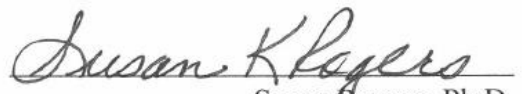


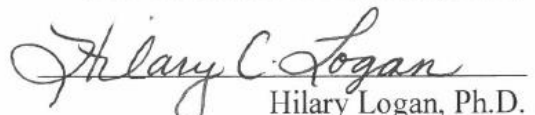
More Than a Score: Cristo Rey Graduates' College Readiness

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Abstract

This qualitative study was conducted to explore the perceptions of Cristo Rey Kansas City (CRKC) high school graduates who did not meet or exceed all four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks and went on to successfully earn a college degree. A sample of 11 participants was selected through voluntary respondents to an email and phone solicitation for participation. The sample reflected the demographics of the CRKC alumni who had completed a college degree. The participants discussed both their college and high school experiences during individual interviews with the researcher. The participants recounted that diverse high school experiences at CRKC cultivated skills that helped them earn college degrees. The two most predominant experiences shared by the participants were the college-going culture of the school and the Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP). These were the only two factors that were discussed by all 11 participants regarding their eventual higher education success. Additionally, the researcher determined that all but one of the participants felt prepared for the academic rigors of higher education, which they attribute to the college preparation curriculum's rigor and excellence of the faculty that they experienced at CRKC. The researcher discovered that although all participants encountered some obstacles in their pursuit of earning college degrees, they felt they were always able to overcome them and be successful. The three most oft-cited areas of struggle for the graduates were social, cultural, and diversity challenges at their colleges and universities; their lack of financial literacy; and their ability to pay for school. The implications for action included: CRKC should continue to invest in quality teachers, administrators, and staff; foster the faith and character development; add financial literacy curricular components or strengthening

existing components; and add instruction in how to navigate a college culture that is drastically different than their home and high school cultures. Recommendations for future research included: determining whether the study's results could be extrapolated to other populations, adding quantitative measures, and exploring the non-cognitive factors that impact higher education success of students who are not deemed "college-ready" yet succeed in earning a two or four-year degree.

Dedication

My accomplishments and success throughout my program would have been completely impossible without the selflessness, support, and love of my husband, Andy. I started my doctoral coursework a month after we were married; and in that time, we bought a house, sold a house, I changed jobs, he completed a Master of Biomedical Statistics degree and won a football state championship, and we have had two children. To say that he has carried a heavy weight in my stead would be quite the understatement. Andy, I am unsure what I have done to deserve such a brilliant partner, friend, and parent to our children, but I thank God every day for you and the life that we have built. To sweet James and Jack, I hope that this work inspires you to fight for social justice, work hard, and love harder.

Acknowledgments

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I am forever indebted to my colleagues at Rockhurst University for supporting my work, especially Mary Pat Shelledy, who had the temerity to hire me for a position in higher education and encouraged me to pursue a doctoral degree to ensure I could keep it. You have forever altered the trajectory of my life, and I am so grateful. I have been lucky enough to have two inspiring mentors during my journey as an educator. Yvonne Horel and Dr. Rick Pribyl, please know that I would not be the person or educator I am today without your mentorship and counsel. To CRKC President, John O'Connor, Past President, Dr. Kathleen Hanlon, Alumni Coordinator, Sister Linda Roth, and all the graduates who selflessly gave of their time to be interviewed, I am eternally thankful. Without you, this study would have been impossible and frankly, meaningless.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2013), “The United States is more educated than ever: In 1973, workers with postsecondary education held only 28 percent of jobs; by comparison, they held 59 percent of jobs in 2010 and will hold 65 percent of jobs in 2020” (p. 3). For high school graduates in the United States to thrive in ever-changing, increasingly globalized, and extremely competitive job markets, their career and life aspirations dictate that they must earn either a two- or four-year degree. Higher education can be the route to a life with more stability, economic freedom, and prosperity for all high school graduates, but especially so for the graduates from families who are marginalized. In short, college is a ticket out of poverty for many of today’s youth (Haycock, 2001; Kenschaft, 2014; McKinsey & Company, 2011). Former President Barack Obama (2019) echoed these realities when he asserted that higher education could not be a luxury reserved just for a privileged few because it is an economic necessity for every family; he called it a pathway to the middle class, recalling his and his wife’s personal journeys to the middle class.

According to Taylor (2014), a Pew Research Center researcher who tracks social and demographic trends, high school graduates are faced with very few job opportunities that could allow for a comfortable middle-class life without a post-secondary education.

In fact, on virtually every measure of economic well-being and career attainment . . . young college graduates are outperforming their peers with less education.

And when today’s young adults are compared with previous generations, the disparity in economic outcomes between college graduates and those with a high

school diploma or less formal schooling has never been greater in the modern era.

(p. 1)

However, the price of this increased push toward a college education is that many high school graduates are not prepared academically for the rigors of higher education. These students are not able to compete academically, and according to the National Center for Public Policy and Education (2010), nearly 60% of students who are fully eligible to attend college are not academically ready for postsecondary studies. These students are increasingly required to enroll in remedial classes in college, which do not count as credits toward their degrees but are merely prerequisites to be eligible for full-credit courses. The result from recent studies on how remedial classes affect persistence have suggested that nearly 40% of all undergraduate freshmen are enrolled in “some form of remedial coursework; however, this figure can be as high as 6 out of 10 students at some postsecondary institutions” (Long & Boatman, 2013, p. 1). In addition to this delaying degree attainment, these courses cost the same amount as credit-bearing courses, so they may place an additional financial strain on students. Despite the push for more students to attend college, actual degree attainment has been sharply declining. In 1990, the U.S. led the world in higher education attainment, and in 2017, the U.S. ranked 16th (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017). According to ACT’s (2015) retention/completion summary tables, since the mid-1980s, the two- and four-year degree attainment percentages have dropped nearly 17% for American college students. These attainment numbers can be even more dire for students from marginalized backgrounds. As of 2016, only 15% of Hispanic Americans and 21% of African Americans had completed a bachelor’s degree or higher; this was compared to 54% of

Asian Americans and 35% of White Americans (Musu-Gillette et al., 2017). “For historically underserved students, defined . . . as low-income students, those who are first in their families to attend college, and students of color, gaining access to and transitioning to college can be a great challenge” (Green, 2006, p. 21). These readiness, achievement, and attainment gaps are paramount, establishing how inequitable the educational system is. For too long, marginalized students have attended sub-par schools, with less than adequate resources available to ensure that they are prepared for either college or careers.

Background

According to Father Mark Lewis, S.J., the past Director of the Thomas More Center for the Study of Catholic Thought and Culture at Rockhurst University in Kansas City, Missouri (personal communication, May 1, 2016), the members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) make up the largest male religious order in the Roman Catholic Church. Education is the hallmark of the Jesuits not only in the United States but also worldwide; it has been a cornerstone of the order since its founding in the 1500s (M. Lewis, personal communication, May 1, 2016). These men are called by their mission to serve where the need is the greatest; these two facets, education and ministering to those who are in the most need, have led the Jesuits to play a prominent role in the education of some of the most marginalized students across the world (M. Lewis, personal communication, May 1, 2016). In the United States, the educational need of marginalized students is greatest in the urban core (Crea, Reynolds, & Degnan, 2015; Navarro, 2003; Thielman, 2012). To this end, Jesuits have continued to seek out ways to serve the students in the urban core.

One example of this apostolate or religious vocation is seen in the Cristo Rey Network (CRN) of Schools.

The CRN is an urban, Catholic school system designed to equip children from families of limited means with knowledge, character, and skills to enrich their lives and the lives of others (CRN, 2018). The first Cristo Rey School was founded in 1996 in Chicago, Illinois, and the network has multiplied steadily since (CRN, 2018). As of the 2018-2019 school year, the network consisted of 35 schools, which served 12,012 students in 22 states and reported 15,505 graduates from their network of schools (CRN, 2018). Bolstering the CRN's growth has been seed money from philanthropists, such as The Gates Family Foundation, The Walton Family Foundation, and B. J. and Bebe Cassin Foundation (CRN, 2018). According to the CRN (2018), to ensure the integrity of the model, the network has set up the following Mission Effectiveness Standards to which a CRN school must ascribe.

1. Is explicitly Catholic in mission and enjoys Church approval
2. Serves only students with limited economic resources and is open to students of various faiths and cultures
3. Is family-centered and plays an active role in the local community
4. Prepares all students to enter and graduate from college
5. Requires participation by all students in the Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP)
6. Integrates the learning present in its work program, classroom, and extracurricular experiences for the fullest benefit of its students

7. Has effective administrative and board structures, and complies with applicable state and federal laws
8. Is financially sound
9. Supports its graduates' efforts to obtain a college degree and enter post-college life as productive, faith-filled individuals
10. Is an active participant of the Cristo Rey Network (para. 1)

The first Cristo Rey school, founded in 1995, was designed to create a systemic model of schools to provide a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum to the most economically-disadvantaged students in the nation (Kearney, 2008). The original model was intended to function as a template for other schools; the desire was that these schools were replicable. The impetus for the founding of the first school in Chicago, Illinois was the Jesuits' desire to serve the working poor and immigrant families in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago (Kabadi, 2015). This desire was a reaction to the failures of the public school systems in the urban core to minister to the most marginalized students in their charge. Led by Father John Foley, S.J., the Jesuits commenced a feasibility study in the Pilsen neighborhood. "Many parents told the Jesuits they were interested in sending their children to a safe Catholic high school because of the poor performance, overcrowding, and sometimes dangerous conditions in local public schools" (Kearney, 2008, p. 55). The biggest hurdle for the new school was financial. Students from the poorest families in the United States cannot afford to pay private school tuition. According to Kabadi (2014), the founders of the new school developed a revolutionary plan they christened the CWSP in which groups of students job-share a 40-hour week by each working one day a week. To allow students to work under the federally-mandated

age of 16, the CRN negotiated an exemption with the U.S. Department of Labor, which allowed students to work up to eighteen hours weekly if they still attend classes the minimum number of hours mandated by the state (Cech, 2007). The CWSP was the brainchild of Father Ted Munz, S.J., a Jesuit priest who also held a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from the University of Chicago. His unique set of skills allowed him to craft a plan that would allow some of Chicago's most impoverished youth to attend a rigorous, private school (Kearney, 2008). The CWSP has proved a radical strategy for effectively supplementing student tuition. Without it, Cristo Rey schools would cease to exist because the students from marginalized backgrounds could not pay full tuition.

According to the immediate past President of Cristo Rey, Kansas City, Kathleen Hanlon, Cristo Rey Kansas City (CRKC) opened in 2006 as the eleventh school in the CRN (personal communication, April 7, 2016). According to Father Mark Lewis, S.J., (personal communication, May 1, 2016), when the original feasibility study was presented to the Jesuit community of Kansas City, they declined sponsorship because they were worried about the financial viability of the school; however the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth agreed to sponsor the school and continue to at the time of this writing. John O'Connor, the President of CRKC (personal communication, March 8, 2018), shared that the CRN utilizes the College Board's ACT battery of tests to gauge the growth and college readiness of their students throughout their matriculation in the network's schools. This battery includes the Aspire, Explore, Plan, and ACT assessments. Although the CRN model's proponents boast of their graduates' increased access and attainment in higher education, often their graduates do not meet the ACT

benchmarks' threshold for college readiness. According to the standardized testing data provided by CRKC, 80% of the 2010-2014 CRKC graduates who attained a two or four-year college degree, did not meet all four of the ACT's College Readiness Benchmarks. Former CRKC President, Kathleen Hanlon (personal communication, April 7, 2016), suggested that the unique nature of the Cristo Rey model augments the students' success rates to compensate for their seeming lack of academic skills. She asserted that there are distinct non-cognitive factors developed at CRKC that allow their students to achieve higher levels of success in college than would be expected.

According to Broughton (2013), Senior Director of College Initiatives at the Cristo Rey Network, "Third-party outcome data from the National Student Clearinghouse shows Cristo Rey graduates enrolling and completing college at rates well beyond what their ACT scores would predict and at twice the rate of their low-income peers" (para. 9). This assertion was seconded by Odiotti (2016), the principal of Cristo Rey St. Martin in Illinois, who reported, "Despite test scores that would indicate that many of our students are not college-ready based on the ACT's college-ready benchmark scores, these alumni are persisting in their post-secondary studies at rates greater than the national average for low-income students" (p. 15). The administrators at the CRN in Chicago, Illinois and the administrators at each individual school diligently collect longitudinal data from their graduates and present students.

Researchers have sought to identify the primary elements that propel Cristo Rey graduates to succeed at higher levels than do their counterparts in public schools. In 2010, approximately 19% of students from urban school districts sought higher education compared to 70% of their suburban counterparts (Pew Research Center, 2010). The 2014

graduating class of the CRN graduated high school at a 95% rate (CRN, 2015).

According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC, 2016), 100% of Cristo Rey graduates are accepted to college; additionally, the clearinghouse reported a CRN average total college enrollment rate of 84%. Also, 37% of the Cristo Rey graduating Class of 2008 graduated from college within six years (Cristo Rey Network Annual Report, 2015). According to Fahey-Smith (2015):

These rates position Cristo Rey favorably when compared to other low SES schools. U.S. Census Bureau (2013) data show that 66% of Hispanics and 85% of Blacks more than 25 years of age, nationwide, have earned their high school diploma. The data from the 2013 National Center for Education Statistics' Beginning Postsecondary Study show a six-year bachelor's degree attainment rate of just 11% for low-income, first-generation students. The U.S. Census Bureau (2013) reports that 22% of Blacks and only 15% of Hispanics nationwide, age 25 or older, had obtained at least a bachelor's degree or higher in 2013. (p. 56)

Researchers most often cite the following three elements of the CRN model: the CWSP, the college preparatory academic curriculum, and the culture of Cristo Rey schools (Aldana, 2015; Bonham, 2014; Fahey-Smith, 2015). The CWSP supplements the tuition of students from low SES families allowing them to enroll in a rigorous, private school that they would be otherwise unable to attend (Kearney, 2008).

Additionally, the CWSP makes it possible for students to learn soft skills such as collaboration, communication, and responsibility that corporations demand; the work-study program also provides an opportunity for students to network and create connections within the white-collar world of internships, part-time jobs, and possible

future employment. Networking and creating connections are areas in which the students typically need instruction and guidance, as they do not come into the network with these skills from their home lives (Fahey-Smith, 2015). The second element that is most often discussed in the literature regarding the success of the Cristo Rey graduates is the rigorous academic curriculum offered at the school. All too often, Advanced Placement (AP) courses, honors courses, and dual credit courses are not as plentiful in schools located in the urban core as they are in the more well-funded school systems. Students who attend schools with high concentrations of poverty are less likely to be exposed to higher-level classes that prepare them for success in college, according to a report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (2018). In contrast, according to Couture (2007), Cristo Rey schools offer a full complement of rigorous coursework in all disciplines, as well as an extended school day and school year to allow for mastery of these disciplines. The third often cited element in the current research is the culture established at the Cristo Rey schools, which is the bedrock upon which all their success is predicated. It is a culture rooted in the Catholic faith tradition, in which all members are valued, cared for, and are a part of a greater community. Teachers, administration, and staff are expected to go beyond their typical job duties to ensure that all students are learning and have their needs met. This sense of community allows students to succeed because they know that the adults in the school are always there to support and care for them. The college-going culture that permeates the schools is a natural outgrowth of the belief that every person has intrinsic value and the innate abilities to reach their highest potential.

Statement of the Problem

The gaps in higher education access and completion for marginalized students create disparities that can have a profound and lasting impact on their lives. These inequalities negatively affect the efficacy of the nation's workforce, health, and overall stability.

The socioeconomic status of a child's parents has always been one of the strongest predictors of the child's academic achievement and educational attainment Family income is now nearly as strong as parental education in predicting children's achievement. (Duncan & Murnane, 2011, pp. 2-3)

In 2017, the ACT released results that demonstrated 9% of students from low-SES families, whose parents did not go to college, and who identify as African American, Hispanic, Native American, or Pacific Islander are ready for college (Anderson, 2017). School systems around the nation have grappled with effectively educating all students to ensure their success both in K-12 schools and beyond into higher education. The struggle to educate all students informed the impetus for Father John Foley, S.J. to found the first Cristo Rey School in 1995. The school was designed to provide a rigorous, college-preparatory curriculum to the most economically-disadvantaged students in the nation. Additionally, the first school was a prototype for future Cristo Rey schools to be able to replicate. The mission of the CRN is to

empower thousands of students from underserved, low-income communities to develop their minds and hearts to become lifelong contributors to society. By providing students an extraordinary college preparatory education and a unique four-year, integrated corporate work study experience, we seek to transform urban America one student at a time. (CRN, 2018, para. 1)

In short, the staff at the CRN and the faculty and staff at each individual school aim to close not only the achievement gap but the attainment gap for marginalized students. However, little information has been gathered to analyze CRN graduates' perceptions of the factors that led to their success in higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact that the CRKC experience has had on the degree attainment of graduates who were not classified as college-ready by their failure to meet all four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. The researcher's goal for this study was to determine the perceptions of CRKC graduates about factors that affected their higher education success. An additional purpose of the study was to determine how high school experiences, 9-12 programming, and college successes and obstacles affected the participants' higher education success.

Significance of the Study

The results of the current study could equip the CRN with information on graduates' perceptions of what influenced their higher education success. Additionally, the CRN might be able to glean valuable information about the perceptions of graduates as they relate to how the CRN prepared them for the rigors of higher education. This study contributes to a body of knowledge surrounding the CRN model, the achievement gap, and using the ACT to make high stakes admissions and scholarship decisions. This study could shed light on the role of the CRKC experience in college admission, persistence, and eventual degree attainment. Also, this research could be of interest to those institutions that use the ACT as a gatekeeper for admissions, scholarship considerations, honors program admissions, and course exemptions. The disparity

between the predicted success of the CRKC graduates by the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks and their actual higher education success could be compelling to the CRN as well as any institutions that serve primarily marginalized students. Any secondary institution that is interested in closing the enrollment and attainment gaps of their students who enroll in higher education might be interested in the results of the study. Secondary institutions that are considering test-blind or test-optional policies for admission could be interested in this study.

Delimitations

According to Lunenburg & Irby (2008), “Delimitations are self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study” (p. 134). The study was confined to graduates of CRKC. Although the results may be extrapolated to other CRN schools, they may not apply to schools outside the CRN. The sample was limited to graduates of CRKC from 2010 to 2016. The sample was limited to Cristo Rey graduates from the population that were not considered college-ready based on their ACT composite score of 22 or lower but had earned a degree from a two or four-year college or university. The data were not disaggregated by gender, SES, ethnicity, religion, or any other demographic information.

Assumptions

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), “Assumptions are postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research” (p. 135). This study was predicated on the following assumptions: (a) the participants understood the interview questions, (b) the participants were honest in their responses, (c) the

participants were from a marginalized background due to their attendance and graduation from CRKC.

Research Question

One research question guided this study of the graduates of CRKC. It guides the study to examine the unique attributes of the CRN that allowed graduates to be college-ready despite their scores on the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. According to the perceptions of CRKC alumni who did not meet multiple ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, what factors, including high school experiences, college successes, and obstacles affected their completion of a two or four-year college degree?

Definition of Terms

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), any terms used in the study that are not commonly known should be defined, and the definitions should come from a “professional reference source” (p. 119). The following list of terms and definitions comprises the words used in the study that may not be common parlance for all readers.

ACT composite score. The ACT consists of four tests: English, mathematics, reading, and science. The score range for each of the four tests is 1–36. The composite score, as reported by ACT, is the average of the four test scores earned during a single test administration, rounded to the nearest whole number (ACT, 2018b).

ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. These scores represent the minimum ACT score that is required for students to have a high probability of success in credit-bearing college courses like English composition (18), social sciences courses (22), college algebra (22), or biology (23) (ACT, 2018b).

Academic achievement gap. The National Center for Education Statistics (2019) identifies achievement gaps as occurring when one group of students (such as students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender) outperforms another group and the difference in average scores for the two groups is statistically significant (that is, larger than the margin of error).

Economically disadvantaged. Fontenot, Semega, and Kollar (2018) defined economically disadvantaged students as those coming from families that earn less than 75% of national annual median income, which was \$61,372 in 2017; the CRN uses this definition for admission.

Ignatian pedagogy. The International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (1993) defined Ignatian pedagogy as the educational philosophy and practice, which stems from Ignatian Spirituality, the expected pedagogy at Jesuit schools.

Ignatian spirituality. According to the Society of Jesus (1995), Ignatian spirituality is based on the lived experience of Saint Ignatius. Most notably, Ignatian spirituality calls for the discovery of “God in All Things” as one experiences the world.

Marginalized student. Lawrence-Brown and Sapon-Shevin (2014) described a marginalized student as one with a cultural or linguistic disadvantage, deprived access, disenfranchised social-class, or underrepresented racial background.

Student of color. Any student whose ethnicity is not classified as Caucasian is considered a student of color (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012).

Student of poverty. Payne (2003) stated that the extent to which a student does without necessary resources that influence academic achievement such as financial,

emotional, spiritual, physical, support systems, and role models designates him or her a student of poverty.

Organization of the Study

The study's background information, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, significance, assumptions, delimitations, assumptions, the research question, and definition of terms were presented in this chapter. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on the achievement gap, the history and applications of the ACT, and the Cristo Rey model. Presented in Chapter 3 is the research methodology used in this study, which includes the research design, the setting, sampling procedures, instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis and synthesis, reliability and trustworthiness, researcher's role, and the limitations. Chapter 4 presents the results and summation of the emergent themes gleaned from the interviews. Chapter 5 contains the study summary, the findings related to the literature, and the conclusions.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In this chapter, the literature surrounding the themes and topics related to this study are presented. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section is an exploration of the achievement gap between marginalized students and their non-marginalized counterparts. The second section includes the history and applications of the ACT. Research regarding the Cristo Rey model of education comprises the final section.

The Achievement Gap

The NCES described the achievement gap as the discrepancy between the academic performance of white students and other ethnic groups as well as that between economically disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students. Achievement gaps are persistent and consistent, not isolated or fleeting. The typical markers that measure the achievement gap are standardized-testing scores, college degree completion, high school and college GPA, and various other proficiency measures (Ansell, 2011).

History of the achievement gap. The story of the achievement gap is as old as the history of the United States itself. The gaps between the achievement of non-white students and their white counterparts and students in poverty and their economically well-off peers have not only existed since the very beginning but were also engineered to be a system that did not serve all equitably. From the earliest settlers, the American educational system was designed to serve the needs of white males with property (Allen, 2008). This institutional racism is described by Singleton (2013) as “The American school system was designed, from the very beginning to exclude, then marginalize, and then under-educate children of color” (p. 6). Although public schools proliferated during

the mid-to-late 1600s, they still largely excluded any students who were not white males, who typically came from the upper echelons of society (Powell, 2019). Simultaneously, in the mid-1600s, slavery was legalized in Massachusetts and quickly spread its way throughout the colonies. At that time, most colonies had strict laws prohibiting slaves from reading or writing, and anyone from teaching slaves to read or write (Powell, 2019). When the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1863, many African Americans rightly demanded an education (Powell, 2019). However, they were often thwarted by Black Codes and Jim Crow laws that kept the races separate in public spheres; this separation was codified with the 1896 Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which established the “separate-but-equal” doctrine (Powell, 2019). The ruling in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was the prevailing law of the land until overturned by the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, which established that “separate-but-equal” was inherently unequal, thereby ending de jure segregation in the United States (Powell, 2019). However, even though de jure segregation was no longer in effect, many school systems had to be forcibly integrated through the late 1980s (Powell, 2019).

Although the *Brown v. Boards of Education* ruling was a step in the right direction toward closing the achievement gap, currently there are still concerns about de facto segregation and the fact that schools are more racially segregated than they were in the late 1960s (Frankenberg, Lee, & Orfield, 2003; Orfield, Kuscera, & Siegel-Hawley, 2012). In 2013, R. Rothstein asserted, “Today, African American students are more isolated than they were 40 years ago, while most education policymakers and reformers have abandoned integration as a cause” (p. 2).

In addition to de facto racial segregation, students are also increasingly segregated by social class. A well-documented relationship between low socioeconomic status (SES) and racial and ethnic minority status exists in the United States. Economically marginalized American students are disproportionately African American, Latinx, and Hispanic youth (Berg, 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; R. Rothstein, 2004; Solórzano, Datnow, Park, & Watford, 2013; Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). Even though African American, Latinx, and Hispanic youth account for only one-third of all children in the United States, they make up more than one-half of children living in severely impoverished neighborhoods (Fontenot et al., 2018). According to Musu-Gillette et al. (2017), in 2014, the highest percentage of children under 18 living in poverty were African American at 37%, and the second highest percentage was Latinx and Hispanic children at 31%.

The significance of the achievement gap. The educational inequalities that have persisted throughout American history have not abated for marginalized students. In fact, many contend that the achievement gap has not only continued but has also gotten worse for students of color and low SES backgrounds (Barton & Coley, 2009; Bohrnstedt et al., 2015; Garcia & Weiss, 2017; Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011; Musu-Gillette et al., 2017; Reardon, 2011). Some authors have identified the achievement gap as the greatest civil rights issue of the first 20 years of the 21st century (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Frey, 2017; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Whitman, 2008). This push for equity is echoed by many Americans, as shown in the Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup Poll of attitudes toward public schools, which reported that 75% of Americans said they felt that

students from low SES communities have fewer educational opportunities than those in prosperous communities (Rose & Gallup, 2018).

In addition to the moral and ethical motives, there are many other compelling reasons for eliminating the achievement gap. Inequalities, in any form, have deleterious effects on society as a whole. Bowen et al. (2009) contended that on a personal level, people facing inequalities suffer from poor physical and mental health, lower life expectancy, and less overall satisfaction with life. Additionally, on a societal level, there is greater crime, less civic and community involvement, and greater racial and class tensions. As well as the personal economic gains enjoyed when inequities are eradicated, economic gains are enjoyed by the nation as a whole. According to Lynch and Oakford (2014), closing the achievement gap would have substantial positive influence on the gross domestic product (GDP), federal, state, and local tax revenues estimating that federal revenue would increase by \$110 billion yearly, state and local government profits would rise by \$88 billion annually, and the GDP would rise by \$551 billion per year.

The state of the achievement gap. Evidence indicates that the achievement gap exists before students enter formal schooling. Data have revealed that the achievement gaps in both mathematics and reading are substantial even at the start of kindergarten (Fryer & Levitt 2004; Garcia & Weiss, 2017; Reardon & Galindo 2006; Rothstein, 2013). Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) data, measured in units of standard deviation, indicate achievement gaps widen between kindergarten and fifth grade and by fifth grade, the math gap is about one full standard deviation, and the reading gap is nearly three-quarters of a standards deviation (Reardon & Galindo, 2006). According to

Musu-Gillette et al. (2017), in 2015, a substantial achievement gap persisted throughout K-12 schooling:

- in 4th grade, the White-Black achievement gap in reading was 26 points; the mathematics achievement gap was 24
- in 4th grade, the White-Hispanic gap in reading was 24 points; the mathematics achievement gap was 18
- in 8th grade, the White-Black gap in reading was 26 points; the mathematics achievement gap was 32
- in 8th grade, the White-Hispanic gap in reading was 21 points; the mathematics achievement gap was 22
- in 12th grade, the White-Black achievement gap in reading was 30 points; the mathematics achievement gap was 30 points
- in 12th grade, the White-Hispanic achievement gap in reading was 20 points; the mathematics achievement gap was 21 points (p. iv)

In every indicator of academic achievement, at every level measured by the NCES, a gap exists between white students and their peers of color.

The ACT

The ACT is a standardized test that is designed to assess students' college readiness. The components include academic achievement tests in English, mathematics, reading, and science; additionally, there is a student profile section and career interest inventory as well. The multiple-choice assessment is divided into four sub-categories of English, mathematics, reading, and science, that are scored on a scale of 36. The four sub-category scores are averaged to produce a composite score on a scale of 36 as well;

the optional tests do not affect the composite score. The ACT National Curriculum Survey is utilized every few years to ensure that the tests accurately measure the skills taught in high school and that the instructors of entry-level college courses expect (ACT, 2018a).

Background and purpose of the ACT. The ACT was first introduced in 1959 as a competitor for the Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT). However, the aims of the ACT organization are quite different from the aims of the SAT organization (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009). Whereas the ACT was designed to assess students' readiness for college and appropriate placement in college courses, the SAT was designed to screen college applicants uniformly on pure intelligence, rather than content acquisition (Fletcher, 2009). Thus, the ACT has always been more closely aligned with the high school curriculum than the SAT (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Bettinger, Evans, & Pope, 2011; Zwick, 2007). In 2011, the ACT surpassed the SAT for the first time in total test takers; that year, 1,666,017 students took the ACT, and 1,664,479 students took the SAT (Pope, 2012). According to ACT (2018a), 1,914,817 students took the test in 2018.

To fulfill one of the ACT's stated purposes of helping students assess their college readiness, the ACT developed the College Readiness System in 2006 (Allen & Radunzel, 2017). The College Readiness Benchmarks correspond to ACT subject area test scores that represent the threshold of achievement essential for students to have a 50% chance of earning a B or higher or a 75% chance of earning a C or higher in equivalent credit-bearing first-year college coursework. The ACT College Readiness Benchmarks are English, 18, reading, 22, mathematics, 22, and science, 23. They

correspond to the following college coursework: English, English composition; reading, social sciences; math, college algebra; science, biology (ACT, 2017a).

Efficacy of the ACT in predicting college success. Assessing the validity of the ACT in predicting college success can be contentious, even among researchers who have devoted their life's work to analyzing assessment measures. In the ACT's own research report series, the discussion of validity by ACT psychometricians, Huh and Huang (2016) indicated, "Several studies have documented a positive correlation between ACT scores and/or high school GPA and students' success in the first year of college" (p. 5). What ACT fails to note regarding all seven of these cited studies (Allen, 2013; Allen & Robbins, 2010; Allen & Scoring, 2005; Noble & Sawyer, 2002; Noble & Sawyer, 2004; Sawyer, 2013; Westrick, Le, Robbins, Radunzel, & Schmidt, 2015) is that either all the researchers or all the principal researchers are directly employed by ACT. However, according to Messick (1988), the predictive ability of the ACT alone does not connote test validity. To evaluate the validity, one must take into consideration the design, development, content, administration, and finally the use of the test.

When reviewing the ACT publications, ACT's psychometricians and writers consistently cited another variable beyond the assessment itself that is complementary in predicting students' college success as defined by persistence or attainment. According to the ACT (2018a), "ACT scores can be used in combination with other relevant measures to estimate students' likelihood of success in college during the first year and beyond to help inform college admission and course placement decisions" (p. 23). This statement has been reinforced by ACT's psychometricians, who assert that their research indicates that college grade point average (GPA) prognostications that are jointly based

on ACT composite score and high school GPA (HSGPA) are more precise than predictions based on either variable in isolation (Huh & Huang, 2016). The complementary use of the HSGPA and a standardized test score has been vigorously supported by multiple studies; in fact all the studies that have encouraged the use of multiple measures of assessing student potential stress the predictive value of the HSGPA over a standardized test score and caution against using a standardized test score as the sole predictor of college success (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Geiser & Studley, 2003; Gilroy, 2007; Hawkins & Lautz, 2005; National Association for College Admissions Counseling [NACAC], 2016; Sawyer, 2010; Sternberg, 2010). Geiser and Santelices (2007) expanded upon previous research by Geiser and Studley (2003), which found that HSGPA was consistently the best predictor of freshman grades in college, which is the most oft-cited predictor in predictive validity studies. Geiser and Santelices (2007) found that not only was the HSGPA consistently the strongest predictor of freshman success but that this predictive weight increases after the freshman year to function as the strongest predictor of four-year college outcomes. Bowen et al. (2009) asserted that HSGPAs are a stronger predictor of four-year and six-year graduation rates than either the ACT or the SAT scores. Using regression analyses, Bowen et al. (2009) found that the relationship between HSGPA and college success is the strongest of the factors studied of the 125,000 test subjects; this effect was observed across all 68 higher educational institutions studied.

Impact of the ACT on marginalized student populations. A growing body of research has refuted the validity claims of the standardized testing giants, ACT and The College Board, which owns the SAT (Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Choi, 2004; Geiser &

Santelices, 2007; Geiser & Studley, 2003; Wonnell, Rothstein, & Latting, 2012). This literature review will only focus on how overreliance on standardized tests, like the ACT, negatively impacts marginalized student populations.

Although ACT's psychometricians admit that the HSGPA is the strongest prognosticator of future college success, they still contend that the ACT is also a strong predictor of college success for all students (Huh & Huang, 2016). Despite these contentions, some research has illuminated the fact that standardized test scores do not always accurately predict college success equally when disaggregated for factors that classically identify marginalized students, such as race, first-generation status, and SES (Astone & Nunez-Wormack, 1990; Atkinson & Geiser, 2009; Crouse & Trusheim, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 1994; Geiser, 2017; Gerald & Haycock, 2006; Madaus, 1995; Soares, 2007; Wilson, 1978). According to Atkinson and Geiser (2009), traditional validity studies evaluating standardized tests tend to rely on simple correlational methods; however, these studies can be misleading because these methods can disguise the contributions of other factors that are not specifically studied in the predictive models, for instance, SES. Atkinson and Geiser (2009) go on to say that much of the ostensible predictive power of standardized tests actually "reflects the proxy effects of socioeconomic status" (p. 666) because parents' education and family income are correlated with ACT scores and with positive college outcomes. J. Rothstein (2004) estimated that traditional methods and sparse models overestimate the predictive accuracy of standardized tests by 150% when they fail to consider socioeconomic factors. Laskey and Hetzel (2011) found that for at-risk students, ACT scores were not a predictor of college achievement or retention; in fact, they recommend that more colleges and

universities should admit at-risk students through means that extend beyond the ACT because they can be successful with proper supports. According to Geiser (2017), utilizing standardized tests as admissions standards has a more adverse bearing on economically marginalized and minority candidates than HSGPA, class rank, and other more equitable academic measures of achievement. Geiser (2017) further asserted that scores on nationally normed tests, like the ACT, are most impacted by the SES of the test-takers; “more than a third of the variation in ACT scores is attributable to differences in socioeconomic circumstance” (p. 1). Myers and Pyles (1992) and Hoffman and Lowitzski (2005) found that ACT scores in isolation are not accurate predictors of college academic success for minority students; these findings were established through analyses that enabled comparisons based on HSGPA, standardized test scores, race, sex, and gender. Due to the results of these studies, the commission of the NACAC (2008) cautioned that the overemphasis of ACT scores during the admissions process might further intensify the prevailing inequalities among marginalized students in higher education. Disproportionate dependence on standardized test scores in the admissions process tends to exclude marginalized students and typically creates higher education institutions that are largely white and affluent (Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005; Gerald & Haycock, 2006; Soares, 2007; Shanley, 2007; Zwick, 2007).

The Cristo Rey Model of Education

According to Aldana (2015), “The Cristo Rey schools stand in contrast to the majority of U.S. Jesuit high schools, which cater to an elite, powerful constituency” (p. 185). Essentially, Cristo Rey schools grew out of the Jesuits’ concern that this was not in keeping with the mission to serve those on the margins (Aldana, 2015; Reese,

2011). The CRN is explicitly designed to serve the underserved. Although the first Cristo Rey school opened in Chicago, Illinois in 1996, the Cristo Rey Network was not created until 2001, which coincided with the opening of the second Cristo Rey school in Portland, Oregon (Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014). As of 2019, there are 35 CRN schools, operating in 22 states that serve over 12,000 students exclusively from economically disadvantaged families, 98% of whom are students of color (CRN, 2018). Because Cristo Rey schools have only been in existence for 23 years and the CRN has only been in existence for 18, many of the early scholars attempting to study the model lamented the scarcity of research grounded in educational theory (Aldana, 2015; Bludgus, 2018; Odiotti, 2016). Instead, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, much of what was written about Cristo Rey was found in opinion editorials, news, and journalistic writing, and not in peer-reviewed educational research (Aldana, 2015).

However, the recent numbers reported by the CRN show great promise for their graduates, especially since they stand in stark contrast to the achievements of their peers of similar backgrounds in public schools. According to National Student Clearinghouse (2015), “for the graduating classes of 2008-2012, 90% of Cristo Rey graduates have enrolled in college, and for the graduating classes of 2005-2007, 42% have graduated from college” (p. 1). These enrollment and attainment numbers for CRN students are at a far greater rate than reported for students of color in public schools. Due in large part to the successes the schools and their network have enjoyed with populations of underserved students, multiple studies have been undertaken since 2005. Although it is still a relatively small body of research, the literature is robust enough to inform conclusions and draw upon areas for further study. To understand more fully the reasons

why CRN schools have been effective in educating economically disadvantaged students of color, it is imperative to explore a myriad of factors that created this success.

Catholic schools' efficacy in educating underserved populations. Historically, Catholic parish schools served the burgeoning population of immigrants who were flooding American cities after World War II. The schools served both the educational and community needs of these new American families. Moreover, because they relied upon minimally paid nuns and priests for much of the labor, they could keep costs low enough for most families to afford private Catholic schooling (Brinig & Garnett, 2010; Fialka, 2003; Gihleb & Giuntella, 2013). It was upon this foundation that much of the successes of the Catholic schools were built.

Much study and debate have centered around the “Catholic schools effect (CSE)” or the “Catholic school advantage (CSA),” which asserts that Catholic schooling is more economically efficient and academically effective than public schools. Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore (1982) asserted that Catholic schools were empirically better at educating students than public schools. Their research dovetailed from Coleman’s (1966) seminal education research, dubbed the Coleman Report, in which the researcher was tasked with analyzing equity in the American school system; although he did not anticipate conclusions regarding Catholic schools, they were implicit in his findings and the methodology shaped much of how data is used to shape policy in the early years of the 21st century (Dickinson, 2016). Although many researchers (Alexander & Pallas, 1985; Willms, 1985) have challenged both the results and the methodology of their work, many researchers have seized on a seemingly peripheral finding regarding Catholic schools and their efficacy for narrowing the achievement gap for students of color in the urban core

(Altonji, Elder, & Taber, 2005; Figlio & Stone, 1997; Huchting, Martin, Chavez, Holyk-Casey, & Ruiz, 2014; Jeynes, 2005; Morgan, 2001; Neal, 1997; Polite, 1992; Sander, 2001; Telles & Ortiz, 2008). Through the work of these researchers, it has generally been acknowledged that although the CSE or CSA cannot be extrapolated to the average student or the population as a whole, the effects of the CSE or CSA are dramatically felt by certain populations, such as urban African-Americans, Hispanics, and Latinx students (Bempechat, Boulay, Piergross, & Wenk, 2008; Figlio & Stone, 1997; Jeynes, 2005; Neal, 1997; Polite, 1992; Sander, 2001, Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

The Catholic Church has a long tradition of serving the most marginalized in society. This practice is formally known in the church as the preferential option for the poor, by which a moral test is instigated to ensure that the most vulnerable are tended (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998). Historically, Catholic schools' preferential option for the poor requires that the schools minister to underserved populations from low SES and often minority backgrounds. Indeed, many researchers have found that Catholic schools have contributed significantly to the education of low-income and minority students in the United States (Bempechat et al., 2008; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Coleman et al., 1982; Greeley, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Neal, 1997).

Because of the dictate to serve the poor, Catholic schools do not discriminate between students who are practicing Catholics and those who are not. As the former Cardinal of Washington, D.C., James Hickey said, "We don't teach them because they're Catholic but because we are" (as cited in Turner, 2010, p. 1). According to the Alliance for Catholic Education (2018), non-Catholic enrollment in Catholic schools in the urban core is over 20%. This color-blind, SES-blind policy of the Catholic schools stems from

the belief in the human dignity of all people regardless of their race, ethnicity, background, or creed. According to research conducted by Bryk et al. (1993), and summarized by Sweas (2014), the effectiveness of Catholic education is based upon, “the belief, intrinsic to the Catholic faith, in the equal human dignity of every person. All deserve and are capable of receiving a classical education that advances their spiritual understanding” (Sweas, 2014, p. 31).

Devotion to this tenet of human dignity for all people tends to yield the greatest results for the African-American, Hispanic, and Latinx students in the urban core for a variety of reasons. The primary reasons cited by the researchers are the following: students in the urban core are most likely to be zoned into under-performing public schools; Catholic schools tend to offer fewer electives, so they tend to focus on a core curriculum for all students; and the decentralized nature of Catholic schools decreases the bureaucracy that can run counter to student-centered decision making (Aldana, 2015; Bryk et al., 1993; Gamble, 2015; Manno, 1999; Neal, 1997; Polite, 1992; Sander, 2001).

More specifically, the Catholic schools’ dropout rate is 3.4%, compared to public schools, which documented a 14.4% dropout rate (Council for American Private Education [CAPE], 2015). Additionally, 99% of students from Catholic high schools go on to graduate, and 97% continue to higher education (CAPE, 2015). Moreover, these numbers do not just depict higher enrollment numbers at universities and colleges. Multiple studies have found that these marginalized students are more college-ready than their public-school peers, which increases their likelihood of graduating (Aldana, 2014; Greeley, 2002; O’Keefe & Murphy, 2000; Riordan, 2000). In addition to higher rates of graduation and matriculation in higher education, African American, Hispanic, and

Latinx students in Catholic schools outperformed their peers in public schools on the ACT. The average score for Hispanic and Latinx students was 22.3 compared to their peers in public school, which was 18.6, while African American students also scored higher with a score of 23.8 compared to those in public schools who averaged a score of 20.7 (CAPE, 2015). These results led Payne (2008) to suggest that the Catholic school model “is probably the closest thing we have to an answer to the question about how one scales up effective education in the inner city” (p. 117). Viteritti (as cited in Freedman, 2010) concurred by saying, “If you’re serious about education reform, you have to pay attention to what Catholic schools are doing. The fact of the matter is that they’ve been educating urban kids better than they’re being educated elsewhere” (p. 4). To examine the success that the CRN has been able to specifically cultivate, it is imperative to start with the Mission Effectiveness Standards (MES, see Appendix A), which ensure fidelity to the CRN brand.

Development of the Mission Effectiveness Standards (MES). Supporting everything that the CRN schools do is their mission statement, and MES ensure faithfulness to the CRN mission. Although the original Cristo Rey school in Chicago and all subsequent schools have been mission-driven, the rapid proliferation of the model from 1996 to 2002 meant that the network administration had not prioritized setting it up as a non-profit organization formally. Additionally, the schools had less oversight from the CRN and no formal standards by which the schools were evaluated (Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014). As with most institutions that lack accountability structures tied to a clear vision, the newer schools in the network had varying degrees of success and fidelity to the core values of the founders (Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014; Thielman, 2012).

In many ways, the CRN grew too quickly for the previous administrative structures to keep up with the demands (Sweas, 2014; Thielman, 2012). The primary impetus to formalize the non-profit structure and establish standards came from the Gates Foundation's \$9.9 million grant that was contingent upon instituting both of these requirements (Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014; Thielman, 2012). The CRN was formally established as a 501(c)(3) organization in 2003; the primary task of the CRN was to manage the growth and quality of the schools (CRN, 2018). After the CRN was officially incorporated, the secondary task meted out by the Gates Foundation was to codify the standards by which the schools would be evaluated (Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014). The Gates Foundation (2018) currently invests billions of dollars in K-12 education and has strict guidelines for how they hold their beneficiaries accountable for the return on their investment. This demand represented a transformation in the organization because they had previously been guided by just a mission statement, not a specific set of standards. The CRN's mission is:

The Cristo Rey Network empowers thousands of students from underserved, low-income communities to develop their minds and hearts to become lifelong contributors to society. By providing students an extraordinary college preparatory education and a unique four-year, integrated corporate work study experience, we seek to transform urban America one student at a time. (CRN, 2018, para. 1)

However, the mission statement alone was not sufficient to ensure fidelity to the vision, so the CRN initiated a process to establish a set of standards by which schools could be effectively and objectively evaluated. These standards later were known as the MES.

To complete this process, the CRN turned to its Jesuit roots for inspiration. The MES are borne out of the ideas in the book, *What Makes a Jesuit School Jesuit?*, that includes the 10 criteria by which a Jesuit school can and should be evaluated (Jesuit Conference, 2011). These 10 criteria (see Appendix E) were utilized to create the MES (Frey, 2017).

Although ostensibly these standards codified the mission for the CRN going forward, they also weeded out some prospective schools that wanted to join the CRN. This process ensured fidelity to the mission of the CRN. For instance, a community in New Bern, North Carolina saw the model as an opportunity to bring a new Catholic school to the area; but since their feasibility study only planned for a student body that was 80% economically disadvantaged, their request to join was denied (Sweas, 2014). Additionally, San Juan Diego Catholic School in Austin, Texas, which had been in the CRN since 2002, decided to leave the network in 2006 because of the MES. The bishop in Austin said he did not feel that it would be wise to deny a Catholic education to those who were not economically disadvantaged (Sweas; 2014). In both instances, these were clear cut decisions by the CRN. If schools were unable or unwilling to meet the standards outlined in the MES, then they could not be designated as a CRN school.

MES implemented. Although the MES are codified and specific, the CRN must be intentional about how they are executed at each school site. The MES are ultimately guided by the Jesuit Social Justice Dialectic (Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014). A dialectic is a technique of examining and discussing apparent contradictions by critically investigating seemingly contradictory concepts to achieve certainty and uncover the complexities involved in the ideas which are being studied (Rappaport, 1981; Todd &

Abrams, 2011). This tension between two seemingly contradictory concepts is at play in this case between the Jesuits' desire to affect social justice change through cultural inclusivity and the economic power that is requisite to ensure that this mission is fulfilled (Kabadi, 2015). Another essential principle at the heart of the Jesuit mission is seeking God in all things; this calls Jesuits to develop an appreciation and reverence for the diversity of God's creation (Barry, 2009; O'Malley, 1993; Traub, 2008).

Additionally, the social justice element of the Jesuit mission encourages advocacy for and with those who are marginalized or underrepresented in society (Arrupe, 1972; Brackley, 2004; Kammer, 2004). These social justice tenets are embedded in the MES of the CRN, which requires the schools to serve only marginalized and underrepresented students. This ability to serve the most marginalized students is built upon the financial foundation of the CWSP because they would cease to function without funding derived from it.

In a study commissioned by Sobrato, co-chair of the CRN's school board in San Jose, California, and administered by the Lexington Institute, Bateman (2014) found "Through interviews, focus groups and the utilization of grounded-theory analysis software . . . Cristo Rey's success story is founded in four specific components: Work Experience, Faith and Character Development, College Preparation and School Climate" (p. 6). All four of these elements emanate from the core belief of the social justice mission surrounding the education of the whole child, or *cura personalis* (Bateman, 2014). These four components result in intermediate outcomes of "character development, internal developmental assets, gateway skills, and a supportive social network, which ultimately lead to long-term outcomes of academic achievement, civic

engagement, college matriculation, and career readiness” (Bateman, 2014, p. 7). All these findings are supported by the foundation upon which the mission is built and incorporated through the MES.

Characteristics of schools serving underserved students. To understand how the CRN schools minister to the underserved effectively, it is first important to discuss the traits of schools that successfully serve marginalized populations of students. Numerous social scientists and educational researchers have studied the characteristics of schools who serve high poverty populations well. The studies of high performing, high poverty schools tend to focus on the following characteristics: effective administrative leadership, strong faculty work ethic and morale, positive school climate and culture, financial responsibility, parental and guardian engagement, and a robust focus on academics, instruction, and student learning that can be quantified (Carter, 2000; Edmonds, 1979; Kannapel, Clements, Taylor, & Hibpshman, 2005; Parrett & Budge, 2012; Reinhorn, Johnson, & Simon, 2017; Whitman, 2008). The CRN schools embrace all six of these identified characteristics of high-performing, high poverty schools in addition to adhering to the 10 MES. The next sections will clarify how each of the six characteristics is demonstrated in the 10 MES.

Effective administrative leadership. The MES highlight the importance of effective administrative leadership in standards seven and 10. Administratively, the CRN schools function quite differently than traditional parish-based Catholic schools. According to Bryk et al. (1993), in traditional parish-based Catholic schools, “No task is too big or too small for the principal to undertake . . . financial management, development and fund-raising, public and alumni relations, faculty selection and

supervision, student recruitment, and in many cases, discipline and instructional leadership” (p. 41). Although only 10% of Catholic schools in 1996 had presidents in addition to principals, Father Brad Schaeffer, S.J. knew that a solo principal model was untenable for the CRN schools; this led him to appoint Father John Foley, S.J. as president of the first CRN school in Chicago (Sweas, 2014). The rest of the CRN model schools have followed suit by replicating the “president-principal model” of administrative structure. This shift in the governance of school leadership allows for the president to focus on business operations, alumni relations, fund-raising, and advancement, which leaves the principal available to focus on the quality of the academic and instructional practices at the schools. Studies have shown that the “president-principal model” contributes to the sustainability of the schools who adopt it, results in higher retention among administrators, and increased job satisfaction and efficacy (Bateman, 2014; Dygert, 2000; Haney, 2010; Heft, 2011; James, 2009; Lockwood, 2014; Sweas, 2014). As of 2013, about half of all U.S. Catholic high schools currently have adopted the president-principal model. More specifically, 36% of typical parish and parochial schools and 69% of private Catholic schools adopted this model (Cirigliano, 2017).

In addition to the progressive model of administrative leadership that the CRN employs, they also utilize a best-practice framework network-wide called Teach Learn Lead (TLL). The Teach and Learn facets are primarily geared toward teachers, while the Lead initiatives are geared toward principals and rooted in the research and frameworks of Charlotte Danielson (Sweas, 2014). Through the CRN Summer Institute, the principals’ meeting in January, the national conference in the spring, and ongoing

leadership coaching cohorts, principals are trained in how to become academic leaders, rather than just school managers; this training is primarily based on how to evaluate and support teachers (Fahey-Smith, 2015; Frey, 2017; Sweas, 2014). These collaborative training sessions are somewhat akin to professional learning communities for the principals in the CRN. Not only do these sessions provide camaraderie, but they also provide both hard and soft skill development that the principals can take back to their buildings to ensure that they are affecting building-wide achievement. Principal of Cristo Rey Brooklyn, Christine Ramon (as cited in Sweas, 2014), credited the collaborative nature of the network for much of her leadership success, she stated “Everyone was so willing and open to welcome me to their school and have me there, teach me, mentor, me, show me what they were doing and be honest about what was working and not working” (p. 109).

Strong faculty work ethic and morale. The MES reflect the need for a strong faculty work ethic and morale in standards four and nine. According to Bludgus (2018), as a leader in urban education, Cristo Rey can leverage its reputation to recruit the best teachers and administrators. This reputation is most attractive to teachers who are called to serve marginalized students and with whom the social justice ideology of the Jesuits resonates (Fahey-Smith, 2015; Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014; Thielman, 2012). The Jesuit concept of *magis* is a Latin term used in Ignatian Spirituality that describes the consistent striving for excellence and a refusal to settle for mediocrity (Traub, 2008). This concept is oft-cited by teachers as a driver of their own engagement through the ethical lens of reform and social justice (Coelho, 2017; Traub, 2008). The value of the intentional adult presence was not lost on Father Robert Welsh, S.J., who helped start St. Martin de Porres,

a CRN school in Cleveland; he asserted that “It’s important to recognize that the success of a Cristo Rey school is dependent on the adult community” (as cited in Sweas, 2014, p. 39). This assertion is borne out in research on teacher effectiveness, which suggests that teachers are the most significant facet of student academic achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006).

Teacher training comes primarily from the network and school-based supports related to the best-practices program set up through TLL, which is an academic framework that identifies three main components the CRN deems critical for academic achievement; these components are the implementation of a rigorous academic curriculum, professional development of school administrators and faculty, and the incorporation of effectiveness training (Frey, 2017; Schulze, 2018; Sweas, 2014). In the Teach portion of the framework, teachers are trained in academic intervention strategies that are designed to remove barriers to high school and college success (Fahey-Smith, 2015). Some of the framework’s strategies for students include one-on-one tutorials, guided study halls, summer bridge programs, and double dosing, where students take an extra class in English and mathematics to boost literacy and mathematical skills (Fahey-Smith, 2015). The training for the teachers also consists of instruction in how to assess students, analyze the data, and utilize the data to drive instructional decisions (Frey, 2017), which is imperative for school improvement (Bernhardt, 2003; Ingram, Louis, & Schroeder, 2004; Mason, 2002; Schmoker, 2004; Sharkey & Murnane, 2006). Although the CRN does not officially designate themselves as ascribing to the professional learning communities model, the framework that is set up by the Teach facet of TLL has many of

the same hallmarks: shifting the focus to learning from teaching, collaborating with colleagues, and outcomes accountability at all levels (DuFour & Fullan, 2013).

Positive school climate and culture. The vast majority of the MES standards are centered around the import of the school's climate and culture; in fact, only standards seven, eight, and 10 do not apply to the climate and culture of the school. A culture of support, love, and trust is cited multiple times throughout the literature regarding the student, teacher, and administrator experience at CRN schools, which makes for powerful places to learn, teach, and lead (Aldana, 2012; Bludgus, 2018; Coelho, 2017; Fahey-Smith, 2015; Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014). In Jesuit schools, this is derived most empirically through the concept of *cura personalis*, which is the Latin word meaning care for the whole person. The guiding principle of *cura personalis* is the *modus operandi* at all CRN schools.

Moreover, according to Gray (2000), "this forms the basis of Ignatian pedagogy and the formative process for students in Jesuit schools – an internal and ongoing spiritual, moral, and intellectual conversion, which results in a continuous externalization of love in action" (p. 1). According to Engle and Tinto (2008), while mentoring programs, the establishment of faculty and peer relationships, and social-support services help retain and promote academic attainment for all, they are especially effective for economically disadvantaged minority students. A strong sense of community is a hallmark of all Catholic schools (Bludgus, 2018; Loyola University, School of Education, Center for Catholic School Effectiveness, & Boston College, School of Education, Roche Center for Catholic Education, 2012; Miller, 2006). This sense of community allows for students, teachers, and administrators to feel cared for, valued, and appreciated.

Financial responsibility. The MES standards explicitly detail that the CRN is to be run in a fiscally responsible manner in standard eight. The fiscal model of the CRN is one of the hallmarks of what makes it such a departure from other Catholic or parochial schools. According to Fahey-Smith (2015), the financial model calls for 60% of the operational budgets of the schools to be covered by the Corporate Work Study Program; the other 40% of operating expenses are funded through 30% fund-raising and development and 10% tuition paid by families. This model has been described as both responsible and sustainable (Bateman, 2014; Bludgus, 2018; Kabadi, 2014), which is in stark contrast to the parish-model Catholic schools of previous generations (Bateman, 2014; Bludgus, 2018; Kabadi, 2014; Lockwood, 2014; MacGregor, 2012). Although 10% of the tuition is still high for many of the families living in poverty, this sum helps them feel accountable for the education that their sons and daughters receive.

Catholic schools are in a period of flux whereby many urban Catholic high schools that serve low-income students have shuttered their doors because of a lack of funding (Brinig & Garnett, 2014; Broughman, Swaim, & Keaton, 2008; McDonald & Schultz, 2019). Conversely, CRN schools are thriving and growing due to their fiscal model. Petrisek (2016) asserted that tuition-based models of Catholic education are outmoded and unsustainable for the families who exhibit the most need. This assertion is borne out by the success of the CRN model, which does not rely on the traditional tuition-based model of yesteryear.

Parental and guardian engagement. The MES outline the importance of family engagement in standards one and three. Although there are multiple barriers to family engagement in high poverty schools (Hanafin & Lynch 2002; Hill & Torres 2010; Hill &

Tyson, 2009; Williams, Sanches, & Hunnell, 2011; Yamamoto & Holloway 2010), the CRN has made engagement a priority at all its schools. Family outreach has been prioritized at all CRN schools because the network knows that it is a vital component for student success. The most oft-cited barriers to family engagement in research revolve around issues of language and communication, cultural differences, and teacher perceptions of parental involvement (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon, 2000; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, & Ryalls, 2010; Yamamoto & Holloway 2010). To counter these barriers, the CRN has formalized programs to engage all families in their students' learning and extracurricular activities (Aldana, 2012; Crea et al., 2015; Sweas, 2014). This push to involve parents and guardians involves proactively soliciting parent input and developing relationships, rather than working from a deficit model of parental behavior as many schools have done in the past, resulting in failure (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005). This model is focused on transcending parental involvement to get to true parental engagement in which parents are trusted members who share in the educational decision-making regarding their children (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009).

The three primary strategies employed by the CRN to increase parental engagement are cultural responsiveness, teacher-parent collaboration, and age-appropriate involvement (Crea et al., 2015). The concept of cultural responsiveness stems from a reverence for the background, experiences, language, and culture that make the students and families who they are; by embracing these facets of their lives, educators can leverage increased family engagement and support of the educational processes (De Gaetano, 2007). While De Gaetano (2007) highlighted the need for schools to be

welcoming of parents and include them as equals in their children's education, parents also need to be trained in how to reinforce the schools' expectations and tenets at home (Epstein & Dauber, 1991). Teacher-parent collaboration continues to be one of the most important factors for not only student success, but parental engagement as well. Across multiple studies, researchers have found that positive teacher-parent collaboration and outreach results in higher parent self-efficacy, which is an impetus for engagement, constructive collaboration where shared objectives breed student success, and an unshakeable trust between teachers and families leads to a positive and productive academic and social-emotional climate at schools (Anderson & Minke, 2010; De Gaetano, 2007; Fan & Williams, 2010; Larocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). The concept of age-appropriate involvement is important to keep in mind when discussing the success of high school students because it is imperative to realize that it is reasonable for parents to play a subtler role in their children's education than they may have when they were younger (Jeynes, 2007). The problem is that educators often mistake this subtlety for lack of parental care or concern about their children's educational success; these assumptions can limit a teacher's likelihood to reach out to parents, thereby circumscribing the parental engagement often needed for student success (Epstein & Dauber, 1991).

Focus on academics, instruction, and quantifiable student learning. The MES that focus on academics, instruction, and quantifiable student learning are found in standards three, four, six, and nine. As previously mentioned, the CRN proliferated at a rapid pace with no playbook to consult regarding curriculum and assessment for this new model of schools. As the CRN was finding its footing, it experienced growing pains

along the way related to how to hold schools accountable for their academic achievement (Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014; Thielman, 2012). When Birdsell became president of the CRN in 2007, he knew that he needed to build institutional structures that would allow for transparency and accountability. The CRN received a grant from the Gates Foundation to fund a strategic planning project with The Bridgespan Group, Bain Consulting's nonprofit practice (Fahey-Smith, 2015; Reese, 2011; Sweas, 2014). One of the first initiatives of the strategic plan was to institute a higher level of academic accountability than previously existed, called the Mission Effectiveness Review, and utilizes the MES to evaluate how the schools are performing (Sweas; 2014). Additionally, the strategic planners encouraged the CRN to hire a Chief Academic Officer (CAO) in 2009 to oversee all academic and assessment initiatives throughout the network. As CAO, Goettl's first priority was to create a common, standards-based curriculum across the network (Fahey-Smith, 2015; Sweas, 2014). At the time, this standardization was a departure from the disparate curricular plans that were in place, which allowed for almost complete academic autonomy within the schools (Kearney, 2008; Fahey-Smith, 2015; Sweas, 2014). This move toward a standards-based curriculum is supported by school-wide reform efforts nationwide (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone, 2012; Marzano, 2007; Schmoker & Marzano, 1999; Voltz, Simms, & Nelson, 2010).

This period of change also signified a network-wide shift toward relying more heavily on quantifiable analytics regarding the assessment of student achievement. This shift was already taking place in isolated schools around the network. For instance, at Cristo Rey Boston, they started analyzing their students' Iowa Tests of Educational

Development scores and data from the NSCRC to drive instructional and curricular changes at the school (Thielman, 2012). Data have become an integral part of the CRN accountability model. According to Fahey-Smith (2015), the CRN analyzes data from the ACT, AP tests, and NSCRC to compile a comprehensive statistical directory, the Annual Data Report. The CRN uses this data to hold the schools accountable, enforce professional standards, determine best practice, set policy, and implement change to affect positive outcomes.

CRN graduates compared to similarly-normed peers. Since 2013, the NSCRC (2018) has compiled a comprehensive report of the nation's "most updated data on high school graduates' college access, persistence, and completion outcomes" (p. 3). The outcomes are disaggregated by a variety of characteristics, including income level, minority enrollment, and locale (NSCRC, 2018). For the purposes of the NSCRC, schools defined "high poverty" schools as those who meet the threshold of having at least 75% of the student population eligible for free or reduced lunch. All CRN schools meet the high poverty threshold by virtue of the MES, which dictates that the CRN only serve the most economically marginalized students.

CRN's NSC-verified average of college enrollment rates in the first fall after high school graduation for the class of 2015 was 86% (CRN, 2015). CRN's average college enrollment rates stand in stark contrast to other schools that the NSCRC designates as high poverty schools, who had college enrollment rates in the first fall after high school graduation for the class of 2015 of 51% (NSCRC, 2016). The data that tend to be more impactful than mere enrollment data is the persistence data that describe how many of the students succeeded in earning a college degree. The CRN's NSC-verified college

completion average for the class of 2009, in year six after their high school graduation, was 43% (CRN, 2015). The other designated high poverty schools in the NSC report have far less success in graduating their students from college in six years or less.

Among high poverty schools in the NSC report, only an average of 18% of students from the class of 2009 have completed college (NSCRC, 2016).

Perceptions of CRN students and graduates. This segment presents the findings of the most current research regarding the perceptions of the CRN students and graduates as of this writing. Astorga-Velasquez (2012) compared and contrasted two CRN schools located in Chicago, Illinois, which served two completely different populations; one was predominantly Latinx, and the other was predominantly African American. The perceptions of the culture and faith intersection of the CRN can best be summed up by the research of Astorga-Velasquez (2012), who found that the students overwhelmingly asserted that the faith-based nature of the school is the primary reason that they feel like family in a safe and secure academic setting. Additionally, the students said the character and faith development augmented their studies to pave their path as future scholars, leaders, and citizens. Additionally, Astorga-Velasquez (2012) found that the students overwhelmingly appreciated the CWSP for how it prepared them for the future in both college and careers. Astorga-Velasquez (2012) did discover two noteworthy disparities in student perceptions regarding the Catholic values of the CRN. Of the Latinx students (95% of whom identify as Catholic) nearly 100% ranked Catholic values as “very important” or “fairly important,” while of the African American students (3% of whom identify as Catholic) none ranked Catholic values as “very important,” and only 45% ranked it as “fairly important.”

In an ethnographic study, Aldana (2015) explored the students' perceptions of the influence of the religious programming at their high school. Her conclusions indicated a need for CRN teachers to be more cognizant of students' cultural and social identities, while developing culturally appropriate pedagogical strategies to strengthen students academically, socially, and spiritually (Aldana, 2015). The researcher found that the religious programming "helped students to develop relationships but failed to help students make religious connections to their lives," noting that these were lost opportunities to draw the students closer to God and themselves (Aldana, 2015, p. 212). The researcher also found that while students did develop positive relationships with peers and teachers in their religion classes, they also noted that they "did not take the class (religion) seriously" and "did not see the value in their religion class" (Aldana, 2015, p. 212). In an additional finding, Aldana (2015) determined that the CWSP created some discomfort for students regarding the wealth and power to which they were exposed, the Catholic social teaching on the preferential option for the poor they studied at school, and their lived experiences of poverty.

Gamble (2015) studied students' perceptions of grit, socio-emotional intelligence, and the acquisition of non-cognitive skills in the CWSP at three CRN schools in California. Gamble (2015) found that CRN students typically perceived themselves as having relatively high levels of grit and possessing above average interpersonal skills, but below-average intrapersonal skills. According to the perception data generated during the study, the three areas most impacted by the students in relation to the CWSP were "social responsibility, interpersonal relationships, and flexibility; the categories least

impacted according to the students included self-awareness, self-regard, assertiveness, independence, empathy, and impulse control” (Gamble, 2015, p. iii).

Boyle (2017) studied the perceptions of alumni who had graduated from Philadelphia Catholic high schools from the 1950s through the 2010s. The researcher was attempting to determine if alumni embrace certain values from the Catholic school experiences that inform their civic and community involvement or interest. She found that a service identity emerged across the decades of the participants that led them to give back to their communities; volunteer their time, talent, and treasure; demonstrate gratitude; and engage in civic service. Nearly two-thirds of the participants stated that they were active in service or leadership roles in high school, and this same involvement as adults was reported in over 50% of the participants (Boyle, 2017). Additionally, Boyle (2017) found that alumni shared a sense of family values, tradition, and mission-driven service that permeated their high school identity formation and informed their life-long views and habits.

Summary

Provided in Chapter 2 was a comprehensive overview of the relevant research and topics related to this study. The researcher investigated the role that the achievement gap between marginalized students and their non-marginalized peers affects educational achievement and attainment at the outset of the chapter. The literature on the origins, applications, and efficacy of the ACT was explored as well. And finally, current literature on the Cristo Rey model was examined. This study could contribute to the current body of literature by highlighting how CRKC prepares students for higher education success despite their lack of college-ready scores on the ACT. Chapter 3

contains a description of the research design, setting, instruments, data collection procedures, analysis and synthesis of data, reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher's role, and limitations.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of graduates of CRKC on the factors that impacted graduates' higher educational success. This chapter includes the research methodology used in this study. It is comprised of the research design, the setting, sampling procedures, instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis and synthesis, reliability and trustworthiness, researcher's role, and limitations.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to address the research question in this study: According to the perceptions of CRKC alumni who did not meet multiple ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, what factors, including high school experiences and college successes and obstacles affected their completion of a two or four-year college degree? This approach was deemed most suitable to inform the purpose of the study, while also reflecting the researcher's social constructivist theory of knowledge. Social constructivists believe that each individual embraces different and valuable viewpoints and the role of the researcher is to uncover these manifold views; constructivists view the participants as the experts in any study and will rely on participants' views to construct the major themes in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2018). At the heart of qualitative research are the central phenomena the researcher desires to illuminate (Creswell, 2018). This study was designed to explain the cultural and academic phenomena of the CRN and how CRN graduates often succeed in higher education despite great odds. Through personal interaction with the participant, the researcher can interpret the experiences of the study participants. These interpretations highlight the perceptions of graduates of a

CRN school (CRKC) to shed light on the study's research question regarding the capacity for college degree completion. This specific methodology was selected because qualitative research methods are used to explain, explore, and understand phenomena (Creswell, 2018). Although the successful implementation of the Cristo Rey model has been extensively studied, it has not been examined through a population who were designated as not ready for college by ACT College Readiness Benchmarking standards, and yet succeeded in college. A qualitative research method delivered an opportunity to uncover the college graduates' perceptions of the effect that the CRN model had on their higher education attainment.

Setting

According to the President, John O'Connor (personal communication, March 8, 2018), CRKC is a private, Catholic high school sponsored by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. It is one of the 32 schools that comprise the CRN in the United States. The school is designed to serve a culturally diverse student body with significant economic need. During the 2018-2019 school year, the school served 386 students: 56% Latinx, 35% African-American, 3% Caucasian, 1% Asian, and 5% other ethnicities (J. O'Connor, personal communication, March 8, 2018). Although Catholic principles undergird the school, only 60% of the 2018-2019 student population identified as Catholic. The administration seeks to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible, harkening back to the true definition of "catholic" as all-embracing and universal (K. Hanlon, personal communication, January 12, 2016). As a mainstay of the CRN, CRKC participates in the CWSP, which enables students to build white-collar skills while earning approximately half of the cost of their tuition (J. O'Connor, personal

communication, March 8, 2018). CRKC graduated its inaugural class in 2010, and for each year since, 100% of the school's graduates have been accepted to college (J. O'Connor, personal communication, March 8, 2018).

According to the immediate past president (K. Hanlon, personal communication, January 12, 2016), CRKC admits 100% of the students who apply if they meet the lengthy requirements for admission

- qualify for the Federal Free and Reduced Lunch Program (determined by the parent/guardian's income tax records)
- reach 14th birthday before September 1
- desire to work and is employable by being a documented, U.S. citizen with a valid birth certificate
- receive favorable recommendations from middle school teachers
- interview successfully with two staff/faculty members of CRKC
- write an adequate admission essay
- document a relatively clean discipline record
- show a strong record of attendance K-8
- complete all steps in the admissions process (K. Hanlon, personal communication, January 12, 2016)

Since the students work at their CWSP placement one day a week, they attend school four days a week; to make up for the missed day of school, their school days run from 7:30 am until 4:00 pm and they attend school 190 days a year, which is a longer school year than traditional schools in the Kansas City metro area (K. Hanlon, personal communication, January 12, 2016).

Instruments

Three types of instrumentation were utilized in this study: sampling, selection, and data collection. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to hone in on the 90 2010-2016 graduates of CRKC who had completed a 2- or 4-year degree. The selection instrument further narrowed the participant pool to those graduates who had not met or exceeded all four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. The data collection instrument was an interview script created by the researcher.

Sampling instruments. Purposive sampling drove the selection of the participants. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), “The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 148). The participants in this study were graduates of CRKC from 2010 to 2016 who had completed either a 2-year or 4-year degree, of which there were 90 graduates. The sample was further narrowed to include only potential participants who did not meet all four ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. Of the 90 college graduates, 70 of them fell into this category. The researcher was granted access to the information through the alumni coordinator; each CRN school has an alumni coordinator who updates and houses the longitudinal data for each of the graduates. For more information on this process, see the measurement section.

After the 70 potential participants were identified, their contact information was accessed via the CRKC Alumni Office. All potential participants were contacted via email, social media, or phone inviting their participation in the interview process (see

Appendix C). Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants and any CRKC staff and faculty who were mentioned specifically.

Selection instrument. In this study, the archived ACT scores for each CRKC student included four subtest scores and a composite score, which were used to select the participant sample. The ACT generates the College Readiness Benchmarking standards that are meant to predict how likely students are to experience success in the four areas tested when they take entry-level courses associated with the content in higher education (ACT, 2017b). The reading subject-area test benchmark is 22 and is designed to equate with higher education success in an introductory social science content class (ACT, 2017b). The mathematics subject-area test benchmark is 22 and is designed to equate with higher education success in a college algebra class (ACT, 2017b). The science subject-area test benchmark is 23 and is designed to equate with higher education success in an introductory biology class (ACT, 2017b). The English subject-area test benchmark is 18 and is designed to equate with higher education success in an introductory composition class (ACT, 2017b). The composite ACT score is a mean of the four subject-area tests: reading, mathematics, science, and English. These benchmarks were based on the results of research conducted by Allen and Sconing (2005), who studied over 340,000 students to extrapolate the ACT sub-score that one would need to attain to have a 50% or higher likelihood of achieving a B or higher in college coursework.

Data collection instrument. The interview protocol, which was generated by the researcher, was the instrument used to collect data. The primary interview questions and follow-up questions were designed to elicit responses that would address the research question. According to Kvale (1996), the interview is the heart and soul of qualitative

research; it is both factual and meaningful, and through its use, the researcher strives to ascribe meaning to the central themes of life for the subjects. Since these central life themes tend to be personal for the interviewees, it is imperative that the researcher builds a level of trust with the interviewee as much as possible (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). To that end, great care was taken by the researcher in devising an interview script to ensure that order, quality, and clarity of the questions would set the interviewees at ease and make them feel comfortable. The researcher included the following four types of questions in the interview: introductory questions, transition questions, key questions, and closing questions. Introductory questions should be easy to answer, non-threatening, and ask for a narrative answer that will signal the types of questions to come (Patton, 2015).

Transition questions move the interview toward the coming key questions, while still preserving the conversational tone (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Key questions tend to solicit the most valuable information for the researcher in the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The closing questions signal the interviewee to the conclusion of the session and allow for any final questions for the researcher (Creswell, 2018). The interview questions were tightly aligned with the research question of the study, which allows the researcher to preserve the conversational nature of the interview that engenders confidence, while still focusing on the inquiry goals of the research.

The interview included seven semi-structured prompts with follow-up questions to allow for elaboration and explanation on the part of the participants. The following statements and questions were posed to each of the participants:

- Interview Question 1 (IQ1): Tell me a little bit about yourself.
 - Follow-Up Question 1 (FUQ1) Where did you attend college?

- Follow-Up Question 2 (FUQ2) What degree(s) and or certification(s) have you earned?
- Follow-Up Question 3 (FUQ3) Tell me about your current work position.
- Interview Question 2 (IQ2): Explain your decision process when you decided to attend college.
 - Follow-Up Question 1 (FUQ1) What factors influenced this?
 - Follow-Up Question 2 (FUQ2) How prepared were to be successful in higher education?
 - Follow-Up Question 3 (FUQ3) What preparation do you feel you were missing?
- Interview Question 3 (IQ3): Please describe some of your high school experiences that contributed to your success in college.
 - Follow-Up Question 1 (FUQ1) What specific programs in your 9-12 experience led you to be successful in college?
 - Follow-Up Question 2 (FUQ2) What specific skills do you think helped you most?
- Interview Question 4 (IQ4): Describe some of the successes you encountered while you attended college.
 - Follow-Up Question 1 (FUQ1) To what do you attribute these successes?
- Interview Question 5 (IQ5): Describe some of the obstacles encountered while you attended college.
 - Follow-Up Question 1 (FUQ1) How did you overcome those obstacles?

- Follow-Up Question 2 (FUQ2) Tell me about any obstacles that you were unable to overcome.
- Interview Question 6 (IQ6): Describe your high school selection process.
 - Follow-Up Question 1 (FUQ1) What were your other choices?
 - Follow-Up Question 2 (FUQ2) Tell me about your family's involvement in the selection process.
- Interview Question 7 (IQ7): Tell me about any advice you would give to future CRKC graduates.
 - Follow-Up Question 1 (FUQ1) Is there anything else you would like to add?
 - Follow-Up Question 2 (FUQ2) What questions do you have for me?

Data Collection Procedures

Before the data collection, the researcher began building a relationship with the president of CRKC in the spring of 2016 to engender trust and goodwill regarding the study. The qualitative nature of the study appealed to the president's desire to probe more deeply into the higher educational success of her graduates. After the president retired in the spring of 2017, the researcher continued a relationship with the new president, who indicated an interest in the outcomes of the study and was amenable to the process. The president introduced the researcher to the CRKC alumni coordinator, who had access to the ACT data as well as the contact information for graduates. The ACT testing data was analyzed to create the sample for the study. ACT data for all graduates were entered into an Excel spreadsheet for them to be coded as CR, college-ready, or NCR, not college-ready. Additional archived data was obtained from CRKC to

determine whether the graduates had obtained a degree, were currently working toward a degree, or were not enrolled in higher education. All graduates with higher education data were entered into a Microsoft Excel table to be coded as degree earned (DE), working toward a degree (WTD), or not enrolled (NE). After both data sets had been coded, the potential participants were identified as those who had already earned a two or four-year college or university degree and were not considered “college-ready” by failing to meet all four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. For purposes of confidentiality, the researcher worked with the CRKC alumni coordinator on campus to review the data sets. The data sets were stored on password-protected One Drive servers that only the CRKC alumni coordinator and the researcher could access.

After the Baker University Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval to conduct the research on April 2, 2019 (see Appendix B), the researcher was granted permission to contact the potential study participants. The data procedures for this study drew from both primary and secondary collection protocols. Primary collection is defined as data that is collected by the researcher for the specific purposes of the study at hand, while secondary collection is defined as data collection from existing published or archival sources (Hox & Boeije, 2005). The ACT College Readiness Benchmarking standards were derived via secondary collection protocols, while the interviewer gathered data via primary collection protocols. As discussed in the selection of participants section, the archived ACT data obtained from CRKC allowed for the population to be further narrowed into the participants who were interviewed.

Emails were sent to potential participants to solicit their participation in the study (see Appendix C). After the initial emails were sent, the researcher also called all 70 of

the potential participants to solicit their participation in the study; the same script from the email solicitation was used for the calls (see Appendix C). Upon receiving correspondence from an interested participant, the researcher sent a digital copy of the study's consent form (see Appendix D) and attempted to set up an interview appointment, which was scheduled after the consent form had been completed and returned to the researcher. The participants could either mail a hard copy or scan and send a digital copy of the consent form to the researcher. The duration of the interviews was typically thirty minutes to an hour. Participants were encouraged to select the interview format with which they felt most comfortable: face to face, Zoom, FaceTime, Skype, or Google Hangout. Participants were advised that their participation was voluntary, and all information would be kept anonymous. They were also apprised of how the data would be recorded, stored, and used. All interviews were recorded digitally on an iPad and an iPhone to ensure that no dialogue was lost. The digital applications used by the researcher for this task were VoiceRecorder and TapeaCall; the researcher used Tapeacall for remote interviews and VoiceRecorder for face to face interviews.

After the interviews had been conducted, the researcher transcribed them using Trint, which is an online transcription software that creates an electronic transcript of each interview (Moore, 2018). After the interviews had been transcribed, the transcriptions were sent digitally to the participants so that they could review them for accuracy. These member checks were a vital piece of the study because they safeguarded the trust of the participants; the participants were assured that they had the final say in how their words were represented for the study. In addition to the transcription, the researcher included a note of thanks to each interviewee for taking part in the study.

Data Analysis and Synthesis

Whereas quantitative researchers are focused on the validity of their numerical data, qualitative researchers must be concerned about the validity of their communication tools. According to Creswell (2018), the wealth of data and the range of data sources can create a challenge for qualitative researchers. The goal of the qualitative study is to ascertain the commonalities and themes that present themselves through the myriad of interactions that the researcher has with the participants. It is imperative that communication is transcribed and verified to ensure its accuracy and validity.

After the transcription files were created through Trint, they were uploaded into the online Dedoose Research Analysis software. At its core, Dedoose is an online repository for all data related to a study. Additionally, this software allows for management, organization, and thorough analysis of the transcribed interviews (Dedoose, 2018). The researcher used the Dedoose platform to organize and code the content of the interviews by themes and classifications. The researcher heeded the caution of Rubin and Rubin (2012) when they pointed out that systemic coding is imperative to ensure that the study's data is empirical, not just the biased remembrances of the researcher.

Furthermore, the researcher also paid special attention to the words of Patton (2015), who cautioned that despite using computer coding software, the authentic analytical labor always takes place in the head of the researcher. After the use of both Dedoose and personal review of the transcripts, the researcher systematically coded and summarized the data. This process followed the procedure laid out by Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), which calls for organizing the data, creating categories, pinpointing

patterns and themes, and coding the data. The culmination of this process resulted in the ability of the researcher to draw conclusions from the qualitative data.

Reliability and Trustworthiness

As previously stated, one way that the researcher attempted to engender the trust of the interviewees was to do a member check of the transcriptions. As Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) stated, “As a further indication of validity . . . researchers should document feedback on their interpretation of data from study participants—that is, member checks” (p. 110). Additionally, the researcher remained constantly vigilant about nurturing and protecting the researcher-participant relationship as it ensured a higher likelihood of obtaining accurate and balanced data. The researcher attempted this through a variety of channels: open and honest communication, transparency regarding the scope of the study and participants’ roles, clear consent forms, and clarifications regarding them, protecting participants from harm, and ensuring confidentiality. Furthermore, the researcher kept comprehensive and systematic explanations of how data were collected and analyzed, which provided a trail that would allow the collection and analysis to be reviewed by other researchers. This process was done to assure trustworthiness and credibility, along with member checking.

Researcher’s Role

Since the researcher is the key instrument in qualitative research, it is vital to disclose the background, possible biases, and cultural experience of the researcher (Creswell, 2018). At the time of the study, the researcher was an assistant professor in the school of education at a private, Catholic university in Kansas City, Missouri. She held a bachelor’s degree in secondary English and social studies education, a master’s

degree in curriculum and instruction, and was a doctoral candidate in educational leadership. Because Cristo Rey is a Catholic institution and the researcher is a life-long Catholic and works at a Catholic institution, these factors could contribute to potential bias on the part of the researcher. The researcher intended to remain impartial and professional during the study to ensure objective data collection, data analysis, and formulation of conclusions.

Limitations

According to Lunenburg and Irby (2008), limitations are “factors that may have an effect on the interpretation of the findings” (p. 133) that fall outside the realm of the control of the researcher. Although 70 participants were contacted, the researcher could not control who chose to participate voluntarily. The researcher also could not control for the response numbers. Additionally, interviews are self-reported data and can be subject to bias, selective memory, and hyperbole.

Summary

Chapter 3 was comprised of the research methods employed in this study. Provided in the chapter were the research design, setting, sampling procedures, instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, reliability and trustworthiness, the researcher’s role, and the limitations. The results of the qualitative analysis of the data are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter provides the results of this study. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact that the CRKC experience has had on the degree attainment of graduates who failed to meet all four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. Eleven CRKC graduates, who had earned one or more college degrees, were interviewed for this study regarding their high school and college experiences. All participants were interviewed between May 31, 2019, and July 11, 2019, at a time that was most convenient for the participant.

Thematic patterns were used to address the research question. Each finding section includes an explanation of what the major discoveries were, the connections between the participants' collective responses, and the actual participant responses to the interview questions. All participants graduated from CRKC between 2010 and 2016 and earned at least one degree from a four-year college or university. Additionally, three participants earned a degree from a two-year community college, two participants earned a graduate degree, and two participants were pursuing graduate degrees at the time of this writing. All participants interviewed were between the ages of 22 and 28. Interview participants included: one Hispanic male, one African American male, five Hispanic females, and four African American females. This distribution roughly reflects the greater sample of the 70 possible participants, who are comprised of 11% Hispanic males, 42% Hispanic females, 8% African American males, 34% African American females, 2.5% Caucasian males, and 2.5% Asian females. Table 1 represents a summary of participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Racial Identity	Year Graduated	Degrees Earned
Juan	Male	Hispanic	2011	Bachelor, Master
Jenise	Female	African American	2015	Bachelor
Nikole	Female	Hispanic	2012	Bachelor
Michael	Male	African American	2015	Bachelor
Juanita	Female	Hispanic	2014	Bachelor
Tanisha	Female	African American	2012	Bachelor
Laura	Female	Hispanic	2011	Associate, Bachelor, Master
Edith	Female	Hispanic	2010	Associate, Bachelor
Aliyah	Female	African American	2011	Bachelor
Jade	Female	African American	2010	Associate, Bachelor
Claudia	Female	Hispanic	2012	Bachelor

Finding 1: Diverse high school experiences at CRKC cultivated skills that helped participants earn college degrees

All participants reported that experiences and programming at CRKC played a significant role in both higher education access and attainment. The interview questions that informed the first finding were questions two and three. In IQ2, participants were instructed to explain their decision-making process when they chose to attend college. Participants were free to discuss anything that affected their college-going decision-making developments, including familial factors, monetary factors, and academic or school factors. In IQ3, they were instructed to describe their high school experiences that contributed to their success in college and the skills that were developed as a result.

Types of high school experiences were not specified in the question; the researcher left the question open-ended so that the participants could discuss all types of experiences, including academic, extracurricular, and other programming. Although a variety of themes emerged as subtopics of the overall finding, the two that predominated the discussion as pivotal to the participants' higher educational success were the college-going culture of CRKC and the CWSP around which the CRN is built.

College-going culture. One of the most oft-cited elements was the atmosphere of a college-going culture that permeates the school. All 11 participants described a college-going culture created at CRKC, where it was an expectation to not only attend college but to graduate as well. According to the various responses of the participants, this culture was supported by college seminar classes, college counseling services, and the support and encouragement of the entire faculty and staff. In fact, six of the 11 participants cited the college-going expectation as a foregone conclusion. The support that they received and the high expectations they were held to by staff and faculty made them believe unquestionably that college was the path for them. Nikole, a 2012 CRKC graduate and first-generation college student who went on to earn an elementary education degree, shared,

Oh honestly, I never really felt like I had a choice whether or not that college was an option, just an expectation... There was no other option. Also, just being in that environment, having a senior seminar class, and you know looking at colleges they gave us time in class to apply to colleges. I never felt like I wasn't going to go to college.

Jade, a 2010 CRKC graduate, earned her associate degree at a community college before going on to earn her bachelor's degree in nursing from a four-year university. She echoed the college-going expectations her peers noted, but she focused more on the community that was created at CRKC, which allowed her to believe in herself. In particular, she mentioned the Sisters of Charity, who are the nuns that sponsor the school. She narrated,

Cristo Rey, the community really helped uplift us a lot. You know like the sisters and just I feel like they care, and they really did try to get us to college as best they could. And it's also a college prep school. Yeah because they have a college prep hour and we you know we went to the college prep advisor.

Aliyah, is a 2011 CRKC graduate, first in her nuclear family to graduate college with a B.S. in psychology and at the time of this writing was pursuing a Master of Clinical Mental Health Counseling. She articulated,

So, with Cristo Rey, it was like I don't even think for a moment like I'm not going to college because you have to apply to so many schools. So, I was like if I'm doing it, let's do it right...I think you come in and that is the expectation when you go to a Cristo Rey school that you go to college.

For some participants, the college-going culture drove them to seek educational opportunities that were not available to other family members. Their attendance at CRKC seemingly strengthened their resolve to not only attend college but to graduate as well. Tanisha is a 2012 CRKC graduate who earned a Bachelor's of Non-Profit Leadership and at the time of this writing is pursuing her teaching certificate. Before attending CRKC, she went to a metro-area charter school that closed unexpectedly; this

caused great disruption in her family's life. She relayed that CRKC was a stabilizing force in her life that allowed her to achieve her dreams of earning a college degree. Along the way, she narrowly missed earning valedictorian honors and instead earned the honor of salutatorian. She relayed,

I always knew I wanted to go to college. I had older siblings that started but did not finish. My sister went to a high school where they were part of a partnership with a college. And when the high school closed, she lost that opportunityAnd so, when I finally did get to Cristo Rey, I surrounded myself with the best and the brightest. I didn't spend time lagging or anything. I tried to make sure that my circle was the people that I either wanted to be like or needed to be around.

Jenise, a 2015 CRKC graduate, and first-generation college student who earned a B.A. in Sociology/Criminology and Black World Studies, shared,

So, college was definitely like a no-brainer. I mean, it was just a desire to continue to grow and be exposed. And my mom didn't finish college, and my dad didn't finish college. And I'm the oldest out of all of my siblings, so just setting that example.

She went on to pinpoint the skills that allowed her to be successful in college when so many of her peers were not, saying,

No, I mean Cristo Rey, all in all, was a good place to grow and develop as you know a high school student. And it's amazing why a lot of students you know they come to college, and then they don't come back, especially a lot of black students where the retention rates are terrible. But because Cristo Rey kind of

gave me those you know those skills and that encouragement and stuff like that, I was able to push through but other students they don't know how to do that. They don't know who to ask for help or sometimes receive help.

Aliyah echoed this desire to achieve more than her parents, while noting that this is now her family's way of proceeding, saying,

So first, it was seeing how much my parents struggled and how much I saw that other family members that went to college how they were living differently than we were. And so, I can only think that's the only reason why we aren't living the way that you are. So, I kind of felt like this is the path that you have to take.

College is where you need to go. I felt like I couldn't get anywhere else. That was the next thing. And so, I think it was more so a generational thing. Like this is what we do now, right? That's what we do from now on this is how life goes.

Nikole, concurred with these sentiments to strive to have more than her parents, by adding,

And to my family like that wasn't an option either. After all, you know our parents work hard for what they do and to give us a better life than they have. So, I never felt like I had the option to let them down and not go to college and have a better life than they did.

For some participants, these higher educational aspirations were borne of familial expectations or tradition that preceded CRKC attendance, but for many, these were new dreams cultivated during high school. Five of the 11 participants reported that they either never thought college was an option or hadn't even considered it until they were at CRKC. All five participants were children of immigrants whose parents had not only not

attended college, but many had not even graduated from high school. Edith, a 2010 CRKC graduate, who emigrated from Mexico in the fifth grade, related that she hadn't even considered college until her junior year at CRKC. But much like the previously mentioned participants, she had a desire to achieve more than her parents, which was a wish that her parents shared for her as well. She recounted,

I think it was in my junior year, late in the game. I originally just wanted to finish high school and earn a certificate in cosmetology. I was kind of just on that route. Then I started attending Cristo Rey and something in me just sparked My family had a lot to do with my decision to go to college and especially my mom. My mom didn't have the opportunity to go to school. I think she only finished middle school. And then my grandparents pulled her out So, my mom actually was the one who wanted us to have a college degree because she also wanted to have a college degree.

Edith went on to say that the college-going culture of support and high expectations at CRKC encouraged her to reach higher than she anticipated in her early years of high school,

I think it was the faculty and also the culture at Cristo Rey that is very central to getting people to go to college. It's the mission. Pretty much everything you do there gets you closer and closer to college. Plus, a lot of my friends were thinking about attending college. We had visits and fairs from many colleges. Once I went to the college campus and took the ACT's. I totally would picture myself that world.

Juanita, a 2014 CRKC graduate and child of teenaged, immigrant parents knew that she wanted to go to college but did not think that it would be possible. Her narrative highlights her and her parents' desire for her to transcend her circumstances. She shared that,

It was really difficult because I knew that I wanted to go to college. I just didn't know how it would be possible because of my background. You know my mom and dad were 16 when they had me, and I felt that I was a part of something that kept them from their full potential. I felt that I owed them something and I felt like going to college and doing the things that they couldn't do would kind of take some of that burden off of my shoulders.

She went on to share that the CRKC college-going culture of support and resources allowed her to have the confidence to pursue her dreams of college. She also contrasted how different her experience at CRKC was from her previous K-8 experience in the Kansas City, Missouri public school system saying,

I believe my junior year is when I decided like college is for me because freshman and sophomore years were just really still transitioning since I came from a public [middle] school not ever experiencing you know the one on one technology and having resources like Cristo Rey provided us. I felt still kind of like almost like a culture shock to me But then junior year I was like I'm not just another number. No, I'm not just another race like I'm an actual person here they know my name. They know my story. They're hearing my story. Not only do they know it but they're telling me this is what you can do. You can be more than what you've come from. CRKC [was an] extremely, extremely important factor in my

decision to go to college because they didn't make me feel as though I was something different. They made me feel abnormal but in a good way.

Claudia, a 2012 CRKC graduate and first-generation college student, echoed Juanita's sentiments about her skepticism that college could be a reality for her. The child of immigrant parents, who didn't speak English, she was daunted by the financial obligations, application process, and navigating the world of higher education. She reported,

But when I first went in, I wasn't sure because I know it's expensive. And I'm like wow you know I don't think we can pay for this. I don't know if it's [college] an option for me...They [CRKC] were a big factor. They helped me, especially Miss Smith. She is not there anymore, but she was our college counselor. Actually, she helped me a lot with scholarships and guiding me because I didn't really know about college, you know. No one in my family really knew the process.

Laura, a 2011 CRKC graduate and the valedictorian of her class, who had since gone on to earn three degrees, nevertheless did not think that college would be an option for her. She initially believed that her tenuous immigration status and financial concerns would preclude her from the higher education that she desired. She shared,

Oh, so I never thought that I could attend college. I thought that high school would be it because, so I was undocumented when my parents brought me here So, I didn't think college was an option. And then I learned about Kansas being a dreamer state.

She went on to recount that her college counselor and other CRKC staff were pivotal in helping her understand her possible options outside of Missouri in neighboring Kansas through HB-2145, also known as the Dreamer Bill, which allowed her to receive in-state tuition and scholarships without the FAFSA. CRKC was instrumental in helping her access services at Johnson County Community College that allowed her to attend and eventually graduate with an associate degree. And she did not stop there; she eventually earned her Bachelor of Accounting and her MBA as well.

Corporate Work Study Program. In addition to the college-going culture, participants also frequently discussed the impact that the CWSP had on their achievements, not only in higher education but with life in general. In fact, all 11 participants recounted that the CWSP played an integral role in developing the skills necessary to be successful in school and beyond. While some participants reflected more concretely on the skills that they acquired and how they were able to apply them in college, other participants focused on the resume building and networking opportunities that the CWSP afforded them. The skills most often cited by the participants were professionalism, interpersonal acumen, and communication. Aliyah summed up her CWSP experience by saying,

The work study program definitely gave you skills outside of school that you would never get socially and economically. It just gave you a lot more skills that you wouldn't have gotten from just being around the people that were your age. You're around professionals. You're around older people. You're around people that are investing in your future. So, I feel like that definitely is a factor on top of the fact that they treat us like adults at Cristo Rey. And so, you have these

expectations, so you are kind of molded from year one all the way to year four on those life skills that you need They also had this expectation that you are prepared. You come from Cristo Rey, so we know what you can do. We're not gonna hold your hand. I think that was another thing we're gonna put you out here and you can kind of figure it out yourself along the way. But we also know that you're a professional.

When asked about the experiences in high school that led to higher educational success, Michael, a 2015 CRKC graduate who earned a Bachelor of Business Administration and minored in Economics, shared that he was thankful for how it helped him procure college internships and eventually his current work position. The networking and resume-building that he enjoyed through the program paid dividends in college and beyond. He shared,

One was corporate work study. It's really helpful when I tried to find an internship in college because they don't see a high schooler who is working at KCP&L Country Club Bank, and American Academy and that's where I was working when I was in CWSP So, I have experience in IT and HR probably two biggest ones, and that was how I was able to get an HR internship, and I had maybe two or three more offers for IT places, but I picked HR because that's more of what I wanted to do with my life. It was a really good experience overall, and the skills you got from CWSP does [sic] contribute a lot to when you're trying to find something in college.

Juan is a 2011 CRKC graduate, who was a first-generation college student, graduated with a Bachelor of Chemistry and a Master of Education. He specifically

focused on the skills that he attained while he was in the CWSP that empowered him to earn two degrees. He shared,

The skills I got from Cristo Rey because you know having that work study program you were being put into situations where you're going to be meeting people that you don't know at all. So, I had a very broad perspective on different kinds of fields. And but I took that as you know skills that I can learn and make it more on me that I am very adaptable. So, really with any kind of situation I'm in, I pretty much adapt pretty quickly.

Claudia echoed the skill-building sentiments as well, mentioning perseverance, professionalism, and networking as skills that she built while working at a children's foundation and a law firm during her time in the CWSP, citing,

I think a skill for me would be just like perseverance. Like working at a younger age, you know just realizing that if I wanted something you know I had to work hard for it But I think it really helped me realize that like if you want something like it's not going to be handed to you like you have to find a way to make it work I think that was really important to being professional and making connections like networking.

Unlike other participants who had different CWSP placements all four years, Juanita was placed at the same bank her ninth-through twelfth-grade years, which allowed her to grow professionally and build her confidence. She said when she felt like she was not being adequately challenged, she advocated for herself through the CWSP Director, and they moved her to a position in which she would have increasingly more stimulating tasks. After her departmental move, she recounted,

I actually started closing bank accounts for people who passed away and dealing with printing off paperwork for families to sign over accounts and doing the mailing and creating meeting agendas. Just kind of getting my hands-on experience that the program was intended to do so I just feel like all different departments taught me a variety of things. But it was really like the time management, organization, communication I needed. And I learned Excel Microsoft Office and all of the programs that I used for the banking app. So those are the different kind of skills that I had gained throughout my all my four years.

Edith cited communication as the biggest skill that she learned during the CWSP, and she also noted that she immensely enjoyed the experience overall because it built her confidence by working in a bilingual environment. When she emigrated from Mexico in fifth grade, she spoke no English. And while she had been enrolled in English Language Learner programs through middle school, it was still culturally relevant for her to be around people who were bilingual in the workplace. Additionally, as a medical biller now, she has parlayed some of her learning from high school into her full-time job where there is overlap in much of the vocabulary and skill. She recounted,

Corporate work study was probably the best time of my life. I was working in a health clinic in Kansas. I loved it. I loved my co-workers. And I was in the medical records doing a lot of filing and things like that. But the important thing is that they were bilingual. So, we would joke. We had a good time. And I think as far as like work ethic I think they wanted us to be ourselves. But we had to do things. We had the standards. You need to keep up with the standards of you

know what my manager wanted to do. And so, I think it was mainly just like professionalism.

Nikole noted that her skill-building through the CWSP in professionalism and communication helped her immensely in pursuing her undergraduate degree in elementary education because those skills were so vital for her in her multiple classroom observations that were required for her degree. She shared,

With the corporate work study program, I felt prepared as in like I know what to wear to an interview, I know what to wear to a job. I know how to interact with you know people who are in charge of a company. I know how to address people. Yeah like the communication and professionalism. That's why I felt prepared. I especially noticed that when I was doing not my student teaching, but when we'd go to schools and do observation. And there were other people who were not dressed appropriately. And then my head I'm like how are you this way? How did you not know that? But I had had that exposure to it, and I knew what was right and wrong, and I think that just helped out, no doubt.

Laura echoed Nikole's assertions about learning professionalism and experiencing an office environment as a teenager, which is rare for most teens by saying,

Just office environment like professionalism kind of stuff. Yeah. Like not only like not working like Excel or like computer things because you learn that in school but just showing up to work, being on time, deadlines. You have like this is your job and what to wear.

Finding 2: Participants said they felt academically prepared for the expectations of higher education, which they attribute to the college preparation curriculum's rigor and excellence of the faculty they experienced at CRKC

All but one of the participants described feeling academically prepared to be successful at their college, university, or community college. Of the 10 participants who responded positively about their preparation, they all attributed their success to either the quality of the faculty, the academic rigor, or both. The interview questions that informed the second finding were FU3 to IQ2 and IQ4. In FU3 to IQ2, participants were asked to explain how prepared they felt to be successful in higher education. Participants were free to discuss all types of college readiness, from academic preparation to social and emotional issues and financial literacy. The researcher purposefully kept the question open-ended to encourage the discussion of a wide range of themes applicable to the topic. In IQ4, participants were asked to describe some of the successes they encountered in college and to what they attributed these successes.

Juan, a 2011 CRKC graduate, was emphatic about feeling prepared to tackle the academic work that he encountered at a local, private university, where he earned both a bachelor's and master's degree. Reflecting on his time in college, he relayed,

I absolutely felt prepared to be academically successful And I was pretty much excelling in all my courses. I was overly prepared.

He said he felt especially prepared in his freshman chemistry course, where many of his peers were struggling. He attributed much of his success to the faculty at CRKC and the rigor that was instituted across the board at the school, recalling,

My favorite course that I loved was chemistry and why? Because of the teacher that was there. She was a phenomenal teacher But I remember everything that we did in that class and the rigor of it. We covered so much. I know that rigor kind of pushed up for me realizing that you are coming from a basic kind of knowledge and now you're going to apply to get a little bit higher. So that is like a steppingstone, so like in my mind it was like I was in college basically right now the rigor was up. And so, having that experience made me realize that I can do college more and you know just realize that you're going to have challenges you're going to have to step up and have that mentality to do that. So, my confidence level was always increasing and kind of increased so much that you know maybe rather that I can do everything they are asking me to do. So, when I actually took my first-year chemistry at college, people were struggling with certain things, and I wasn't because I had a great teacher who basically gave us those skills and made us learn those skills.

Juanita, a 2014 CRKC graduate, also said she felt unequivocally prepared to navigate the academic landscape of a local, private university, where she went on to earn a Bachelor of Psychology with a concentration in Mental Health and a minor in Sociology. Like, Juan, she also mentioned her academic preparation in relation to her peers, who often struggled with work, she found to be relatively easy. She shared,

Oh, I was really prepared. It was very surprising to me to see how much my classmates struggled with something that I thought was so simple Just seeing my classmates kind of struggling once they'd seen like oh like your final paper will be a five-page paper and they're freaking out, and I'm like I just have to do

five pages like how I'm going to fit it all in five pages? So, I felt like that was just like my realization of I can do this. Like they prepared me four years to do this.

Tanisha, a 2012 CRKC graduate, also said she felt definitively prepared to tackle the academic rigors of higher education at her local, private university, where she successfully earned a Bachelor of Non-Profit Leadership with a minor in communication and entrepreneurial leadership. She shared,

I think that the rigor in class prepared [us] for college. I know students who went to other colleges and were surprised at the limited amount of work they had to do compared to what we did in high school. They [CRKC faculty] definitely wanted to make sure that you did not go into college blindsided, so no matter what level of institution you went to you would still have the rigor behind you to understand that you can get it done. They also made us very accountable for our work. So, it wasn't coddling in the sense where we can get away with things because you can't get away with them in college. So, they definitely prepared us I think on all levels.

Much like Tanisha, Nikole, a 2012 CRKC graduate, also found that some of her academic work expectations at her local, private university were lower than what they expected at CRKC in high school, recounting,

I will say like the challenges and the rigorous work, like that academic rigor that was definitely part of why I felt so confident at least my freshman year. I was like this is easy, I can do this. Like I just did harder stuff at Cristo Rey. So that part prepared me there. I will say my freshman year I did feel pretty good and prepared. Like my English classes when I realized like what they were expecting

of us was what they were expecting of us at Cristo Rey maybe our sophomore year. That felt like a breeze.

She went on to specifically credit the faculty in general as well as some specific teachers that helped her be successful along the way, saying,

I mean, for the most part, I think it's just I was able to create a lot of connections and relationships with people, especially like teachers and that helped me you know just ask questions My Spanish teacher, my English teacher, and my science teacher. They were super super super helpful, and they truly cared. Their strictness is what got me to where I am.

Laura, a 2011 CRKC graduate and valedictorian of her class, concurred that she was prepared to be successful at all levels of higher education, where she went on to earn an associate degree, bachelor's and eventually an MBA, stating,

I think overall like I would say my whole college career was successful It was easy I felt pretty prepared. I passed all their tests. I didn't have to do any of the basics. Like their math, science, English tests, that if you don't pass, then it's basically like high school all over. So, with Cristo Rey, I think I was prepared.

Claudia, a 2012 CRKC graduate, specifically cited the academic rigor and specific faculty that helped her feel scholastically ready to be successful at a local, private university, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing, saying,

I think I was prepared academically just because at Cristo Rey you know the workload there is a lot. But I think it helped out in the long run already experiencing that rigor you know, and you know they would teach us like time

management and all that stuff The classes were really helpful. Especially, one of my favorites was chemistry with Miss Schirmer. So, she was really trying to help you. Also, Spanish was really good, Senor Peper. He taught us a lot. I mean, he was a hard teacher, but it was a good class.

She has continued to build on her success in her undergraduate experience, by pursuing a family nurse practitioner license at a local, public university, which she is projected to finish in spring of 2020.

Aliyah, a 2011 CRKC graduate, expressed that she was pleasantly surprised at the fact that she was so well prepared when she arrived at a local, public college, recounting, I think I was more so prepared than I thought I would be academically. I always felt like I was behind [in high school]. But I still feel like oh, okay. We went over that. You know, great. You know, that kind of thing. So academically, I felt more prepared than I thought I would be. I think I felt prepared. I never second guessed and thought I don't think I should do this. And then again through Cristo Rey when you get there, you just figure it out. And if it's something that you don't know, you'll figure it out. At Cristo Rey, it's hard all day. They hold you to a high standard from the jump at 14 [years old].

Like Claudia, she is pursuing her second degree, which is in clinical mental health counseling at a local, private university; she is projected to finish in spring of 2021.

Jade, a 2010 CRKC graduate, who earned an associate degree as well as a Bachelor of Nursing at local community college and local public university respectively, said she believes that she was better prepared at CRKC than she would have been at her local public school, citing,

I feel like Cristo Rey got me more prepared than a lot of the other schools could have could have gotten me. I don't believe that I had as great earlier education as I could have had. But I do appreciate Cristo Rey and everybody for preparing me to where I got, and I felt like I was prepared enough to make it.

She went on to highlight a specific faculty member and program that allowed her to master basic skills, which she then parlayed into her higher educational academic success, recounting,

So, one thing I will have to say is when I originally started my ninth-grade year Cristo Rey, there were four students in my class who didn't test high enough to get into the regular math class, and I was one of them. And the fact that they just took the four of us out of that class. Sister Margaret Marie, she taught us a class just for people who were behind. It was four of us. That in itself helped me with fractions and all the other stuff that I didn't get I still didn't know as much as I needed to know and taking me and putting me in that class helped me understand some of the basics, you know. And I actually aced every math class once I got to college.

Jenise, a 2015 CRKC graduate, who earned her undergraduate degree from an out of state, private university, cited the intentionality that was always present with faculty and staff as a defining feature of her success, sharing, "I mentioned before that intentionality. That was really there with faculty and staff. Yeah. You know just that balance of helping me to figure it out but also giving me the room to figure it outright."

The only participant who felt that she was not prepared for the rigors of higher education indicated that she found community college and eventually university work

extremely difficult. Much of her struggle can be attributed to the fact that she immigrated to the United States during her fifth-grade year of school from Mexico. At the time, she and her parents spoke no English, so she was enrolled in an English Language Learner program at her local elementary school. Additionally, she attended chronically underperforming public schools through freshman year of high school, which did not prepare her for the academic expectations of higher education. When she arrived at CRKC her sophomore year, she said that she felt well behind her peers in regard to her academic skills. Despite these difficulties, she persevered and went on to earn her Associate of Arts degree from a community college and eventually a Bachelor of Science in Business from a local university. She shared her reflections on her journey saying,

It is very important as a first-generation college student to be genuine and don't be ashamed, embarrassed of where you come from or the path of your success. It took a lot of me to be truthful and admit that it took me six years to earn a degree. But I did it. I worked hard and failed a lot of times. Now, I can be open and share this is part of me. With the hopes that someone that is going through the same or even worst situation. They can read my story and learn that there is hope and that they will become successful.

Finding 3: Although all participants encountered some obstacles in their pursuit of earning college degrees, they were always able to overcome them and to be successful

All participants reported that although they faced obstacles in their higher education experiences, they were always able to overcome them to achieve their ultimate goals of graduation and beyond. The interview questions that informed the third finding

were the FU4 to IQ2 and IQ5. In FUQ4, participants were asked to describe the preparation that they felt that they were missing for success in college. Participants were free to discuss anything that may have affected their college-going success, including familial factors, monetary factors, and academic or school factors. In IQ5, they were asked to describe any obstacles that they encountered while they attended college, how they overcame those obstacles, and whether there were any obstacles that they were unable to overcome. The researcher left the question open-ended so that the participants could discuss all types of experiences, including academic, social, cultural, and financial obstacles. Two primary themes emerged as subtopics of the overall finding; participants encountered obstacles primarily with social, cultural, and diversity issues, as well as monetary struggles. However, every participant remarked that they were able to overcome the obstacles that they faced.

Social, cultural, and diversity obstacles. When asked about obstacles encountered and other preparation that they were missing for higher educational success, 10 of the 11 participants mentioned that they struggled socially or culturally at some point in their college journeys. Although many college students face homesickness and struggle to find their niche socially, the participants' difficulties seemed to transcend these typical growing pains. These struggles often stemmed from being a first-generation college student, for whom the norms and values of the college-going culture were new and different. Specifically, eight of the 11 participants cited diversity issues on campus related to their cultural and social realities. Coming from Cristo Rey, which was made up of 98% students of color and then going to colleges that were typically not nearly as diverse, was a culture shock for many of the participants. This culture shock led many

participants to feel like outsiders and retreat into themselves or into their comfort zones with students who were racially or culturally similar to them. However, despite the nature of their obstacles, the participants all reported that they were able to overcome them successfully.

Michael, a 2015 CRKC graduate who as of this writing is working as a business development specialist, recounted that his first year was difficult because of the isolation that he felt socially. He was able to overcome this by joining a gentleman's fraternity, which gave him a social niche in which to pursue multiple leadership opportunities, saying,

Socially, I kind of had to get a groove on that. First semester freshman year, I wasn't close to anybody, but I did join a fraternity, and that helped a lot. I want to say probably after joining the fraternity, all my stuff has been all fraternity related. So mostly all my social aspect was all fraternity aspects, in my opinion, and that really did help a lot with the social issue right there and then I was good emotionally. So, at the fraternity, I was the treasurer for about almost two years. Like I said I was in IFC and I was the VP of finance and communications.

Juanita, a 2014 CRKC graduate, who is as of this writing is working as a college counselor and registrar for high school students, shared that her time in college was difficult socially and culturally at first. Like Michael, she was able to overcome some of the social struggles by joining a club with students who shared her cultural heritage. She attributed this primarily to the lack of diversity of her campus, sharing,

It was extremely hard. I would stick with the diversity piece; I just didn't feel like many of them [college peers] could relate, so I felt like I couldn't really go and

ask for help if I was struggling in a class. I didn't feel comfortable like I was told many times to go to the free tutoring since it was an option. It's included in your tuition, but I felt like most of these people I encounter on a daily basis. If not, I will encounter in like a class like my gen eds or eventually into my major and just kind of letting them see my vulnerability of not being able to do something sufficiently. I didn't feel comfortable. And so, I feel like asking for help there was a much higher challenge in a way than at Cristo Rey. It did take a toll on me emotionally. And then trying to look for that support group because like I said the diversity on the campus was not there. So just kind of knowing where to reach out and find the clubs and organizations. We did have one on campus called Society of Latinos (SOL). So, I joined that immediately once I heard about it because it was actually run by a Cristo Rey alumni [*sic*].

Jenise, a 2015 CRKC student who as of this writing is working as a youth empowerment specialist, echoed Juanita's sentiments regarding the obstacle of diversity at her school and how different that was from their experience at CRKC. She channeled her frustrations into not only joining clubs and organizations but taking on the leadership position as President of the Black Student Union for two years to push for institutional change, saying,

But here at [my school] you know it's a diverse school, but there's not a lot of black students here. And Cristo Rey, it was. So that was kind of, I mean I've been in a lot of different spaces you know. But just the lack of programming you know what I'm saying. Of course, you want to get to know the students, of course, you want to be in different environments and learn different cultures, but

you also want to be with things that are familiar you know engaging programs that represent you and your culture. And that was lacking here in the programs that they had and didn't get a lot of support. So that was kind of hard to work through because I spent a lot of my years here trying to create change and space for that. So that was a little; that was rough You know, the Black Student Union before I left, I was able to get us annually funded. So that was definitely a success.

Tanisha, a 2012 CRKC graduate, who at the time of this writing is working as a substitute teacher while pursuing her teacher licensure, also experienced obstacles regarding race and diversity on her campus. Much like Jenise, she channeled her frustrations into leadership opportunities that allowed her to be a major change agent at her institution, citing,

A major obstacle was the racial tension on my campus. That was a huge obstacle. I think that my goal with being in so many organizations was to show people that we're not all the same and that I can work with anybody cooperatively and there can be genuine friendships across cultures and find a commonality with people I was the vice president of our Black Student Union, and we put in a lot of work to dismantle ideology of race and connectivity on our campus. And the four of us were awarded the Dr. Martin Luther King Award for Outstanding Campus Diversity Service. Well, we put in a lot of work over the few years that we were in Cabinet to handle situations. We had a lot of racially layered situations, but we built a relationship with our president, where we could have face to face conversations to try to deal with the issue. And I'm grateful that he trusted us

enough to show him the flaws of our institution but also try to help them get better. One of those initiatives that we did was finally creating a course on race with one of our professors.

Both Tanisha and Jenise noted that they felt accomplished to leave their respective institutions better than they found them; they felt that they were able to affect real change for future students at their schools.

Nikole, a 2012 CRKC graduate, who at the time of this writing is working as an elementary school teacher, echoed the sentiments of Juanita who said she felt like an outsider at her own school until she found her social niche with people who felt the same way. Additionally, she mentioned struggling with the unwritten curriculum of the college-going culture, saying,

Oh, yeah. Because like I said I didn't know a lot of the college lingo. I didn't know about majors and minors and I don't know about FAFSA And just kind of having experience and knowing what to expect going into college. None of my family had gone to college, and I only had maybe one or two or a couple visits. And I didn't know anything about like joining classes just a lot of stuff that I was unaware of Well socially, I feel like it was kind of difficult to blend in, but I did find a group of friends. But honestly, they all looked like me. So, I think it's how we all kind of got together, you know a lot of outsiders. So that helped I will say like making friends was a little difficult. I did stay at the dorms three out of 4 years. I did have a little trouble there. I just felt like it was a school full of people, and I didn't feel like I belonged there. Like I didn't understand the college thing. I didn't look like any of them. You know. And I was a little quiet.

Well, like I said friends I had were in my same group. I just I enjoyed having those friends at the time, but I didn't feel included in the rest of the society or in the rest of the school community.

Claudia, a 2012 CRKC graduate who at the time of this writing is working as a nurse and pursuing her Family Nurse Practitioner license, also struggled with the lack of diversity at her college, compared to CRKC citing, "So, when I first got there, I think culturally it was an obstacle just because Cristo Rey was so diverse. Going to [her college] it's not very diverse. So that was hard." Like Juanita, she joined SOL and said that it was helpful in finding her cultural niche at school.

Juan, a 2011 CRKC graduate who at the time of this writing is working as a chemist, struggled like Nikole with some of the unwritten curricula of the college-going culture since he was a first-generation college student. However, despite feeling overwhelmed initially, he was still successful, remarking,

I mean after you know starting my first year it was very overwhelming, a very new experience, and very uncharted. When I first went up there just to sign up for my first semester of classes, I freaked out because I'm like I don't even know what's going on here. I remember my first list of classes and I was just like well what is all of this? And me coming from where I was at, I really didn't feel ready or anything like that. And you know I tried my best to not be overwhelmed, kind of deal and it really wasn't bad because once I started, I was completely fine.

The only participant that did not mention social or cultural struggles did mention that she thought she might not have experienced them as much because of the culture university that she chose to attend and the fact that she has lighter skin so that she can

often “pass” as white. However, she did mention that she has had some of those struggles in her place of work as an adult.

Financial struggles. Of the 11 participants, nine of them mentioned that they either felt unprepared by their lack of financial literacy, or that finances were an extreme stressor in higher education. Despite these assertions, all participants were able to overcome these issues, mostly by way of scholarships, grants, work study programs, or additional jobs on top of their academic work. They often cited their time in their college seminar class, where they researched scholarships, applied to colleges, and filled out the FAFSA as instrumental in overcoming financial obstacles in their path. However, they also noted that they would have appreciated more financial literacy skills as well. Despite that, when they were asked if there were any obstacles that they were unable to overcome, all 11 participants answered no.

Four of the 11 participants were able to overcome financial obstacles by earning full-ride scholarships: Jade, Edith, Nikole, and Aliyah. Jade, Edith, and Nikole were recipients of metro-wide scholarships funded by local philanthropists, Ewing Marion Kauffman and Henry W. Bloch. These scholarships not only offer financial assistance, but support and mentorship to ensure that students stay on track to achieve college success. All three participants mentioned that they were encouraged by the CRKC faculty and staff to apply for these scholarships; additionally, they were given time, resources, and guidance in their high school college seminar class to research and complete them.

Aliyah earned a volleyball scholarship that alleviated much of her financial stress; however, she still said felt as though she was still missing some preparation that would have been helpful, regardless of her scholarship situation, saying,

I think it is just more financial literacy. I think that was it. Cristo Rey did as much as they could, I think. But I think we could have had more resources to let us know like hey here's a place you can go throughout college. I think I was kind of lost once I went to college, I was like OK, so now you need to depend on people that are here at college.

Tanisha, a 2012 CRKC graduate, was able to get almost all her tuition covered through scholarships and grants that only left minimal out of pocket expenses that she could cover through work study jobs. She credited the CRKC staff with helping her attain the scholarships and grants that helped make her attendance possible. She also acknowledged that she would not have been able to attend her local, private university without this financial aid, relaying,

When I was there, I had three work study jobs. I did not have the financial backing to go to a college like the small, private university in the Midwest. When I started at my school, it was forty-one thousand a year. Well, I got most of my years were paid through scholarships Cristo Rey definitely took the time. They also gave me the connections to be the first recipient of a scholarship called The Most Influential Women to Be which was sponsored by Cadillac Cars.

Both Claudia, 2012 CRKC graduate, and Laura, 2011 CRKC graduate, managed to work nearly full-time while in school, combining multiple work study and part-time jobs to overcome financial obstacles. Claudia recounted,

So, I worked there throughout college. That was my kind of extra money. And I did work study at college too. I had a lot of little part-time jobs throughout college like two or three at a time just to help out with costs. I think the obstacles would be going back to finding a way to pay for college. I had some scholarships, and FAFSA, and loans, but there would still be like that leftover to pay. So, I did work study and those part-time jobs. But even then, balancing everything as I went on in college was hard.

Laura shared,

So, I had a teacher there [CRKC] who was very good about number one giving us scholarships. Because I had no idea what a scholarship was, and she helped.

There were the Hispanic Development Fund and Greater Kansas City. I did JUCO for two years. I got enough scholarships that I didn't pay anything even though money was also a factor with no FAFSA. I was in the Phi Beta Kappa program, so I got scholarships to a small, private university in the Midwest, so my two years at community college, I didn't pay very much. I can't think of anything that held me back. I mean money was always an obstacle. Like if I didn't have to work [full-time], I probably would have done better in school.

Jenise, a 2015 CRKC graduate, echoed Aliyah's desire for more financial literacy skills when asked what preparation she was missing for higher education success, citing,

But as far as like, paying for college. And stuff like around budgeting money was tough. I had no way to pay for college, so that was hard. It was definitely hard. It was kind of a step into adulthood, but you know what I mean. We kind of went in on a prayer and my mom didn't know what to do.

Juanita, a 2014 CRKC graduate, and Juan, a 2011 graduate, both shared examples of money struggles being a wedge issue that separated them from some of their peers at school who came from more affluent backgrounds. Both realized that their concept of money and a majority of their peers' concept of money was vastly different. Juanita recalled,

I think just the financial aspect overall because I knew that was my academic part had to be done in order for me to get the financial assistance and if I messed up, there was a chance that I could lose the grant. As opposed to someone who could fail numerous classes and then their parents could afford for them to take summer classes where I didn't have that option. I would have to pay out of pocket. Seeing that they didn't have the same worries and stresses and kind of exposure and background that I did, limited me a lot. Like I only made a few friends there because it just I felt very judged.

Juan concurred saying,

My upbringing with my family also played a big factor. Like for example, I didn't come from the family money. And when I started at a small, private university in the Midwest, you know I can very much tell when certain people were, they came from money, and I'm not saying that in a negative way. I notice the things that you've got and the things that I got. So, the things that I have I hold more value to it and make sure that you know I take care of it and I know that I can't get another one of those or anything like that. And that plays a big factor as well. So, I've seen both sides of it.

Laura, a 2011 CRKC graduate, and Juanita, a 2014 graduate, both shared examples, one which came to fruition and one hypothetical that highlighted the fact that CRKC also directly helps former graduates overcome financial struggles. Laura shared,

So, like I remember one year at JUCO, I didn't have enough money. I think I was missing like three hundred dollars or 500 dollars and I couldn't cover my books.

So, I went back to Cristo Rey, and I was like can you guys help? So, they just gave me the money for it and so just to pay them back come in reset all the lockers. So, I just reset the lockers one summer, and then they paid it.

Jonna shared that she knew if she did have financial struggles, she would be more apt to turn to CRKC than to her own parents for fear of being a burden, recounting,

Because for example, if I had a financial struggle, I would've turned to Cristo Rey before I would turn to my parents. I know that I would add another stressor to them and that's something that I have resources as an alumni [*sic*] to turn to instead of just running [to my parents].

Of the 11 participants, only two failed to mention financial literacy or paying for college. It is unclear if this was the result of learning financial literacy skills at home or some other venue. It is also unclear if financial aid, grants, and scholarships alleviated any stressors or concerns regarding finances for these participants.

Summary

A summary of the three findings from the interviews indicated that participants perceived that their CRKC high school experiences prepared them well for college success. High school experiences most noted by the participants included the college-going culture that was established by the staff and faculty and the CWSP around which

the financial model of the CRN is built. Additionally, participants said they felt like their exposure to rigorous college-preparatory curriculum and top-notch faculty at CRKC allowed them to be successful academically in higher education. Lastly, although participants encountered both social and cultural obstacles and financial struggles, they said they felt they were able to overcome them to achieve their higher education goals. In the next chapter, a study summary, the findings related to the literature, and the conclusions are presented.

Chapter 5

Interpretation and Recommendations

This qualitative study was conducted to examine CRKC graduates' perceptions related to their higher education success. Chapter five is presented in three primary sections. The first section of the chapter, the study summary, is comprised of an overview of the problem, the purpose statement and research question, a review of the methodology, and the major findings. The second section relates the findings of this study in relation to the present literature. The final section, conclusions, consists of implications for action, recommendations for future research, and the concluding remarks.

Study Summary

This section presents an overview of the study, which was intended to examine the perceptions related to the high school and higher education experiences of CRKC graduates. Additionally, the purpose statement and research question describe the rationale for the study. Eleven participants, who are both CRKC graduates and who have earned at least one college degree, were interviewed for this study. The review of methodology and major findings inform the researcher's conclusions and possible avenues of future research.

Overview of the problem. Despite decades of research and rhetoric regarding gaps in higher educational achievement and attainment between marginalized students and their non-marginalized counterparts, little progress has been made. Although marginalization comes in many forms, most research has focused on SES, which according to the American Psychological Association (2019) impacts general human

functioning, which includes mental and physical health and often results in lower educational achievement and poverty; additionally, inequities in health care, resources, and quality of life are increasing in the United States. The results of research have shown that racial and ethnic minorities are often overrepresented in economically marginalized populations due to the stratification that often governs a person's SES (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2010). In this intersection of the multiply marginalized are millions of American students who are both racially and ethnically marginalized as well as economically marginalized.

Moreover, students who are multiply marginalized are more likely to attend low-performing, high-poverty schools that fail to prepare them for higher education success. This failure to prepare all students for higher education success informed the incentive for the creation of the original Cristo Rey High School and eventually, the CRN. The mission of the CRN is to serve the most underserved students in the community to ensure that they not only become upstanding members of society but can fulfill their dreams to achieve college success, thereby reducing the achievement and attainment gap.

Purpose statement and research question. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact that the CRKC experience has had on the degree attainment of graduates who were not classified as college-ready by their failure to meet all four of the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. The goal of this study was to determine the perceptions of CRKC graduates about factors that affected their higher education success. Potentially influential factors discussed in the interview include but were not limited to high school experiences, 9-12 programming, and college successes and obstacles.

The following research question guided this study of the graduates of CRKC. It speaks to the unique attributes of the CRN that allowed them to be college-ready despite their scores on the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. According to the perceptions of CRKC alumni who did not meet multiple ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, what factors, including high school experiences and college successes and obstacles affected their completion of a two or four-year college degree?

Review of the methodology. A qualitative study was designed to examine the perceptions of the CRKC graduates who had earned college degrees despite being deemed not college-ready by their failure to meet all the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. A representative sample of 11 participants who had completed a college degree before June 2019 was studied. The sample was selected from the recipients for whom current contact information was available via the CRN. A qualitative approach was used to interview graduates. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the participants' perspectives of their high school and college experiences. This approach was adopted to gain a deeper understanding of the impact that their CRKC experience had on their eventual higher educational completion. Each participant in the study was interviewed individually. After each interview, the researcher created transcriptions of them with the assistance of Trint, audio transcription software. These transcriptions were then uploaded into the Dedoose Research Analysis software, a cross-platform app for analyzing qualitative research, which was utilized to code and analyze the content of the interviews. The resulting information was used to identify the impact of the CRKC experience on access to and attainment of a college degree for the participants.

Major findings. This study's first major finding was related to the participants' perceptions regarding choosing to attend college and their high school experiences that impacted their higher education attainment. Analysis of the interview results determined that all of the participants cited both the college-going culture of CRKC and the CWSP as pivotal to their success in college. Elements of the college-going culture that were most oft-cited by the participants were the college seminar classes, college counseling services, and the support and encouragement of the entire faculty and staff. According to all the participants, the CWSP equipped them with skills like communication, professionalism, and interpersonal acumen that allowed them to be successful in their next level of education.

The second major finding of the study was related to the participants' perceptions of their academic college readiness. Ten of the 11 participants reported that they felt academically prepared to be successful at their community college, college, or university. The participants all attributed their readiness to the quality of the CRKC faculty and staff and the rigorous academic curriculum of the school.

The study's third major finding was related to the participants' perceptions and experiences with obstacles and their ability to overcome them to be successful. Although all 11 participants described some type of obstacles that they faced in their higher education, they all reported that they were able to overcome them. Ten of the 11 participants reported that a major obstacle to their success was related to diversity issues on campus or social and cultural tensions. Additionally, eight of 11 participants stated that financial issues or literacy were the source of stress for them. Grit, hard work, and

resourcefulness characterized the participants in their ability to overcome multiple obstacles in their higher educational paths.

Findings Related to the Literature

In this section, the results of the current research are compared with the results of previous research. Literature pertinent to the present study was presented in Chapter 2. One research question was developed to ensure fidelity to the purpose of this study.

According to the research of Frankenberg et al. (2003) and Orfield et al. (2012), students attending schools at the beginning of the twenty-first century are more likely to have attended racially segregated schools than their counterparts in the 1960s, due to de facto segregation, rather than de jure segregation. This assertion is in keeping with the demographics of the students in the current study where students of color make up 98% of the population at CRN schools. In addition to being racially segregated, economically marginalized American students are segregated as well, because they are disproportionately African American, Latinx, and Hispanic youth (Berg, 2010; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; R. Rothstein, 2004; Solórzano et al., 2013; Terenzini et al., 2001). These findings are also replicated in the demographics of the participants of the current study as well as where the students all come from economically marginalized families, due to the CRN requirement to serve students in most need.

A body of research has highlighted the fact that standardized test scores do not always accurately predict college success equally for different populations, especially when populations are disaggregated for aspects that identify marginalized students, such as race, first-generation status, and socioeconomic status (Astone & Nunez-Wormack, 1990; Atkinson and Geiser, 2009; Crouse & Trusheim, 1988; Darling-Hammond, 1994;

Geiser, 2017; Gerald & Haycock, 2006; Madaus, 1995; Soares, 2007; Wilson, 1978). Additionally, Myers and Pyles (1992) asserted that utilizing ACT scores in isolation will not accurately predict college academic success for minority students. The results of the current research are consistent with earlier findings in that all 11 participants scored below the threshold for college readiness, according to the ACT, but went on to successfully complete at least a four-year degree.

Due to the research that casts doubt on the validity of standardized tests to predict college success, NACAC (2008) warned that the overemphasis of standardized test scores might serve to exacerbate the current inequalities and underrepresentation among marginalized students in higher education. Dependence on ACT scores during the admissions process often discourages or eliminates marginalized students and naturally creates higher education institutions that are principally Caucasian and wealthy (Bowen et al., 2005; Gerald & Haycock, 2006; Soares, 2007; Shanley, 2007; Zwick, 2007). The results of the current study support these assertions in that a lack of diversity and cultural tension was overwhelmingly present for the participants in their higher educational journeys. The findings of the current study point to nearly all the students of color feeling like they were outsiders at their own institutions; they were often painfully aware of the differences between them and their peers.

Researchers have asserted that Catholic schools have a capacity for narrowing the achievement gap for students of color in the urban core; the effects of the Catholic school advantage are dramatically felt by certain populations, specifically, urban African-Americans, Hispanics, and Latinx students (Bempechat et al., 2008; Figlio & Stone, 1997; Jeynes, 2005; Neal, 1997; Polite, 1992; Sander, 2001, Telles & Ortiz, 2008).

According to research conducted by Aldana (2015), Bryk et al. (1993), Gamble (2015), Manno (1999), Neal (1997), Polite (1992), and Sander (2001), this advantage is felt by marginalized populations in part because they have typically been zoned into lower-performing public schools. The current study reinforces these findings as all the participants resided in the urban core, zoned to underperforming schools, classified themselves as African American, Hispanic, or Latinx, and were able to overcome the achievement gap by not only attending higher educational institutions but by also graduating.

Bateman (2014) found “Through interviews, focus groups and the utilization of grounded-theory analysis software . . . Cristo Rey’s success story is founded in four specific components: Work Experience, Faith and Character Development, College Preparation and School Climate” (p. 6). These four factors typically produce outcomes of “character development, internal developmental assets, gateway skills, and a supportive social network, which ultimately lead to long-term outcomes of academic achievement, civic engagement, college matriculation, and career readiness” (Bateman, 2014, p. 7). The findings of the current study are consistent with earlier research in that work experience, college preparation, and school climate were the most oft-cited elements regarding students’ higher education success. Moreover, despite the faith and character development piece not being explicitly stated by participants, the character of the graduates to persist through struggles and report that they were always able to overcome, speaks to their resilience and character.

Typically, the CRN employs teachers who feel called to serve marginalized students and who ascribe to the Jesuit social justice ideology (Fahey-Smith, 2015;

Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014; Thielman, 2012). Father Robert Welsh, S.J. asserted that “It’s important to recognize that the success of a Cristo Rey school is dependent on the adult community” (as cited in Sweas, 2014, p. 39). This assertion is supported by research on teacher effectiveness, which has suggested that teachers are the most impactful factor regarding their students’ academic achievement (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Gordon, Kane, & Staiger, 2006). In keeping with these studies, the participants in the current study overwhelmingly attributed much of their success to the committed staff and faculty at CRKC. They consistently cited the excellence, hard work, and steadfastness of their teachers to ensure that they were receiving a top-notch education.

A culture of caring and trust is cited multiple times throughout the literature regarding the student experiences at CRN schools (Aldana, 2012; Bludgus, 2018; Coelho, 2017; Fahey-Smith, 2015; Kearney, 2008; Sweas, 2014). In Jesuit schools, this is articulated through the concept of *Cura Personalis*, which is Latin, meaning care for the whole person. Engle and Tinto (2008), assert that the establishment of positive faculty and peer relationships, coupled with social-support services, are especially effective for economically disadvantaged minority students at achieving academic attainment. A strong sense of community is a hallmark of all Catholic schools (Bludgus, 2018; Miller, 2006; Loyola University, School of Education, Center for Catholic School Effectiveness, & Boston College, School of Education, Roche Center for Catholic Education, 2012). This sense of community and culture of support is represented throughout the current study as well, where all the participants made mention of how this culture of support

significantly impacted not only their high school experiences but their higher education attainment as well.

Initially, the CRN only adhered loosely to curricular standards and academic rigor across the board for all students. When they hired a Chief Academic Officer in 2009, she created a common, standards-based curriculum across the network (Fahey-Smith, 2015; Sweas, 2014). This paradigm shift toward standards-based curriculum is reinforced by school-wide reform efforts nationwide, not just at the CRN (Dean et al., 2012; Marzano, 2007; Schmoker & Marzano, 1999; Voltz et al., 2010). This shift in rigor instituted by the standards-based curriculum is seen in the results of the current study, whereby graduates felt prepared to tackle the academic work of higher education.

Astorga-Velasquez (2012), found that CRN students stated that the faith-based nature of the school was an integral factor in their sense of community and that faith development complemented their studies to pave their future path to success. Additionally, Astorga-Velasquez (2012) found that the students acknowledged the CWSP for how it prepared them for the future in both college and careers. The current research is split on these findings. Only one participant explicitly mentioned the faith-based nature of the school and its bearing on her academic success. However, all participants overwhelmingly attributed their higher education success to the skills they learned in the CWSP.

Gamble (2015) studied perceptions of grit, socio-emotional intelligence, and the acquisition of non-cognitive skills in the CWSP at three schools in the CRN. Gamble (2015) found that these students characteristically perceived themselves to possess high levels of grit and above-average interpersonal skills, but below-average intrapersonal

skills. Additionally, the results of the study indicate that the three areas most impacted by the students in relation to the CWSP were “social responsibility, interpersonal relationships, and flexibility; the categories least impacted according to the students included self-awareness, self-regard, assertiveness, independence, empathy, and impulse control” (Gamble, 2015, p. iii). The results of the current study agreed with Gamble’s assertions in the positive realm; participants overwhelmingly self-identified as having high levels of grit and interpersonal skills.

Boyle (2017) studied the perceptions of those who had graduated from Philadelphia Catholic high schools from the 1950s through the 2010s. The researcher wanted to determine if Catholic values have informed their civic and community involvement. Nearly 50% of the participants stated that they are currently active in service or leadership roles in the community (Boyle, 2017). Additionally, (Boyle, 2017) found that alumni typically espoused a sense of family values, tradition, and mission-driven service that was informed by their high school experience. The findings of the current study are consistent with earlier research in that nine of the eleven participants are currently employed in service-oriented positions, such as nursing, teaching, or the non-profit sector. Additionally, seven of the 11 participants specifically mentioned volunteer work or giving back to the community in their interviews.

Conclusions

This qualitative study was intended to examine the perceptions and experiences of CRKC graduates who did not meet all the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, yet still successfully earned a college degree. Specifically, the high school experiences, college

successes, and obstacles were examined. In this section, the implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding remarks are included.

Implications for action. The findings of this study provided evidence that action is needed in several areas. Firstly, CRKC should continue to invest in quality teachers, administrators, and staff that continue to create a college-going culture of love, trust, and most importantly, academic rigor for all. Additionally, CRKC should continue to foster the faith and character development piece that nurtures a sense of purpose, grit, and resilience in its students. Furthermore, CRKC should consider either adding financial literacy curricular components or strengthening those existing components in their seminar classes that address the soft skills of student success. Although one of CRKC's greatest strengths is its diversity, the participants' responses highlighted a need area for instruction in how to navigate a college culture that is drastically different than their home and high school cultures.

The results of this research also highlight the need for higher educational institutions to rely less empirically on standardized test scores for admission and scholarship consideration, especially if they want to be more diverse and inclusive environments. It is recommended that institutions undertake policies that are test-blind or test-optional to affect cultural change that allows those most marginalized by the tests not to be excluded from these institutions. There are also implications for institutions of higher education to be more attuned to the needs of the students from diverse backgrounds as they navigate a college-going culture that may be entirely foreign to their sensibilities. These needs could be addressed by more culturally sensitive programming and support through advising and mentorship.

Recommendations for future research. The following recommendations outline possible avenues for additional research. Researchers could build upon the results of this study to ascertain whether the experiences of these graduates are the same for other CRKC graduates or simply graduates from other CRN schools. Additionally, adding a quantitative piece to future research to conduct a mixed-methods study would allow for survey data to inform the interview questions. By surveying more CRN graduates, data could be interpreted to see if the experiences of the CRKC graduates could be extrapolated to the other CRN graduates. Future research could be enriched by interviewing the graduates who were not successful in higher education, whether they met the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks or not. It would also be interesting to measure CRKC graduates' higher education enrollment, persistence, and attainment against their similarly-normed public-school peers. Future research could also explore the non-cognitive factors that impact higher education success of students who are not deemed "college-ready" yet succeed in earning a two or four-year degree.

Concluding remarks. Despite espousing the ideals of equity, the educational reform movements of the last 50 years have failed to close the achievement gap. The most marginalized students continue to pay the heaviest price for this educational inequity by dramatically lower access to higher education. As educators, we must tirelessly work for the students and families who cannot always advocate for themselves. Inherent in all humans is dignity and worth that demands social justice, and this is often closely tied to educational opportunity. Our country is strengthened by a populace that is well-educated, healthy, and empowered to better themselves. The CRN of schools has highlighted a powerful model for urban schools to implement to transform themselves

and their graduates. The model that they have executed is a template for narrowing the achievement gap that has plagued us for all too long.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Mission Effectiveness Standards

Cristo Rey Network Mission Effectiveness Standards

The assessment process serves as a way for the Network to evaluate the progress of each school concerning these Standards as well as a means for Network schools to share expertise and learn from one another. This process must take into account that each school differs from the others and may have alternate ways of addressing these Standards. Also, schools typically participate in the activities of accrediting agencies and are reviewed by sponsoring religious congregations and dioceses. Assessment of these standards is meant to complement this ongoing work on the part of the school rather than duplicate it.

Standard One

A Cristo Rey school is explicitly Catholic in mission and enjoys Church approval.

1. The school meets the requirements of its religious sponsoring body in areas such as religious identity and mission; community atmosphere; faculty, staff, and board formation; and programs of religious education, worship, retreats, and community service.
2. The school incorporates the cultural traditions and customs of the student body into the celebration of faith.
3. The school has in place personnel, processes, and programs such that the school is religiously vibrant, marked by its faith-identity in the various aspects of the school's life.
4. The school relates collegially with surrounding Catholic high schools, parishes, and grade schools.
5. The school incorporates the primary elements of the Cristo Rey Network Faith Formation Document into its religious and faith formation programs.

Standard Two

A Cristo Rey school serves only economically disadvantaged students. The school is open to Students of various faiths and cultures.

1. All accepted applicants to a Cristo Rey school must complete a third-party financial aid process approved by the Network that incorporates their most recently filed tax records, family demographics (e.g., family size) and other relevant financial information. The school annually shares the student income information from the third-party financial aid service with the Network.
2. Through its admissions process, the school continually renews its commitment to the marginalized by aggressively seeking students from economically disadvantaged families and neighborhoods. Specifically, schools recruit students who are eligible for the federal free/reduced lunch program. As a result, each school maintains an admissions policy that considers student income levels and meets one of the following measures for all incoming students:
 - a. the per capita Adjusted Available Family Income for an individual student's family (as determined by a Network-approved third-party financial aid service) shall not exceed 75% of the per capita Median Household Income (as indicated by the U.S. Census Bureau's most recent American Community Survey) of the city in which the school is located or for the nation, whichever is higher; or

- b. the total Adjusted Available Family Income for an individual student's family (as determined by a Network-approved third-party financial aid service) shall not exceed 75% of the Median Household Income (as indicated by the U.S. Census Bureau's most recent American Community Survey) of the city in which the school is located or for the nation, whichever is higher.
3. Beyond the assistance provided by the work-study program, the school provides financial aid to families who cannot afford the full tuition, while maintaining a policy that every student must pay something.

Standard Three

A Cristo Rey school is family-centered and plays an active role in the local community.

1. The faculty strives to meet the individual needs of student learners.
2. A variety of relevant assessments (ACT College and Career Readiness System, curriculum-aligned formative and summative assessments, diagnostic assessments) are used to inform classroom instruction and to plan for improvements in student achievement.
3. The school closely examines student retention data and actively works to increase student retention.
4. The school obtains and maintains accreditation by the recognized regional high school accrediting association and meets the state graduation requirements.

Standard Four

A Cristo Rey school shall prepare all of its students to enter and graduate from college.

1. The comprehensive college-ready curriculum, designed for a high level of student engagement in learning, is sufficiently rigorous to prepare every student for success in college; the faculty is committed to and has planned for systematic implementation of the curriculum.
2. The faculty demonstrates commitment to regular and effective use of evidence-based instructional strategies with a high probability of maximizing student achievement.
3. The school provides students with a variety of intervention structures necessary to succeed in a college preparatory curriculum, e.g. bridge programs, tutorial programs, etc.
4. The faculty strives to meet the individual needs of student learners.
5. A variety of relevant assessments (ACT College and Career Readiness System, curriculum-aligned formative and summative assessments, diagnostic assessments) are used to inform classroom instruction and to plan for improvements in student achievement.
6. The school closely examines student retention data and actively works to increase student retention.
7. The school obtains and maintains accreditation by the recognized regional high school accrediting association and meets the state graduation requirements.

Standard Five

A Cristo Rey school requires participation by all students in the work-study program. All students must be 14 years old by September 1st.

1. The directors of the work-study program conduct the program as a business and are subsequently attentive to the needs and expectations of the school's corporate clients.
2. The work-study program is a separately constituted corporation well integrated into the school.
3. A yearly fee for the student, appropriate to the going market rate for a full-time salary and benefits, is charged to corporate sponsors, representing a business expense, not a charitable contribution to the school.
4. The school contracts with non-profit employers in order to serve the local community and to provide students with exposure to the non-profit world; funds are raised from outside sources to finance these positions. These positions should not exceed 10 percent of the school's total job base when the school is at full capacity.
5. The school properly trains students for the work-study program and provides sufficient guidance and assessment throughout the school year.
6. A dress code appropriate for the corporate community is consistently enforced at school and work.
7. Site supervisors and school staff evaluate students' performance in the work program using a common Cristo Rey Network form, at least twice a year.
8. Directors of the work-study program contribute regularly to the ongoing cross-selling initiatives among work-study directors throughout the country.

Standard Six

A Cristo Rey school integrates the learning present in its work program, classroom and extracurricular experiences for the fullest benefit of its student workers.

1. The school recognizes that its work and academic programs are interdependent and interconnected. At the school's very foundation is the conviction that work, and academics enhance one another for the benefit of the students, the sponsors, the teachers and the community.
2. The school makes certain that all employees understand they have a stake in the success of the work program. All strategies and programs related to integration respect the sensitivities of the work situation. The school assumes the added workload and effort necessary to integration.
3. Students receive academic credit for the work-study program, as arranged with the local accrediting agency.
4. Both the Academic and Work-Study staff select and retain and, if necessary, dismiss students based on the student's desire to exert maximum effort in a rigorous college-ready curriculum and on their ability to perform in the workplace.

Standard Seven

A Cristo Rey school has an effective administrative and board structure as well as complies with all applicable state and federal laws.

1. The school's Board includes religious, community, business, and educational leaders, is appropriately trained, understands its responsibilities and role in the school, and supports and understands the school's mission and programs.
2. A Cristo Rey school, while always following the requirements of its religious sponsor, has elements of independent governance that promote Board members taking an active role in the school's success.
3. The Governing Board performs a regular self-evaluation.
4. The Governing Board annually evaluates the performance of the President.
5. The school is staffed appropriately to ensure the effective education and formation of the student body – minimally including the following separate positions: President, Principal, Work Study Director and Development Director.
6. The school designs and implements a compensation structure that is supportive of quality performance.
7. The school's internal accounting system is appropriately managed, and the school and work-study program undergo an independent audit each year.
8. The school complies with all applicable state and federal laws, including immigration, labor and not-for-profit tax laws.

Standard Eight

A Cristo Rey school is financially sound. At full enrollment the school is primarily dependent on revenue from the work-study program to meet operating expenses. In addition, the school maintains a comprehensive advancement program to ensure financial stability.

1. At full enrollment, a Cristo Rey school shall have a minimum of 400 students and a maximum of 600 students. A school below 400 students will need to demonstrate how it can be financially sustainable without undue reliance on tuition and fundraising.
2. A Cristo Rey school is not tuition driven. At full enrollment, income from family contributions to tuition should cover approximately 10% of operating expenses.
3. At full enrollment, income from the work-study program should cover at least 60% of operating expenses. As a school works toward full enrollment, the individual school ratio of annual work-study cash revenue to operating expense should be within 10% of the Network average.
4. The school raises money for capital improvements, non-paying non-profit jobs, tuition assistance, and program needs.
5. The school develops a multi-year budget model to anticipate future needs and trends.
6. The school develops materials such as newsletters, brochures, a web site and other communication approaches that effectively tell the school's story and promote the raising of funds from the larger community.
7. The school embarks as quickly as feasible on a campaign to establish an endowment in order to ensure the school's long-term financial stability and to guard against the impact of a national or regional economic downturn.

Standard Nine

A Cristo Rey school supports its graduates' efforts to obtain a college degree.

1. The school faculty and staff actively promote and nurture a college-going culture for all students through school events, traditions, and a comprehensive college-counseling program. The school employs a full-time college counselor hired by its third year.
2. The school collaborates with the Cristo Rey Network to track its alumni through the National Student Clearinghouse and its own alumni tracking platform.
3. The school maintains accurate records of alumni progress from college acceptance through completion of college.
4. The school actively solicits feedback from alumni on how well prepared they were for college, with specific attention given to the school's academic curriculum, college counseling program, and corporate work-study experience.
5. The school establishes a robust network of advocates at local colleges to ensure alumni access, available resources and supports.

Standard Ten

A Cristo Rey school is an active participant in the collaboration, support, and development of the Cristo Rey Network.

1. The school is operating in accordance with the results and plans outlined in the Feasibility Study.
2. The school participates in the various conferences and gatherings of the Cristo Rey Network.
3. A Cristo Rey school benchmarks itself against other Network schools, paying particular attention to schools with similar enrollments, demographics, and years of operation.
4. The school shares its learning and expertise with other Network schools.
5. The school participates in the Network support and assessment processes, such as the Mission Effectiveness Review Process and the annual Statistical Directory data collection.

Appendix B: IRB Approval



Baker University Institutional Review Board

April 2nd, 2019

Dear Elizabeth Walter and Susan Rogers,

The Baker University IRB has reviewed your project application and approved this project under Expedited Status Review. As described, the project complies with all the requirements and policies established by the University for protection of human subjects in research. Unless renewed, approval lapses one year after approval date.

Please be aware of the following:

1. Any significant change in the research protocol as described should be reviewed by this Committee prior to altering the project.
2. Notify the IRB about any new investigators not named in original application.
3. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents of the research activity.
4. If this is a funded project, keep a copy of this approval letter with your proposal/grant file.
5. If the results of the research are used to prepare papers for publication or oral presentation at professional conferences, manuscripts or abstracts are requested for IRB as part of the project record.

Please inform this Committee or myself when this project is terminated or completed. As noted above, you must also provide IRB with an annual status report and receive approval for maintaining your status. If you have any questions, please contact me at npoell@bakeru.edu or 785.594.4582.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Nathan D. Poell'.

Nathan Poell, MA
Chair, Baker University IRB

Baker University IRB Committee

Scott Crenshaw
Jamin Perry, PhD
Susan Rogers, PhD
Joe Watson, PhD

Appendix C: Solicitation Email

Calling all Cristo Rey College Grads,

First of all, congratulations! Only 33% of Americans have earned a college degree; you can count yourself among elite company. My name is Elizabeth Walter, and I'm currently a professor in the Department of Education at Rockhurst University. Prior to that, I was a high school English teacher for 15 years. At RU, I have been lucky enough to work with some outstanding Cristo Rey graduates; this led me to take an interest in the Cristo Rey model. I'm currently working on a research study with Sister Linda Roth about what makes Cristo Rey graduates successful at the college level. In order to collect data for my research, I would love to interview Cristo Rey graduates who have completed a 2-year or 4-year degree. If you are interested in taking part in a short interview, please contact me at elizabeth.walter@rockhurst.edu or 913-530-8244. Interviews can be conducted however you choose Facetime, Skype, Zoom, or in person; if you do not have transportation, I'm happy to come to you. Please know that I will keep your comments confidential; if they are used in the study, you will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your anonymity. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Walter
elizabeth.walter@rockhurst.edu
913-530-8244

Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent for Participation in a Research Study

Research Title: More Than a Score: Cristo Rey Graduates' College Readiness

Researcher: Elizabeth O'Brien Walter

Advisor: Dr. Susan Rogers
Baker University
913-344-1226
srogers@bakeru.edu

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Elizabeth Walter about your experience at Cristo Rey Kansas City and how it prepared you for your eventual college success. Thank you in advance for your consideration. Your participation will take approximately 45-60 minutes.

The purpose of this research is to examine the impact of the Cristo Rey Kansas City experience on access to post-secondary education and persistence in college. The researcher seeks to identify factors that facilitated scholars' educational attainment, to understand the role of Cristo Rey Kansas City on college access and persistence, and to understand the success of the graduates.

The study will consist of one interview; I am asking your permission to record the interview and take notes over it as part of the research. The recording is used to ensure fidelity to the dialogue that ensues. All interview notes, recordings, and transcripts will be digitally password-protected, and only the research analyst and principal investigator will have access to the raw data until the dissertation is defended, at which time they will be destroyed. Your interview will be anonymous and at no time will the researcher utilize the recording for any other purpose beyond what is stated in this consent form.

By signing below, you permit me to record you during your participation in the research study. Additionally, you permit me to send you the transcripts of our interview for your review. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may leave the study at any time without penalty. You may refuse to answer any question(s) asked. Your anonymity will be maintained in all published and written data subsequent to this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Elizabeth O'Brien Walter at elizabeth.walter@rockhurst.edu or 816-501-4585. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records. Thank you again.

Sign your name

Date

Print your name

Email Address

Phone Number

Appendix E: What makes a Jesuit school Jesuit?

What Makes a Jesuit School Jesuit?

10 criteria by which a Jesuit school can and should be evaluated

1. Jesuit schools constitute one of the most effective forms for the apostolic activity of the Society of Jesus. These schools must be based in the same first principles which serve as the foundation for the contemporary mission of the Society of Jesus.
2. The Society of Jesus' way of proceeding demands close collaboration with all "who hunger and thirst after justice" in order to make "a world where the brotherhood of all opens the way for the recognition and acceptance of Christ Jesus and God our Father." At the same time, the "Jesuit heritage of creative response to the call of the Spirit in concrete situations of life is an incentive to develop a culture of dialogue in our approach to believers of other religions." Therefore, Jesuit schools "conscientize their students on the value of interreligious collaboration and instill in them a basic understanding of and respect for the faith vision of the members of the diverse local religious communities, while deepening their own faith response to God." The ultimate objective of the mission of education should be to contribute vitally to "the total and integral liberation of the person, leading to participation in the life of God himself."
3. A Jesuit school publicly declares its Catholic character and seeks "to incorporate itself more and more vigorously and creatively into the life of the Church." Like the Society of Jesus itself, the Jesuit school acts "in the service of the worldwide mission of the Church." Above all, board members, faculty, staff, and administrators in their work for students constantly seek to teach them to "learn in the Church, with the Church, and for the Church how to live our faith."
4. The Society of Jesus urges us to take particular care that students "acquire that knowledge and character which are worthy of Christians, and that animated by a mature faith and personally devoted to Jesus Christ, [they] learn to find and serve Him in others." General Congregation 32 summed up the contemporary mission of the Society in these words: it is "to preach Jesus Christ and to make Him known in such a way that all men and women are able to recognize Him whose delight, from the beginning, has been to be with them and to take an active part in their history." Furthermore, the Complementary Norms to the Constitutions remind Jesuits that their community should be "a faith community that comes together in the Eucharist with others who believe in Christ to celebrate their common faith."
5. The school's policies should always clearly reflect a sense of justice. The precepts of Catholic social teaching should be applied not only in dealings with the school's employees but also in making plans which will affect the "local socioeconomic needs" of the surrounding community. "Our schools have become

platforms, reaching out into the community, not only to the extended school community...but also to the poor and the socially disadvantaged in the neighborhood.” “We must in a special way help prepare all our students effectively to devote themselves to building a more just world and to understand how to labor with and for others.”

6. A Jesuit education should make students intellectually able to assess critically the values propagated by contemporary culture, and competent to evaluate the results of modern economic and social trends. Above all, the education and formation offered students in Jesuit schools includes attention to areas such as “the protection of the human rights of persons and peoples, ...the consequences of interdependence..., safeguarding human life itself..., the influence of the media in the service of justice..., protection of the environment..., the tragic marginalization of not a few nations..., and the problem of the socially marginalized in every society.” A Jesuit education should aim to free its students to confront honestly the social injustices of racism, sexism, and religious intolerance. Schools should work to instill in their students a willingness to collaborate “with others, ...with other members of local churches, with Christians of other denominations, with adherents to other religions, ...with all who strive to make a world fit for men and women to live in.”
7. Recent general congregations have stressed that Jesuit schools “should be outstanding not so much for number and size as for teaching, for the quality of the instruction, and the service rendered to the people of God.” General Congregation 34 reminded educators in Jesuit schools that they are training men and women to assume “leadership roles in their own communities” as well as in “many Jesuit works in years to come.” The most recent congregations have also called attention to the great progress in technology, communication and information exchange, and the need for a reasoned critical knowledge of the cultural revolution they have brought about. Stress is placed on education in communication in order to foster “critical knowledge of the rhetoric of this new culture,... an appreciation of its aesthetic dimension,...[and] the skills required for teamwork and for the effective use of media and information technology.”
8. Modern Jesuit education must be characterized by that growing cooperation within the whole school community which “has expanded our mission and transformed the way in which we carry it out in partnership with others.” General Congregation 34 reminded Jesuits that today they carry out their mission as “Men with others.” “Men and women with others” are not only willing to share their spiritual and apostolic inheritance with their students but also to listen and learn from one another and from others in the outside community.
9. Maintaining and developing the Jesuit identity of a school depends on careful selection of board members, teachers, staff, and administrators and on “adequate formation in the Ignatian charism and pedagogy.” Consequently, all Jesuits in the educational apostolate must serve their lay colleagues and professional partners “by offering them what we are and have received; namely, formation in our

apostolic spirituality, especially...the experience of the Spiritual Exercises and spiritual direction and discernment.” Jesuit secondary schools “should improve continually both as educational institutions and as centers of culture and faith for lay collaborators, for families of students and former students, and through them for the whole community of a region.”

10. The Constitutions remind us that the works of the Society of Jesus are characterized by “a profound spiritual experience through the Spiritual Exercises.” General Congregation 32 believed that “the spirit of the Exercises should pervade every other ministry of the Word that we undertake.” In Jesuit education, this mandate has been especially strengthened by the evident intellectual and methodological connection between the Exercises and the educational objectives and methods described in *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education and Ignatian Pedagogy*.