic hardship and nongrad parent(s), and issues related to low self-confidence. Some of the participants in the study related their struggles to absenteeism, shyness, little support at home, and academic deficiencies, especially in math. All participants conveyed that assistance from the graduation coach was crucial to their success of completing their high school diploma--whether it be through **strategies** of developing graduation plans, arranging tutoring sessions, setting up credit recovery opportunities, requesting online classes, or building self-confidence.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of six graduates who received assistance from a graduation coach at a small rural high school in Southern Middle Tennessee. Their accounts of successful **strategies** in overcoming **obstacles** in order to graduate from high school were presented in Chapter 4. Interaction through personal interviews with each of the six graduates was the primary data collection method of this research. This chapter is a summary of the findings of this study, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

Summary and Conclusions

The overarching question of the study was "What are student perspectives and expectations of the graduation coach's advocacy and facilitation to satisfy their graduation requirements?" Specific emphasis was devoted to discussions of the **obstacles** that each participant faced while in school and the **strategies** suggested by the graduation coach.

Six graduates were interviewed and asked to retrospectively recap their journey of achieving their high school diploma. Six key interview questions framed this research:

1. Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach. Describe what was going on in your life at that time.

2. What happened in your grad coach sessions?

3. Did your parents graduate from high school?

4. Was it expected (by your parents) that you would graduate from high school?

5. Have you been retained?

6. What were some factors that led to your success?

The responses to the interview questions resulted in emerging themes as reported in Chapter 4.

Theme 1: Circumstances Leading to a Relationship with your Graduation Coach

The data indicate that the six participants sought assistance from the graduation coach due to situations they were facing such as expecting or parenting a child or failed credits. Four of the participants were either expecting or parenting a child when their high school requirements were completed. All four indicated that teenage parenting presented challenges, which further motivated them to complete their high school diploma. According to Rumberger and Lim (2008) teenage parenting is one of the specific behaviors impeding student engagement in high school.

Five of the six participants needed to make up failed credits. Balfanz and Herzog (2006) affirm that lack of credits is a performance indicator associated with dropping out of high school. In each circumstance the graduation coach was able to arrange credit recovery opportunities during the time they were students rather than require that they repeat the class to receive credit. Bridgeland et al. (2006) point out that the support of a caring adult increases the likelihood that students will follow through with requirements leading to high school completion.

Theme 2: Discussions During Grad Coach Sessions

The research confirmed that each participant had an academic plan set by the graduation coach during the grad coach sessions. The plan was reviewed periodically to see if the goals remained the same regarding which format of classes would be more suitable—the traditional classroom or online. The plan was adjusted as needed. Also during the sessions the grad coach would offer assistance with class projects as time permitted. Oftentimes, the eventual goal of completing the class was broken down into more attainable short-term goals. Knesting and Waldron (2006) contend that goal orientation is major factor regarding student persistence.

The grad coach seized any opportunity to instill confidence in each participant, "coaching" him/her along to complete each step offering praise when the goal was attained. Knesting and Waldron (2006) emphasize that when the focus is on people, not programs, the support from a caring adult can enhance student persistence. According to Brown (personal communication, July 28, 2014) relationships, relevance, and rigor are crucial to student success. As expected with coaching sessions, sometimes the grad coach needed to "light a fire" underneath each student to keep him/her on target to meet particular deadlines. Brown further encourages figuring out what engages the student and tap into that motivation.

Theme 3: Nongrad Parents Influence Perspectives of Their Teenager

The study included former students who were considered economically disadvantaged at some point while enrolled in school. Perhaps this low socioeconomic status was precipitated by having one or more parent not attaining a high school education. Rumberger (2007) states having a parent who did not graduate from high school is a specific demographic at-risk factor regarding graduating from high school. Furthermore, some of the participants in the study related receiving a high school diploma with higher paying job opportunities, an assumption D'Andrea (2010) confirms for Tennessee graduates.

Similarly, the study found that most of the participants realized that their parents wanted them to graduate from high school. Oftentimes, however, their parents became doubtful as situations arose during the teenage years of their son or daughter. Nevertheless, Rumberger and Lim (2008) confirm that parenting practices such as having high educational aspirations and monitoring their teenager's academic progress do reduce the odds of dropping out of high school.

Theme 4:   Parent Expectations

Four of the six participants indicated that their parents expected them to graduate from high school. One of the females in the study mentioned that her parents felt like her educational accomplishments would be "iffy" *after* she became pregnant. Although they had aspirations for her to graduate from high school, they weren't sure she would make it a reality due to her circumstances. Rumberger and Lim (2008) agree that teenage parenting is an event that obstructs high school completion.

Two of the males in the study said that their parents became doubtful that they would actually graduate when they got into trouble. Rumberger and Lim (2008) further contend that delinquent behavior is a specific circumstance that disrupts achieving a high school diploma. One of boys stated that his parents "never" told him whether or not he was going to graduate from high school. Another male had two arrests within a month. If two deputies and a few staff members at school had not written letters to the district attorney and the judge encouraging delay of one of his court dates, he most likely would have been incarcerated for his last semester of high school. While parental expectations and influence are many times crucial to academic success, the most hopeful parents become doubtful in extreme circumstances. A joint report by U.S. Departments of Education and Justice (2000) confirms that teens who engage in criminal or other high-risk behaviors are at a greater probability of dropping out of high school.

Theme 5: Grade Retention

The study revealed that four of the six participants had been retained in grade school, with two of them being retained in two grades. Draper (John Draper, personal communication, July 27, 2014) states that retention is not a valid form of remediation. One participant in my study responded that being made to repeat two grades back-to-back really took a toll on his self-

esteem and confidence. He said that during that time he felt stupid and that he could not learn.

Simcox (2011) agrees that student perception does affect success rate, as revealed in a study she

conducted in Upper East Tennessee.

A young lady who was retained in middle school mentioned that she was too shy to

approach a teacher for extra help, even in her high school years; and having a graduation coach

as a liaison was so valuable in her educational process. Bridgeland et al. (2006) caution that

when academics are too challenging students often become unmotivated to complete the work.

Hirsch (2007) concurs that disadvantaged youth are more apt to feel lack of control regarding

their learning and more inclined to feel anxious and unconfident. Along the same lines, Jensen

(2009) states that *learned helplessness* is an adaptive response to life conditions. He contends

that young people with learned helplessness are more likely to drop out of high school or become

pregnant while in their teens. Such was the case for the young lady in this illustration. She had a

child in her sophomore year. Through assistance from her graduation coach, however, she did

not drop out of high school.

Theme 6: Strategies Implemented by the Graduation Coach

The study confirmed that strategies implemented by the graduation coach were effective

for the six participants in the study. The **strategies** that seemed most effective were participating

in credit recovery (rather than repeat the class), enrolling in online classes (as opposed to

satisfying all credits in a traditional classroom), arranging tutoring sessions (particularly in

math), and periodic review of progress being made (or lack thereof) and tweaking the academic

plan.

One young man included in the study mentioned that he felt stupid and that he couldn't

learn after being retained twice during his middle school years. He firmly believes that having

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the opportunity to complete credit recovery and enroll in some online classes were what resurrected his educational process. Jones (2011) revealed in a similar study that students perceive they can experience success when allowed to take online and/or credit recovery programs.

Blevins (2009) points out that students who lack appropriate social skills are often inhibited, thus alienated at school. The young lady mentioned in the earlier example from my study, who was also retained during her middle school years, insisted that she was too shy while in high school to approach a teacher for extra help. She believes that the attention offered by the graduation coach and encouragement received are what ignited her regarding her school work. The graduation coach was a caring adult who positively influenced the student's perception of herself and her school work, which led to the student's eventual success. Simcox (2011) affirms the importance of positive student perception leading to success.

Recommendations for Practice

High school leaders should consider the value of caring adults within the school setting and the positive impact that could result. The graduation coach program has been a difference maker over the past 4 years for numerous high school seniors at CHS. As young people realize their dream of graduating from high school, they can now expand their educational dreams, and in most cases, in Tennessee can attend a 2-year college or Tennessee College of Applied Technology tuition free. With this benefit, a high school diploma becomes an even more prized possession.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research study provided a deeper understanding of the **obstacles** that each of the six graduates overcame in order to complete a high school diploma. Themes prevailed indicating

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that several of the participants had similar circumstances and used similar **strategies** to overcome their **obstacles**. Interestingly enough, many of the **strategies** employed by the six participants of this study are tactics from which other students (with *fewer obstacles*) could also gain benefit. For example, online classes are growing in popularity among all students.

Further research is suggested among graduates facing a variety of other **obstacles** and employing other solutions to achieve their high school diploma. Research could be conducted to study how facilitation could make a difference for students with parents who are incarcerated or otherwise absent (perhaps deceased). Each senior class has its own unique personality presenting a variety of *circumstances* and **strategies** for solutions. Further research might involve other segments of the school population (such as students with disabilities or specific ethnic cultures). In addition, a similar study could be conducted in other types of high schools (such as inner city or suburban settings) or perhaps larger high schools.

For a quantitative study, further research could be done to make statistical comparisons of credits recovered, credits earned (in the traditional classroom versus through online classes, dual enrollment, or dual credit opportunities) and the influence of the program on attendance rates *prior* to intervention by a graduation coach as compared to *after* intervention by a grad coach.

An interesting study might involve surveying graduation coaches to discover what their background consisted of prior to holding the position. Knowing the demographic background, whether or not the grad coach personally has children of his/her own, whether or not school counseling is part of prior work experience, and the length of time served as an educator could all be enlightening details. In addition, examining the level of satisfaction that a graduation coach receives from providing assistance to an eventual high school graduate would provide fascinating data as well.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol

The following questions are designed to address the overarching question of "What are student perspectives and expectations of the graduation coach's advocacy and facilitation to satisfy their graduation requirements?" The participants in the study are six CHS graduates who received facilitation from a graduation coach while in high school. The research encourages the participant to reply from a retrospective point of view. Two research questions were used to guide this study:

> RQ #1. What were some of the **obstacles** students were able to overcome in order to complete their requirements for a high school diploma?
>
> RQ #2. What were the **characteristics** of the graduation coach's facilitation that students cited as being important to completion of high school requirements?

Questions posed during the interviews:

1. Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach.
2. Describe what was going on in your life at that time.
3. What happened in your grad coach sessions?
4. What were some topics of discussion in your grad coach sessions?
5. In your opinion, were the sessions structured more as academic advisement sessions or personal counseling sessions?
6. What did you gain, if anything, from your grad coach sessions?
7. Describe how the influence was valuable or not valuable.
8. What adjustments could be made to the graduation coach program that would have positively assisted your high school completion?
9. What improvements could be made to the program that would have allowed you to complete your diploma requirements sooner?
10. How has graduating from high school changed your life?

11. Did any of your friends not graduate?

12. How is your life different from their life?

13. Did your parents graduate from high school?   Mother?   Daddy?

                                                             Y   or   N   Y   or   N

14. Was it expected (by your parents) that you would graduate from high school?   Y or N

15. At what point did things turn around for you?

16. At what age did you begin school? _____ years old

17. Have you been retained? Y   or   N   Which grade(s)? _____   How many times? _____

18. What were some factors at school which led to your success? _____

      _____ online classes   _____ credit recovery

      _____ tutoring   _____ flextime to make-up work/retake tests

19. What life events happened to influence your decision to complete high school?

20. What courses or circumstances were most difficult for you?

21. Would an abbreviated schedule have helped your process? Y   or   N

22. How could we have helped your process?

APPENDIX B: Informed Consent

Dear Graduate,

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding your interaction with a graduation coach. It is important that you read this material carefully and then decide if you want to participate. Your participation will involve a personal interview taking approximately one to one and a half hours. A few days after the interview in a follow-up call, you may be asked some questions for clarification or to review summarization notes for accuracy

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to describe the experiences of six to eight graduates who received assistance from a graduation coach at CHS and to explore the potential impact of the graduation coach program on the participants included in the study.   Examining their experiences will provide a rich, thick description of events leading to their successful high school completion.

DURATION: Your participation will involve a personal interview taking approximately one to one and a half hours. A few days after the interview in a follow-up phone call, you may be asked some questions for clarification or to review summarization notes for accuracy.

PROCEDURES: Graduates participating in this research study will be interviewed to obtain their perspective regarding how they overcame obstacles to successfully complete requirements for a regular high school diploma. It is estimated that the interview will take approximately one to one and a half hours to complete, in addition to a follow-up phone call for clarification, as needed, upon review.

AUDIO RECORDING: The interview will be recorded for later review and transcription during analysis of the research. Your signature on this form indicates that you agree for the conversation to be recorded.

POSSIBLE RISKS: While there are no intended risks to participation in this research study, it is feasible that by discussing happenings from your high school experience, some anxiety could result. Should this circumstance arise, the interviewer will bring the interview to a close.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: There are no direct benefits for participation in this study. Graduates will, however, have the occasion to tell their story involving their journey to graduate from high school, offering an opportunity to reveal their strategies for success.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Participation in this research study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not you will take part in this study. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time without giving a reason. You are free to not answer any question(s) you choose. If you decide to take part in this study, your consent will be implied by signing below and beginning the interview process. There are no alternative means to participate in the study. If you elect not to participate in the interview, you will not be included in the research study. Doing so will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: If you have questions regarding the research, you may contact the principal investigator, Gayle Gragg at 931-XXX-XXXX. For any additional questions you may have about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University at 423-439-6054. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the principal investigator on the research team, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423-439-6055 or 423-439-6002.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. Pseudonyms (fictitious names) will be used in an effort to protect each graduate's identity. A copy of the records from this study will be stored by Gayle Gragg at her residence for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. East Tennessee State University personnel particular to this research from the Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department will also have access to the study records. Also ETSU IRB has access to the records.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

_____

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

_____

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT   DATE

_____

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

APPENDIX C: Participant Selection Chart

Upon reviewing 46 CHS graduates who received graduation coach facilitation between 2010 and 2014, four themes prevailed.

At-risk Factor	Number of Graduates Exhibiting the Factor
Behind classmates in credits earned	32
Lack of family involvement	21
Age (older than classmates)	13
Parenting/expecting a child	8

Code Mapping: Three Iterations of Analysis *(to be read from bottom up)*

Code Mapping for Facilitation by Graduation Coach

The central research question is to explore the obstacles that six CHS graduates overcame and the strategies they used through facilitation by their graduation coach to overcome obstacles to graduate from high school. (RQ #1 and 2)

- Back story of student (establishing culture) (Interview questions #1, #2, #13, #14, #16, #17, #19, concept map, and index cards)
- Academic progress (Interview questions #3, #4, #5, #6, #8, #9, #15, #17, #18, #20, #21, concept map, and index cards)
- Personal growth toward completion (Interview questions #2, #5, #6, #8, #10, #12, #14, #15, #19, concept map and index cards)
- Factors contributing to unlikely high school completion? (Interview questions #2, #11, #13, #14, #17, #19, and #20)
- What improved your chances of graduating? (Interview questions #3, #4, #5, #6, #15, and #18)
- Influences (if any) of graduation coach? (Interview questions #1, #3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, and #18)
- Your opinion, what enabled you to graduate? (Interview questions #1, #3, #4, #6, #7, #14, #15, #18, and #19)
- Influences (good and bad) affecting your graduation? (Prioritize index cards)
- Influences (good and bad) affecting high school graduation? (Drawing of concept map)

(Third Iteration: Plan of Action *in* action)

Plan of Action set in place; student begins on-line classes and/or credit recovery, as needed; student continues classes in traditional setting

Continue review as Plan progresses; confirm on-line credits and credit recovery credits have posted on transcript upon completion

(Second Iteration: Enact Plan of Action)

Graduation coach requests on-line class(es); prepares credit recovery paperwork for parent signature, if applicable; answers remaining questions of students on Plan of Action

(First Iteration: Students meet with graduation coach to formulate a Plan of Action)

Initial meeting with student to determine which credits are needed for graduation and the best method to earn those credits (traditional classes, on-line classes, dual enrollment opportunities)

Plan of Action created. Student (if under 18) discusses plan with parent; acquires parent signature; meeting w/ parent, if warranted

Data Sources

- Birthdate order list to determine students most at-risk due to age
- Transcripts to review students needing to be assigned credit recovery
- Transcript review to determine student progress toward required credits for graduation
- Student self-referral (especially in the case of pregnancy)
- Attendance records

APPENDIX E: Interview Transcript with Ashley

Investigator (I)   "Ashley" (A)

(I)--Ashley, I'd like you to describe the circumstances in which you began a relationship with a graduation coach.

(A)—to graduate early

(I)—So your first reason to come to my office and meet with me was because you wanted to graduate early. Why did you want to graduate early? What had happened in your life or that you realized was coming up that caused you to want to graduate early?

(A)—I wanted to be out of school at least a little after I turned 18 and I had a baby on the way and I wanted to be out before he was here.

(I)—OK. You reached that goal, right? You graduated a few months before your baby came, right?

(A)—Yes.

(I)—Describe some things that happened in the grad coach sessions.   When you met with the graduation coach, what were some things that y'all talked about or were there to meet her about?

(A)—We reviewed the classes, and went over what we thought we could do during the summer. . .during the winter.

(I)—So the classes that you would take over the summer. . .what type of classes were those? Did you go to summer school for that? Explain a little about those classes.

(A)—It was online. I did the online English IV during the summer. I did History over the summer. The rest I think I did during school.

(I)—And you had Internet access at your house for some of that, right?

(A)—Yes.

(I)—Your sessions that you had then, would you consider that they were more along the lines of academic advisement rather than personal counseling. . .you talked more about school things rather than maybe issues that were going on outside of school, or at your house?

(A)—More about school things.

(I)—OK. . .Academic advisement. What do you think you gained from meeting with a graduation coach?

(A)—To graduate early.

(I)—So you reached your goal of graduating early?

(A)—Yes.

(I)—Did you think that that would have happened if you hadn't have met?

(A)—No.

(I)—OK. What adjustments could be made to the graduation coach program that would have positively assisted you getting out?

(A)—I think everything went pretty good.

(I)—So you were pleased? Great! That's nice to know. I really appreciate that.

(A)—I don't think it could have been done any better.

(I)—Good. Were you able to get the online classes appropriately at the time that you needed them to reach the goal. . . the timeline that you set for yourself?

(A)—Yes, everything was done ahead of time. I got everything done before . . . I graduated ahead of time.

(I)—Ahead of time! Yes, I do remember that. Good! Refresh my memory. . .your due date for your baby was coming up when?

(A)—January 10th.

(I)—And you finished your progam in????

(A)—October.

(I)—Probably, if I remember correctly, we were shooting for December graduation, weren't we?

(A)—Yes.

(I)—Yes. You were able to graduate a couple of months early. I was excited about that. I think you set a good example for other people that were wanting to pursue something similar with a program. I don't know if you had conversations with other people that might have wanted to be like you. . .to get your program finished. Do remember having anyone ask you about it?

(A)—Yes. Afterwards. . .after I graduated, I had a couple of other people ask me that were doing online classes.

(I)—How has graduating from high school changed your life?

(A)—I get to spend time with my son; work; and now starting to go to college.

(I)—And what do you think you're going to study now?

(A)—Pharmaceutical tech.

(I)--Did any of your friends not graduate?

(A)—No. . .they all did.

(I)—Did your mother graduate from high school?

(A)—Yes

(I)—Did your daddy graduate from high school?

(A)—No

(I)—Was it expected (by your parents) that you would graduate from high school?

(A)—With me getting pregnant it was "iffy." I knew I would graduate either way. But they didn't know if I could.

(I)—So, did they encourage you to, but when you realized you were pregnant, they were going to be understanding if it didn't work out that way?

(A)—I don't know if they were going to be understanding. . .

(I)—Describe to me what. . .without maybe going into specific conversations that were at your house, but what were some things that they mentioned to you about it?

(A)—They were just clear. . .they just wanted me to finish high school.

(I)—So when you did finish high school, and even a couple of months ahead of the timeline that you and I had set, were they good. . .
(A)—They were excited. They were happy.

(I)—Were they??? Good!

(A)—They were really happy. Everybody was. . .in my family. They were "iffy" about me graduating because I was pregnant, but I set to graduate. I was going to do it!!!!

(I)—Yes, I remember. So at what point. . .when you were in high school--or maybe before you even entered high school—what turned things around for you? I think you did answer one of my questions--that you did have some credit recovery to do? So you did have to back up and. . .

(A)—Freshman year.

(I)—So freshman year was a turnaround year. What. . .can you remember some things?

(A)—I was being lazy in school. Hanging out with my friends. Not paying attention to classes at all.

(I)—OK.

(A)--I wasn't worried about graduating.

(I)—Umm, hmm. Because that was years down the pike.

(A)—Yea.

(I)-- . .so why did that matter?

(A)—So I messed up my whole freshman year. And then I ended up. . .freshman/sophomore, junior, a little bit of my senior year—I finished up what I messed up freshman.

(I)—OK. So if you were discussing it with people that were now 9th and 10th graders. . . any words of wisdom???

(A)—Yea. Pay attention in class. It ain't that hard. . .work's really easy. . .if you just pay attention.

(I)—And keep up with the work?

(A)—Yea. If I could go back to get my diploma again, it would be so easy. I just wish I would paid attention. But, I ended up graduating either way, I just wish I could have got better grades . . .

(I)—Yea. I can see that.   At what age did you begin school? Were you 5? A September birthday? You weren't in Tennessee at the time, were you?

(A)—Yea. . .

(I)—You were at our elementary school?

(A)—Yea.

(I)—So you were probably. . .5???

(A)—Yea. I don't know what the age limit is. . .I was either 5 or 6.

(I)—You were older than the other kids in your class, basically, because. . .

(A)—I started with my class but I think during either elementary or middle, I ended up staying back a year school.

(I)—Do you remember what year that was?

(A)—I wanna say it was the beginning of middle school. Sixth grade, maybe?

(I)—What were some of the factors that led to your success in graduating from high school? I'm gonna name some things and you can say "yes" or "no." Online classes?

(A)—Yes.

(I)—Credit recovery?

(A)—Yea.

(I)—Flextime or our home room time to make-up work and retake tests?

(A)—Yes.

(I)—Tutoring? Did you get any tutoring from either classmates or teachers? Did you get extra help?

(A)—Yes. Our class president helped me with some things. . .credit recovery.

(I)—Oh really? Good! And this was somebody who was willing to give up their time to help you? Because you didn't pay that person to help you, did you, right?

(A)—She was one of my friends.

(I)—Good. And we touched on this just a few minutes ago, but let's take the conversation a little further. . .what life events happened to influence your decision to complete high school?

(A)—Getting pregnant.

(I)—OK. And, why was that like an "ahhh-ha" moment for you? "Oh, now I'm pregnant so now I know I've gotta graduate from high school." What were some of the things you thought during that timeframe?

(A)—It changed a lot. I wanted to make sure that I was gonna be out of high school so where I wouldn't have to do the struggle of having the baby and going to school. I was afraid it was going to mess me up with school.

(I)—OK. Because, had you stayed the course and graduated with your classmates. . .that timeframe, you would have had the baby in January and then you would have had to continue to May graduate from high school.

(A)—When he was a baby. . .yes. It would have been a struggle. Especially with me having a C-section.

(I)—OK. Your delivery with him, you would have probably had to taken a little longer than just a few weeks to recover from and you would have had to be sitting in the hard chairs and that kind of thing.

(A)—That would have been exhausting. I was tired staying up all night with the baby.

(I)—Yes, you know, I've heard other girls say that. . .that you don't realize how much your sleep is interrupted.

(A)—Yes, I used to stay up—sometimes it was just because I was scared. . .because he was a newborn and was my first kid—I used to just stay up all night long and wait until he woke up. And then when my boyfriend came home, that's when I would go to sleep, and he was tired, too. And I would go, "I've been up all night. . .you stay up for a little bit."

(I)—So were you just watching to make sure he was breathing?

(A)—I was scared. I had my own place; so I wasn't with my mom.

(I)—OK. Back to the academic side. . .for things that happened. . .what courses or circumstances were most difficult for you? You mentioned the baby was born after you actually graduated. . .so the early stages of your pregnancy?

(A)—Morning sickness! And me being tired all the time. . .the entire pregnancy. But the online classes helped a lot, though, because I could just do it online if I wasn't asleep. . . in the morning. . . and got up in the afternoon. . .I could work on them any time.

(I)—So time management became a factor for you with that?

(A)—Yea.

(I)—Would an abbreviated schedule helped your process? Meaning, if you had been able to check out early from school during any of that timeframe. Did you checkout early or did you stay all day? I know you were trying to pack that in and get that done.

(A)—Monday, (not Tuesday), Wednesday, (not Thursday), and Friday

(I)—And so, thanks for refreshing my memory because you were one of the first people we tried the abbreviated schedule with and it worked real well for you, didn't it?

(A)—Yes.

(I)—What else could we have done here at CHS to help your process?

(A)—I don't know. I think everything went really good. I was surprised to graduate early. . .to get everything finished.

(I)—Yes, because thinking back to your freshman year, you did have some "do over" things. . .some things that you had to get caught back up on.

(A)—Yea. The credit recovery. I caught back up on them pretty good, too.

(I)—Yes. I think time management was a big deal for you, realizing that you were under the gun because you wanted to get it done before the baby came.

(A)—I started working right when I graduated from here. In October I went to work in a daycare. It was a lot of work! I couldn't have done that still in school.

(I)—OK, I've got a couple of things that basically is gonna be your thoughts, necessarily.
I want you to draw a circle in the middle of the page. It's a concept map. . .it's just what we call it in college. I want you to put yourself in the middle of the page.

(A)—My name?

(I)--You can just put "me." And then I want you to draw the people. . .that were key people that helped you get through high school.

(A) [*Drawing the map*]

(I)—It doesn't matter how neat they are. I just want to see the closeness. . .the proximity, that you put toward the inner circle. That's what this activity is for.

(A)—Can I put myself?

(I)—Un hun.

(A)—Mrs. Lxxxx helped with credit recovery. Mrs. Cxxxx helped when I needed help with math. You helped with everything. Jxxxx helped us a lot, too. . .and I helped myself.

(I)—Yes, you did help yourself! I will say. . .Yes, ma'am. . .you did help yourself!!!!!!!

(A)—*hahaha!*

(I)—Now I have some index cards. Some may apply to your circumstance; some may not. I have index cards that have circumstances written on them. I think there are eight circumstances that I have written on here. Choose those that were factors within your situation. I have some

blank index cards that if some of these circumstances don't apply to you, then we can write up some that are applicable to you. So, out of these index cards or any index card you would make for yourself, I want to know the priority of what you think was the biggest factor in your situation.

(A)—That one. . .

(I)—OK. . ."pregnancy or parenting a child" is the first one.

(A)—That one. . .

(I)—And your "failed credits"

(A)—these two—*"not active in clubs or volunteer work"* and *"absenteeism."* I wasn't active in anything.

(I)—So if you had a "do over", you might be more active in maybe a club or two at school? Maybe do some volunteer work?

(A)—Un hun.

(I)--And in your defense, you didn't have a lot of time for volunteer work because we had some stuff we had to catch up on.

(A)—Yea, I know. My classes.

(I)—And absenteeism. . .

(A)—Yea, that was my freshman year.

(I)—And was that because you just didn't like school?

(A)—I was just being young. If I could have "do over", I would do it again. No, I wouldn't miss school again. I would come to school and do my work and have better grades.

(I)—And there may not be anything else that's written out here that affected your situation.

(A)—No

(I)—Is there any of your circumstances that you want to write up a card for? Feel free to if you do.

(A)—No. I can't think.

(I)—Can you think of anything else that maybe I didn't ask you that you think would be important for me to include in my write-up. . .about your circumstances?

(A)—Not really. It helped me a lot; graduating early.

(I)—Um hun. I see that it did. So probably within the next couple of weeks, I'll e-mail you a copy of the summary of what we talked about today and you can just type in or point out if I've misunderstood something or misinterpreted something. And then if I need to talk with you again then we will. Does that suit your approval?

(A)—That's fine.

(I)—OK. Thank you--thanks for your time today.

Investigator (I)   Brianna (B)

(I) Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach.

(B) Well, I was struggling in several classes so I came to you and told you that I needed help. And throughout the year I met with you quite a lot of times. And you helped me every time.

(I) OK So what was going on in your life at that time? You were struggling in some classes and we worked through the academic side of it, but were there other things going on, other factors?

(B) Well, I was pregnant and that could have slowed me down. And some of the classes. . .I just needed someone to actually break it down and show me how it was worked.

(I) So what are some things that happened in your grad coach sessions? You just mentioned that we broke some of the assignments down. . .and some of the math problems down so that you could understand them and work through them.

(B) Yes. Math and Algebra, really, and Chemistry was not my thing. Actually, Mrs. Cxxxx, I believe, helped me with a lot of math online and Mr. Gxxxx was actually a lot of help with my Chemistry. He would let me come after class and explain to me what I was not understanding.

(I) Very good. So you were able to have other staff members to help you with some classes, in addition to the time you were actually in the class.

(B) Yes.

(I) And you had classes that were traditional classes where you go in a class with 20 or 25 other students and the teacher teaches it. And you also had some online classes, is that right?

(B) Yes. I don't remember exactly what all I've taken online, but I have taken a few classes online and I know you've stayed after a lot and helped me with a lot of my online work. And my classes that I took every day, and presentations that I had to do, you've helped me get that together, also.

(I) Well, I can remember that when we were working on some things, especially your presentation, sometimes being in front of a group of other students or a class was not really something that you looked forward to doing.

(B) No. And we had an option, actually. I can remember, you had helped me do the whole presentation and then I had an option to either do it in front of the class or just turn it in and if you hadn't have pushed me to [haha] do it in front of the class, too, I wouldn't have. I would have just taken the points off [hahahaha].

(I) Well, you know, sometimes you need somebody just to give you that. . .first of all, that extra push, and second of all, an extra vote of confidence.

(B) Right.

(I) So in our grad coach sessions, not necessarily when I was helping you with a class or breaking down an assignment for you, let's talk a little bit more about some of the planning that we did in the grad coach sessions. As I remember, we looked at what credits you had already completed and the ones you had left to complete. So talk a little bit about the planning of the classes that were coming up. Like. . . maybe, not necessarily your schedule, but where we talked about which class we want to do online. . .which class we might could do some credit recovery for. So talk about some things we talked about in our grad sessions.

(B) Well, I know that we had talked about which classes I would rather sit in and maybe and go "hand on hand learning" and be able to ask questions in class and the other classes that I took online, you know, you would have to be able to be my person to go to to understand the work that I'm not understanding.

(I) So, overall, when we did meet, would you consider that our sessions were mostly academic advisement in nature or were personal counseling sessions?

(B) No, I've gotten so much help. . .like academically. . .I mean, I've actually got so much more confidence since all that we've went through, as far as each time I met with you.

(I) And I've seen that. I've seen your confidence boost and you blossom as a young lady as we had talked. And my next question was what did you gain from your grad coach sessions and I think you just answered that. The confidence level was. . .

(B) Yes. . .

(I) . . .good. So would you consider that influence valuable or not valuable?

(B) Yes, very valuable.

(I) What adjustments could be made to the grad coach program that would have positively assisted your high school completion?

(B) That's a tough one [haha]. . .everything went as good as it could be, as far as I'm concerned.

(I) Can you think of any improvements that could be made to the program that would have allowed you to complete your diploma requirements sooner?
(B) No.

(I) I think we had a pretty solid plan

(B) um hmmm

(I) for you to get finished because—remind me, you had your little girl when you were a sophomore, is that right?

(B) Yea

(I) And so, had you stayed in high school, two more full years after that, then that would have made you what age when you graduated from high school? Because you graduated at. . .were you 19?

(B) I was a year behind.

(I) Yes.

(B) 'Cause I had failed 7th grade.

(I) How has graduating from high school changed your life?

(B) I have so much more options in life.

(I) Let's talk about that just a little bit more. . .so tell me what kind of options? Tell me more about the options that you have in life.

(B) I have more options as to where to work and going to college. And being able to become to who I want to be and who I need to be for my children, also. That's another thing that I was actually wanting to talk to you about today whenever we met is what I might want to. . .I know my options, but I need a little advice to what I would like to go back to school for this fall.

(I) OK. I can help you with that. [pause] Did any of your friends not graduate from high school?

(B) There's a lot of them, I'm sure that didn't come as far as graduating. But I know a lot that were meeting with you also that has got to graduate. . .I'm sure they didn't think they would, just like I didn't until we met with you and got, I guess, more confidence that we could and actually have somebody pushing us to go farther and want more for ourselves, also.

(I) So, in your personal circle of friends, most of your friends did graduate from high school?

(B) Yes.

(I) Yes. OK. I've got a few questions here. . .some of these questions you can just answer "yes or no" to. Did your parents graduate from high school? Did your mother, yes or no?

(B) No.

(I) Did your daddy, yes or no?

(B) No.

(I) Was it expected by your parents that you would graduate from high school?

(B) Yes, they also pushed me and I know that whenever I would go home and know that I was having to meet back up with you, either on the weekend or after school, that they were glad that I had that extra help. And they were confident that I would graduate.

(I) I remember especially after your little girl was born that you mother was willing to help you if you needed extra help with the child so that we could meet after school to work on your studies or to redo a project, or whatever. I do remember that she was very helpful in babysitting for you.

(B) Yes. Yes, there were a lot of times that she had to do that so that we could . . .that I could come back to school [haha].

(I) Yes. And so at what point do you think things turned around for you? You mentioned just a minute ago that after meeting in some grad coach sessions and we set a plan for you, you got the confidence realizing that you could graduate from high school. Sometimes at some points when you doubted that, you still got the confidence from our sessions that you would graduate from high school. . .but at what point do you think things turned around for you?

(B) I know I came to you and we talked about my options with the online classes and how many credits I needed and how I could get them accomplished. And when you actually broke it down and showed me what all I had to do and what all I needed to pick up in, and I knew that I could come to you at any time and ask you for help on something or where I was slacking in then I knew that you would tell me. And before that I didn't have that, I didn't really know I was failing until I had got the failing grade.

(I) Um hmm.

(B) And it's just a lot of help having someone to go to . . .to help you. And then whenever I didn't understand something I knew I could come to you and you would help me the best you could.

(I) So when you began school, like in kindergarten, you were at the same age as everyone else, your parents didn't hold you back a year, or whatever, because if I remember, you have an October birthday?

(B) Yes.

(I) So you started with everybody else that was your same age, right?

(B) Yes.
(I) Now you mentioned just a few minutes ago that you were retained. . .I believe you said 7th grade?

(B) Yes.

(I) Is that correct?

(B) That's right.

(I) I'm going to name some factors, and you can add some, if you would like. What are some factors at school which led to your success? Online classes?

(B) Yes. That's a huge factor.

(I) Credit recovery?

(B) Yes.

(I) Using home room time or study hall time to make up work or retake tests?

(B) Yes.

(I) Tutoring and extra help?

(B) Yes.

(I) And did you get most of that from staff members? I know you've named some people earlier in our conversation. But, what about students? Did you have some friends that you worked on some projects with, or was most of your help from staff members?
(B) I know, as far as Spanish. I had a hard time with Spanish, also. So Mrs. Bxxxx did help me with my chapter class and through study halls as best she could. .

(I) Um hmmm.

(B) . . .and on all of my other classes, I really just came to you because I felt comfortable.

(I) Um hmmm.

(B) And as far as going to teachers, you don't feel like they're going to break it down you really want it. . .to get what they're saying. And I knew that you could. So you helped me through a lot. Spanish. . .that was a hard one. Mrs. Bxxxx had to help me.
(I) Right. And I haven't had instruction in Spanish. . .I haven't had Spanish classes so I wouldn't have been your "go to" person in that. But sometimes, it's helpful to have another adult in the building to encourage you to go speak to a teacher and ask for extra help. When. . .you mentioned just a few minutes ago sometimes you don't realize you're failing a class until the grade has already come through.

(B) Right. . . and with asking for help, and knowing that you would come tell me, "hey, you're slacking". . .I knew, even though I turned in a test and wasn't sure about it, if it showed up on my

grade then you'd be like. . ."you need to see what you're doing and see what you can do to pull your grade up." And I knew I couldn't fail the classes I was taking and still be taking online classes.

(I) Right. . .because we had to get some of that checked off so that we could have room in your daily schedule to take some online classes. And also, I think during the time that you were in high school, our PowerSchool program, where we could click on and see what assignments had been turned in and see what grade you got in those assignments. . .

(B) Yea.

(I) . . .on the computer.

(B) That was a lot of help

(I) Um hmmm. That is a huge help.

(B) A lot of confidence, too, knowing that you made a good/passing grade and that encouraged you to keep going with it. Because if you were failing, you're not feeling like you're getting through.

(I) . . .or you're just spinning your wheels all the time, too.

(B) Um hmm.

(I) What life events happened to influence your decision to complete high school?

(B) Well, having my daughter was a big thing to me. I mean, I want her to get through high school and go to college and I plan to further my schooling, too. That's one of the things I was gonna talk to you about today. . .

(I) Um hmm. OK. . .So it's important to you that you set an example for your daughters.

(B) [shakes head yes]

(I) OK. And so, a life event that happened for you while you were in high school is that you did have her. And so that was something for you to realize that there was somebody else in life that could benefit if you graduated from high school.
(B) Right.

(I) OK. I think you mentioned that math and Chemistry were tough for you. What courses, or maybe even other circumstances, and we talked about the presentation that maybe you weren't real excited doing in front of others. . .what are some courses and circumstances that were most difficult for you?

(B) Chemistry and math were my hardest two in high school. Those and Spanish were my tough things to get through as far as actually classes that I was taking.

(I) I realize that, especially after you had your daughter, that we pretty much filled your day up. But you were able to graduate, basically a year early. So I'm not sure if an abbreviated schedule would have helped your process or not because of the way that we loaded your day. But can you see how an abbreviated schedule might would have helped you in some circumstances. . .meaning, we have some students that check out at 2:00 and even now, we have our schedule set where there are a handful of students who just come on Monday, Wednesday's, and Friday's, and they have Tuesday and Thursday. Most of them work. . .

(B) That would be a good option if you had a job.

(I) Um hmm.

(B) But if you're really trying to get through high school and. . . like I did. . .to finish.

(I) Um hmm.

(B) Then it was good for me to fill my day up and get through the year. . .

(I) Right.

(B) . . .and be able to graduate.

(I) So probably, in your case, an abbreviated schedule wouldn't have been something that would have been a lucrative thing for you to consider because you were trying to get as much in your day as you could?

(B) Yea.

(I) . . .because you're abbreviated part was gonna be you were graduating months early, rather than going the same. . .regular four years and having either some days off in between or getting out earlier in the day. So your choice was to graduate months earlier?

(B) Yes.

(I) How could we have helped your process? What's something else we could have done to have helped your process?

(B) Um. . .I believe we done all we could. I mean--I feel great about how things turned out taking all my classes and the help that I got.

(I) OK. I've got some index cards. And I've got some circumstances on these index cards. And I've got some blank index cards so if there's some circumstances that apply to you that aren't on these eight index cards, we can make new index cards. But here are some

circumstances and which ones apply to you or were factors in you graduating from high school? Or some obstacles that you had to overcome to graduate from high school.

(B) OK. . .I was. . .pregnancy was part of me.

(I) OK

(B) Um. . .failed credits.

(I) OK

(B) Self-confidence would be another one.

(I) OK.

(B) And I wasn't active in clubs. . .but I don't believe that would have affected me to graduate.
(I) If you had a "do over", would you be more active in clubs and things going on here in school, or did you not have really a personal interest to do that anyway?

(B) No, I think I'm too much of a shy person.

(I) OK.

(B) That was the only reason I didn't.

(I) OK.

(B) But I do think that being in clubs and maybe being in a sport that is a great thing if you're not a shy person.

(I) Un hun. Very good. . . this is our last activity. In college, we have something that we call a concept map. And I've got kind of an example here to show you. And I want you to draw a circle with yourself in the middle and label yourself as "me." Just draw it free hand or I have some circle shapes laying out there. It doesn't matter. It's up to you. Drawing like spider arms out. . .show some things that were factors in you graduating from high school. Maybe obstacles that you overcame or things that helped you. You mentioned some tutoring. . .some extra help that you got. You mentioned some teachers that maybe even helped you after class. . .those kinds of things. You mentioned you had a daughter. So draw some spider arms out there to include some things.
(B) OK. And that includes some things that we have just talked about???

(I) Yes! Definitely! Yes, you can!!!

(B) {drawing concept map}

(I) OK. Let's see what you've got so far. You've got yourself in the middle. And you think it

was helpful to meet after school for extra help. Someone pushing you to strive for more. Showing you what you are capable of doing; and also having your daughter made you want more. Higher standards. . .you wanted a high school diploma. . .OK. So here, I know that you and I met several times after school and some of these things that I helped you with and you mentioned earlier that you got help with your Chemistry and your Algebra. So the meeting after school and being pushed to strive for more and showing you what you were capable of doing, do you think that was mainly through the graduation coach program or do you associate those three things with someone else here at school?

(B) No. I actually feel like, ugh. . .and not to be just bragging on you. . .but I actually feel like I really wouldn't have graduated had it not been for you, because the teachers, they were good as far as teaching the class, but to know that you've got somebody to go to and they'll help you no matter what, and even coming back after school to help in anyway, that they will make sure that you graduate; that's how I felt that you done. I really don't know that I would have graduated if it hadn't been for you. Because I feel like before we met the first time I was at the point to where I was just ready to go ahead and quit and then after I realized there was someone that was there to help, then, you know, I knew that I could do it.

(I) And I remember some of the early meetings that we had and that when we found answers for ways that we could add on an online class or that we could do something through credit recovery rather than repeating the class, I can just remember how that would brighten your spirit and how you realized that there were options that you didn't know about before you came to grad coach sessions.

(B) Yes. I didn't even know about the online classes. . .that they were an option. And I always wondered what credit recovery was and then whenever you told me that I could be in that and do online classes, also. And I realized that I could actually get done on time. Because I did look at it before I met with you that I was never gonna get through high school. Because I didn't know how to do what I was doing every day. And I was behind anyway. And then after you got me the online classes, you were staying after school to make sure you helped me get that done and whatever help I needed in my daily classes, also, you was there to help me with that, too.

(I) I'm glad I was able to help you because I do value education and I think that everyone in Tennessee has a right to free and appropriate public education, especially to graduate from high school. And I knew you could do it, and I wanted to help you . . .I wanted to be the one to help you.

(B) Thank you for all you've done.

(I) Is there anything else you would like to add to the interview? I don't have any more questions.

(B) No.

(I) Alright, well then this concludes the interview. Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX G: Interview Transcript with Candy

Investigator (I)   Candy (C)

(I) Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach.

(C) I started my relationship with my graduation coach in order to graduate early because I was becoming a teen mom.

(I) So what are some things that happened in your graduation coach sessions?

(C)   How I could take online classes and graduate a complete year early.

(I) So an academic plan was set for you in your grad coach sessions?

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) And, for example, after that first grad coach session and the plan was set in place, and we realized that you were going to be having the baby, then the upcoming sessions, you would review those? You would come back and I would review those with you?

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) And, as I recall, as you earned credits, we looked ahead at what the next courses should be and we strategically chose the online classes and decided which might be most appropriate for you online, as opposed to sitting in a classroom, is that correct?

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) And then when we talked about some of the classes, what were some of the subjects that you thought might be best if you sat in an actual class where a teacher could specifically answer your questions? What were some of those subjects?

(C) English III and Geometry.

(I) And do you think that was a wise decision to do English III and Geometry in that fashion?

(C) At the time and situation, yes, ma'am.

(I) Of the sessions that we had--when we talked—did you consider those more academic advisement, in nature, or personal counseling sessions?

(C) Kinda like personal.

(I) OK. So what did you gain, if anything, from the grad coach sessions?

(C) Just that I could do it . . .and that I needed to keep my mind set that I was gonna get through high school.

(I) So. . .it was a confidence factor?

(C) Yes

(I) So. . .when we talked, and I was able to remind you and keep you focused on which classes we were going to do next and check off what you had completed. . .are you saying that that was a confidence builder?

(C) Yes.

(I) So would you consider that valuable or not valuable?

(C) Valuable

(I) What adjustments could be made to the graduation coach program that would have positively assisted your high school completion?

(C) No changes. No, I think everything that the graduation coach did was correct and helped

(I) So. . .you're not suggesting any changes. . .that you thought the plans that were made were correct and were very helpful. . .am I gathering what you said there?

(C) Yes, ma'am

(I)   OK. How has graduating from high school changed your life?

(C) How has graduating changed my life?

(I) Yes. . .if you had not graduated from high school, how would your life be different? Or would it be different?

(C) It would be very different. It would be like my children, some day, wouldn't feel the need to graduate "Because Mommy didn't!"

(I) Right. . .

(C) Mommy graduated high school to show her kids that that what's they were supposed to do.

(I) So a good motivator for your to graduate was an example for the child you were expecting and other children that are on the way. . .not just necessarily for yourself . . .is that what I'm gathering?

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) Did any of your friends not graduate from high school?

(C) I don't think so. . .I think all my friends graduated.

(I) OK. . .and I would guess that they did. . .that was one of my questions. Now some of the next questions I have are basically "yes or no" questions. Did your parents graduate from high school? Your mother, yes or no?

(C) Yes.

(I) And your daddy, yes or no?

(C) No ma'am.

(I) Was it expected by your parents that you would graduate from high school?

(C) Yes, ma'am. They did expect me to graduate.

(I) At what point do you think things turned around for you?

(C) I don't understand the question.

(I) At what point did things turn around for you. . .like when you came to me that you were expecting the baby and we made the plan, do you think that's the point when things began to get in place for you. . .and start moving. ..

(C) Yes, ma'am. And when I started to see that I was getting done is when it started to change.

(I) So when you could see light at the end of the tunnel and you could see some accomplishments and success and you could see that you were getting finished, then that's really when your viewpoint changed? Or you felt relieved? Or how. . .describe that to me.

(C) I felt like when I was seeing light at the end of the tunnel and getting excited about graduation. . .

(I) So what are some factors that led to your success? Online classes, yes or no?

(C) Yes.

(I) Tutoring? Did you get any tutoring for either your actual classes or your online classes, yes or no?

(C) Yes.

(I) And was that tutoring from faculty members, people that worked here, or students?

(C) Yes, it was from faculty.

(I) Faculty. . .and do you remember who some of those people were?

(C) Mr. Wxxxx was my math.

(I) What do you think about that?

(C) He's an excellent tutor.

(I) Yea, he's awesome in math, [haha] isn't he?

(C) He knows what he's doing!!!! [haha]

(I) He is really good. . .and what about Flextime or home room time . . .to make up anything you needed to make up? Was that useful for you. . .or that wasn't a factor?

(C) Yes, that was my time that I worked on my online classes.

(I) You had a full schedule. . .you didn't have a whole lot of opportunity at school to work on some of your things, did you?

(C) Yes, I was completely a seven-period day.

(I) You had Internet access either at your house, your boyfriend's house, or somewhere away from school, right?

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) Would you say that your pregnancy was the biggest life event that happened to influence your decision to complete high school?

(C) It definitely helped, but I was going to graduate regardless.

(I) So you were going to graduate anyway whether you had had your baby—when you had your baby, that's what made you want to graduate early, though, right?

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) I'm assuming since you got some math tutoring that that's probably some of your most difficult. . .but for example, what courses or circumstances were most difficult for you?

(C) English IV was difficult. Algebra II was difficult.

(I) . . .and those courses are difficult for a lot of people. We consider Algebra II probably the most difficult course that everybody has to take. What about any circumstances, like, just remembering back after the baby was born and maybe when she was teething, you had some sleepless nights, or you seemed really tired, but you just kept going forward. So, what would you say were some circumstances that maybe were a challenge for you?

(C) Just being up late and being a full-time student and a full-time parent was difficult. I was a teen parent, living with my boyfriend and my child, and basically a wife, too.

(I) You pulled it off, too, girl!!!

(C) I sure did!!!!

(I) [hahaha] How could we have helped your process? Can you think of anything now that we've talked a little bit? I know I asked a question similar to that just a few minutes ago regarding the grad coach program, but what about our process here at CHS, in general—can you think of anything?

(C) Not off the top of my head.

(I) If you think of anything over the next few days, we can add it later. . . [pause] Thinking about the index cards that you see, you can determine if they were factors in your circumstance. If they're not factors in your circumstance, that's quite alright. We can make up cards, if necessary. What were defining factors?

(C) Definitely parenting a child.

(I) OK.

(C) Absenteeism.

(I) OK.

(C) I had support at home. But I moved out so it wasn't the same.

(I) . . .so let me just ask a question or two about that. . .and if you choose not to answer it, it's quite alright. OK?

(C) Alright.

(I) You mentioned that you were with your boyfriend and had your child. . .so when the support was different, was he still encouraging you to finish school?

(C) Definitely. . .he was in school himself.

(I) Yes. . .just wanted to confirm that. . . but, it's just different when you're with your parents, don't you think?

(C) Yes. Your parents are hounding you and your boyfriend isn't.

(I) You're boyfriend is not to be a parent. He's supposed to be an equal. So I can understand that.

(C) . . .right.

(I) So out of the other cards, were there any more that were important?

(C) Not so much.

(I) So then we've got three cards of the existing cards, and if we want to make any more, we can. But your first one was your pregnancy and parenting the child, absenteeism, and little support at home, after you moved out.

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) OK. Now the concept map. You're in the center of the map.

(C) Yes ma'am.

(I) So thinking about it like a spider arm. What are some arms that stretch out? What are some factors?

(C) Parents.

(I) And they were a positive factor?

(C) Yes.

(I) Alright what else?

(C) And my boyfriend, of course.

(I) And he was a positive factor?

(C) Yes, that's right.

(I) Alright.

(C) And Ms. Gragg, of course, my graduation coach.

(I) OK, your graduation coach. Alright. You mentioned some tutoring help from Mr. Wxxxx, what about that. . .would you put him on the map?

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) And what about your daughter? Would you put her on the map?

(C) Oh, yes, she definitely kept me going. Both physical and mental!!!

(I) Both physically and mentally. ..

(C) . . .right.

(I) . . .good answer!!!!!!! Ok, can you think of anything else you'd put on the map? Household chores?

(C) Un hun. Responsibilities. I had *many* of those. . .and still do!

(I) Yes, and I think you're doing well. I commend both of you! Is there anything else you wanna put on the map?

(C) I think that pretty much covers it!

(I) I'll type a summary of what we talked about today, and the concept map, and send it to you as a Word document in an e-mail, and specifically if there's something maybe I misunderstood--I didn't hear it right, make sure you clarify it for me, OK?

(C) OK.

(I) Is there anything else you want to add to the interview that maybe I didn't ask that was important regarding you graduating from high school?

(C) Just being helped as much as I was. . .just everybody. All the teachers from CHS knew I was graduating early and knew that I was a teen mom, and they would just throw in a helping hand whenever they could.

(I) That's nice to know, ya know. Because you would think everybody would wanna do that and be that way, but you know, it's not always that way. And I think that everybody here just wrapped their love around you, and helped you through it, you know?

(C) Yes, ma'am.

(I) I don't have anything else to add; if you don't have anything else to add, then that concludes our interview.

(C) OK. . .thank you.

Investigator (I)   "David" (D)

(I) Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach. What was going on in your life—the reason you started meeting with the graduation coach?

(D) My grades were really bad and I got away from school to focus more on work and outside things.

(I) So you started meeting with the graduation coach and what were some of the things that you talked about in those grad coach sessions, especially the early ones?

(D) What my goals outside of school in the future would be, how I wanted to accomplish those goals, and where I wanted to go in life. . .and how to get there.

(I) So when we met about those things, then we also set an academic plan, right?

(D) Yes.

(I) In that academic plan, what were some of the things you had to do? Because, as I recall, you were behind in your credits when we started meeting.

(D) Un huh.

(I) We have things that we can offer here at this high school like credit recovery, online classes, tutoring from teachers or students--maybe your grade or whatever, so what were some things that worked for you to reach those goals?

(D) Online class was probably the best because it worked around my schedule. So I could work and come home and knock out some of the online class whenever I had the chance to.

(I) OK. And where were you working during most of your high school time?

(D) At a logging company.

(I) OK. . .so most of that would have been through daylight hours, so with the online class being something you could access 24/7, that was probably a definite benefit for you.

(D) Yes.

(I) What were some of the other things regarding your academics? I do remember that the online classes went real well for you, especially over the Christmas holidays. Did you have to do some credit recovery?

(D) Yes. I was in credit recovery almost every year. It helped me get to where online classes were actually an option.

(I) OK. In your opinion, were your sessions when you and I talked over your academic plans and a few things that were going on outside of school, were the sessions when we met mainly academic advisement or personal counseling, in your opinion?

(D) Academic

(I) And I agree. I think they were mostly academic advisement, as well. So what did you gain from these sessions. We met multiple times. . .what did you gain?

(D) It was good to kinda get a foundation of where I needed to be and how I needed to get there. And it was nice to know that somebody actually cared if I made it through school or not.

(I) OK. So you would describe that influence as valuable?

(D) Yes

(I) What adjustments could be made to the graduation coach program that would have positively assisted your high school completion?

(D) I don't think that there was much. I think it's a real good program and I know it's helped me out and I feel like it's pretty much solid.

(I) OK. I know that the program got started while you were already in high school and maybe if the meetings that you and I had could have started a few months earlier, it might would have benefited you. . .but I agree and I think you mentioned just a few minutes ago that the online classes are really what spurred you on?

(D) Yes

(I) How has graduating from high school changed your life?

(D) It's opened up the doors to better jobs and a lot of confidence when speaking with clients and other people you're trying to show your work on the business force.

(I) Did any of your friends not graduate from high school?

(D) Yes.

(I) And how is your life different from theirs? Is it different from theirs?

(D) Yes, a lot different.

(I) Do you think your job is better than theirs?

(D) Yes.

(I) Well, you mentioned your confidence earlier. Do you think your confidence as you go about your daily living is possibly better than theirs?

(D) Yes. Because I know that I achieved something during my time in high school. . .and no regrets going forward.

(I) Good! I've got a few questions to ask you. . .Did your mother graduate from high school, yes or no?

(D) No.

(I) Did your daddy graduate from high school, yes or no?

(D) No.

(I) Was it expected by your parents that you'd graduate from high school?

(D) Umm, yes.

(I) At what point in high school or in middle school did things turn around for you? I think you mentioned that just a few minutes ago. . .when you were able to do online classes, do you still think that was your turning point?

(D) Yes

(I) Do you remember how old you were when you started kindergarten?

(D) I don't know the exact year, no.

(I) But you started at the same age that everybody was supposed to start; your parents didn't hold you back a year or anything like that, right?

(D) No

(I) Were you retained in school in any of your grades?

(D) Yes.

(I) Do you remember. . .do you know which grades it was or what time? What year?

(D) Yes, it was 4th grade and 7th grade.

(I) You mentioned that online classes were a factor which led to your success, what about credit recovery, would that be "yes"?

(D) Yes.

(I) What about using our homeroom or our Flextime to catch up on work, make-up work, and retake tests? Do you think that was valuable?

(D) Yes.

(I) And did you get any tutoring from either any classmates or teachers here? Or after you got going you didn't need any help?

(D) I got tutoring.

(I) Do you remember if it was from a student or from a faculty member?

(D) Both.

(I) What life events happened to influence your decision to complete high school? Why did you want to complete high school?

(D) College. Better job. And when I start a family to be able to show my kids that you do need to finish school to be successful.

(I) OK. What courses or circumstances were most difficult for you?

(D) Math.

(I) Would an abbreviated schedule helped your process. . .like, now here at CHS, we have some students that just come Monday's, Wednesday's, and Friday's, just for example. Or in some cases, when you were in school, people were able to check out at 2:00, or maybe even 1:00. So would an abbreviated schedule helped your process?

(D) No.

(I) Because in your case, you were trying to get as much in, in that 3-yr. period as you could, right?

(D) Yes.

(I) How could we have helped your process here at high school? How could we have helped you?

(D) Ummm, smaller classes.

(I) OK. That's a very good observation! What else can you think of. . .anything?

(D) More focus on individual students instead of just the entire class as a whole.

(I) OK. Looking at the example of the concept map. . .your circle being in the middle of the page, draw circles for the influences as you graduated from high school. You have girlfriend. Was she a student here?

(D) She was a student but not CHS.

(I) So ya'll were both in high school at the same time?

(D) Umm hmm.

(I) Your older brother. . . and Mr. Wxxx [assistant principal]. And he did math tutoring for you or just talking about things in life. . .or what was his role?

(D) Both. . .life and math.

(I) So life lessons and math tutoring?

(D) Umm hmm.

(I) OK. And Ms. Gragg [graduation coach]. And your parents.

(D) I think those were the strongest ones.

(I) On the index cards on the table, there may be some circumstances that aren't written on those eight index cards. And we can make up new index cards for those. So if there's a circumstance that you're thinking about, like the classes were too large, or you needed more individualized help, we can make a card for that. Just because it's not in the batch doesn't mean we can't have that, OK?

(D) OK.

(I) So, what are the order of the cards that affected you?

(D) #1 would be smaller classes; #2 would be absences; and #3 is more personal time with the teachers.

(I) OK. . .Any others?

(D) I think those are probably the best.

(I) Ok. . .do you have anything you'd like to add to the interview?

(D) Just that kids really do need to come first in the school system, not the teacher's paycheck, or, you know, higher test scores. Just focus mostly on the students. . .make sure each one gets through, not just the whole group, if that means one or two gets left behind.

(I) At one time, I think, if I remember correctly, you were interested in culinary arts. Now that you've been out of high school for awhile and you're working, what are your career goals?

(D) I would like to go to college and get a college degree, but at the moment, my work is kinda my whole goal in life is to become a manager or a supervisor.

(I) You know, sometimes workplaces pay for college classes so at some point you might have that opportunity.

(D) Yea, I've looked into getting my engineering with my company.

(I) Great.

APPENDIX I: Interview Transcript with Eric

Investigator (I)   Eric (E)

(I) Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach.

(E) Would be my sophomore year. . .the end of my sophomore year. I struggled through my freshman year, worked pretty hard to get my grades where I could get them good enough to pass and my sophomore year, I was still struggling a little bit more and Ms. Gragg, she had realized, or the teachers had brought it to her attention, or something happened when she had seen my case and seen that I was struggling with my classes. And one of the first few times that we ever talked, she asked why I think it is so hard for me to do it right, I guess, or be able to get the good grades to graduate. And it was just the way. . .doing the work. . .it was just in the classroom setting. . .it just wouldn't work for me. And whenever the first online class or credit recovery, it was, I took in summer school. I took it . . .and as soon as I took it, it just. . .I realized I knew all the work. I knew how to do it. I knew how to learn; it was easy to learn, I just had to figure out my own way for me to do it, and when I think it was my junior year, after my summer school. . . it was my junior year, I believe whenever I took my first credit recovery and online during actual school hours. I liked it just as much as I did during the summer school, and it worked just as good for me and I done about 5 - 6 classes, maybe up to 7 senior year. And all of them but like one, I had pretty much all A's on. Even my Algebra II EOC. I liked that score. . .it was a 96, I think it was [haha].

(I) You had a really good Algebra II EOC score. We were very proud of you for that!

(E) I like to talk about it a lot!

(I) Good. I would, too, if I were you! [hahaha] 'Cause. . .probably. . .that wouldn't have been my score!!!!!!! I can guarantee you that! {pause} So, during the grad coach sessions that you and I had together, some of the topics that we discussed would have been credit recovery opportunities and the online classes. Can you think of some other things that we may have talked about in the grad coach sessions?

(E) Numerous times I got my schedule changed around where I could get classes that were more suitable for me that we felt that I would exceed more in. My schedule got changed around. . .quite a few fair amount of times until we got it perfectly right. And I think I was able to actually have a mixture of a few real classes. . .which was like social studies or World Geography, and Family and Consumer Science classes. And those classes I can. . .they're alright. It was math and science and all that I have troubles with but. . .I got many opportunities to try classes, to actually see which ones would help me the most.

(I) OK. So in our grad coach sessions, we set a plan which sometimes involved face-to-face classes or traditional classes where you went in a classroom and had the teacher. And then some times we chose the online classes.

(E) {shakes head in agreement}

(I) So when we chose the online classes, we kinda handpicked those because, as you said, there were some classes that were effective when you went in the actual classroom, but some of them you like to go at your own pace and you could do those classes when you wanted to. Did you do any of those away from school, or did you do those all here in our online lab?

(E) Actually, I had 4-5 periods of the day my senior year I was in the online lab, and then for about three months straight, usually about two, sometimes three days out of the week—any days that one of the principals or somebody could stay with me, I was up. . .some days, six/seven o'clock at night still working on it here.

(I) Alright.

(E) But, at home, no, because I didn't have a computer that worked good enough on it. . .I had one, but it wasn't fast enough. But I have stayed after school many, many, many, many, many hours to work on it.

(I) And I remember when that was going on, especially the principal and assistant principal would recap—since I worked at two high schools, they would recap and let me know that you were doing that. {pause} When you and I met to speak about your graduation plan and what was going on, did you consider those sessions more academic advisement in nature or personal counseling sessions?

(E) Academic. 'Cause I know that there was . . .I knew that there was always things I could talk to you or any of the other ones about, but I've known you longer than I've known [the other counselor], but as long as I can remember you have always been my graduation coach and guidance counselor, so I've always been alright with that, but when it came to the academic part, it was always about that, but there's been a few times when we've been able to set aside personal issues and have somebody help me out with that, too.

(I) And that's a very good summary, I think, of the times that I helped you with your plan, and so forth, I do appreciate that.

(E) Thank you.

(I) So from our grad coach sessions, what are some things that you gained from that?

(E) I was able to realize that I didn't have to give up. . .that there's other options that. . .just because I wasn't able to do it perfectly in a classroom setting didn't mean I was stupid, or I just couldn't learn, or I wasn't smart, it just means I have my own unique way of doing it and I've met a few other people that the way they explain classroom work is like the same exact way I feel about it. They've had to do online classes, too, and I've seen people since that I graduated with that I done online classes with and they still talk about it all the time about how, if it wasn't for online classes and credit recovery that they didn't know if they ever would have graduated and I've told them I don't think I would have either. . .

(I) Right.

(E) . . .if it wasn't for the online classes, I don't think I would have graduated.

(I) And you know, the principal and assistant principal and I have spoken about this on occasion, just over the years. . .the last two or three years, and we think that, too. We think the online program and credit recovery are *MAJOR* factors for people to graduate from high school.

(E) Oh, yea. There's just some people that it's too hard for them to . . .I don't wanna say comprehend it in the classroom setting, but it's just. . .with me, it was mainly the teachers . . .what teacher it was and *how* they taught. Because every teacher, I mean, the majority of them, they gotta have a basic way of teaching. Because they're all pretty much taught the same way. . .they went to school for it. But in a kinda separate way, they all do it in their own unique kind of way. And if I just couldn't click with the teacher just right, I couldn't learn, I couldn't pick it up. But. . .and I even realize that even the times I was able to do make up work and stuff like that, that even if it was late or anything like that, I knew how to do the work just fine, even if I wasn't even in class, didn't do the notes or whatever, I was just fine, I knew how to do the work and I could get it done. And if I could do it on my own pace, do it. . .pretty much as long as I can see it in my own head and be able to focus on it and do it my own way, without having to keep up with a teacher *and* try to figure it out in my own way at the same time.

(I) Well, you hit on something there. . .with teaching styles meshing with learning styles. If a teacher teaches a certain way, and that student learns more effectively in a different way, then that sometimes is when it is a good idea to have the student be in a different teacher's class *or* different mode of instruction. So, in your case, the online instruction was a good alternative for you, which, as you just explained, it became more—after we realized that. . .we wanted to give you the opportunity to finish that way. To finish your high school career that way. Because we had the slots available.

(E) Like your diploma is. . .it's a big ole bundle of nutrients whether you're eating a big ole meal to get it or you're eating a sandwich to get it, you're getting it one way or another. And that's all that really matters.

(I) OK.

(E) Some people doesn't like spaghetti and meatballs and they can't eat spaghetti and meatballs.

(I) . . .right

(E)   they'd rather have a bowl of cereal. . .or whatever. . .

(I) . . .right. . .

(E) . . .that's the way I look at it. People just cannot. . .if somebody feels like they're not gonna be able to do it a certain way and they feel like no matter how hard they try, that they're just not gonna get it right, then once they get to the point of giving up, it's almost they're at the point of

no return. And once they get that opportunity and they see, "WOW, I like doing this. . .I have fun doing this! I enjoy doing it!" Because that was my favorite thing about my senior year, is I actually enjoyed doing online classes, it was fun doing it, I enjoyed. . .I scored more[credits] my senior year than I did my last. . .first three years!!!

(I) I know [hahaha]. You know, the transformation. . .I just wanna compare your situation from what I remember. . .like a butterfly coming out of a cocoon.

(E) Yea.

(I) And I know that Mr. Rxxxx, our principal, was just really impressed with that. . .

(E) Thank you.

(I) . . .and, you know, as I remember toward the end, there was something you realized about a calculator or some type of instruction, that helped one of our either calculus or pre-calculus classes.

(E) Mrs. Lxxxx. Yea, the program they was doing on the computer to the calculators . . .she couldn't get it figured out and I had to like re-install and then I had to show her *how* to use the little application.

(I) Yes.

(E) That's the one Mr. Rxxxx was out in the hallway watching [haha].

(I) It was quite a defining moment, in my opinion.

(E) Right. Oh, yea. Mr. Wxxxx told Mom about it. She seen him a few weeks ago and he was talking about. He said it's something he'll never forget.

(I) Yea. . .I know [hahaha]. I don't think any of us will ever forget that!!! I really don't!

(E) It was a scary thought, at first [hahaha].

(I) [hahaha]. Do you remember? Was that at like spring break time? April??? It was toward the end of the year, wasn't it?

(E) Um hmm. Yea, it was right around in April/May. . .somewhere in there.

(I) Yea, that's what I was thinking. [pause] So back to our grad coach sessions, do you consider that they were valuable, or the influence that the sessions that we had were valuable in you meeting your plan of graduating from high school?

(E) Oh, yes, ma'am.

(I) What adjustments could be made to the graduation coach program that would have positively assisted your high school completion?

(E) I honestly cannot see any room for improvement because. . .the only thing, if I could change anything about how it happened, the only thing I wish I could have done is have started online classes straight from my freshman year.

(I) OK.

(E) I think if I would have, I'm willing to bet $100 that if I had started online classes from my freshman year, that I probably would have graduated within the top 7 or 8. . .at least the Top 10 of the class roll.

(I) Yea.

(E) Because my grades on the last semester of the year, if we were to go by that, just basing from those compared to half the other seniors' grades whenever we got our report cards at graduation practice, we was all looking at each other's and everything, and mine was up on there pretty much around the Top 10, so that was just the last half, so if I would have done that my whole senior year, I think I probably would have been in the Top 10 my senior year.

(I) I do realize that your circumstance, and a couple of other people that came through about the same time that you did. . .'cause y'all were on the early end of us getting that program together, I do know that some times, the principal and I base our decisions knowing the effectiveness the program was for you that started early with us.

(E) Um hmm.

(I) And, so that's important—that has grown out of the program. . .that's helped us a lot in our planning.

(E) Well, I'm glad. Because that I seen that my senior year there was a bunch of us that really did a good job with it. . .that I've seen. I mean there was a few of them I've had to explain things to them, and try to help them out a little bit, and show them—well, just help them out, tutor them a little.

(I) Um hmm.

(E) And, I've never actually had the opportunity to help somebody else learn, because I've always been the one that's having people help me learn, too.

(I) So, now that you've done the online and you could do those at your own pace, and if you needed to like get out on the Internet and see an example of a problem, or whatever, or research something you could bring it back. You could kinda figure it out for yourself. Then I think you see that that was a very effective way for you to complete high school. And I think that's what

we really wanted that program to be about. [pause]   How has graduating from high school changed your life?

(E) [Whew]. . .were to begin. . .Every since I started my online classes and started getting my good grades up, I felt a lot better about myself. I felt smart, for once. Never until. My freshman year, I made a couple of C's and B's, but I was living with my aunt and, I mean, she was helping me do all the work, and all that. I was receiving a lot of help from her. But, me trying on my own and everything, and do it all based on me. . .never made above a D in my life until my senior year. Like you can see on our report cards where I went from like 60's and 70's in some classes. . .to like my classwork and homework assignments being 60's and 70's and then the next week when I started buckling down, the next week was all like 80's, 90's, 100's and stuff like that.

(I) Did any of your friends not graduate?

(E) I can't remember if there was anyone. . .

(I) Nothing stands out in your mind right now?

(E) But I know that there's. . .I can remember some that have graduated. And I remember. . .I know for sure that there were some that graduated because of the online classes.

(I) OK. These are more specific questions. And some of them are just quick "yes or no" answers. . .but, did your parents graduate from high school? Did your mother?

(E) No, she had a GED.

(I)   Your mother has a GED. What about your daddy?

(E) No

(I) No, he did not graduate from high school. Was it expected by your parents that you would graduate from high school?

(E) No. . .for the most part.

(I) No, for the most part, but they. . .if I remember some conversations that I had with your mother, they really wanted that for you if you could make that happen, right?

(E) Yea. They knew I had it in me, they were just worried I wasn't gonna work hard enough to graduate. I think that's what their whole thing was about it.

(I) OK. And you touched on this several times already in our discussion, but at what point do you think things turned around for you?

(E) February my senior year. Because it was right after January. . .the end of January. Like January 16th, I think it was, I got arrested and it was like a week or two after that I got my act together.

(I) And online classes, when you started those. . . that was a crucial point for you in high school, also, right? We just talked about that just a few mintues ago.

(E) Um hmm. When I first started them I was still being lazy, didn't really wanna work, but once I buckled down on it and started working on it, I {snaps fingers} knew it was going, I was on it.

(I) At what age did you begin school? Did you begin school the same age as everybody else? You weren't held back. . .your parents didn't say "Well, we're gonna wait a few months to a year before we start school. . ."?

(E) {shakes head no}

(I) Have you been. . .were you retained in school?

(E) Yes, ma'am.

(I) OK.

(E) Twice.

(I) Twice. And do you remember. . .do you know what grades those were?

(E) 6th and 7th.

(I) I'm going to name some factors that may or may not have lead to your success. And some of these we've already talked about. And you can just, you know, say "yes or no", if you like. Online classes?

(E) Yes.

(I) Credit recovery?

(E) Yes.

(I) Flextime or home room time to make up work or retake tests within the classroom?

(E) Yes, if I would have used those times for that, but I. . .my study halls that I always used that for, there was my junior year, I think, that I had Flextime. And that was whenever it was the first year, and they was more strict on making us come in to do everything. And that was when we was doing our make-up work, during Flextime, so, yea, it did help.

(I) But study hall time was an effective way for you to make stuff up?

(E) Oh, yea.

(I) And what about tutoring. Did you get tutoring from either other students or maybe faculty members for some of your classes?

(E) Yea, different ones throughout, just whenever I needed it.

(I) OK, as needed. What life events happened to influence your decision to complete high school?

(E) I realized I'd gotten arrested twice in less than a month. If I didn't get my act together, I wasn't going anywhere. I was getting there pretty quick, too. And I realized that if I didn't graduate that I wouldn't ever be able to have a decent job, and go to college. I haven't gotten to start college yet, but I still wanna go to the tech school.

(I) What courses or circumstances were most difficult for you?

(E) Circumstances—the circumstance of me always struggling through school and it just put me down. I had no faith in myself and then whenever I was. . .I finally realized I was able to do the online classes and do good at them, and exceed in them, then that right there just brought my self-esteem and the way I looked at myself. It brought it up a whole lot.

(I) Would an abbreviated schedule helped your process like, I realize in your case we were trying to catch up on some stuff. And get you out in a reasonable number of semesters, but like, if we could have worked your schedule where you could have checked out at, say 2:00, or like now, there are. . .we do have a handful of students that maybe just come Monday, Wednesday's, and Friday's.

(E) Ahhh!

(I) Yea, we've developed a schedule for that. .. would that have helped your process any?

(E) Yea, if that's what I was needing. . .but I think I was so far behind that probably should have been ordered to stay on the weekends!!!!

(I) [hahahahaha]

(E) [haha] I'm surprised I wasn't told I had to!!!! I was behind! [haha]

(I) What could have helped your process?

(E) Starting online classes. . .from kindergarten, if I could have [haha].

(I) [hahaha] So earlier start of the online classes would. . .definitely. . .

(E) Oh, yes, ma'am.

(I) OK. I've got some circumstances written on some index cards. And I've got some blank index cards if the circumstances written on these cards do not apply to you. So, that's not a problem; we can make new index cards. Which out of those were important or fit your circumstance?

(E) {picks up cards}

(I) These two right here? [Failed credits; Self-confidence or Self-esteem issues]

(E) Relationship problems. . . is this any kind of relationship?

(I) Yea, usually when you consider relationship problems, that's usually between a guy and a girl, or other students that maybe you weren't getting along with at school.

(E) I think if I was active in clubs or anything like that at school like FCCLA or anything, then I probably would have had more friends, more people to talk to. That means I would have had more people that could have helped me with work or more opportunities to be more involved with other people in my class. If I'm friends. . .if I talk to somebody 'cause I'm and am in FCCLA with them and then I have them in my Algebra class, and I need help with something, if I don't feel comfortable asking somebody I don't know, then I can say, "Hey, I know you. Help me with this. . .don't let me feel stupid to somebody else."

(I) [haha] You know, I do think that's an important point. I do like that.

(E) Absenteeism. . .a little bit. Mom always made me come to school.

(I) [hahaha]

(E) It was hard getting her to let me stay home from school.

(I) And some of the rest of those may not apply to your circumstance at all. Do you think we need to make any index cards for circumstances that aren't out here?

(E) About how. . .opportunity. . .

(I) What kind of opportunity?

(E) If I could have an opportunity sooner, or if I knew about the classes sooner, or if I had the opportunity to get my act together, pretty much . . .

(I) OK

(E) . . .and want to graduate.

(I) OK. So if you had had an earlier opportunity in your high school career to start your online classes?

(E) Oh, yea!

(I) And. . .an earlier . . .if your plan to graduate high school had been set earlier in your high school career, do you think that would have helped you, or no, it was when it came about within yourself, "Hey, I'm gonna do this!"?

(E) Both.

(I) OK.

(E) I think whenever I realized that somebody else cared or not that I graduated. . .I think. . .what helped a lot, besides just online classes themselves was seeing that there's people that actually care or not if I graduated. . .that didn't have to care. . .like wasn't obligated to care. . .like Mom, Dad, family, stuff like that. . .it was people like that. . .it didn't make no difference in the world to them whether or not I graduated, but that's how they wanted to look at it. And those same people went above and beyond, out of the way to help me graduate.

(I) Um hmm.

(E) Like you, Mr. Wxxxx, Mr. Rxxxx, the teachers. . .everybody. And so I thank God for this school because if it wasn't. . .if I went to any other school, or any other county that didn't offer the programs and the help that this school has, then I don't think I would have graduated.

(I) I do think the program was very effective for you, and as I said just a few minutes ago, we do often think of your circumstance when we're working with other students, you know, and. . .

(E) That's good!

(I) . . .we do appreciate that. So if you were going to put these in order of the way that they affected you. . .we've got six cards here on the table. Earlier opportunity to start your online classes, had your graduation plan been set earlier in your high school career, when you realized that other people cared that you graduated, any issues with self-confidence or self-esteem, you had some failed credits, and you thought maybe you should have been more active in clubs. Out of those six cards, which one do you think is most important?

(E) Most important? I'd say failed credits, because that's what started it all.

(I) Alright.

(E) I mean that was in like $6^{th}/7^{th}$ grade.

(I) OK.

(E) And then, this one right here . . .

(I) Self-confidence or self-esteem. OK.

(E) 'Cause once I failed two years in a row, I failed 6th grade, I done 6th grade over, went to 7th grade, then had to do 7th grade over. I done that and it tore my self-esteem down. It just made me feel stupid, I guess.

(I) Well, two years back to back, I can totally understand that. OK. . .what about next?

(E) This one [earlier opportunity to start online classes] and this one [earlier plan set in high school]. . .these two are about the same. . .equal.

(I) Well, they kinda go together, don't you think?

(E) Yea.

(I) OK. And the remaining card is "realizing that other people cared if you graduated from high school."

(E) Last, but not least.   It is last of the most important list.

(I) OK. We're almost finished. Thinking back to what you said just a few minutes ago of the people that influenced that you graduated from high school, we're going to draw a concept map. It's just a way in college that we refer to what you just talked about while ago, the people in your life or the circumstances in your life that either positively *or* negatively influenced whether you graduated from high school, so I've got some circles here, but you can just draw it freehand, if you want. I want you to draw there on the page with yourself in the center and kind of like a spider the arms the people that influenced you or affected that. I'm going to show you one as an example and you can see what I'm talking about.

(E) {drawing map} These are just people?

(I) Um hmm. . .people or circumstances. . .it could be like. . .one girl drew that her house burned, you know, that was important. And in your situation you mentioned that you had a couple of arrests, and if you had judicial. . .you know, court system, or whatever, if that played an influence, then you can draw that in.

(E) {continuing to draw map}

(I) OK. Is that good? Let me take a glance at this to see if I have any questions. OK on your concept map, you have you in the center, and drawn out your have [assistant principal and principal]. Now, sometimes, I know they offer math tutoring. . .and they offer "life lessons", as well whenever they're talking with you and trying to motivate you to get your school work done. So, for these two men, would you say they helped you more with life lessons? Or tutoring? Or both? Or what role did they play?

(E) A mixture of both. Most of my school work, tutoring. That came from the guidance department.

(I) [the school counselor].

(E) You and [the school counselor].

(I) OK.

(E) And personal issues, I know, my Mom has brought it to [assistant principal, principal]. . .before and they've always helped. And they've always been there for personal issues, also. So they've been a mixture of both, too.

(I) OK. You have a younger brother that's getting ready to graduate, too, right?

(E) Yes, ma'am, this year, I believe.

(I) Yea.

(E) He done credit recovery and all after, I think, his sophomore year?

(I) OK. And, you know, sometimes. . .you came about. . .came through when we were just getting the funding for those. So, I'm glad it did work out for you.

(E) Me, too.

(I) And you've got me listed here and we did a graduation plan, and I tried to give you any encouragement that I could. . .

(E) Oh, yea, you was a big help. You was always on the ball with me. You always had it going and you had me on track. There was a couple of days you tracked me down, to make sure I was getting it done!!!

(I) I know!!! I know!!! I will have to say that there were a couple of days that I thought to myself that I was a little bit too hard on you [haha].

(E) [ha] Sometimes that's what it takes to really get me going, though. . .to really buckle down.

(I) I'm going to read off the other things you have here. . .involved in drugs and court?

(E) Jail. . .

(I) that does say jail, yes. Alright, so toward the end of your high school career, you had, if I remember correctly, you had a court date that was postponed for awhile while you were doing school. Do you wanna talk about that any? Just for a minute?

(E) I got arrested December 16ᵗʰ, 2012. Then January 15, 2013, I gotten arrested. It was one day short of a month. And I'd gotten arrested for the second time my senior year. Within about two weeks after the second time I'd gotten arrested, I buckled down on myself. Once I had actually [started] working real hard trying to graduate, doing my online classes, working hard at them. And my two/three regular classes I had, the SRO [School Resource Officer] officer had went and spoke to the DA [the district attorney] at the court and asked him out of her on cognizance, putting her neck on the line for me, and asked him if there was any way they could postpone my court date until after May, that way I could have the chance to graduate. Because she had seen what effort I was putting into. . . it wasn't the effort coming from anybody telling me to do this and that. . .it'll pay off for you. It was me realizing that I was ruining my own life and I had to get my act together and that's when I did, and when I did it actually did pay off in more ways than one, 'cause it caught the attention from the SRO, that's when she went and talked to the DA [District Attorney].

(I) Alright.

(E) And multiple. . .you wrote a letter to him, I think. Um, [the history teacher] wrote a letter to the DA. Like [assistant principal] and a few other people—teachers--wrote letters to him, talking about how much better I was doing with my school work, and just all around straightening up, getting my act together.

(I) Alright. That's the end of the interview as far as anything I wanna point out. We have a few minutes now, that anything that you wanna summarize or anything that you wanna add that I didn't add.

(E) I just wanted to say "thank you" with how much you really helped me a lot. I've told many, many, many people since I've graduated that if it was not for you and the principals and some of the other teachers, and mostly you, I wouldn't have graduated. If it was not for CHS, I don't think I would have graduated. If it was not for the kindness that y'all have in me, that y'all have more determination to have me graduated than I did at the beginning, then once I buckled down on myself as hard as everybody else was trying to get me to buckle down on myself, I was able to get going. It was a little bumpy at first; I struggled a little bit, but I toughed it out and I worked hard and I got through it, and if it wasn't for y'all, I don't think I would have graduated, if it wasn't for y'all and online classes.

(I) Well, you did, toward the end of your high school career, see that the online classes could help you, and you did do that yourself after we found a good mix for you between the online classes and the classroom classes, but, you know, you did work really hard and we appreciate that, and, as I've said, that we have patterned other programs for kids. . .for students after the success that you experienced because we realized that the program was very valuable and we needed to tailor a program for each individual student. And the online classes allow us to do that.

(E) The online classes may not work for everybody, but the regular classes don't work for everybody, either.

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(I) That's true. . .

(E) . . .so why make one thing fair for one group of students and it not be fair to the other ones.

(I) Right! Right! OK. That concludes the interview.

APPENDIX J: Interview with Franklin

Investigator (I)   Franklin (F)

(I) Describe the circumstances in which you began your relationship with your graduation coach.

(F) It's kinda hard to start, I guess. I just didn't really think I could graduate so I did a little talking and the online classes started and it helped.

(I) So what was going on in your life at that time? You just said you didn't think you could graduate. . .were there things going on? Had things happened maybe outside of school? Were you having difficulty inside of school? Kinda give me an idea of where you were at that time.

(F) Outside of school it was just more stress. . .I had a baby on the way. And just more unexpectancy. It was just hard for me to focus and I knew it would be hard for me to pay attention to anything in class. I figured the best option would be online classes that I could take at anytime. . .so it was just easy enough to get it done and over with that way.

(I) OK. . .having a baby on the way definitely changes your perspective and . . .

(F) Definitely. . .about everything. . .not just school itself. . .

(I) . . .but life in general?

(F) Yes, everything!

(I) What happened in your grad coach sessions, can you kinda describe some things we talked about in your grad coach sessions?

(F) Everything about the credentials to get done. We set a goal. We worked on it and we got it done! Whatever we needed to talk about. . .whatever we needed to say to get it done. . .got done.

(I) What were some of those topics? You've mentioned an academic plan?

(F) Umm hmm

(I) OK.

(F) That's kinda hard. I mean, I had an academic plan but it never really followed out. I never took the same path I should have took. I'm recently about to start TN Tech [Technology Center]. I guess I really did knida follow that little path when I took all of [Mr.] Sxxxx's classes and shop. . .I guess I did kinda go along the technical path.

(I) And so what are you gonna study?

(F) I'm going for Computer Information Tech.

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(I) At the technology center in town?

(F) [Yea]

(I) So what you're speaking about is that maybe you didn't go along with the first plan that you set. . . you meant like the 4-year plan that you set coming out of the 8th grade?

(F) Umm hmm

(I) And when we met in your grad coach sessions, we set more like a plan of action and chose the online classes that would best suit what you needed at that time.

(F) Yes. That's exactly right.

(I) So would you say that our sessions--I know that you said that, you know, that we talked about a variety of things. . .but for the most part, were our sessions—would you consider those academic advisement sessions or personal counseling sessions?

(F) Both. . .really!!!! It was for both academic benefit and a personal benefit. And it helped me to push myself as a person to get my goals done and with someone else there to help make it all better. . .pssst. . .a breeze. . .was just a breeze!

(I) So my next question was what did you gain, if anything, from your grad coach sessions. . .and I think you really just summarized that already. . .so you would consider the influence valuable?

(F) Yes. . .{chuckle} very valuable .

(I) So what adjustments could be made to the graduation coach program that would have positively assisted your high school completion?

(F) Repeat the question. . .

(I) What adjustments could be made to the graduation coach program that would have positively assisted your high school completion?

(F) Hmmmm. .. I don't know. I got a lot out of it. . . .not just school. . .everything in general, pretty much. Just. . .it's just a lot to that. That's just not a one answer question.

(I) Well. . .{hahahahhaha} You can take as much. . .you can talk about that as much as you want to {haha}. . .

(F) It's kinda hard to sum all that up. I don't know. . .I got a huge benefit from all that. A huge benefit. Now, I mean, not just school itself but the help that came from someone actually sitting down and helping me. . .and showed me.

(I) un hun

(F) Not just being in a classroom. There's different types of kids that you're gonna help to graduate. There's gonna be those ones that wanna get out theirself. . .just to do it. . .and there's gonna be those ones that wanna get out to show some sort of value and get something out of it. . .to push theirself. . .not just for the benefit of theirself.

(I) um hmm

(F) . . .but for a lifetime goal that they set. It's there. You only graduate once.

(I) right!

(F) . . .from high school.

(I) right!

(F) I mean . . .you have to set it. . .I had a baby on the way toward the end, so graduating high school really wasn't the point. . .it was just both of those things together. . .not other people experienced what I was going through school. So it was just a huge thing to go through school and have these people here to help me and know what I was going through. And made it so much easier.

(I) um hum

(F) It all folded in together. It all came together.

(I) Very good. So what improvements could have been made to the program that might have allowed you to complete your diploma requirements earlier. . .sooner?

(F) Well, I did a lot of online classes. I think my junior year, I took maybe 15 classes altogether, including my 7 periods, of that junior year. And I think I had 2 credit recovery, and I know I at least took 4 or 5 online classes at least. . .maybe 6 or 7. I know I took a lot. Cause I was taking senior online classes. I got 'em done fairly quickly.

(I) Um hmm. So in your opinion, the online classes were a big part of your whole program?

(F) That was a big part of my graduation. If not for the online courses, I would have never. . .I probably would have never graduated because it was so hard for me to pay attention in a classroom with everything that was going on, opposed to just doing it, ya know? It was just. . .I knew I had to do something. And I knew I couldn't pay attention. It was just. . .I had too much going on so online classes allowed me to do what I needed to do and get done.

(I) Did you work on those. . .I'm sure you worked on them here in our lab during the school day.

(F) Um hmm .. .

(I) . . .but did you have Internet access at home?

(F) Yes. At that time I did. I worked every once in awhile. Because you see, I would get out early. . .

(I) Um hmm. . .

(F) . . .my senior year. What I never did make-up. I would get out early and I'd go home so before that little website closed off, I'd be on there and do my work at home. And so I pretty much. . . instead of being at school all day long, but get my stuff done outside.

(I) OK. How has graduating from high school changed your life?

(F) Well, it's made it a lot easier to get a job. . .I'll tell you that.

(I) OK. So when you go job hunting or fill out the applications or whatever, there's usually the question on there "do you have a high school diploma?"

(F) Yeah. That's the main question. It's also made it easier for me to get in at TN Tech [technology center], it's made it so much easier. They had no problem getting me in. They saw my credentials and that I got out of school earlier than most of 'em. . .

(I) um hmm. . .so that was a plus at the tech center when you got ready to get in there? So when do you start your program there?

(F) Supposed to be the next semester.

(I) So they'll start that the first of May, or something like that?

(F) Um hmmm

(I) Did any of your friends not graduate from high school?

(F) Well, maybe not my friends from THIS school. . .yea, I know a couple of people that didn't.

(I) Not necessarily from this particular high school but people that you're associated with as friends? Yes. . .and how is your life different from theirs?

(F) Well, actually, it's not THAT much different, it's just they're gonna have a hard time going and getting their GED if they wait so much longer. . .they're gonna lose half their memory of school.

(I) . . yes. And I understand that test in the recent years has gotten harder and harder. . .

(F) . . Oh, I have heard. . .yes, I have heard. . .Boy! I have heard from so many people.

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(I) OK. . .I've got a series of questions. . .and some of them you can just answer "yes" or "no" to. . .Did you parents graduate from high school. . .your mother? Yes or no?

(F) No

(I) Your daddy? Yes or no?

(F) Yea, he graduated.

(I) OK. . .was it expected by your parents that you would graduate from high school?

(F) Noooo. . .

(I) No. . .OK. . .tell me a little about that. . .if you did, you did? If you didn't, you didn't? or what???

(F) I just got in a lot of trouble at school; they just thought I was headed down the wrong path

(I) So they didn't think you would make it happen, but as far as when you were growing up 8th, 9th, 10th grade. . .did they speak about "yea, you're gonna graduate from high school"? Or. . .

(F) I never got told whether I was gonna graduate or not {hahahaha}

(I) {hahahahahaha}

(F) They just looked at me like I was in trouble all the time. . .so. . .never thought. . .I knew. . .they didn't just have to come out and say it, but I already knew their expectations that I wasn't gonna graduate so I stepped up and proved 'em wrong!

(I) Good!!!!

(F) It's what I do best. . . .I just prove 'em wrong!

(I) {hahahaha} I will give you that. . .you DO prove people wrong!!!! . . .but successfully!!! OK. . .at what point did things turn around for you? You've kinda talked about that maybe already, but. . . at what point did things turn around for you?

(F) As soon as I hit the online classes. Everything was going downhill. . .online classes made it A-OK!!! GO!!!!!! Just right there . ..

(I) So I think one of the questions that I had asked you before we started the interview to determine if you met the criteria to be included in the study was that you mentioned that you hadn't been retained any. . .so my question is. . .you started kindergarten the same age as everybody else. . .your parents didn't hold you back or try to start you early or anything?

(F) {shakes head yes to starting at same age as everybody else}

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(I) And you have not been. . .have you been retained?

(F) No.

(I) What were some factors at school which led to your success. .. yes or no? Online classes?

(F) Yes. . .online classes. . .yes!

(I) Credit recovery?

(F) Definite yes!!!

(I) Using home room or Flextime or study hall time to make-up work or retake tests?

(F) Nooo. . .{chuckle} never paid attention!

(I) Tutoring? From either other students or staff members?

(F) Yea, that helped!

(I) What life events happened to influence your decision to complete high school?

(F) Having a baby!

(I) Anything else?

(F) Not. . .nothing other than just to prove 'em wrong!!!

(I) What courses or circumstances were most difficult for you?

(F) Math. . .math was the most hardest course I've ever, ever had.

(I) And I don't know if you realize this, but at the tech center, if you have to have any math to go along with your certificate, they have some ladies up there really that can help you with that. And they break it down basically. . .hopefully to what you need on the job.

(F) Um hmm

(I) You know, I think a lot of people figure the math requirements are harder. . .

(F) yea

(I) . . .you know, I don't know if people feel like maybe they. . .like what, in your case? Had you not done well in math all through your years or. . .

(F) I've never done good in math. . .I'm just. . .I don't know. . .my brain doesn't work like everybody else's. . . I'm just not good at crunching numbers. I'm very good at the basic credentials of math. . .maybe like. . .you know, the basics! {chuckle} Division. . .multiplication. I know all those multiplication tables . . .like I know every bit of those. . .all the way up to past double numbers. . .but as far as anything past addition, subtraction. . .you start adding letters in there. . .I can't crunch that! It doesn't. . .It's hard work for my brain. My brain puts letters with the alphabet. My brain malfunctions when it comes to letters with numbers in an equation. It's not easy to process. {hahahaha}

(I) {hahahhahaha}

(F) . . .for numbers {hahahha}

(I) {hahahaha} that just doesn't mix, does it???

(F) no. . .that just don't work with me!!!

(I) So. . .how could we have helped your process?

(F) the tutoring. . .the staff members that wanted to help me. . .they actually gave a helping hand. They broke it down to where it was necessary for me to get it done and understand it.

(I) Um hmm. . .and who were some of those people?

(F) You. . .Ms. Gragg, of course! Mrs. Cxxxx helped me a bit, she's very good. Mr. Wxxxx. . .wow, he helped a lot!

(I) Um hmm, he's really good in math, isn't he?

(F) He's helped a lot!!!!!!! Off the top of his head. . .a few times!!!!!! Easy . .

(I) Yeah, he's really good at that!

(F) Ohhh, yeah, he used to blow my mind!!!!

(I) I don't know if Mr. Rxxxx happened to be someone that helped you, but he can do that, too.

(F) Oh, really?

(I) Yeah, he was a math teacher before he was a principal.

(F) Yeah. . .I think I heard that.

(I) Now you mentioned just a little bit ago that you got out early and went home and worked on some of your things on the computer.

(F) Um hmm.

(I) So the abbreviated schedule helped your process?. . .that would be a "yes"?

(F) Right! Yes!!!

(I) And now, believe it or not, we do have. . .we're able to. . .we've got a schedule where we can allow students to come Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and they have Tuesday and Thursday that they can work or whatever

(F) Whaaat!!!

(I) yep. . .[the principal] came up with that brainstorm!

(F) Ohhh, that's awesome! I bet the kids really like that???

(I) or Monday, Tuesday, Thursday. . .yep!

(F) . . .that's cool!!!!!

(I) yea, we've only got a handful that we're able to accommodate that, but with you in your situation, that might have been a real plus for you!

(F) Boy. . .if I'd have only knew that. . . pssst. . .Gaaaa. . .I would have got out of here waaaay early. . .waaaay early!

(I) {hahahahaha} There's a couple of other things I wanna do here.   I've got eight index cards of circumstances. And some of these circumstances may apply to your situation and some of them may not. And so out of these eight circumstances--and I've got some extra cards here that if there are circumstances that I don't have written on cards, that we need to make cards for, that's fine. But what were some circumstances that were part of your getting out of high school? Positive or negative???

(F) Ohhh. . .I guess pretty much all of these! Really. .well, self-confidence. . .I didn't really have no problem with. . .I never had a problem with any of that!

(I) OK.

(F) or self-esteem or anything. Not active in clubs. . .I never was in any clubs. That just wasn't my cup of tea.

(I) Do you think that was important or "no" you made it OK without being in?

(F) Well, actually, I don't think it was too important. . .because I did make it. But I mean, it probably would have helped a lot better. . .would have boosted me up a little better. . .

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(I) So if you had a "do over" would you be in more clubs and activities?

(F) Yea, I probably would.

(I) OK So. . .out of what's laying on the table, which one do you think is the biggest influence?

(F) The biggest influence would be graduating with a child. . .

(I) . . .the child. . .OK. And which one would you say next? Or we can make the card up if your situation is not there.

(F) Probably, ugh, failed credits, I guess.

(I) OK. Do you think those are the main two, or do you wanna choose. . .

(F) "Little support at home" I know had a little bit of a role in it, too.

(I) OK

(F) I never was too bad at being absent or anything like that. . .I had those days where I didn't show up, but most of the time I did.

(I) OK. . .and we already talked about you didn't start kindergarten late, so that one won't apply to you.

(F) {shakes head in agreement}

(I) And no drama relationships during. . .in school building or out?

(F) Well. . .there was a little bit of relationship problems but that thing got fixed *real* quick.

(I) OK

(F) That little "rock and roll" got settled.

(I) So basically the three then are: expecting a child; failed credits; and having little support at home.

(F) Um hmm. That's it.

(I) OK. And I've got one more thing. In college, we call this a concept map. . .meaning, I just want to know your thoughts of how you relate. . .how situations related to you in high school. For example, put yourself in the middle. Then people or situations that were important to you getting out of high school. . .or that hampered you. For example, at the example you're looking at, at some point their house had burned. So that was an influence; that was a factor. It wasn't a positive factor, but it was definitely a factor. OK. . .so think of what influences. . .

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(F) [graduate drawing concept map] I guess that's about it. I don't really know if I can think of anything else. Other influences.

(I) Well, and maybe some things that helped you. . .we talked about the online classes; we talked about credit recovery, we talked about maybe some tutoring.

(F) Ohhh yeah! [completing the drawing]

(I) OK. .. I'm going to look at your map here. . .The first thing you drew was "baby". . .so that was a definite influence and a motivator to get finished, and, even in your case, get finished early, right?

(F) Um hmmm. Yes, ma'am!

(I) So your thoughts on that were. . .that you weren't getting an education for yourself. There was somebody else involved or you wanted to be able to provide a future. . .tell me your thoughts about how the baby on the way influenced basically everything you did.

(F) He just made it. . .I don't know. . .it wasn't that you walked on egg shells or anything, it was just that you knew that everything you did you had to do it right and you had to *not* screw up. Like it's every step you take you have to make an example for yourself and the one to come. You can't just step into something and not expect anything less than helping yourself *and* somebody else; it's not just beneficial to me, it was beneficial to the baby. It just. . .what I had to do in school, I had to get educated on so I can take this knowledge and pass this on. Not just from school. But there's just extra things that I've learned through school that's just not "academic-wise" in any classes. There's just certain things that you learn as a person through the daily events that go through your life that just teach you anyway. There's daily teaching. It's not just a schooling.

(I) Sometimes I consider that for myself the "school of hard knocks"! {hahahhahaha}

(F) {hahahaha} Yeahhh! Yeahhh!!!

(I) And some other factors you've placed here. . .Mrs. Cxxxx. Was that more through her position as a counselor or she tutored you in math? Or both?

(F) She helped a lot in both! She was one of those people I could go and talk without a struggle or anything. . .but then, again, in this instance, she could be a tutor. She could help with anything, really. It was more of a comfort feeling than anything with Mrs. Cxxxx. You knew that when she talked she would make it easier for you to understand. She's just one of those people that was so easy to go to talk to.

(I) Um hmm. Ok. You listed on here your ex-fiance′

(F) Yes. . .baby's mama. She was a big push because she did not graduate because. . .the baby. She dropped out because of that. And she still never got her GED. Well, she pushed me to get

mine done, then she dropped out. Well, I'm not gonna say she pushed me. . .but she was there along the way to make sure I coasted the way it was supposed to go.

(I) Um hmm. Right, right. . .and I remember her role. And I think that's a fair . . .

(F) Ohh yeah. It was a big push. It was a big push. I guess   . . .

(I) In other words, I guess we'd call that motivation.

(F) Ohhh yeahhh!!!!!!

(I) She was also there to help motivate you.

(F) Ohhh yeahhh!!!! She was a big motivation!

(I) OK. And you've listed confidence on here. . .

(F) Um hmm.

(I) Explain that one.

(F) I don't know. . .even if I think I can't do something. . .there's still something that tells me, "hey, you've gotta get your head in there! You can do this! Because, if somebody else can do it, you can do it!" So it's just. . .I guess it's just that mind brainpower just telling me that's just my brain working against me so I can't do it. . .my brain tells me I can! It's just. . .

(I) So is that confidence factor something that helped you complete your high school requirements or now that you've finished your high school requirements when you approach a task or a goal, then you have the confidence because you graduated from high school to be able to pull that off?

(F) Yes. The confidence played a big part all through high school, really. When I didn't think I could do anything. . .down and out, I did it, I picked myself up and got focused on what I needed to do and got it done. Confidence! If I didn't have confidence, I would have never made it through. I guess it's just one of those things. . .one of those factors about me that if I wasn't confident, I wouldn't be the same person.

(I) Um hmm. Well, I'll tell you. . .that the tech center uses that as a role, too. And they are further able to build that confidence. I've seen that with a lot of students that go there. And their placement rate is so good that they can help find jobs, I mean, you may already have a job and you're not looking for a job, but if you're ready to change jobs, they have a great way to do that.

(F) Um hmm

(I) So is there anything else you want to add to the interview? Something that you want to discuss that maybe I didn't bring up? Or something you want to revisit that we talked about earlier in the interview?

(F) Nothing off the top of my head really.

(I) So, I'll type a summary of what we talked about and get it to you and you can look over it and make sure that I understood what you were saying, and make any corrections that you need to.

(F) Alright.

(I) Is that good?

(F) Yes

(I) OK. Thank you. Thank you for your time.

(F) You're welcome.

VITA

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