BUILDING COLLEGE ACCESS WITH FAMILIES
IN
NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS: A CASE STUDY

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This qualitative study was an investigation into improving college access through family engagement with minority and low-income students in an urban school district. Critical theory concepts of cultural capital, field, and habitus, as well as organizational communication theory, formed the theoretical framework that guided a literature review and shaped the empirical investigation. The study was guided by four research questions: 1) What are the aspirations, views, and beliefs of New Bedford Public Schools’ families concerning college attendance? 2) What college-related information and practices are viewed as helpful and not helpful by family members? 3) What communication strategies do these families find most and least effective? 4) What information do schools in New Bedford convey to families about college access and how is it delivered? A case study approach was used to uncover how family members of underrepresented students experience college access programming in this urban district’s particular socioeconomic context. It explored their impressions and insights during the design and implementation stages of a college access workshop series. The purpose of this study
was to utilize the insights gained to acknowledge the “cultural wealth” as well as improve the college access or “cultural capital” of families of students traditionally underrepresented on college campuses. Findings demonstrated that these families do value education; they want their children to have a college education and view it as a road to a ‘better future.’ They turn to schools to provide vital and timely information to fulfill the aspirations and dreams they hold for their children. The outcome of the study is intended to inform the development of a college access protocol designed to address the informational needs of this community’s families, through effective staff professional development, programming and communication. The findings suggest that by understanding families, who they are, and what they value, schools can build effective communication and informational pathways that meet families where they are. Once this occurs parents will feel valued and empowered to collaborate with schools in delivering their children onto college campuses.

*Keywords*: cultural wealth, college access, college knowledge, aspirations-achievement gap, parent involvement.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

New Bedford is the world's most famous whaling era seaport and the number one fishing port in America. It is a city whose fortunes and occupations have ebbed and flowed like the tide. Aware of its strong and proud heritage, the citizens of New Bedford are engaged in drafting a 2020 Master Plan. Its vision statement reflects a community poised and ready for a bright tomorrow. In part it states:

"The future for our City, the Commonwealth and our nation depends on how effectively we tackle the challenges of education, energy, the environment and social equity. New Bedford already harbors the tools to make progress on these problems, with creativity and speed. We know our strengths: a creative community, comprehensive marine heritage and resources, people eager for work, affordable space, a safe harbor and unrivaled access to nature and the sea” (Committee, 2009).

On the educational front, New Bedford Public Schools' leadership is addressing the needs of the city's youngest citizens in numerous ways; focusing on reducing dropout rates, increasing academic rigor, and improving the post-secondary outcomes of its students. This city has one of the highest high school dropout rates in Massachusetts; every year approximately three-hundred students leave school without a diploma. In the 2009-2010 school year, the dropout rate was 8.4%, almost three times the state average of 2.9%. Of the 1,000 freshmen who enter New Bedford High School each year, only about 600 go on to graduate in four years. Of those who do graduate, fewer than 300 will go on to a four-year college.

Among efforts to support student school persistence, improving student access to a college education is viewed as a critical element. Engaging students in plans for the future is a
powerful antidote to the process of disengagement that researchers find precedes actually leaving school. A report from the Massachusetts Graduation and Dropout Prevention and Recovery Commission (2009) highly recommends connecting school to college and career as a dropout prevention strategy, suggesting that “giving students the opportunity to connect with college and career experiences can increase student engagement, motivation, and overall academic achievement, resulting in students who are better prepared for their future” (p. 16). Accordingly, New Bedford Public Schools’ College Readiness Proposal (2010) rests on the belief that engaged, challenged and supported students will persist to graduation and all youth deserve an opportunity to go to college. This study explored one aspect of college access in this urban setting related to parent involvement and influence.

It has become apparent that American education must undergo significant changes in the way it functions, if it is to be successful in providing its youth with the skills necessary to be successful citizens of the 21st century. In most cases, a college credential or post-secondary experience will be necessary to allow students to achieve this goal. The U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics (Laird & Debell, 2001), found the completion of high school a necessary requirement for accessing post-secondary education and a minimum requirement for most jobs. The statistics show that the impact of low educational attainment has dire effects on individuals and communities, that young adults with low education and skill levels are more likely to live in poverty and to receive government assistance, and that high school dropouts are likely to stay on public assistance longer than those with at least a high school degree.

The term ‘college access’ implies not only supporting entry into postsecondary education, but rather assisting students, particularly minority and low-income students in meeting many
challenges along the pathway to college. “Although the college aspirations of all U.S. high school students, regardless of race, ethnicity, and family income, have increased dramatically over the past several decades, significant disparities remain in college readiness and enrollment” (Roderick, Nagoaka, & Coca, 2009, p. 185). Nationally only 51% of all black students and 52% of all Hispanic students graduate, and only 20% of all black students and 16% of all Hispanic students graduate college ready (Greene & Forester, 2003). These dire enrollment trends confirm the importance of improving college access programming in the New Bedford public school system, whose diverse demographics would predict continued low educational attainment.

In the 2009-2010 school year, New Bedford High School enrolled a diverse population of 2,855 students. Minority students represented close to half of the student body; with 15.5% African American, 22.3% Hispanic, with 8.1% Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). Nationwide, the rates of college enrollment for African American and Latino students are significantly lower than those of White and Asian students.

Studies have demonstrated that college enrollment is the result of the successful completion of critical tasks; it is not solely dependent upon student ability but rather, rests on students and families receiving timely and effective support and information. In a school with a college-going culture, “schools and families are ready and willing partners in all stages of the information-gathering process that is associated with college choice” (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002, p. 15). Partnering with families to build college access is vital, as parents’ expectations and involvement have been found to be among the most significant factors affecting students’ college enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Kern, 2000). Students whose parents did not go to college have lower educational expectations, lower academic preparation, and receive less support from their families in planning and preparing for
college than their peers whose parents had some college experience (Choy, S. P., 2001). Significantly, research has found that parents’ awareness or level of information about college impacts their expectations and involvement in student’s college enrollment process. Although parent education levels are fixed, the promotional effect of accurate and timely information on parent involvement and encouragement and the resulting positive influence on student college aspiration should be capitalized upon. Exploring this aspect of college access was the focus of this study’s intellectual goals.

Informal evidence coincides with the literature, and suggests there are several contributory factors within the families and school community that had to be considered if this trend is to be reversed. Specifically, the communication of vital information was less than effective with students and families; there appeared to be a culture of diminished expectations for and of some students, by families as well as within the school community. A goal of this study was to examine from New Bedford parents’ perspectives which messages and services have the most impact on the college expectations they hold for their children. Circumscribed around a college readiness workshop series for middle school families, this investigation uncovered the beliefs, needs and experiences of some New Bedford families in relation to college access. Using focus groups, surveys and interviews the research documented what information families received, how it was being transmitted, and what they viewed as helpful and not helpful. An outcome of this study’s findings and the review of pertinent literature are recommendations for a college access information protocol and a plan to effectively communicate it to families in middle school.
Research Questions

This research project pursued the following empirical research questions: 1) What information does New Bedford Public Schools convey to families about college access and how it is communicated? 2) What are the aspirations, views, and beliefs of New Bedford Public Schools’ families concerning college attendance? 3) What college-related information is viewed as helpful and not helpful by family members or those without college attendance experience? 4) What communication practices do these families find most and least helpful? The outcome of this inquiry guided the development of a college knowledge protocol designed to address the needs of this community’s families and a plan to effectively communicate it.

This study report begins with the presentation of a theoretical framework. Critical theory concepts and organizational communication perspectives provide a framework with which to discuss college access challenges in this urban school setting. Next follows a literature review which outlines the history of college enrollment research as a foundation for a discussion of bodies of literature that have investigated influential factors related to college access, the import of parent involvement, and what constitutes vital college-related information and programming. A research design influenced by the theoretical framework and extant literature is then presented. This is followed by an outline of the qualitative study that attempted to uncover family member impressions of helpful college-related information content and communication practices. This followed by a presentation of the findings from the data analysis. Lastly, is a discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, relevant literature and the implications for practice in this urban school context.
Theoretical Framework

Concepts from two theoretical approaches, critical theory and organizational communication theory were instrumental in conceptualizing and organizing this investigation into college access for diverse and low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) students. Each lens helped frame an approach and an understanding of the problem, the type of research questions asked, and the kind of interventions developed to improve the communication of information and access to the resources necessary to improve underrepresented student’s enrollment in postsecondary institutions.

Critical Theory

Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is regarded as one of the most important sociologists of recent history. Classified as a conflict or critical theorist, he wrote extensively to explain the existence of a perpetual class conflict and struggle. Bourdieu sought through his studies to give insight into how inequality is generated and maintained. Rising out of Marxist thought, Bourdieu asserted that the struggle between the dominant and subordinate class of society is actually a struggle for distinction. He suggested that class conditions are supported by two factors; first are the practices that serve to perpetuate material inequalities (such as parenting and schooling) which are due to limiting or expanding material conditions; and secondly through the provision of a world view that supports one’s position thereby reinforcing the continuation of these conditions (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977/2000). His theory of social reproduction and related concepts are integral to this study’s theoretical framework.

Social reproduction.

Social reproduction theory has been used by many researchers when studying college access trends of minority populations. A number of college choice studies have used social
reproduction and/or cultural capital as a lens, or as an analytical tool to study the systemic complications and inequities that confront students of color or those with lower-socioeconomic status. This approach, based on the work of Bourdieu (1973; 1977; 2000; 1993), suggests that schools actually reproduce the existing social order that is based on wealth, privilege and power. In essence the educational systems that are intended to level social inequities actually end up contributing to stratification.

Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction holds that individuals within institutions make socially constrained choices that serve to reproduce the existing social order (Bergerson, 2010). Capital, a concept central to his work, is defined as the knowledge, skills, education, and advantages that a person has which give them improved status in society. It is the individuals who possess the kinds of capital (economic, social, and cultural) that are valued by the dominant groups who are then rewarded. Accordingly, those who possess the appropriate forms of capital are able to navigate society’s systems more easily. The concept of capital is frequently used to explain the college attendance rate disparities among American students; suggesting that lower-SES students and students of color do not acquire the capital necessary to successfully navigate the educational system through familial and community relationships, and neither are they given these vital forms of capital through their schools.

**Cultural capital.**

Bourdieu and colleagues utilized the concept of ‘cultural capital’ to explain the differences in outcomes for students from different classes in the French educational system and linked it to “highbrow” or elite status and cultural knowledge or competence. According to Winkle-Wagner’s (2010) review of educational research’s use of cultural capital, there are three additional ways that cultural capital has been defined or operationalized:
“as those cultural competencies, skills, or abilities valued in a particular context; as part of a Bourdieuan framework that aims to uncover the transmission of power and privilege; and as those cultural skills and abilities, knowledge, or competencies of nondominant groups” (p. 92).

The *non-dominant group* cultural capital definition supports this study’s attempts to influence a perceptual shift within the school community; from a deficits view to one that acknowledges the existing cultural assets or cultural wealth held by low-SES and diverse families.

Bourdieu (1977) considered cultural capital as crucial to education as money is to economic capital because the culture of the dominant groups is embodied in schools; therefore it is their cultural capital that is valued and rewarded. According to Winkle-Wagner (2010) cultural status and knowledge, or cultural capital, is acquired through one’s social origin or through education. Cultural capital gained through social origin, one’s family, explains the transfer of lifestyle or class privilege between generations. Although it can also be acquired through formal education, many interpretations of the concept suggest it is difficult to acquire *only* through education; rather, formal schooling often only reinforces the cultural capital of family origin. Bourdieu & Passeron (1977/2000) found that teachers and school staff members, perhaps unconsciously, reward students who have gained relevant cultural capital from their families over students who have not. In this way, Bourdieu charges that schools contribute to social reproduction; they demand of students that which they do not give.

Pertinent to this study, Bergerson points out that the “cultural capital held by a student’s family also plays a role in how much and where he or she collects information about educational opportunities” (p. 42). Supporting the pivotal role of family, Jun and Colyar (2002) cite the importance of involving parents of color in college preparation efforts as a way to transmit
cultural capital “from one generation to the next by parents who inform their children about the value, importance, and process of securing a college education” (pp. 203-204). Researchers (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Tierney, 2002) argue if underrepresented students could gain knowledge of the cultural capital valued in these educational institutions that they could more successfully navigate within them.

**Habitus.**

Related to cultural capital, habitus according to Bourdieu (1977), is a system of dispositions, perceptions, appreciations, norms and tastes that function at every moment to incline an individual to act or react in a specific manner. Habitus is not always conscious but rather the result of a long process of inculcation of these tendencies that begins in childhood. Viewed as a “state of mind” Reay (2004) points out habitus influences behavior even when persons move out of the environment in which their habitus developed. According to Bergerson (2010) when discussing college choice, “habitus is the context in which students consider their postsecondary options, from whether to go to college to where” (p. 42). The notion that habitus will produce specific actions in particular context or field, and the fit between the two will account for an individuals’ actions and connote a range from perfect fit to great dissonance; has been used to explain low-SES diverse students early self-removal from formal educational institutions. Bourdieu’s framework has been used as a way of exploring and understanding how underrepresented students’ cultural capital and habitus may shape behaviors that are not consistent with existing comprehensive college choice models.

**Field.**

Cultural capital depends on the idea of “field.” In Bourdieu’s class conflict approach, individuals compete for the available capital or power within a given field in order to protect their position in that field. Field is the space in which cultural competencies, knowledge of
particular tastes, dispositions, or norms, is both produced and valued (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). As discussed by Winkle-Wagner (2010) practice is influenced by action and interaction within a field and each field has its own rules and is distinct. Field is a dynamic concept that changes as an individual makes choices based on their habitus and available capital. Cultural dispositions, skills, abilities and norms, or preferences are only valued in relation to a particular setting or field. Within the college choice process “field” is the higher education environment, “where students and their families determine their place by amassing information that is processed through the lens of their habitus and available capital” (Bergerson, 2010, p. 43).

Together the ideas of capital, field, and habitus are the foundation of Bourdieu’s social reproduction framework (1977). In essence, this theory posits that social inequities are reproduced as individuals “practice” in their fields, based on their habitus and access to types of capital (Bergerson, 2010). Students are rewarded (with grades, support, and opportunity) by schools and colleges when they already possess the capital that is valued in the field. Students who do not possess the capital that is valued by these social institutions will have a more difficult time navigating these systems and often will choose not to participate in the same way as their peers who do possess it. Many studies (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Perna L. W., 2000; Perna & Titus, 2005; Villalpando & Solorzano, 2005; Horvat E. M., 1997; 2001) that have examined factors that contribute to college attendance rates among separate socioeconomic status populations, have discussed the influence of social capital, habitus, and field in relation to college choice and access to help explain the college access disparities in America.

**Cultural wealth.**

Despite the valuable contributions of Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory to the understanding of social reproduction, this approach has received important critiques. According
to Bergerson (2010) this approach promotes a deficits view and in this context supports an assumption that some families with diverse backgrounds do not place value on education. This cultural capital deficits approach contributes to a school’s reproduction of the social order by inferring difficulties are due to shortcomings on the part of the student and/or family. It thereby absolves the institution of responsibility for its students’ failures, and disempowers individuals from effecting change (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). A deficits perspective shapes how a school communicates with students and their families and influences the quality of their interaction in all educational matters, including student college readiness. Significantly an emerging “cultural wealth” paradigm proposed by Villalpando & Solorzano (2005) focuses instead on the assets students and families of color bring to educational settings. “The underlying assumption of this perspective is that families of color do value education and that they bring with them cultural values that have a positive effect on their educational experiences- if they are validated by educational systems” (Bergerson, 2010, p. 44). A cultural wealth approach views familial support, language, and an emphasis on community building as cultural and social capital to be valued in educational settings. Villalpando & Solorzano (2005) note that the value diverse families place on education is a form of cultural capital that benefits students in reaching their educational aspirations.

Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini (2004); Tierney, (2002); Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, (1996); Yosso, (2005) and Villalpando & Solorzano, (2005) are among researchers who suggest a nondominant group asset definition of cultural capital and/or cultural wealth be used to support the recognition of “the background-, familial-, or community oriented cultural knowledge, competencies, skills and abilities of often marginalized groups” (Winkle-Wagner, 2010, p. 68). A cultural wealth lens acknowledges forms of cultural capital that are typically
unrecognized by schools, such as parental valueing of education, awareness of parental 
sacrifices, hard work of the parents etc. and holds that when students’ and their families’ cultural 
capital/wealth is recognized and valued they will achieve higher levels of success. Most 
importantly a cultural wealth approach moves away from a deficits views, it allows instead for 
 systemic and institutional barriers to be identified and addressed.

This study utilized critical theory’s concepts of social stratification, cultural capital, and 
cultural wealth to frame an interrogation of extant literature as well as to frame an examination 
of an urban middle schools’ families’ college knowledge, their college access understandings, 
their manner of valuing education, and their perceptions of their roles in their child’s college 
access pathway. This lens also informs a discussion of communication practices as methods of 
transmitting cultural capital and recognizing families’ cultural wealth.

Organizational Communication Theory

A second perspective comes from organizational communication theory. Although this 
theory is frequently associated with communication within businesses and corporations, its 
concepts are readily applicable to schools and school systems. Communication can be defined as 
socially situated meaning-making that generates pockets of coherence and community through 
cultural meanings and forms (Carbaugh, 1988). Organizational communication is basically 
concerned with “the content, structure, and process of human interaction through language and 
or symbols in day-to-day organizational activities” (Papa, Daniels, & Spiker, 2008, p. 3). 
According to Papa, Daniels, & Spiker, (2008) one important function served by communication 
is the development of cultural capital. College access researchers find that “ongoing 
communication about college preparation is essential to developing clear expectations for 
students” (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002, p. 14). Attention to communication was
viewed as vital to achieve this study’s practical goals of relaying college knowledge and supporting affirmative interactions between school and families.

Theorists vary greatly in the way they frame organizational communication concepts. Putnam (1982) has suggested the three approaches to organizational communication that are used to frame this discussion: traditional, interpretive, and critical perspectives. Aspects of each of these approaches are useful in discussing college-related exchanges between school members and families. According to Papa, Daniels, & Spiker (2008) the concept of structure in communication is one of the most important ideas when examining organizational communication. As a result, concepts from each of the three perspectives help both to examine existing communication practices surrounding college access/readiness and to structure an effective communication plan.

**Traditional perspective.**

Traditionalists approach communication as an objective activity that can “be measured, labeled, classified, and related to other organizational processes” (Papa, Daniels, & Spiker, 2008, p. 8). They examine the relationship between communication processes and organizational effectiveness. This lens helped examine factors such as the flow of information within the schools’ internal and external networks, the distortion of messages, and breakdowns in communication channels. According to Papa and others (2008), communication effectiveness involves two conditions: first, that the process of sending and receiving messages is accurate and reliable; and second, that the message receiver understands and responds to the message the way in which the message sender intended. In this view, the strategies and the dynamics of communication around college access practices in this urban school setting came under review.

The traditionalist approach to structures dominates the organizational communication field. It views communication as system of channels and pathways that illustrate the flow of
information as well as how participants interact (Zaremba, 2006). Formal communication refers to the officially designed channels of communication. Informal systems are informational pathways that lie outside the officially designated channels of communication. These pathways, networks, or channels are perceived by members and observers, and can be documented. These communication networks are both internal and external to organizations. Organizations formal communication networks are often outlined in manuals or handbooks.

According to Papa et al. (2008) while some traditional scholars have argued that informal networks substitute for inadequate formal systems; most believe that informal communication is a necessary part of an organizational life. Observation, and families’ self-reports as suggested by Papa et al. (2008), were ways of examining family members’ existing formal and informal networks for receiving and responding to information. These revealed gaps, as well as possible channels to send, receive, and reinforce vital college access information.

**Interpretive perspective.**

The interpretive perspective regards organizations as cultures. According to Pacanowsky and O’Donell-Trujillo (1982), the motive of the “organizational culture approach is coming to understand how organizational life is accomplished communicatively” (p.121). Whereas traditionalists work with observable and tangible actions and conditions, the interpretivist “tries to uncover the culture that inspires these actions and conditions” (Papa et al., 2008, p. 10). Interpretivists are interested in symbols and meanings, they describe ways in which organization members understand their experiences through communication and how they act within the organization. This perspective suggests that school staff, students and parents live in the process of communicating about college access; an experience that is often invisible and/or not regarded as relevant.
In the interpretivist view, structure is a social construct that is maintained through language and social interaction (Putnam, 1982). This approach acknowledges how communication structures impact the culture of an organization. According to Sanchez (2004) “communication is a process, a function and a result; it is both a reflection and a cause of the organization’s culture” (p.21). One way interpretivists begin to understand organizational communication is by examining semantic networks that focus “on the shared meanings that people have for message content, particularly those messages that comprise important aspects of an organization’s culture, such as corporate goals, slogans, myths, and stories” (Monge & Contractor, 2001, p. 470). According to Monge & Contractor (2001), in order to identify semantic networks around college readiness information, one would need to ask school personnel and family members to “provide their interpretations of one or more significant communication messages, events or artifacts” (p. 470). A network identified by linking together people who share similar interpretations provides a picture of people who share common understandings. This lens assisted in identifying specific college access related communication messages and strategies that would be more helpful with specific groups within the school community.

Critical perspective.

Lastly, the critical perspective “criticizes organizational discourse with the goal of consciousness raising and emancipation for oppressed organizational classes” (Papa, et al., 2008, p. 14). Associated with Pierre Bourdieu’s work discussed earlier, a critical approach views organizations as “sites of domination” where certain individuals are marginalized or disadvantaged by oppressive groups or structures (Miller, 2003, p. 116). It is concerned with the relationship between social structure and with symbolic processes. According to Deetz (1982)
oppression occurs through the distortion of organizational communication when filtered, manipulated or distorted in response to organizational members’ special interests or perceptions. When discussing distortion, traditionalists talk about inaccuracies or errors in information that impact the effectiveness of communication. Critical theorists regard distortion as deliberate and systematic symbolic efforts on the part of organizational leaders to deceive lesser-powered individuals into believing their interests are joined. This lens points to barriers in providing opportunity and information to all students when the existing cultural wealth of families is not recognized or built upon by schools. It was helpful in considering the manner in which New Bedford Schools’ communication of college access information may be distorted or inconsistent and its unintended effect on underrepresented students and families.

Critical theorists focus on struggles within organizations as well as how communication and organizational structures control, oppress, and sustain existing power and relations (Ashcraft & Allen, 2003). Critical approaches to communication caution that traditional communication and organizational structures will need to be modified in response to an increasingly diverse U.S. population. These theorists suggest that to tap the strengths of a culturally diverse school population requires investigation into cultural groups’ “unique worldviews, skills, and abilities” (Papa, Daniels, & Spiker, 2008, p. 74). This lens supported the use of this study’s qualitative inquiry approach through a cultural wealth lens.

Organizational communication theory’s three perspectives suggest the value of communication processes in shaping a college access pathway. The traditionalist view supports this study’s examination of how college-related information is best shared; while the interpretivist lens highlights the importance of understanding the educational views and school experience of families traditionally underrepresented in postsecondary institutions. The critical
approach helps in framing families’ views on equitable and effective access to college knowledge. This discussion has made clear that all of the elements that must be integrated to shape college access pathway for all students are dependent on understanding and employing effective communication practices for this urban school context.
Chapter 2

College Readiness Literature Review

A critical education lens suggests a study seeking to improve college access in New Bedford should begin by identifying the factors and information that can be utilized in building on the existing cultural wealth within the families of underrepresented students. Organization communication theory posits that effective college access communication must be strategic and shaped by understanding the educational values, aspirations, and needs of underrepresented students and families in the schools. This framework points to the necessity of building a conduit for important information that is reciprocal and affirmative. Based on this understanding the literature review pursued the following interrogation: 1) What is the foundation of current college access research? 2) What are the influential factors of college access for underrepresented students? 3) What is the role of parent/family involvement in the college access process? 4) What programmatic and informational elements are suggested to support families’ cultural wealth beginning in the middle school years? In order to answer the questions posed, an overview of the history of college attendance research is used to frame a discussion of current relevant thinking on college access. Next is a review of factors found to be influential in college access with underrepresented students. This is followed by a discussion of research related to parent/family involvement which includes points to consider when engaging diverse families. Lastly, this review outlines specific college readiness information and programming considerations found to be influential during the predisposition stage of college choice.

Historical Perspectives

Understanding that early investigations into student college attendance patterns addressed enrollment behavior, and were intended to inform higher education management how and why
students made their college choices, is an informative backdrop for a study seeking to improve access for students traditionally underrepresented on college campuses. In 1990, Michael Paulsen’s ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report reviewed college choice research, referencing over two-hundred studies completed in the 1970s and 1980s. The literature included in his monograph focused on identifying factors that influenced college choice decisions and identifying the processes undertaken by students. According to Paulsen (1990) up until that time the college choice process had been examined by three different perspectives: sociological, psychological, and economic. The sociological lens investigated college choice as a part of the status attainment process with an emphasis on students’ background factors. Factors such as race, ethnicity, parent education, family income, peer groups, school contexts, parental expectations, academic achievement and high school curriculum were found to have a significant impact on students’ college enrollment behavior. Studies by researchers such as Manski and Wise (1983), Alwin and Otto (1977), Lee and Eckstrom (1987), St. John (1990), and Litten and Hall (1989), found that these factors were instrumental in developing a predisposition for college attendance and influenced institutional choices.

The psychological perspective investigated how the perceptions of the higher education environment influenced students’ enrollment choices. St. John (1990) and Manski & Wise (1983) found that institutional characteristics such as tuition rate, room and board, location, curriculum and the availability of financial aid, inform the psychological aspect of college selection. The economic perspective viewed the college choice process as decisions about investment in which the students weigh the costs and benefits of attending college (Paulsen, 1990). Factors taken into account by students were the costs of attendance, the availability of financial aid and the anticipated earnings resulting from attending college. According to St. John
and Noell (1989) this was particularly true of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and students of color.

**College choice models.**

The 1980s saw an effort to develop comprehensive models that could explain the process students undertake when making college choices. In this view the college choice pathway is frequently seen as a process through which students realize their college-attendance aspirations by taking several steps that lead to enrollment. Causal choice models were developed by Chapman (1981) and Litten (1982); others built on these, expanding the components and defining stages to assist in the institutional recruitment process. Process models were also developed; they were described by Henrickson (2002) as models that capture elements of potential students, institutional characteristics, and the college application process” (p. 403).

By far the most widely used and cited process model was outlined by Hossler and Gallagher (1987). This approach utilized a survey of existing research to identify a three-phase model of college choice which identified a predisposition, search, and choice phase. This model did not focus solely on students’ behaviors, but rather presented an interactive process “which takes into account the nature of higher education options and some of the organizational factors at both the pre-college and the college level” (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987, p. 209). During the *predisposition* phase a student decides whether or not to continue to postsecondary education; developing aspirations and expectations and it is within this stage that the interest of this college readiness study is mostly placed. Researchers have shown that during the predisposition phase multiple factors such as family socioeconomic status, parental involvement, peers, high school teachers and counselors, interactions with higher education institutions, high school involvement, and the relative value placed on attending college, influence the development of student
aspiration and expectation (Perna & Titus, 2005; Hossler & Stage, 1992). During the next stage, the search phase, students begin to seek information about colleges in order to identify a group of institutions (a choice set) to apply to or seek more information about. Students’ performance on entrance examinations, socioeconomic status, parents’ education, and the availability of financial support are influential factors during this phase (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Perna L. W., 2006). Lastly, during the choice phase students evaluate their choice set, apply, select an institution and then enroll. The characteristics of possible post-secondary institutions, along with parental encouragement, students’ occupational aspirations, student’s high school resources, financial considerations, and students’ academic abilities play a primary role during this stage (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001).

Regression and causal comparative analyses have been frequently constructed around the models of college choice process and college enrollment behaviors (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Galotti & Mark, 1994). This research tradition has resulted in a strong understanding of the relationship of risk factors, and home or school-based factors on students’ college choice behavior (Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997; Kern, 2000). At the time of Paulsen’s review, the enrollment statistics of the early 1990s revealed that underrepresented minorities constituted 29% of the 18-24 year old U.S. population, only 23% of those enrolled in higher education, and represented just 16% of bachelor’s degree recipients (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Programs have been developed to improve these outcomes for minority and poor students, however after decades of involvement in college preparation efforts these students continue to be severely underrepresented on college campuses.
Current research trends.

In the last twenty years, college choice research has shifted its focus from models examining enrollment behavior to addressing issues of college access and enrollment equity. This shift has resulted in a critical examination of the experiences of students from different backgrounds questioning why there continues to be stratification by social class, race, and ethnicity in U. S. in higher education. Some of these studies have focused on student interaction in college choice models; others have examined skills and risk factors, while others still have begun systematic evaluations of the of programmatic practices and their efficacy. However, to date the research on best practices to promote college attendance of underrepresented students remains broad and unclear. The vast majority of college choice studies have been quantitative, utilizing large preexisting databases which have resulted in an understanding of the kinds of factors that influence predisposition. What is less clear is how the interaction of family background and school context shape student postsecondary choices. Through a well planned and carefully conducted qualitative case study this research study begins to provide some insight into these interactions within this urban school context.

In spite of programming and research it is apparent that poor students and students of color remain less likely to enroll or graduate from college. Most recently according to Bergerson (2009), in an attempt to understand and address this social stratification of higher education in the United States, three research trends have emerged. The first of these focuses on state and federal policies and how they effect students’ access to higher education. The next trend moves from a single comprehensive college choice model and attempts to understand the variety of experiences of a diverse college-age population. In order to focus on the equity and access issues authors have examined the subtle influences that differentiate underrepresented students’
decisions of whether and where to attend college. To do this researchers (Freeman, 1997; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Kern, 2000; Perna L. W., 2006) have been building on the existing linear college choice models in order to develop ones that more accurately depict the complexity of the choice process undertaken by those students they describe as “disadvantaged.” Some studies have demonstrated that the college choice process of lower-SES and diverse students who are underrepresented on college campuses is indeed similar to those of students of higher-SES who traditionally enroll in college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001), but these studies fall short in explaining why when compared to highest-SES counterparts, lowest-SES students remain significantly less likely to apply to college. It is the important influence of family factors of involvement, aspiration and encouragement that rises from research in this area that has shaped this case study. Although there is an extensive body of research on family involvement, there is a limited amount on the combined topics of parent involvement and college readiness (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). This qualitative inquiry attempts to contribute to the discourse in this area.

A third area of focus for recent literature examines college preparation and it is within this field of inquiry that this study is most fully situated. Although there is literature describing college preparation programs, few studies have evaluated the effectiveness of these programs in general or of such components as parental involvement in particular (Tierney, 2002). Studies have examined college preparation programs and given specific attention access to information and effective academic preparation. Research has demonstrated that accessing college-related information is a significant element of the college access process (Grodsky & Jones, 2007). A focus on extant literature in this area is helpful in shaping this study’s examination of an interaction between access to information and parent involvement in an urban educational setting.
Influential Factors

Students’ educational aspirations, high school academics, educator factors, as well as access to information are involved in the predisposition phase. When outlining a college-choice model Cabrera and La Nasa (2000) confirmed that student college access is “unavoidably linked to a student’s academic ability, the amount and quality of parental encouragement and involvement received, his or her educational and occupational aspirations, the amount of information available about college, and his or her acquisition of college qualifications.” (p. 50). Family variables have been found to be among the most important during this stage and are among the highest predictors of enrollment in college (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; Hamrick & Stage, 1995, 2000, 2004).

In an attempt to more fully conceptualize college readiness Conley (2008) identified four main areas that are crucial in shaping a college attendance pathway: core academic skills, content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and knowledge. At the core of this model of college readiness are cognitive and metacognitive academic capabilities such as: analysis, interpretation, precision and accuracy, problem solving, and reasoning. Next, content knowledge includes the major concepts and theories related to each content area, with writing as an important overarching academic component. Important academic self-management behaviors are: time management, strategic study skills, persistence, awareness of one’s true performance, and the ability to utilize study groups. Lastly, contextual skills and awareness, or “college knowledge” is described as “the information students need to successfully apply to college, gain necessary financial aid, and then subsequent to matriculation, understand how college operates as a system and culture” (Conley, 2008, p. 10). This study is most directly concerned with the informational dimension of college knowledge; which according to Conley (2008) refers to both
the formal and informal, stated and unstated aspects of being eligible for college admission, choosing an appropriate college, getting admitted to a post-secondary institution and applying for financial aid.

Research has consistently shown the importance of beginning to address issues of college access in elementary and middle school (Bergerson, 2009; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). Developmental in nature, Hossler and Gallagher’s stages are associated with particular “cognitive and affective outcomes” (Henrickson, 2002). However, the predisposition stage is believed by some to take place beginning in seventh grade (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Significantly, researchers contend that when students and their families develop early college plans, a series of behaviors are triggered that put students in more favorable positions to gain the academic, informational and financial resources needed to access college (Cabrera, Deil-Amen, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee, & Franklin, 2006). Due to the complexity of the college access process students are more likely to become predisposed to college when parents, the school community, peers and community partner work together (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). These findings suggested that this study’s goal to impact college predisposition would have the greatest effect if it focused on families during the middle school years.

**Student achievement and aspiration.**

Academic preparation and achievement have been found to be the most fundamental and strongest predictors of college success (Manski & Wise, 1983; St. John & Noell, 1989; Cabrera, Deil-Amen, Prabhu, Terenzini, Lee, & Franklin, 2006). Students with high academic achievement are more likely to aspire to attend college (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999). Yet African American, low income, and Hispanic high school students usually attend schools where
access to rigorous academic programming is uneven, with less rigorous courses. In addition, these students are less likely to be placed in rigorous classes (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Perna L. W., 2005; McDonough, Korn, & Yamasaki, 1997). This is devastating, because as Adelman (1999; 2006) has masterfully demonstrated, access to higher-level math courses in a rigorous high school curriculum is essential to post-secondary success.

Educational aspirations and expectations play an important role in all students’ predisposition development but there are some significant differences found for minority students (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, Edward, & Dunbar, 1995; Pitre, 2006). For many years studies explained dismal higher education enrollment rates of black students as the result of these students’ lower educational aspirations. This deficits perspective reflects a prevalent stereotype that these black families do not value education (Solorzano, 1992). During the past two decades, studies have demonstrated that African American students and Hispanic students had high educational aspirations that remained unfulfilled (Auerbach, 2004), and that blacks actually had higher educational aspirations than whites in every SES quartile except the highest (Solorzano, 1992). Through a case study methodology this study attempted to uncover these aspirations and the college-related cultural wealth possessed low-SES and minority families in this urban school setting.

Several studies showed that for low-SES students financial concerns present a barrier to the realization of their college aspirations (Lillis & Guang Tian, 2008; St. John E. P., 2003; 2006; Grodsky & Jones, 2007). For example, according to Mickelson (1990), although black students hold education in high regard, their pervasive underachievement is considered to be connected to poor quality schooling and also influenced by their perceptions of the potential payoffs resulting from academic accomplishments. That is, the daily realities in which their
parents’ job market experiences are negatively influenced by race, class, and gender mediate their beliefs in the potential benefits of education, to the extent that when it comes time to decide whether or not to go to college, the costs often outweigh the perceived benefit for these students (Mickelson, 1990). A study of difference in labor market perceptions by race (Perna L. W., 2005) confirmed this for Hispanic students also. Similarly, studies of Hispanic students found their aspirations were high, but their failure to attend college was due to the fact that they were disproportionately affected by rising tuition costs, reduced financial aid and by loss of school supports (Ikenberry & Hartle, 1998; Perna L. W., 2006; Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). Recognizing that low college enrollment rates for these students could not be blamed on low aspirations, researchers have examined the role of schools in the aspiration-achievement gap.

**School-based factors.**

When investigating school related influences to differential college access, the negative effects of a school culture of low expectations of students cannot be underestimated. Researchers (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Muhammed, 2008) suggest that school support for students’ educational aspirations is just as important as academic ability when discussing minority students. The literature demonstrates that a school’s culture has a strong impact on students’ aspirations and achievement (McClafferty Jarsky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009). It was found that educators’ beliefs about students are often based on lack of understanding and preconceived notions about students’ race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status and these notions affect educator expectations of student ability to learn and as a result color the types of opportunities educators provide for students to achieve (George & Aronson, 2003). When academic advisers or guidance counselors fall into this same pattern of low-engagement with students whom they believe to be unable or uninterested in furthering their education, those
students’ opportunities for college access are further diminished. This is troubling, as research has confirmed that underrepresented students, students of lowest-SES, and students whose parents had not attended college, rely heavily on counselors and schools for information about preparing and applying for college (Choy, S. P., 2001; Auerbach, 2004; King, 1996). These findings demonstrate the applicability of this study’s social reproduction lens.

Possessing an understanding about college in general and having access to information about postsecondary education has been found to affect both aspiration and achievement during the predisposition phase. Pitre (2006) suggested that a vicious cycle exists where students with lower academic achievement are not targeted by high school personnel to receive college-related information, which results in further lowering of their educational expectations. A goal of this study is to incorporate its findings into a professional development initiative to improve staff understanding of the college readiness process, as well as establish an appreciation of the cultural wealth and capital assets of students underrepresented in post-secondary institutions.

**Family involvement and encouragement.**

Family involvement in student life has long been cited as instrumental in building success. The U. S. Department of Education believed that there was enough evidence about the important influence of parent involvement on student achievement, to include the following statement in a guidance document:

“Studies have found students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background are more likely: to earn high grade and test scores and enroll in higher level programs; pass their classes, earn credits, and be promoted; attend school regularly; and graduate and go on to postsecondary education” (U. S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 10).
Parental involvement is considered important throughout a child’s education, however it changes as the child develops. During the secondary years a child benefits from a different form of parental involvement than was needed during elementary school (Catsambis, 1998; Patrikakou, 2004). During the elementary years parent involvement may consist of helping with homework and communication with teachers, however during the secondary years there is greater need for involvement in course selection and college and career readiness (Patrikakou, 2004). Parental factors are among the highest predictors of students’ college enrollment (Hamrick & Stage, 1995, 2000, 2004; Hossler & Stage, 1992). Yet, according to Tierney and Auerbach, (2005) due to finite resources there is a disconnect between what researchers recommend and what is actually done to assure family involvement, especially at the secondary level.

The concept of parent involvement is not clearly defined in empirical studies and policy discussions (Catsambis, 1998; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002). Epstein’s (1995) typology most commonly referenced in research, proposes that schools should promote six types of parent involvement: basic parenting, communication with school, volunteering at school, supporting learning at home, participation in school decision-making, and collaboration with the community. Tierney et al. (2005) argued that this model is reflective of the traditional practices of a white, middle-class society and fails to include factors outside of school and factors such as child advocacy and protection from racism and low expectation, which are key educational concerns for parents of color.

Parental encouragement for college, according to Tierney & Auerbach (2005) is generally described in the literature as “the frequency with which parents and students discuss school matters and postsecondary plans” (p.41). In their review of parent engagement literature Tierney and Auerbach (2005) discussed using the terms “family engagement” and “parent engagement”
interchangeably to suggest a more flexible definition of family that more accurately depicts contemporary patterns of family formation. This approach recognizes that frequently siblings and extended family members of underrepresented students offer important college encouragement and assistance and may often act as ‘cultural brokers’ for other first-generation college students. The terms “family” and “parent” will be employed interchangeably in this study in an attempt to convey and capture this vital capital transmission.

**Diverse families.**

It is apparent that there is a need to expand the definition of parent involvement in relation to diverse families, (Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002). Low-income parents are frequently reported as being less engaged in their children's education when compared to middle- and high-income parents (Moles, 2000). According to researchers, educators' perception that low-income parents and parents of color do not value education is faulty and is based on a definition of parental involvement that is not inclusive of issues of power and marginalization that frequently concern these parents (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). Due to practical and structural barriers, parents of color or low-SES often support their children’s education in ways not recognized by schools, these “invisible strategies” include verbal encouragement and financial sacrifice (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). In other words, what is defined as a lack of involvement, is merely a reflection of the educational system’s failure to identify diverse family interest and related cultural wealth.

The importance of parental involvement for student populations traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary institutions and those who commonly attend college has been substantiated (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; McDonough P. , 2004). It is shaped by the ability of the child, parental and sibling education levels, and access to information about college and
costs (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Catsambis, 1998; Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, 2005). In a survey of college preparation programs Gandara and Bial (1999) found that:

The experience, knowledge, resources, and expectations of parents play a significant role in the kinds of choices that students make. Students with equal ability make very different decisions about their postsecondary education based on the guidance—or lack of it—that they receive from home. (p.30)

Researchers still do not know enough about how diverse families interact with schools or exactly what type and degree of parent engagement is most effective for specific students under particular conditions (Catsambis, 1998; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002). These findings suggest the importance of this study’s investigation into how minority and low-SES family members are currently involved in their child’s education and its attempt to uncover ways to build on this cultural wealth.

**Expectation and aspiration.**

The expectations held by parents shape post-secondary predisposition regardless of race or SES (Paulsen, 1990). The premise that families are a key factor in developing and sustaining student achievement and aspirations is indeed expected among middle-class college educated families; however Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, (2005) confirmed that low-income, minority and immigrant families inspire their children and support their academic persistence. Parents support of all kinds, moral, emotional and logistic and financial has motivated students of color and low-SES; while other family members and siblings often provide more specific information and guidance (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005; Kern, 2000). Perna’s (2000) study of white, African American and Hispanic students’ college enrollment decisions found some important differences in the impact of these expectations. She found that African Americans’ educational expectations
are less predictive than whites and Hispanics. She suggested this is the result of lower access to college-related information; which transforms the discussion of choice, to one of access to needed social and cultural capital. Contrary to the view that these families have low educational expectations, Perna’s (2000) findings demonstrated that these parents indeed have college education dreams for their children. Coinciding with this study’s intent, Cooper et al. (2005) suggested that it is the task of schools and college readiness programs to sustain the college dreams of these families.

Three of the main predictors of college enrollment, parent education, parents’ aspirations, and parental encouragement for college, are all closely linked to class (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). Socioeconomic factors have shaped student access to information about college; higher-SES parents are more likely to have higher expectations of their children’s educational attainment, are more likely to discuss college with their children, and have helpful informational networks (Solorzano, 1992; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Auerbach, 2004). Parents of color/low-SES do have college aspirations for their children, yet they remain underrepresented in four-year institutions (Gandara, 2002; Solorzano, 1992). Their encouragement and expectations have been found to be some of the most powerful influences on students’ college enrollment after academic preparation and forms of counseling (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Tierney & Auerbach, 2005). These families want to be helpful, “yet academic outreach programs rarely reach out in substantive ways to parents” (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005, p. 29). Factors of family education, SES, information, and involvement are intertwined and seem to conspire to preclude underrepresented students college attendance. This study implemented an intervention built on the premise that parental involvement and encouragement is a pivotal force in the development
of student occupational and educational aspirations during the predisposition stage; and it is on this foundation that an effort to improve college access was designed to begin in middle school.

**Access to information**

Reflective of social stratification and cultural capital premises, a lack of information is associated with lower-SES families. This is due in part to the absence of important influences such as access to family members with high educational achievement and positive school experiences (Hanson, 1994). Differing from higher-SES families, low-SES students and their families frequently cannot access this information, this cultural capital, through their social network. Developing social networks composed of family members, peers, school counselors, and/or mentors, to disseminate information and guide these students as they navigate the college access pathway is an important strategy to improve these students’ college enrollment opportunities (Bonous-Hammarth & Allen, 2005; Gandara, 2002). Utilizing these networks in developing important college-going aspirations and building a sense of self-efficacy has been found to be important by many authors (Conley, 2008; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). If parents without college experience could learn about steps in the pathway to college as part of a supportive community or networks of families and educators, they could offer more useful monitoring and guidance to their children because of the acquisition of this important form of cultural capital.

Research has demonstrated that parents’ awareness or level of information about college impacts their expectations and involvement in student’s college enrollment path (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Kern, 2000). Parental education determines the extent to which parents are knowledgeable about college choice and financial aid (St. John & Noell, 1989). Cabrera and LaNasa (2001) found that less than a quarter of the lowest-SES parents can provide guidance about college based on their experience, whereas nearly all highest-SES
students were raised in families with post-secondary experiences. Findings from a Nation Educational Longitudinal Study (1987) (NELS-87) confirmed that students whose parents did not go to college reported lower educational expectations, lower academic preparation, and received less support from their families in planning and preparing for college than their peers whose parents had some college experience (Choy, S. P., 2001). According to Kao and Tienda, (1998), black and Hispanic youth were relatively uniformed about college admissions and financial aid packages, which decreased their odds of reaching their educational goals. This lack of awareness was associated with the lower educational levels of their parents. Although parent education levels are fixed, the promotional effect of accurate and timely information on parental involvement and encouragement and the resulting positive influence on student college aspiration should be capitalized upon when seeking to improve college access. This data supported principle is the foundation upon which this study rested.

**Vital information.**

According to Roderick, Nagoaka, and Coca (2009) “a student’s college readiness will be shaped by whether he or she has the information, resources, and skills necessary to effectively navigate the college admission process” (p.197). The contextual skills and awareness, or “college knowledge” is described as “the information students need to successfully apply to college, gain necessary financial aid, and then subsequent to matriculation, understand how college operates as a system and culture” (Conley, 2008, p. 10). This refers to both the formal and informal, stated and unstated aspects of being eligible for college admission, choosing an appropriate college, getting admitted to a post-secondary institution and applying for financial aid (Conley, 2008; Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999). When discussing vital college-related information, researchers affirm that effective college readiness goes beyond assistance in
completing a college application; it is a multifaceted concept with factors both internal and external to a school setting.

Beginning in middle school, knowledge about post-secondary education plays an important role in cultivating college aspirations and securing college access. Vargas (2004) suggests that access to “college knowledge” may determine whether or not qualified students will actually go to college. Low-SES qualified students who receive college guidance are more likely to attend college than those who don’t (King, 1996). Inequities in the college knowledge of underrepresented students are often the result of families’ lack of experience or familiarity with the educational system. These students do not naturally inherit the necessary cultural capital to attain or even perceive themselves as entitled to some educational opportunities (McDonough, Korn, & Yamasaki, 1997). According to Vargas (2004) while there are many factors that contribute to college enrollment disparities among low-SES African American and Latino students, the deficits in college knowledge helps maintain a less than level playing field for these families.

Supporting access to knowledge about college academic requirements, the application process and understandings about college going in general, is vital for low-SES and diverse students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008; McDonough P., 2004). The limited personal experience of low-SES and diverse families in attending post-secondary institutions, a lack of contact with school staff and guidance counselors, and high schools with limited resources, inhibit these families ability to collect and evaluate various kinds of information about college (Grodsky & Jones, 2007). When parents lack such information, they must rely on the school to inform their children as well as provide them with the resources necessary for college exploration, planning, and decision making (Stanton-Salazar, 1997).
Programming

Many programs have been developed to address students’ college access and enrollment challenges. Tierney, Corwin and Colyar (2005) presented nine programmatic elements they found to be effective in increasing access to higher education for underrepresented students of color and low socioeconomic status. Of these nine, family engagement, early intervention, and college preparation curricula are considered essential; while mentoring, peer groups, and cultural emphasis, are helpful but not consider a necessity. Researchers have recommended specific strategies when seeking to improve college access that consider these important elements. Parent workshops, written communication and informational sessions are considered important in providing information about postsecondary options and college readiness (Gandara, 2002; Auerbach, 2004; McDonough P., 2004).

Wimberly and Noeth (2005) suggest the creation of a college readiness plan in middle school to help families and students to connect courses and school experiences to their long-term academic and career goals. This flexible road map would be helpful to any student and should include “postsecondary and career goals, high school graduation requirements, middle and high school courses needed to prepare for post-secondary training, standardized tests students will take in middle and high school and how the results will be used, potential extracurricular and community activities, available pre-college programs, college finance plans, college admissions steps” (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005, pp. 17-18).

Engaging families.

Researchers’ findings and suggestions are invaluable when designing college access interventions for middle-school students and families traditionally underrepresented on college campuses. King (1996) finds the availability of academic and informational resources can mediate the effect of limited college-related resources on low-SES students. Cabrera and La
Nasa (2001) suggest that targeting lowest-SES parents for informational outreach efforts would produce the highest pay-off. Ensuring these students and families are aware of important information about testing and academic preparation for college and are encouraged to pursue rigorous coursework is an important aspect to improving college access (Adelman, 1999; 2006; Vargas, 2004).

Parental involvement and educational expectations are likely to be increased if parents see a connection between a college education and the economic as well as social benefits (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). While Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, (2008) suggest the importance of increasing parents’ knowledge of full range of post-secondary options, Bangser (2008) suggests providing information on educational requirements for particular jobs, as well as internships, lectures from the business community, career days, youth apprenticeships, job shadowing, and mentoring. This approach supports family members’ understanding of the curricular demands as well as outcome benefits.

As discussed, for many students and particularly those of lower SES or students of color, one of the greatest inhibitors in accessing college is the question of affordability. Findings demonstrate for African American and Hispanic students, the perceived benefits of education often do not outweigh the costs when it comes to deciding to go to college (Mickelson, 1990; Pitre, 2006). Researchers have discussed the importance that students and their families have knowledge of the actual cost of tuition, an understanding of the monetary benefits of college and the ability to manage college costs (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Grodsky & Jones, 2007; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). When it comes to information about college costs and financial aid, families of students from underrepresented groups are consistently the most misinformed (Ikenberry & Hartle, 1998). Grodsky and Jones (2007)
presented study outcomes which demonstrated the correlation between parent awareness of tuition costs and increased encouragement; their study highlighted the need for more effective means of informing lower SES parents about the costs of a college education. These researchers propose that most “generous aid policies and most aggressive tuition discounting will be ineffective if parents and students are unaware that such policies exist” (Grodsky & Jones, 2007, p. 762). Initially this information need not be detailed (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001), but giving general, concise and clear information on tuition and financial aid will help families feel empowered and begin to plan (Hossler, Schmidt, & Vesper, 1999; Gandara, 2002).

School structures and policies contribute to low levels of parental involvement. In a study by Rowan-Kenyon and others (2008), they found that in addition to language barriers, inflexible work schedules, lack of comfort with school staff, parents “do not believe that the school wants them to be involved” (p. 566). The development of parent involvement programs beginning as early as elementary school was found to be instrumental in overcoming barriers associated with structure, and creating an atmosphere that is more welcoming to underrepresented families (Auerbach, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Preparing teachers to support parent involvement by highlighting the benefits of it, and key areas they can affect is considered to be important (Patrikakou, 2004).

When seeking to engage Latino parents, research confirms the importance of communicating in the parents’ language, (Auerbach, 2004; Clark & Dorris, 2006; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Hosting small group meeting of parents in convenient and comfortable locations, inviting parents by telephone or in person rather than through letters or flyers, and inviting speakers of similar backgrounds, are ways to support these parents participation (Auerbach, 2004; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Clark and Dorris (2006)
suggest ways to foster a welcoming atmosphere, such as creating a family center, posting signs in Spanish and following up with parents who attend school events. Acknowledging barriers that Latinos face in college access and discussing strategies to overcome them is also considered important (Auerbach, 2004). Reinforcing basic college information in a variety of ways is key to this effort, while spending time addressing the special concerns of these parents such as children’s safety on college campuses, as well as the impact of having undocumented status and acquiring financial aid is considered effective.

Some suggest that schools provide mentors to supplement the parent role with low-SES students (Auerbach, 2004; Patrikakou, 2004). Several authors suggest enlisting college personnel to partner in readiness programs, as well as to explain to parents the importance of early curriculum planning instrumental in outreach efforts (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Clark & Dorris, 2006; McDonough P., 2004). Research highlights the importance of letting parents know that they have a strong influence on their child’s post-secondary success and by keeping the lines of communication open with the school they will show their children that education is important (Patrikakou, 2004; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005).

Since the publication of Paulsen’s monograph, research has moved from focusing on enrollment management into developing models that utilize meaningful variables that have clarified how students move through the college choice process. Although higher education continues to be stratified by race, ethnicity and social class, the movement toward addressing issues of access and equity is definite. Research remains focused on not only identifying, but addressing the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of diverse and lower-SES students on college campuses.
The stages of the college choice process are clear, although the path is neither straightforward nor uniform for all students and families. The models developed provide a broad understanding of predisposition, search and choice, but have not succeeded in providing the information needed for educators to increase diverse and low-SES students’ and families’ access to post-secondary institutions. Neither have they provided an understanding of how the variables frequently present in the lives of these students interact. There is an understanding of the factors that influence the predisposition phase, yet research has yet to explain how students and families develop it in their particular cultural and socioeconomic context. This study responded to a call for qualitative and mixed methods research to help explain how these different students and families experience the choice process if their dismal appearance on college rolls is to be rectified (Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002; Bergerson, 2009; St. John E. P., 2006).

Underrepresented students’ and families are challenged in accessing postsecondary education. These students tend to be educated in low-resource schools; where they may lack a supportive college-going culture, have limited access to rigorous courses, and limited access to school personnel to provide the information and guidance their families cannot. However, schools and programs can be high-volume agents of cultural capital by facilitating families’ acquisition of college information with early and relevant communication. Incorporating strategies outlined in this literature review and adopting a cultural wealth perspective, it is posited that schools can partner with parents in bridging the aspiration-achievement gap.

This study rested on literature that suggests the importance of family involvement and encouragement in shaping underrepresented students’ postsecondary predisposition. It used the reported strength of access to timely and vital college information as a way to shape a college readiness workshop series intended to build on families’ existing cultural wealth. Through a
case study methodology this project also uncovered family members’ aspirations, views, beliefs and perceived barriers to their children’s postsecondary attainment. The literature review supported the adoption of a cultural wealth lens to assist school personnel in understanding how affirmative collaboration and communication will support students’ and families’ college access-improving access to postsecondary institutions is not a problem to be solved but a path to be cleared. This study’s outcome is intended to contribute to the discourse on parent involvement within college readiness programming.
Chapter 3
Research Design

A social reproduction lens suggested a project to improve college access in New Bedford should begin by identifying what information is considered relevant to build on the cultural wealth held by families of underrepresented students. Organization communication theory suggests that effective college access communication must be strategic and be shaped by understanding the educational values, aspirations and needs of underrepresented students and families in the schools. This framework points to the necessity of building a conduit for important information that is reciprocal and affirmative.

Given the review of relevant literature as well as the researcher’s practice-based knowledge, this study’s empirical investigation rested on the following propositions: a) Family member encouragement and involvement have a great impact on students’ aspirations and college enrollment behaviors; b) family involvement in post-secondary planning is influenced by the amount of information they possess on the college enrollment processes; c) family members of students traditionally underrepresented on college campuses have limited access to college access information; d) information and events that exist in most urban schools have not been effective in bridging the college access gap in for families without post-secondary experience; e) families of students underrepresented on college campuses have cultural capital/wealth that typical schools’ college access efforts do not acknowledge; and f) improving the communication of relevant college access information to families beginning in middle school will improve parental involvement and encouragement, and result in increased aspirations and college enrollment behaviors of disadvantaged students in this urban school setting.
Research Questions

Given these propositions, this research project pursued the following empirical research questions: 1) What are the aspirations, views, and beliefs of New Bedford Public Schools’ lower-SES parents about college attendance? 2) Which college-related practices and information are viewed as helpful and not helpful by lower-SES family members or those without college attendance experience? 3) What communication strategies do these families find most and least effective? 4) What information does New Bedford Public Schools convey to families about college access and how is it communicated? The outcome of this inquiry was intended to guide the development of college knowledge protocol designed to address the needs of this community’s families and a plan for effective communication.

Methodology

The majority of past research studies conducted on students’ college enrollment behaviors have been quantitative in nature. Researchers have used large samples and databases to examine students and their parents’ navigation of the college choice and access process in order to generalize the results. Regression and causal comparative analyses have been frequently constructed around models of college choice process and college enrollment behaviors. This tradition has resulted in a strong understanding of the relationship of risk factors, and home or school based factors on student’s college choice behavior. However, these quantitative studies have been unable to uncover why certain populations of students continue to be underrepresented or explain how this phenomenon occurs. There exists a limited amount of qualitative research in the area of college choice. According to Bergerson (2010), now that research appears to be able to clearly identify risk factors and challenges to college access and attendance, there is a call to utilize qualitative methodologies to focus on how specific groups that have been underserved as
they “engage in the process of deciding whether and where to go to college” (p. 46). The strength of qualitative research in this line of inquiry is its ability to provide rich contextual descriptions of how students and their families experience the college choice and access process.

Qualitative methods were employed during this study to help understand the perspective of study participants, these strategies assist researchers who are interested “not only in the physical events and behavior that is taking place” but also in how the participants in the study “make sense of this and how their understandings influence their behavior” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 17). According to Creswell (2009) qualitative methods are instrumental in identifying the impact of intangible factors, such as social norms, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, whose role in the college choice process for minority students has not yet been adequately demonstrated.

A case study methodology was employed to answer this study’s research questions. Creswell (2009) defines a case study as an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context. This approach was useful in helping to better understand how family members of underrepresented students experience college access programming in this urban district’s particular socioeconomic context. The study explored their impressions and insights during the design and implementation stages of a college access workshop series. In accordance with sound case study practices, this study sought to analyze “an existing, real life situation in all its complexity, exploring is as close to the people concerned as possible, describing the situation in as much detail as possible, and finally explaining the findings in a clear and comprehensible way” (Kyburz-Graber, 2004, p. 54). According to Creswell (2009) a case being studied may be a program, an event, an activity, or individuals, such as this study’s family members, that is
bounded by time and activity. This study was bounded by family member participation in a college readiness workshop series development and delivery as an ‘activity.’ While qualitative studies may employ both qualitative and quantitative data, this study employed mostly qualitative data collection and analysis methods.

A case study strategy was chosen because of its fit with this study’s purpose as well as theoretical framework. A goal of this study was to examine from New Bedford students’ family members’ perspectives, which school-based messages and experiences had the most impact on the post-secondary aspirations they held for their children. The purpose of this study was to utilize the insights gained from the case study to acknowledge as well as improve the college access or “cultural capital” of students underrepresented on college campuses through effective practices and communication. According to Stevenson (2004) case studies can be appropriately framed with a “critical theory orientation” as has been adopted as part of this study’s theoretical framework. Participatory and interventionist case study methodologies such as those employed in this study are useful to those who are concerned with “mobilizing stakeholders to work collaboratively for change” and are therefore aligned with critical theory’s intent not to just “understand but transform social reality” (Stevenson, 2004, p. 45). Therefore, the transformative power of this study’s outcome is twofold: these families’ contributions will improve the college access experience of the families that will follow them, but perhaps more importantly sharing participant family perspectives with the school community will expand the ability to recognize and value their cultural wealth.

This inquiry could readily be described as an *explanatory* case study because it goes beyond description (Yin, 2009). It attempts to provide an understanding of the participants’ experience and how that experience influences students’ college enrollment behavior. This
empirical investigation was circumscribed around a college access workshop series and set against the backdrop of this urban school district’s practices surrounding the college-related informational needs of its students and families. In collaboration with the school, the researcher sought interview and focus group participants that were representative of the school districts’ socioeconomic context. The input of family members of students that are presently in college or in high school intending to enroll in college, were sought to help design the content and context of the college readiness workshops for parents. Family members of students in middle school were invited to participate in a college readiness workshop series and evaluate its effectiveness in meeting their needs for college access information. These impressions and evaluations, as well as an understanding of these families’ cultural wealth, will be used to develop future college access programming and effective college-related information communication practices.

**Site and participants.**

New Bedford Public Schools, a small urban school district, is the site for this practice based research. Based on extant literature this district’s low college attendance rates and diverse demographics predict ongoing low college enrollment trends. In order to improve such outcomes, researchers stress the importance of improving college access and readiness for low-SES and minority students in urban settings (Bergerson, 2010). Accordingly, a workshop series took place at Roosevelt Middle School which consisted of three sessions over a three week period. This middle school educates nearly 800 students from 6th through 8th grades. It has a diverse population, 30% of its students identify themselves as Hispanic and more than half of its population is of an ethnic minority group. This school’s leadership has been working on many fronts to improve outcomes for its students through school and community collaborations. Its
community outreach pattern and the welcoming nature of its leadership made this site a suitable location for the workshop series portion of this study.

This study employed purposeful sampling, which according to Maxwell (1996), is a type of sampling common in qualitative research. This is a method where elements are chosen based on purpose of the study, selecting “those times, settings and individuals” that can provide the information needed to answer research questions. He posits that it “is the most important consideration in qualitative sampling decisions” (p.70). This study sought to gain as broad a range of perspectives as possible on the college readiness experiences of students’ families; as a result, participants were recruited from low-SES families and/or who have not had previous college attendance experience at several points in the college access activity continuum, from middle school through the first year of college attendance.

The sample was not large in size but was chosen looking for typicality within the population. Maxwell (1996) assures investigators that “a small sample that has been systematically selected for typicality and relative homogeneity provides far more confidence than does a sample of the same size that incorporates substantial random or accidental variation” (p.71). This study collected data from three types of respondents, high school students, family members of first generation college attendees, and middle school family members, in order to fulfill the study’s purpose and answer the empirical research questions. Attempts were made to include family members of ethnic origin reflective of the middle school student population; who are identified as being 46% Caucasian, 33% Spanish and 11% African American. Although this objective was not entirely realized, the study successfully engaged a diverse population; over 75% of the participants identified themselves as an ethnic minority, with 33% being Cape Verdean, 22% Puerto Rican, 1% Portuguese, 5% Guatemalan and 5% multi-racial. In addition
low-SES families were adequately represented; 57% of participant families qualified for a free or reduced lunch benefit for their children.

*Family members of first generation college attendees.*

Family members of first generation students, in high school planning to go to college or presently in college, were included in the initial sample to find out what information they found was helpful and in supporting their children’s college access. Using a focus group strategy, they were asked about communication methods that were most effective in the college enrollment experience with their children. Their insight informed the development of a workshop series intended to communicate college-related information to the parents of middle school students who have not have previous college experience. They were also asked to help identify a location and a context for the workshop series.

Initially these family members were identified as potential participants through the New Bedford Public Schools’ student database and by high school guidance counselors. They were contacted through letters mailed to homes explaining the study and requesting their participation in a focus group to help in designing the workshop series. In addition, the researcher and guidance counselors reached out to perspective participants by telephone to encourage participation, confirm attendance and answer their question. Of the more than forty parents identified and contacted, ten parents confirmed interest and were scheduled to attend the first workshop; of these five actually participated. Two students also attended to translate for their Spanish- and Creole-speaking parents. The five parents identified themselves as of the following ethnic backgrounds: one as Caucasian, one as Portuguese, two as Cape Verdean and one as Puerto Rican.
Next, family members of the Upward Bound pre-collegiate program’s parent group were contacted by letter mailed to their home. As with the first mailing, this included an explanation of the study, a request for participation and the approved Informed Consent form. Of the ten confirmed participants two mothers attended the second focus group; one woman identified herself as Puerto Rican and the other as Cape Verdean. Five of the seven parents volunteered to participate in individual interviews held after the workshop series. These interviews were conducted to review the workshop outcomes and to gain deeper insight into what they believed supported their children’s successful college pathway and their influential cultural capital/wealth.

**Middle school student family members.**

Family members with low-SES or those without college experience whose children are in middle school were included in this study to discover what their aspirations, views and concerns were about college attendance. Addressing college access issues in middle school allows for early and ongoing communication about ways that family members can support students’ educational aspirations. During interviews following the workshop series, participants identified the information they believed would be most helpful in assisting them in supporting their children’s college access. They also discussed what communication strategies they believed were most effective in delivering important messages to families.

All Roosevelt Middle School family members were sent an invitation to the college readiness workshop series. These flyers were offered in English, Portuguese or Spanish. In addition, the researcher and principal reached out to family members who had expressed interest in college-related information during other school events. Each of the three workshops had six to eight (6-8) parent attendees. During each workshop session participants were given explanations of the study and the potential role family members could play. They were asked to
complete workshop evaluations and were also given a volunteer form for a 1-1 interview. Individual interviews were later conducted with five of the middle school parent workshop participants.

**High school students.**

Student participants were the children of the focus group participants. Parents were asked during the focus group and/or interview sessions, if they would allow their children to participate in an interview. Those who indicated willingness were asked to sign an informed consent, this form was also signed by the students at the beginning of the interview session. Six students participated in the interview process, four were seniors, one was a junior, and another a sophomore.

**Data collection.**

Resting against a backdrop of artifacts documenting the schools’ college readiness efforts, these forms of data collection were selected and sequenced to work in relationship with each other, as depicted in figure 1. Initially, the focus group input was used to shape the college readiness workshop series. The workshop series itself had two valuable outcomes. The evaluation survey data collected from the participants in the workshop series will refine the content and context of the information to be offered to middle school families in the future. Additionally, the workshop series provided

![Figure 1: Data collection relationship.](image-url)
another source of participants for interviews, during which the personal fears, challenges and aspirations for college access of family members were given a means of expression. These voices will alter the structure of the workshops, but more importantly are intended to be used as part of professional development protocol to influence how New Bedford staff comprehends and responds to the college access needs of its diverse students and families.

Artifacts.

During the study the researcher gathered artifacts which documented the existing practices surrounding college access at New Bedford High School and at the Roosevelt Middle School site. At the most apparent or surface level of an organization or culture, are the artifacts “which includes all the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels when one encounters a new group with an unfamiliar culture” (Schein, 2004, p. 25). The researcher attempted to take an etic view; or behave as an outsider, stepping back and gathering evidence to paint an accurate picture of the existing programs, activities, and communication methods. In order to fully describe the context for this study, evidence rose from documents, notes, correspondence and researcher memos compiled over the last year. Artifacts gathered included posters, activity flyers, letters, administrative record of activities, as well as web-based messages or postings on the district and schools’ webpage. The researcher conferred with staff and administration to assure all activities had been properly identified and to ascertain the communication methods employed in each effort.

Focus groups.

Family member focus groups were held to gather information about what have been their aspirations, views and beliefs surrounding college access for their children. These focus groups were in essence, group interviews that relied on the interaction between participants “to elicit
more of the participants’ points of view (than would be evidenced in more researcher-dominated interviewing)” (Mertens, 1998, p. 174). The focus group strategy was appropriate in this study, as the researcher was interested in how individuals formed a perspective of the problem. In order to set the stage for the discussion, participants were sent a non-technical description of the study in advance of the convening of the focus group to activate interest. A written protocol (see Appendix A) was used by the facilitator to conduct the focus groups. As part of the focus group protocol for this study, each session began with introductions and a description of the college access research study and the participants’ roles. The facilitator situated their participation in the study by specifying the goal of the focus group activity. Confidentiality issues were discussed and participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants were instructed to flag any directions that were unclear.

The researcher led the focus group in a review of the proposed content for the workshop series. Participants were asked to reflect on what their experiences had been with similar college readiness information. Through the use of open-ended questioning the researcher attempted to elicit participants’ impressions and how information affected their involvement in their child’s college access. An additional focus of the discussion centered on identifying what family members viewed as vital information and effective communication practices to promote college access. Sessions were conducted in English and translated for participants who were not English-language dominant.

*College access workshops.*

A three-session college access workshops series was conducted. The workshops sessions covered topics that research has shown to be vital to families and was adjusted according to the insights gathered from the previously held focus groups. These workshops were designed for
middle school families without previous college attendance experience and intended to cover all the information considered vital by literature and focus groups data. The sessions took place at the middle school, which was considered the best location according to the feedback from the participants of the focus groups.

Each session was delivered by the researcher and included a protocol for introductions and explanation of the workshops and its position with this research study. Topics covered in the workshops included an overview of the college choice process, suggestions about areas for participation, step-by-step ways to navigate the process through high school, information on tuition and financial aid, as well as how to develop a college attendance action plan with their child. Participants were given a packet containing copies of the evening’s presentation and other resources at the beginning of each workshop session (Appendix B). The workshop series was conducted in English, with Spanish and Portuguese translation offered. Each of the three workshops had six to eight (6-8) parent attendees, two to four students (2-4) who accompanied their parents and listened to the presentation, two translators, two facilitators, and the researcher/presenter. Refreshments were available and a raffle was held at the end of each session.

**Workshop surveys.**

Surveys are considered good tools because they allow for comprehensive data collection from a larger number of participants than is often possible through other methods. This study’s workshop exit survey (Appendix C) was researcher-designed, but utilized components of an existing survey. A tool used in a previous study was obtained and portions were used with permission from the authors (Fann, McClafferty Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009). At the end of each workshop the researcher situated attendees’ participation in the study by specifying the goal
of the evaluation surveys and interviews. Participants were instructed to flag any directions that were unclear. Confidentiality issues were discussed and participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation. The researcher highlighted the importance of honest and thorough completion of the evaluation surveys in order to improve future workshops for other families and influence family members’ ability to help students access a college education.

The surveys were used to assess family members’ satisfaction with, and the effectiveness of the workshop information given, the format utilized, and where further information or support is needed. It also asked for feedback about communication strategies between families and school with regard to post-secondary information. Several open-ended questions were posed to ascertain possible ways family member aspirations, views and beliefs surrounding college access for their children were influenced by the workshops. The survey was limited in length and asked for demographic data, reasons for attendance and how they learned of the workshop. The instrument included a series of questions designed to allow evaluation of the workshop methods and content, utilizing a scale of 1 to 6 (where 6 is the highest rating). One question concerning communication practices asked participants to rank each strategy in order of preference. Seventeen (17) participant surveys were completed and analyzed. Along with the surveys, workshop participants received a form to complete in order to volunteer for follow-up interviews.

**Family member interviews.**

One-to-one interviews with family member volunteers were conducted to provide greater depth to the investigation into the problem of practice and research questions. According to Maxwell (1996), interviews are a valuable way to gain access to information of events that happened in the past and to gain insight to things that are not readily observed. Through a
researcher-controlled line of questioning, these purposefully selected participants shared the rich data and description most sought in qualitative measures. A protocol of open-ended questioning (Appendix D) was structured to gain deeper insight into these participants’ aspirations, views and beliefs about their children’s college attendance, their perceived supports and barriers, what information they found helpful and what was not, and how they believed that school personnel can be helpful. Workshop attendees were asked questions about how they viewed specific aspects of the workshop series. Attention was paid to identifying what the participants found were effective means of communication between them and the school. At the beginning of each interview the researcher situated the volunteers’ participation in the overall study and stressed the importance of their participation, as “giving voice” to experiences not commonly heard. Confidentiality issues were discussed and participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants were instructed to flag any questions that were unclear. Eleven participant volunteers were interviewed; one was conducted over the telephone and ten (10) were conducted in person. One interview was facilitated by a translator. A digital voice recording of each interview was made, and researcher notes and memos were created. Three types of interview subjects participated in sixteen interviews, five middle school parents, six high school parents and five high school students. Although the interview protocols focused on the same objectives, each subject group provided a separate and important perspective.

**Data analysis.**

Best practices suggest that analysis of the qualitative data in a case study must have several components in order to make sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data to be analyzed, conducting varying types of analysis, delving “deeper and deeper into understanding the data”… and “representing the data and making an interpretation of the larger
meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 138). The following section outlines the procedure utilized to accomplish the analysis for the study’s different types of data: artifacts, survey data, as well focus group, and interview records.

Artifacts.

Data collected from this portion of the investigation was catalogued. The documents and artifacts were numbered and recorded in spreadsheet (Appendix E). This spreadsheet identifies a) the service, activity or program, b) its purpose, c) the population served, c) timeframe or schedule, d) the location and e) other comments. A review of this document was completed by the lead guidance counselor at New Bedford High School and the principal of Roosevelt Middle School to assure accuracy. An analysis of the spreadsheet was conducted in order to identify what was existing practice; and where there appeared to be gaps in services, activities, or communication methods, as these schools attempted to address the needs of families. The results were used to establish a description of the existing college access context for this study.

Focus Group and Interview Data.

The focus group and interview recordings were reviewed and notes were made on what was heard in the data and tentative ideas were developed about data “categories and relationships” (Maxwell, 1996). The recordings were then transcribed. A qualitative computer software program (MAXQDA) helped code, organize, and sort information that was useful in writing the study report. This data analysis was an iterative or cyclical process of coding and reflection. Coding is “taking data or pictures gathered during data collection, segmenting sentences (or paragraphs) or images into categories, and labeling those categories with a term” (Creswell, 2009, p. 186). Concurrently, the researcher utilized what Saldana (2009) describes as analytical memo writing; where the researcher thinks critically about the analysis and coding of
data throughout the data analysis process. Researcher memo writing was used to challenge the researcher’s thinking by examining assumptions and perceptions and the extent to which these effect the research decisions and how data is viewed (Saldana, 2009).

Coding, the main categorizing strategy in qualitative research was used to reduce and organize the data for interpretation. According to Saldana (2009), coding is the transitional process between data collection and analysis, where the researcher reflects on a passage to “decode” its meaning and appropriately label, or “encode” it. This study employed a four-stage process to move from preliminary code development through interpretation, as illustrated in Figure 2. This process reduced the large amounts of data, in successive stages in order to allow for manageable and meaningful interpretation. See Appendix F for samples of the coding process as applied to this study’s focus group and interview transcripts.

**Stage 1: Open coding.**

At this stage the researcher reviewed the large quantities of raw data. During this process emic codes emerged from participants’ comments. As was expected “codes that are surprising and not anticipated,” “codes that are unusual,” or of “conceptual interest to the reader,” arose from the data record (Creswell, 2009, pp.186-187). According to Saldana (2009) this “first cycle” coding should include an amalgam of coding methods. In this study the researcher employed aspects of Structural Coding, In Vivo Coding, and Values Coding. Structural Coding, a question-based code that is appropriate for interview and open-ended survey responses was...
used to identify data related to the research questions. In Vivo Coding or literal coding captured the actual language of participants found in the qualitative data record. This method is useful in honoring the participants’ voices in critical studies such as this. Values Coding applies codes to qualitative data “that reflect a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview” (Saldana, 2009, p. 89). This process helped the researcher explore the cultural values and the personal experiences of the participants.

Stage 2: Etic coding.

Etic codes were then established to identify specific data related to the study’s theoretical framework and literature review. According to Creswell (2009), these provisional or predetermined, a priori codes may address “topics that readers expect to find, based on past literature and common sense” and “codes that address a larger theoretical perspective in the literature” (pp.186-187). In this study, these predetermined codes were established to apply to areas of text that reference participants’ comments related to: college readiness information sources, communication practices, and recommendations for workshop content and format. Other codes were used to indicate parts of the text that indicated the participants’ views, aspirations, and fears, in relation to college access. Of particular interest in this study was the coding of text that relates to cultural wealth or mechanisms supporting cultural reproduction within the college access context. At the end of this coding segment, more than sixty (60) separate codes had been developed and applied to the transcribed text.

Stage 3: Thematic analysis.

During the next stage the researcher further reduced data, by successively recoding the data and developing more refined themes and impressions. According to Saldana (2009) during recoding of the study data the researcher “further manages, filters, highlights, and focuses the
salient feature of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, and concepts, grasping meaning, and/or building theory” (Saldana, 2009, p. 8). This method of organization often called “codifying” arranges data in classifications or categories, because the coded data shares some characteristics (Saldana, 2009). Next, the researcher compared the categories and attempted to consolidate them in various ways, in order to transcend the concrete “reality” of the data and move toward the more theoretical, thematic, and conceptual. Initially nineteen (19) themes were found, these were eventually consolidated into eleven (11) themes related to the study’s research questions.

Using a *Pattern Coding* method at this stage, explanatory or inferential codes were used to identify emerging themes and help in the search for causes and explanations. According to Saldana (2009) similarly coded “first cycle” data are to be retrieved from the data corpus and reviewed by the researcher to assess their commonality and assign them a Pattern Code. The Pattern Code was used “as a stimulus to develop a statement that describe a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of relationships, or a theoretical construct from the data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 154). This analysis was used to ascertain whether the study’s propositions were supported by the data.

*Stage 4: Interpretation.*

According to Creswell (2009) the last step in analyzing qualitative data is interpretation or “making meaning of the data.” The researcher attempted to summarize “what has been learned?” and discuss how it confirmed or contradicted past literature or theories. Utilizing the critical educational theory and organizational communication lens the researcher discussed how the findings may inform the district’s understanding of the participants’ cultural wealth, the further development of the workshop series, and inform college access communication efforts.
Further questions were posed, to call for what Creswell (2009) describes as further “action agendas for reform and changes” (pp. 189-190).

**Survey Data.**

The evaluation surveys collected at the end of the workshops were reviewed immediately to facilitate any changes to the content or context of the remaining workshops. The content of all the surveys was analyzed when the workshop series was completed. A descriptive statistical analysis was performed on the multiple choice survey items concerning reasons for attendance, communication practices, and evaluation of the workshop methods and content. The descriptive statistics were used to determine the central tendency in the responses of the respondents themselves and about the workshop content, context and communication strategies. Appendix G contains results for the quantitative survey items.

The open ended inquiries about the participants’ preferred manner of communication, their aspirations, views and beliefs was transcribed into the focus group and interview data record. It was also analyzed utilizing the five stage procedure used for focus group and interview data analysis (See Figure 2). This open-ended question data was included and summarized within the relevant focus group and interview data and discussion sections.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher employed practices during and after the investigation to ensure the rigor of this study. The constructs of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability that been identified by Guba (1981) and favorably used by investigators to ensure the trustworthiness or the validity of qualitative inquiries were employed. Credibility assures that the study actually measures or tested what was intended, transferability is concerned that the results of the study can be applied to a wider population. With dependability the researcher strives to assure that
another investigator can repeat the study; and confirmability attempts to demonstrate that the findings emerged from the data and not from the researcher’s own predispositions (Shenton, 2004).

**Credibility.**

Comparable to quantitative tests for internal validity, this study used several strategies to demonstrate credibility, to assure that “a true picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny is being presented” (Shenton, 2004, p. 63). During the study the researcher became more familiar with the Roosevelt Middle School site; as suggested by Guba (1981) this “prolonged engagement” helps demonstrate that sufficient time and reflection was spent to justify the researcher’s characterization.

According to Yin (2009) to ensure credibility the researcher must also “identify correct operational measures for the concepts being studied.” This study’s careful selection of data collection forms, the use of focus groups, interviews and the workshop exit survey provided both breadth and depth of inquiry. The sampling strategy, which engaged participants at several stages in the college access continuum, was also designed to provide a broad perspective of the college informational needs of families in this economically disadvantaged community.

Debriefing, another credibility test supported by Guba (1981) was utilized. During debriefing the inquirer disengages from the site to interact with persons such as a director or steering group, where the experience of the collaborator may assist in widening a vision, discussing alternative approaches, recognizing flaws in the course of action, and identify researcher biases (Shenton, 2004). A regular part of a doctoral research protocol, this study’s researcher had multiple opportunities to debrief with an advisor more knowledgeable in research methodology and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged communities.
The use of the multiple sources of evidence during data collection also allowed for a triangulation of data, where the verification of information by more than one source supported credibility. A last, yet crucial test occurred once the case study report had been drafted the researcher had two “key informants review draft study case report” to assure that the researcher has given a faithful portrayal of their experience (Yin, 2009). Although these informants approached the data from differing perspectives, each affirmed the researcher’s portrayal of their comments, as well as their experiences as their children navigated a college access pathway.

Transferability.

Transferability is likened to external validity; it discusses the applicability of the outcomes of a study to other situations (Guba, 1981). It is understood that the findings of qualitative case studies are specific to individuals and circumstances and are not readily generalizable; however when the investigator provides “sufficient contextual information about the fieldwork sites” it allow others “who believe their situations to be similar to that described in the study” to relate or transfer the findings to their own situations (Shenton, 2004). In order to assure the greatest amount of transferability possible, the author of the study provided what Geertz (1973) described as “thick description.” Rich detailed descriptions and background data was used to establish the context of study and to allow comparisons to be made by researchers in other settings.

Dependability.

Reliability is discussed in terms of dependability in qualitative studies; these are attempts to ensure that another investigator could “in principle repeat the same procedures and arrive at the same results” (Yin, 2009). In order to support dependability the researcher of this study took care that procedures followed were fully documented, such that another researcher could repeat
the inquiry, even if the intention was not to get the same results. As suggested by Shenton (2004), the research report of this study fully documents the investigation and does “include sections devoted to a) research design and its implementation, describing what was planned and executed on a strategic level; b) the operational detail of the data gathering, addressing the minutiae of what was done in the field; and c) reflective appraisal of the project, evaluating the effectiveness of the process of inquiry undertaken” (p71-72).

**Confirmability.**

Comparable to objectivity, confirmability in qualitative measures ensures that “as far as possible that the works findings are the result of the experience and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Triangulation of this study’s data was effective in reducing the effect of researcher’s bias. Having input from eleven parents of both middle and high school students, who ranged in ethnicity and SES offered multiple opportunities to confirm the findings. These were further supported by including the interviews with the high school students.

In addition, the researcher’s coding practice was analyzed for interpreter reliability. Three educational professionals within the school department reviewed and coded samples of text to assure that appropriate and fitting codes were being applied to the data record. In each case some variance in coding was noted, however the measure of agreement between the researcher and the reviewers’ interpretation and application of codes was significant. In most cases the variance was believed to be due to the researcher’s familiarity with the theoretical background for the study.
Validity.

The workshop exit survey contained both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative data was treated for trustworthiness as described in the preceding section. Many of the quantitative items were used with permission of the authors of an existing instrument. Six items were included from an evaluation of a college readiness workshop series utilized by Fann, McClafferty Jarsky, & McDonough, (2009) in a similar study; as a result these have proven construct validity and reliability. A pilot-test of the survey was completed with four (4) of the focus group members. According to Creswell (2009), this practice helps to establish the content validity as well as improve the questions, survey format or the item scales. After the pilot-test, two questions were revised to follow the format established for previous items, and the directions for ranking respondents’ preferred communication methods was reworded.

Researcher’s Role.

This study’s researcher facilitated the focus groups, assisted with arranging the workshops, presented the workshop sessions, and conducted the interviews. There did not appear to be any conflict between the researcher’s role in this study and her employment as Director of Pupil Personnel Services in New Bedford Public Schools. Although the researcher works in a supervisory capacity over the guidance counseling personnel in the middle schools and high school, there was not a supervisory relationship with any study participants or other Roosevelt Middle School staff members. Guidance staff members were not participants in the study but supported the recruitment of family members. Two parent participants were familiar with the researcher; they work as clerks in the school administration building. However these relationships did not appear to threaten the validity of the inquiry.
The participation of the school in the study was solicited but not coerced in any manner. As a fellow administrator to the researcher, the principal of Roosevelt Middle School welcomed and encouraged this research study. A limited professional relationship existed between the researcher and this principal.

As the drafter of a K-12 college access proposal for the district, this researcher has held discussions and gathered information that informed the explanation of the problem. This activity gave rise to the researcher’s view that attention to college access was needed at the middle school level and should include a plan to effectively communicate it. This relationship to the problem of practice did not appear to reach a level of involvement that would threaten the validity of the inquiry.

The researcher’s inexperience in conducting qualitative research coupled with her deep desire to improve college access for underrepresented students in the district where she works could pose a possible threat to the validity of the interpretations and findings. The triangulation of data, member checks and debriefing sessions with dissertation advisors will help guard its validity.

Protection of Human Subjects

Informed consent.

In accordance with practices approved by the Institutional Review Board of Northeastern University, for Human Subject Research Protection (see Appendix H) all effort was made to assure all participants were fully informed of the nature and purpose of the study and their participation. The research project was presented to potential participants at the initial meeting of both the focus group and at the workshop series as well as prior to the individual interviews. The informed consent form was distributed and reviewed with attendees. The researcher
explained the study’s goals and purpose in lay language and answered all questions. Individuals were given an opportunity to opt out of the project. Separate informed consent forms were designed for the focus group and interview participants.

**Confidentiality.**

Although there was no foreseeable risk to participants, confidentiality will be maintained. Participants’ role in this study remains confidential, only the researcher saw any identifying information. Resulting reports or publications will not use identifiable information. Only the researcher on this study listened to recordings and transcribed them into written form. Spanish translation was completed by a qualified Spanish-speaking individual, who translated the researcher’s questions and participant responses during the interview; the resulting recording was transcribed by the researcher. Participants’ actual names were not included in the transcripts; each was given a pseudonym or alternate name. All individuals who facilitated data collection by assisting with translation or survey collection were trained in the described procedures to maintain confidentiality. Only people authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University saw research information about individuals in this study and only to ensure that the research is done properly.

Audio recordings of the focus group, workshop sessions and interviews were kept in the researcher’s locked home office file cabinet and were destroyed within 3 months of the study’s completion. Digital records of the transcriptions were kept on the researcher’s computer hard drive and back-up drive only. Paper and digital records of the data were destroyed within three months of the study’s completion.
Chapter 4

Research Findings

An analysis of the twelve parent and six student interview and focus group transcripts was conducted to accumulate evidence in response to several of this study’s research questions. These subjects fit profiles of families that are typically underrepresented on today’s college campuses. The pertinent results are presented in this chapter in the form of illustrative participant quotes, researcher summary statements and interpretations. Workshop survey outcomes and artifacts related to college readiness activities were also analyzed. Summary statements, charts and tables are offered in response to this study’s interrogation into college-related information transmission in this urban school district. Four broad themes rose from the analysis and organize the presentation of findings: Parents Aspirations, Views and Beliefs; Helpful College-related Information and Supports; Communication; and College Access Information Context. Given this study’s modest sample, the results do not claim to be representative of the entire diverse or low-SES population in this urban city; it does however provide valuable insight into how these families have developed college-going dreams and plans for their children; and what they believe schools may do to support these aspirations.

Parents Aspirations, Views, and Beliefs

The voices of parent and student participants within this section provide ample and compelling evidence against the widely held preconception that immigrant, minority, or low-SES parents and families do not value education. Four themes emerged from the data analysis of interview and focus group transcripts related to parent aspirations and beliefs about education and college attendance for their children. Responses suggest that in this urban context
(a) family background and culture are important factors influencing a student’s educational pathway; (b) a steadfast determination that their children will attend college is often related to parents’ life challenges and/or their own unfulfilled educational aspirations; (c) parents possess different ideas about their role in their child’s college access pathway and the actions they undertake toward that end vary; (d) financing a college education is the single greatest concern among these families.

**Family background.**

Data analysis revealed patterns in the responses illustrating how family background shapes values. According to subject statements some of this influence is related to ethnicity and some rises from the hardships families have endured. In addition to these factors there was evidence of a strong pattern of intergenerational encouragement within participant families, between the children’s, parents’ and grandparents’ generations. Comments related to immigration status implied that this experience also impacts how education is perceived by these families.

**Cultural Influence.**

When asked questions about the influence of family culture on college attendance in this urban setting, some participants cited aspects of an ethnic background that yield positive support and others identified challenges associated with a particular heritage and its beliefs. During an individual interview Sarah, a high school student, expressed:...

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Figure 3: Influential family background factors.
student, made two of the only statements which offered specific support for a college education from within an ethnic community, she said:

I absolutely see it as encouragement. We actually have the Cape Verdean parade that goes on in the city. There are certain seniors or students that ride in cars and they have like sashes on; and on the side of the car it will have a sticker of a certain scholarship that they got. So actually in the Cape Verdean community I think that it’s absolutely encouraging.

Donna is a high school parent who fought with her mother to attend college. When asked to describe the values her Puerto Rican culture holds concerning education, she explained how education was not encouraged as she was growing up; instead giving grandchildren to your parents was valued by her culture. Donna said:

Our culture is to be married at 13, 14,15 years old and give your parents grandkids; cuz that’s what they’re always dreaming of…so that they can raise them, so you can give your kids to them.

**Immigration.**

A pattern in the data suggests that the educational values that these parents hold are the result of their family’s pattern of immigration, the associated economic hardship and ethnically informed perspectives. Five of the twelve parent participants were first generation immigrants to the United States, and they discussed the valuing of education in relation to this experience. Interestingly all these participants said that they themselves value education and disagree with those who do not. Two mothers explained that seeking educational opportunity was among the reasons they chose to emigrate. Marisol, a mother who came from Puerto Rico with her daughter
explained how for some families, seeking an improved future includes accessing educational opportunities:

Example the parents, the immigrants when he come here to find a better future, as part of the better future the kids go to college. Because you know their country is struggling, because is poor, the situation is not good. It’s the same in my country, the situation is not good.

Another mother, Rosalia who came with her boyfriend from Guatemala at sixteen, identified a focus on work and financial security by other immigrants. She explained through an interpreter how “a lot of people from her country”… “a lot of people that are Latin also don’t believe that school’s important.” Differing from preceding remarks, another mother explained how undocumented families face difficulties with employment and must prioritize the financial stability of the family over education. As a receptionist in a doctor’s office, Ana, a Cape Verdean immigrant, interacts with many people new to the states. She stated:

In my case it’s different, but I have to say that other Cape Verdean families that I know, they came as immigrants; now it’s another problem they were illegal then they became legal. So really college is not on their mind. They want their kid’s at least graduate high school and that’s about it. You need to get a job because of the social, um economy that we are in. So it’s different for them …it’s still you done with high school, then you gonna have to get a job …and help the family. Portuguese culture is the same thing. Reflective of statements that are often used to dismiss minority cultures as not valuing education, Janisa, a senior who emigrated from Puerto Rico with her mother, described behaviors of some people in her culture. She said:
Like if you could see the difference between kids from my culture, they’re encouraged not to go. The majority of them don’t really care. They just come here, I’m not trying to be rude, but they just pretty much come here to live off the government cuz they think that it’s America and they give you money for everything.

It is evident that immigrants bring other values, needs and priorities from their culture of origin that compete with the American primacy of ‘going to college’ and ‘becoming someone through education and going to college.’ For some families the urgency of getting a job, financial survival, legal status and the importance of giving children to the family are stronger areas of focus. The data also demonstrated that there are parents who have used immigration and/or the challenges associated with it to forge a commitment to secure a college pathway for their children.

**Hardship experiences.**

Study participants made numerous comments that indicated there was a relationship between the experiences or hardships of one generation and increased educational aspirations for a succeeding generation. Elise, a woman of Cape Verdean descent described how her in-laws’ and their struggle as immigrants was influential in her daughter’s college attendance plan, she explained:

My husband’s parents straight from Cape Verde they’re always telling them “don’t be like us” you know they speak English and they also speak Creole; they speak both to the kids. They always instill in them, “Go to school, go to school!”

This point was also made by Ana, a Cape Verdean immigrant. During an interview she said:
Like I said, there will be some groups that they do value education because when they came that they struggled so much that they are saying I don’t want my kid to go through that. And then they work hard so their kid can go to college.

**Changed Views.**

Many study participants discussed how there was change in view concerning education on the part of many immigrant grandparents. Several participants described how previously held ideas about the need for their children to work and forego a college education had been transformed; these grandparents now actively support their grandchildren’s college attendance.

Lena, her husband and two children live on the second floor of a house owned by her immigrant Portuguese parents. She proudly told of her parents’ encouragement for her son’s educational goal, though she was made to quit high school to help support the family. She offered the following:

> Ya, they’re so like psyched. They’re so glad, they’re like…. O my God, he wants to be a doctor…O my God! That’s a big dream. Oh that’s a lot of hard work they say.

When asked if her parents were supportive of her child’s college aspirations, Jane another middle school parent, explained her parent’s changed view saying wryly:

> Yeah go figure! Yeah, they are and they’re a pretty big influence; and I think with the way the economy is that they see that it’s important that you really need, you need a college education. You really do. It’s important to really make something, to make better than what you see…other people are having struggles right now.

Donna’s son, Kyle explained his grandmother’s shift in perspective as being related to providing support for the family. He said:
I know my grandmother, she’s a hard-core Puerto Rican that all she does is work and she was always looking for support. You know, she wanted my mother to go to college…I mean she wanted my mother to work and not to go to college. And now my grandmother tells me she wants me to go to college, you know what I mean? It is a little odd… but not really…the way the economy is now. The way things are now she kinda realizes you need to go to school to have a good job and support your family.

When asked if he thought this shift was related to a cultural gender bias, Kyle conceded that his grandmother’s support may actually be related to the fact he is a Latino male. He said, “Yeah…probably. Usually the man takes up the role of the household. He controls the household support more than anyone else.”

According to both student and parent subjects, many grandparents have had a shift in perspective over time. Where they had discouraged or denied their children educational opportunity they were now reported as being influential and supportive of their grandchildren’s college aspirations. This transformation in perspective is seen as the result of understanding the association between increased education and employment opportunities for this generation.

**Parents’ life and education experiences.**

Evidence demonstrated that a steadfast determination that their children will attend college is often related to parents’ life challenges and/or their own unfulfilled educational aspirations. This next section outlines a category of data that illustrates a relationship between parent participants’ life challenges, including past thwarted educational experiences.
aspirations, and the college-going dreams they hold for their children. Ten of the twelve parents who participated in either focus groups or interviews expressed a determination that their child or children will have a post-secondary school experience. When asked about their college attendance dreams and goals for their children, many individuals told of the challenges they had faced as having influence on their educational aspirations for their children. The majority of parent participants also referenced a past or present desire to attend college themselves.

**Hardships.**

Hardships were described by several parent participants as shaping their educational aspirations for their children. They outlined challenges they faced in life, they described difficulties they had earning sufficient monies to support their families and they explain how limited job opportunities or chance for advancement was due to a lack of education. Valerie relayed the following explanation of her struggles and resulting support for her children’s college attendance:

> It was important for me and I have three children also. And it was important for me for my children to go to school because I started to go to college and I was making more money waitressing and bartending than I would if I had finished school, so I figured that I wouldn’t finish school. And then I met my ex-husband and then I didn’t have to work.

> And then we got divorced and I was left with the three children and I didn’t have my education and I had to go back to work as a waitress; and it wasn’t as easy with the three kids and I still had a great income but I didn’t have the benefits. Your income is minimum wage, for a waitress it’s $2.63 an hour which isn’t anything and a bartender is $3.65. So I really instilled in all three of my children to go to school and all three of them have…which I am very fortunate.
Donna told how she warned her son to get an education in order to avoid the difficulties she has faced. During an interview she reported telling her son at an early age to go to college, she said:

I’d say… “Look what I’m doing! I’m working three jobs, I don’t get to see you.
(Grandma) and daddy are taking care of you. You don’t wanna live like this.” We lived in the projects. I lived in the projects all my life. I’d tell him, “You don’t wanna be here.”

_Thwarted educational aspirations._

More so than culture or family influence, parents told how their support for their children’s college attendance was related to thwarted educational aspirations in their own lives. During an interview in her home, Lena described how she eventually got her GED and a Certified Nursing Assistant license; when asked about what influenced her determination that her children attend college, she reflected:

I don’t think anybody’s helped me make that decision. I think it’s just me, it’s been in me. It was planted in me cuz I always had a dream of finishing high school cuz I couldn’t because I had to quit to work for the family. Nobody ever pushed me to go to college. I never had the push so I guess the eagerness somebody should have had to give to me I’m giving to my kids. So it was actually like a seed that was planted in me already.

During an interview Jane, a middle school parent, explained how she was told by her parents that they could not help with college; that she and her brother “were on their own.” She discussed how her inability to pursue a college education and her work-related frustrations shaped her aspirations for her sons and made the following statement:
Like I said, none of four kids went to college. So like I said, so, my decision was made a long time ago that my kids were going to go to college because we didn’t do it. It’s just I feel I want them to have the opportunity that I didn’t have.

With the help of a translator, Rosalia told of her sadness at being removed from school after first grade in Guatemala. She described how she wanted to be a doctor, but father could only afford to keep her brothers in school. Rosalia described how she does not have legal status right now and is unable to work, yet she is insistent that her three children will get a college education. The fact that she was the only mother of a sixth grade student and one of two bilingual parents to attend the workshops, speaks to her commitment. Rosalia told how her experiences have shaped what she says to her children:

When I talk to them I only talk to them about myself, about my dreams, about how I dreamed to be a doctor, how I dream to continue school but I never got that opportunity…I’ve always talked to them, that they have to go. I tell my kids ‘You have to go to college. No matter what there has to be help for you. Maybe not me because I didn’t have that opportunity … but all of three of you have that opportunity and you all have to go to college.

*Present college aspirations.*

Further evidencing the high value these parents’ place on a post-secondary experience, all but two among the parents expressed a desire to attend college at this time. Elizabeth, the nail technician explained her plans to attend college:

Nowadays like we said you don’t have many options, if you don’t have a college education nowadays. You know it’s something that even like I said to you after the workshops…Wow… I think I wanna go back to school! You know and finally figure out
what I want to do for a living!...I can take that time for myself to be able to do that because its gonna better all of us for the future, if you think about it so…….

Donna recounted how she told her son of her unfulfilled desire, she said:

You know what? I tell him even now I want to go to college. You know I want to go back. I’d love to go back. I’d love to further my education. I said ‘But I have you. I have (3 children).’ You know what I mean? It’s very hard. Brian would like to go back to college, my husband….so I think we are constantly talking about it.

The data clearly illustrates how parents’ unfulfilled education aspirations have been used to fuel the determination that their children will have a college education and will not experience the financial hardships they have endured. They value education and most wished aloud they could attend college now, although only two described taking steps toward that end.

**Parent dreams.**

This next section outlines some parent participant data concerning the dreams and aspirations that they hold for their children. During interview and focus group sessions in response to a question about the dreams they had for their children, participants made statements that ranged from holding broad hope for a “happy” future, to specific visions for college and career success. They shared desires that their children: make contributions to society; improve the family’s future; and gain personal success and self-sufficiency.

Rita, a Creole speaking focus group participant
said, “My dream is to see my son, do his own dream. To make me happy, see him to be a good man with respect for everybody.”

Marisol, a Puerto Rican immigrant mother spoke of the how the future belonged to her child and recounted her altruistic vision, she said:

> Because I told my children you need to go to college because I want you to help society, because you need to do something to help the other people. You need a future for you, that the reason you need to go to college. That is true… is very important, for me very important. Is the first reason, I told you again that’s the future there. And probably the people that go to college have business, have a job. Myself, I finish…I work at McDonalds.

Lena shared her milestone dream its association with hard work:

> Seeing them succeed and see them with a cap and gown up there on the top, to me that will be like…tears in my eyes. Seeing my kids, something that I didn’t have, giving it to my kids knowing that they will have worked hard. Hopefully that will be the dream that they can accomplish.

The preceding discussion outlined some of the dreams that parent participants hold for their children. They expressed desires that their children be happy and have a better life by having experiences and opportunities they did not. The belief they have in the value of education was evident as most participants offered education-related dreams.

**Parent role conceptualization and involvement.**

Parents possess different ideas about their role in their child’s college access pathway and the actions they undertake toward that end vary. Their role conception was often described in relation to their past experiences, aspirations and hardships. Overall they viewed themselves as
instrumental in supporting their child’s college pathway. Ana, who is active on the parent board of her daughter’s pre-collegiate program, did explain what she believed is the parents’ role in setting expectations and supporting college access, she said:

They don’t even think about drop out of high school because they know what are we expect of them, that’s their life. As I said at the same time we have expectations for them. Even though I know it’s not gonna happen what we want, but at least we are laying that to them. It’s up to them to decide what they want to do. It’s up to them but as I said we do every little thing.

Lena shared a vision of the devotional role she intends to play to support her eight grade son’s educational aspirations, she said:

I tell my son ‘I don’t care if you never work.’ You know what I mean? ‘But my priority, my responsibility of this house is to put you to college. You know I don’t care if you ever get a job. I don’t care if I have to support you for another 12 years to be a doctor, whatever it is that you want to be.’ But my thing is college, college, college…both of my kids.

When asked to describe their roles, few parent participants actually described their part or gave a specific philosophy in supporting college attendance. Rather most described the action they took or the things that they said. The next few discussions outline the various forms of involvement and encourage reported by students and parents.

Figure 5: Parent involvement forms.
The data analysis suggested that parents’ support for post-secondary pursuits can be categorized as either verbal support or direct involvement/concrete action. All parent and student participants described how a range of positive and negative verbal interaction was used to influence educational performance and aspirations. Illustrative of the different role perceptions they held, parents relayed a spectrum of actions they undertook that they characterized as support along the college pathway; from the monitoring of grades to arranging vacations to allow for college visits.

**Verbal interaction.**

Verbal encouragement for college attendance was described by all parent and students. They gave examples of how parents: set expectations, told stories of family experiences, expressed their commitment to support college aspirations, used encouragement to build their children’s sense of worth and esteem, and deliver warnings that were used to encourage their children’s college aspirations.

**Goal setting.**

Jane described engaging their children in early discussions about college as a form of encouragement. She associated her continued insistence on a college pathway with her experiences and unfulfilled aspirations. She described goal setting discussions:

I think we just talked about getting a good education and working really hard in school and just talked about going to college. Going to college to get a degree in something that down the road is gonna pay off for you and it may not seem that way right now. You know what I mean? But you know I think it’s important. So I think we just had conversations different times popping up or whatever it may be. But I just always talked about college, I think it was because I didn’t go and I wanted to go. I wish I went you
know, so I want them to do what I didn’t do….I think just starting the process as far as starting to talk about college. I’ve been talking to my kids since grammar school about college. I wasn’t afforded the opportunity to go to college myself so…my parents never talked about it.

Encouragement.

Elise, whose daughter Lori is in a pre-collegiate program, shared her frequently used verbal encouragement for her daughter’s educational pursuits. This esteem building message was also reported by her daughter during an interview. Elise said she began every day this way… “I always tells her, ‘You are made for amazing things!’ That’s my favorite, favorite, thing.”

Students were asked about their view of their parents’ role in their college enrollment pathway, the question included a number of descriptors such as ‘director,’ ‘supporter,’ and ‘observer.’ They all confirmed their parents’ support of their college aspirations and often characterized their parents’ directives or verbal encouragement as “pushing.” During the interview it was noted that students made many of these statements in a manner that conveyed pride in their parents’ participation and attention. Lori, a senior planning to attend a university in the fall, discussed her mother’s monitoring and daily involvement as being associated with her participation in the Upward Bound’s parent group. Using the offered descriptors, she outlined her mother’s role this way:

I think my mom is like a director and supporter. Some things I just didn’t want to do, and she was just like, ‘you’re gonna do it! Whether you like it or not, you’re gonna do it.’ Um… like I decided I was gonna apply… it was some college in Washington D.C., I think it was Georgetown, and I was like I’m not gonna apply there anymore cuz I don’t
want to. I don’t think I’ll get in. And she was like, ‘No you’re gonna do it. If you wanted to go there in the first place then you’re gonna apply there.’

Mathias, a senior planning to attend a state university in the fall discussed his mother’s role and how he regarded her hard work is a source of inspiration when he said:

I mean… my mom, she raised like four kids basically by herself. So that kinda pushes me to help her; and now she can’t work cuz her shoulder’s dislocated or whatever. So I mean that helps me work harder. She asks me questions like as if I’m already gone to college to see what would my answer be and how would I live like by myself without her.

**Warnings.**

Several parents described warnings they gave their children about their own experiences, the economy and the need for financial independence, in order to promote college attendance.

Marisol offered this warning to her children:

I all the time I told (my children) they need to college because they need a future. Because one day I gonna pass away, no more mammy. Because I am single mom and they need to prepare to do something for theirselves; that there isn’t all the time I not gonna pay their debts.

Donna described how she used her current struggle to warn her son to finish his education, because she had not. She drew associations between being educated, accomplished and being secure, she said:

Look at the way I’m struggling and I’m almost 40 and I am still struggling to keep my house. And I am living paycheck to pay check to paycheck to just make ends meet and to get you the little things that you might need. You know what I mean? Don’t be like me!
When you leave here- be somebody. Be somebody, be important, be able to have money in your wallet 24/7. Free of worry.

Parents’ verbal interaction with their children provided encouragement, support, and cautionary warnings that were meant to improve their children’s college readiness behaviors. Though viewed as helpful it was only one form of involvement that parents had in the college enrollment process.

**Action.**

Participants reported a wide spectrum of actions undertaken in support of college attendance. They discussed sacrifices they made, cultural trips taken, attention given to academic performance, and active involvement in the college enrollment process. Remarkably, two parents identified their immigration to America as a way that they supported their child’s road to higher education. When asked about her role, Ana who has two children, described her family’s focus on college attendance and told of early trips to visit colleges. She stated:

> So my kids are growing up in a household that college is their number one topic of conversation. Also we do, in summertime we go Boston, we just do trips to colleges. So they’ve been to Northeastern, they’ve been to Brown.

Donna associated her role in promoting college with encouragement and actions taken to support her son’s strong academic performance, she said:

> But he has something I didn’t have, I encourage him. But sometimes I think that I may say things that make him feel discouraged at times. We’re having a problem with Physical Science right now and I have contacted the coach, I’ve contacted the teacher, I contacted the guidance counselor, I contacted the dean of juniors or whatever that person
is. I put all my cards on the table and now I’ve left it up to my son. It’s ok. I got him a private tutor through Upward Bound.

As would be expected, parents of high school students who are closer to attending college discussed actions associated with information gathering, the enrollment process, seeking scholarships, and applying for financial aid. When asked about getting helpful information, Linda discussed attendance at a college fair, she said:

We went to the one at UMass, but every, you know, college in the state was there. Bridgewater, Salem MA, every college was there so you just grabbed, you know, the brochures that you needed and then you asked them questions. They were there to help you. That’s what we did.

Another described her quest for information during a focus group session, she stated:

What I did was I went online too and I just looked for FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) and how to fill it out. And a couple of my friends had already done it, so they told me what to do. And then I’m like okay how do they apply for scholarships? And then you just look them up or you get ‘em, like my husband got one from his job, I got one from the bank. Well he actually got me a group of them and he brought some home from school. So the schools would provide that. So then I called the guidance counselor and I said, ‘Can you help me along with how do I, or what do I do?’

In April of her daughter’s senior year, Elise relayed the following morning exchange when describing her oversight of the college enrollment process, she said:

In my house? Oh I’m always ‘(Daughter) do you have this done? Do you have this done? Let me see. What’s the deadlines?’ We were just doing this, this morning. ‘Did
you fill out those scholarships?’ ‘I’m working on it. I have so much work.’ ‘I don’t care, go talk to (guidance counselor).’ That’s how it is. It’s like that every day now.

Donna discussed her enrollment associated actions and how they differed from her mother’s. She said:

I just paid for his SATs earlier in the month you know, to guarantee his spot on the test and stuff like that. And I speak very closely with his guidance counselor and I tell her you need to keep your foot in it cuz if not I keep my foot in it….I have (son)’s stuff in a plastic slipcover, every single thing in a plastic slipcover. I have his goals essay from his freshman year; a lot of stuff because my mom never did that stuff. Remember I had no help as far as college went.

During interviews some middle school parents who had participated in the workshop series, identified what they believed would be their role in supporting college access during their child’s high school years. Jane discussed staying informed and obtaining school support, she summarized most parents’ comments when she said:

You know it’s not easy but you have to keep pushing, encouraging you know, no matter what. So it’s a matter of just trying to keep them on track and hopefully I’ll just get informed more when (son) gets into high school and be aware of some things that are going to go on in the school to get him ready. And the Upward Bound program, I’m interested in doing that. You know just try to get him on the right track to get ready for college and see what happens. It’s gonna be a learning experience for me but I’m really excited. I’m really excited for them, I really am.

Immigration it is not commonly recognized as action in support of a college pathway, however it was a theme that was identified in this study’s data. Three of the five first-generation
immigrant parents told of their history of emigration to the United States and related it to their long term goal of creating a better future for their families and children through education. Marisol told of how she came to America for greater opportunity for her daughter:

I know when I came here; my brother told me here is better. Better school. Because before I came here I work in my country and I come here because I want a better future for (daughter) in school. Before I came here I went to (daughter’s) school and I speak with the teacher about that. I have this plan and the teacher told me that’s good for her. And the teacher told me mostly university is good for her. The teacher told me is good for her because she is very smart and Janisa is gonna be a professional.

Parents in this study described the varying ways that they perceived their role in support of their children’s college access pathways and they described what they did in fulfillment of their role perception. They outlined how they used positive encouragement as well as dire warnings to help mold their children’s college aspirations. Some of their comments were heartwarming and communicated a strong sense of belief in the value of their children and education as a way of having a better future. Other dire warnings conveyed a fear of economic insecurity and the desire for financial independence that they believed a college education could deliver. Attention to grades, educational trips and attendance at school events were actions parents cited as supporting college aspirations in the early years. Involvement in the college enrollment process was described by parents of high school students. Daily monitoring of the enrollment process, arranging and paying for entrance exams, and going on college visits, were among the actions that these parents undertook. Two parents described coming to the U.S. as action they took in search of educational opportunity and a better future.
A conceptual model.

An analysis of the transcribed interviews and focus group sessions revealed relationships among the factors that influence parents’ interaction in the college access process. Figure 6 depicts a conceptual model suggested by the data in this study. This model presents family-related influences as being nested within a context supported by a previously existing factor. Family background and culture is the backdrop and sets the stage for each parent’s education and life experiences; such experiences influence the college attendance dreams and aspirations they hold both for themselves and their children. These ideas shape how parents conceptualize their role in supporting their children’s college access process; and lastly, their role definition influences the type and form of involvement and encouragement each parent enacts to support a child’s college enrollment path.

College financing concerns.

One of the last questions posed during all focus group and interview sessions, asked about subjects’ concerns related to higher education pursuits. All participants identified financing a college education as one, if not the greatest concern they held. Other than concern related to finances, two parents mentioned being worried about grades, and three comments were related to finishing college, being away from home, and the safety of their child. The following
are a select few of the numerous transcript passages about these money-related fears. Many parents indicated concern and uncertainty about how to finance a college education or where to get guidance. Some discussed the economic challenges and limitations they already faced.

Donna had many financial concerns and explained her trepidation in her statement:

> Because it’s a terrible economy, it really is so hard- and I am not sure about Kyle, but I’ve worked since I was fourteen and the only thing I have to show for it is my home and even that I am on the brink of losing. So financially it is something that I think everybody needs to try to wrap their brain around. Because right now I don’t even have a brain for that right now. I tell my son ‘I don’t know… you want to go to a school that’s forty-thousand dollars for a year. I don’t know how I could supply that.’ Not that my heart isn’t into it and I desire it with all my soul, but my pockets are empty. I don’t have… I only have what I have now to supply you with your food and your clothing. I don’t know what I’m going to be able to do in the long run.

Rita, a Creole-speaking parent of a senior described her difficulties and financial concern.

During a focus group she said:

> Is hard for him. So I can’t afford because I’m a disabled mom. So’s a lot of problem with me. So I don’t know what’s gonna be him to go. So it—I don’t know how to say, it hard to apply …I don’t know to say….financial aid.

A poignant story of sacrifice was told by a Marisol. She is currently out of work after she sustained a significant injury when hit by a car walking home from her midnight manager shift at McDonalds. In this passage she discusses her insistence on returning to work:

> ‘Janisa need to go to college, she need to finish because she need a future for her and her daughter. She told me, ‘Mommy the only that I need is a laptop, is a thousand, or $800,’
and I say ‘Okay I buy it for you.’ Because I need to take my wages and I say ‘Okay I buy that for you. No problem because you need it to go to college. I sacrifice for you.’ I don’t have any problem. That the reason I go to Boston next month, and probably she toll me ‘Mammy don’t work no more,’ but I cannot stay home. I cannot stay home because I cannot help her. You know the college is not easy and is not cheap.

Rosalia also told how she is surprised that many people do not realize how important college is, and that many dismiss the possibility because of a lack of money. She shared:

The majority of people don’t believe they can go to college. I already have friends that have children that are older and they’re not even interested in college. The biggest thing for them is money. Yeah, it’s too much money, I’m not gonna go to college…. So they don’t even pursue it.

Jane shared her determination in this statement:

I think no matter what I’m sending my child to college both of them, so I think that I was determined, no matter what to be able to figure out financially how I’m gonna do it.

Interestingly she was also the only parent who confirmed she had already begun to save for college she said:

Well personally for me, I’ve always been a big saver money-wise. I spend my money wisely. I think for them right now. I do have savings accounts for them and when they get birthday money or whatever they get they know that half has to go in the bank to pay for college. This is to go toward college so they do that.

For this study’s subjects, who are predominantly minorities and/or of low-SES, financing a college education is of greatest concern. Most parents did not demonstrate an understanding of financial aid mechanisms that could allow their children to go; even though some of their
children were already seniors in high school planning to attend college. Unfortunately the perception of financial barriers was reported to result in students and families self-exclusion or removal from the college access pathway altogether.

The foregoing discussion of the analysis of parent and student interview transcripts described how in this urban context, families of some students traditionally underrepresented on college campuses value post-secondary education. Interview participants shared how multiple generations perceive and encourage young peoples’ college aspirations; it is the life experiences, the hardships, the dreams, and the sacrifices that parents and grandparents use to propel these children along the pathway to college. It seems that for these families, more than for wealthier families, a ‘child going to college’ is really ‘the whole family going to college’ as grandparents, siblings and family members often become invested in a child’s college aspirations.

Helpful College-Related Information

It is important that schools understand what attention, information and support these parents need. When this is done, schools can meet parents where they are, enhance what they bring, and offer what they need so that they may be stronger collaborators on the college access pathway. A strand of inquiry in this study sought to ascertain what family members viewed as helpful college-related information and practices. This understanding is seen as the foundation for recommendations to improve this urban school district’s response to families’ need for effective and timely “college knowledge.” A data analysis of the focus group, survey, and interview data, related to college access information resulted in the identification of four themes pertinent to this study’s investigation: a) family members benefit from college access information regardless of their college-going experience; b) schools are viewed as a primary source of early and valuable information for many families; c) practices like workshops can
provide helpful college and education-related information; d) pre-collegiate programs transmit information that promotes informed and involved families. The following section outlines data and offers insights concerning: school role in addressing all families need for a range of college-related information; the need for the early and explicit provision of college-related information; families’ workshop input and experience; pre-collegiate programs’ effective practices.

Descriptive and qualitative survey results, interview and focus group data, and researcher memos, are presented to substantiate the preceding claims.

**Informational need.**

High school parents who participated in either focus group or interview sessions made statements about the need for detailed “college knowledge.” Family members need college-related information regardless of their college-related experience. It was expected that family members without college going experience would find the workshop information helpful and they did. However, survey and interview data revealed that parents of students at the middle and high school level, with and without college experience, sought information in order to support their children’s college pathway.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completed some high school</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated from high school</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed some college</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated from college or technical school</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1: Parents’ education levels.** Survey outcomes confirmed the need for college access information regardless of parents’ educational background. According to survey data twenty-five percent (25%) of the participants graduated from college (see table 1); yet 100% of the exit surveys completed for the workshops rated the information delivered during three sessions as *Very helpful*; when given a field of *Very helpful, Somewhat helpful,* and *Not helpful.* Parents who had been to college wanted information about current processes and resources. A
researcher’s memo from the first workshop documented a conversation with the workshop facilitators and a parent, it was noted “these parents have had college experiences but don’t feel confident in guiding their own children appropriately.” The workshop facilitators were educators within the school department and had both sent several children to college, they discussed that they had “learned something new” from either the presentation or from discussions during the workshop session.

**School role.**

It was clear that parents rely on schools or programs within schools as a primary source of valuable college access information. This was found through analysis of some statements, but mostly by the scant data in which interview participants identified alternatives. A researcher’s memo on the first focus group remarked that participants appeared to have “a heavy reliance on the high school for help” with the college enrollment process. Other than an occasional mention of the internet and a few ‘family members and friends,’ parents did not identify other reliable sources of post-secondary information. Ana’s statement is representative of many parents’ view of the role of the school. During an interview she stated:

The funniest thing is that everybody is relying on the school system to give all that info. Which probably I would be the same; the school should be the one to give that information. If they want my kid to go to college they need to provide that info to me.
Another said, “But I think that the schools need to throw the information to parents, cuz a lot of them don’t know what’s out there.” Significantly Ana also connected a lack of information to parents to the dropout problem and implied that schools do not care about involving parents in this important process:

Yes, here’s your child, he has the potential to go to college. I think that’s one of the problems with dropout, the school is not caring at all to give that information to parents.

This study’s outcomes supported the need for “college knowledge” information by families regardless of their post-secondary experiences and their reliance on schools for this vital resource. The next sections discuss the forms of information study participants believe would allow them to work with schools in building their children’s college pathway. Parents identified the need for information as early as middle school, information that covers a range of college-related topics, as well as a clear step-by-step map of the college readiness and enrollment process.

**Early information.**

The focus group discussions surrounding the structuring of the workshop series gave strong approval to giving parents information about college beginning in middle school. In comparison to their experiences, these parents approved of this “early” engagement. Researcher’s memo from both focus group sessions identified parents’ desire for more information, “all wished they knew more, earlier.” As they reflected on their child’s high school years and college pathway, these high school parents confirmed the need for early and accurate information. Comments seemed to convey a sense of regret about not having been aware and prepared earlier. Donna, a mother of a junior observed:
I think that the parents aren’t aware of how fast things happen; like myself included I would say. I just don’t think they have any clue what’s going on!

Focus group members were asked what advice they would give to other parents about helping a child access college, as those who have had experiences navigating a college pathway with their children have the most pertinent insight into what is helpful and what is not. One exchange concerning early information went as follows:

Linda: It comes so fast. I think that’s what it is…you think you have more time.

Elise: You think you have time and then it’s here!

Interviewer: Based on your experience what advice would you give to other parents?

Linda: Start earlier!

Valerie: You don’t have that much time.

Workshop participants’ positive response to the series also provides convincing testimony of the need for early information; in exit surveys, 88.2% of attendees described themselves as Very Satisfied with the session they attended.

Pathway map.

Interview transcript analysis revealed that both middle and high school parents expressed the need for, or absence of important information, as they attempt to support their child’s post-secondary planning. It was clear that parents sought a clear map of the steps needed to access college. They expressed fears about not being able to provide good guidance to their children because they were not fully informed. Elizabeth, a middle school mother without college experience stated:
I don’t know if I have any worries about it just… the whole overwhelming of it all. I just want to know where to start. What’s the first step to get to the second step to get to… that whole thing!

Throughout her interview Jane asserted her determination that her sons would go to college, however her greatest concern came from the fact that she recognized that as students get older they become the main target of guidance and information from schools. She hoped that the school would continue to keep her informed so that she could guide her sons. Jane said:

Well I think that I’m the type of person that I’m determined so no matter what it takes. I’m determined to get him where he needs to be; by I think, just being informed and learning more about this. I think that once he gets into high school I’m hoping that we can, I can continue getting more information and reminders of when he needs to get things completed and when he need to get completed. I think my biggest fear is not doing something that he’s gonna need or that he needs for college; or when do we start looking at colleges? I know that people say you start looking very early on but I think that would be my biggest fear of missing something; or if I’m not informed by (son) how will I know to remind him what he needs to do?

Helpful topics.

Data analysis suggested that a workshop series, such as that delivered during this study, can provide helpful college and education-related information to families. In order to shape the initial workshop series and improve it for subsequent presentations, it was important to gain parents’ insights into what constituted valuable college-related information. Focus group input assisted in shaping the workshop series and workshop participants evaluated the sessions.
A draft of various workshop topics was assembled as a result of the literature review and presented during the focus groups for feedback. Focus group participants were asked to rate college-related topics for the workshop series according to importance given choices: Very Important, Important or Not Important (see Table 2). According to all the focus group participants, ‘understanding academic requirements for college’ and ‘financial aid’ were considered Very Important. While ‘knowledge of the college system’ was given a mix of Very Important and Important ratings; ‘understanding the enrollment process’ and ‘entrance exams’ was given ratings of lesser importance. Jane’s statement is a good summary of what most cited as impactful, she said:

I think no matter what, I’m sending my child to college, both of them, so I think that I was determined, no matter what to be able to figure out financially how I’m gonna do it. They’re gonna go so I think it was helpful because first of all I didn’t realize how many scholarships are out there so that was really important; and the scholarships they can apply to. You know there’s so many different things so I think that was great. You know and learning the differences between the private colleges and the state colleges, the difference in cost and you know it just depends. I thought it was informative as far as the finance. I don’t know- I have to say the last workshop I liked because of the speakers and we did talk about so many different things too. But finances, I mean I’m gonna find...
a way anyways but it was helpful and gave me a better understanding of how to start preparing and what to look for and I think the scholarships for me was big.

It is clear that parents rely on schools to deliver a range of information, however many discussed how they appreciated and learned from the information from the college representatives who assisted with the last session. These findings suggest that partnerships between secondary schools and institution of higher education are beneficial to families in this context.

*High school decision.*

Unexpectedly, the middle school interviews resulted in participant views that supported the inclusion of an additional workshop topic designed to help inform families’ decision-making process about high school choice. Students in New Bedford can attend the comprehensive high school and they can apply to a charter school or the regional vocational technical high school in their eighth grade year. During one of the initial middle school interviews, a parent discussed the difficulty many families had helping guide their child’s high school choice. Lena suggested the creation of an addition workshop session that would offer families information on the various high schools, to help inform this decision-making process, she said:

Maybe the first session should focus more on what high school would be best for the student. You know what I mean? Because we kinda tossed that up, we went back and forth with that. I’m glad he made the decision that he wanted to go to New Bedford High School but he was really thinking about Voke. Vocational Regional School.

All four of the subsequent middle school parents concurred with this parent’s suggestion to add to the workshop series.
Workshop series.

The analysis suggested that practices like workshops can provide helpful college and education-related information. The workshop series was given approval by parents of students in both middle and high school; transcript and survey data supported the value of the information conveyed. Evidence of support for subsequent workshop presentations was derived from an exit surveys. One item asked workshop participant to indicate their desire to attend more workshops in the future and eighty-eight percent (88%) of respondents indicated they Would attend. Table 3 presents additional qualitative data from the surveys that illustrate the important impact the workshops had on some participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent comments related to impact of workshops</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>That I’m not alone in feeling unknowledgeable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That I still have time and glad that this workshop has come about to relieve some of the stresses of all the decisions to be made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It made it better!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That there’s always (sic) a way no matter the circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always wanted them to go to college this just reinforces it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire me to help my son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Bedford seems to have interest in children going to school past high school and want to aid in that process</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Workshop survey data.

Middle school participants reported that they appreciated the information and effort that went into the workshops and keeping them informed. When discussing the workshop series, Lena an immigrant middle school parent offered this statement of appreciation:

Thank you for you and your crew coming down in the good and bad weather. Cuz I know that you took time out of your families too to come down and teach us what to do. You know get ready for your kids. To me that was very nice because I’m sitting there
and I think about these things…it meant something to me too, it marked my life that there’s people like you guys thinking about giving us parents ideas about what to do. It’s just sad it breaks my heart that there wasn’t enough parents there.

High school parents helped guide the development of the middle school workshop series. The college knowledge topics that were discussed were chosen based on the literature review of best practices. The fact that they rated all topics offered by the researcher with some level of importance and discarded none, coincides with the literature and further demonstrated these families’ thirst for all manner of helpful and pertinent “college knowledge.” Several participants also reported that pre-collegiate programs like Upward Bound and Gear Up at New Bedford High School provided parents with a consistent source of information and guidance for families seeking to send its first generation to college.

**Pre-collegiate programs.**

The data analysis of transcripts demonstrated significant evidence that pre-collegiate programs transmit information that promotes informed and involved families. Parents of students involved in a pre-collegiate program presented as more informed and involved in their child’s college access process throughout this study; both parents and students cited the importance of pre-collegiate programs in supporting a college pathway and highlighted its various program components. A researcher’s memo from the first focus group session noted that most parents appeared to be observers in their child’s college enrollment process, relying on the school to guide their child, “except for the Upward Bound mother. She was more confident in details of the access path. She was a source of help for others.” This parent shared information she learned from the program during the focus group also. The next section offers sample parent
and student impressions of the value of these programs. During the focus group session when asked about how they received important information, Elise the mother of a senior explains:

I got Upward Bound. Well, it’s a program at UMass, actually it’s like an academic tutoring kind of program. If it wasn’t for them, I probably would be lost.

When asked about informational support for parents, she responded:

Right up front they give you the timelines, the deadlines. They tell you everything.

There’s meetings, it’s on paper, its online… you know the website. They are constantly giving you information. They have a parent group as well. I didn’t join but I still know everything, I am constantly looking. They give so much information.

During the second focus group two other parents who are also involved in a pre-collegiate program with their child concurred with her and cited specific aspects of the program that they thought benefited their families. During interviews all five students, credited a pre-collegiate program with assisting their college access. Two students also mentioned Gear Up as helpful. Janisa credited that program with giving information that instigated her mother’s encouragement, she stated:

It wasn’t really my family, it started like by Gear Up. Cuz they started a center near my house, it was somehow connected to Seven Hills and she was like always like just send paperwork out to my mom like about college readiness stuff. And then after that, then my mom started like- you know where you’re going? If you need any money we’ll figure it out but it was like- after she got informed about it, then she started pushing me.

It is clear that parents and students benefited from these pre-collegiate programs available at the high school. During interviews parent and students who were enrolled in a program presented as more informed and confident of the college access pathway. Although these
families may have already had a college attendance predisposition they indicated that the information that these programs transmitted was of great importance to them. Though their words were sufficient evidence, it was the emphatic way they delivered these statements that was most convincing. This finding suggests that pre-collegiate programs should serve as good models or offer insight into effective communication of college-related information for the school district.

Communication

As noted in the previous section, parents in this urban setting report that there is a need for effective and timely college readiness information to be conveyed. With respect to the communication of information, focus group and interview transcripts, as well as survey and artifact data analysis revealed that in this urban context: a) communication challenges exist between schools and families; b) communication and outreach strategy considerations can help promote parent participation; c) attention to language barriers will improve underrepresented family member involvement in college-access activities; d) and employing multiple communication methods is viewed as the most effective way to convey information. The next sections focus on participant and artifact data regarding gaps and challenges in communication, the relationship between communication and parent involvement, and families preferred communication methods and outreach strategies.

Communication challenges.

It was demonstrated in previous sections that parents in this study often desired but lacked timely and effective college access information. An analysis of the data confirmed that communication challenges exist between schools and families. The fact that high school parents were not aware of programs and cited examples of the lack of timely and current information
indicated that there are communication gaps between schools and families. These results implied that schools do not always utilize effective strategies to convey information. Family-based factors such as the unreliability of transmission methods and frequently changing contact information were also cited as interfering with communication. It was also noted that parents and students utilized informal networks to share important information when school sources did not provide the support that was needed.

High school parents who participated in either focus group or interview sessions made statements about the need for schools to communicate “college knowledge.” Comments were made that indicated there was a communication gap that manifested in an uneven transmission of information to families. During the focus groups when some parents spoke, others remarked that they were unaware of certain college-related requirements supports, or programs. Valerie, a high school parent with some college experience, blamed her poor health and a lack of information for her son’s exit from college, when she said:

But like myself, I had a stroke last year and I’m disabled now. And because I bartend and waitress, I can no longer work in that field. And because I am unable to work any longer I am unable to pay for (son) to go to school like my other two. So therefore (son) suffered, and to me if I had had more information about financial aid…

Although this mother has had three of her children enroll in college from NBHS, poor communication was further evidenced when she suggested a financial aid workshop be designed for parents like her. Three participant parents responded that this was offered to parents at the high school, she was bewildered as she replied: “They do? I never knew that……”
**School-based factors.**

An analysis related to school-based communication suggests weaknesses in how the schools notify parents of events. Challenges with the currency of information, the reliability and timeliness of notification, were viewed as problematic and disconcerting to participants.

**Reliability and timeliness of notification.**

When communication is not reliable or timely, parents are uninformed and feel marginalized. Lena was upset when she discussed how she missed the first workshop due to a miscommunication, she said:

Yes, because the first one somebody called and told me it was postponed. I was so upset with it. I don’t know what ever went wrong. Oh it already happened… I called the school and so when is the first day? She’s like it already happened. What? I did? I was upset because I was actually looking forward to it.

Although the artifact review demonstrated that flyers were created for most events, (Appendix D) a high school parent reported that she received phone calls but did not receive the flyers promoting events. Ana requested improved timeliness for notification, she said:

They had different meetings like for financial aid and things. It’s just that I think they should give –they might have given more notification ahead of time than they did. I don’t know if they had sent out flyers, I never seen it; but I got a call the day before and I couldn’t rearrange my schedule to specifically to that meeting.

**Currency of information.**

The school district’s website information is not current, specifically areas containing notices and calendars that could inform families of upcoming events have not been maintained. A review of information from New Bedford High School and Roosevelt Middle School websites
revealed much information posted is not current. The high school Guidance Department page contains helpful information and links but it has not been updated since 2008; college testing dates etc. are not current. Roosevelt’s web pages contain supportive information and links related to school initiatives; however the events and calendars contain dates for events in 2009 only. Comparing her experience with other helpful college-related organization’ websites Elise remarked:

You know the website, New Bedford’s website, I always check on there. Of course I am gonna check on there and they have not updated the high school website since 2008. It has dates for SATs 2008-2009. That’s sad.

**Family-based factors.**

Findings suggest that effective communication was negatively affected by the unreliability of the student-dependent paper-based communication method traditionally utilized by schools. In addition, the transient nature of many of families in this urban community make phone and mail communications ineffective in reaching all families. Roosevelt School office personnel confirmed challenges keeping accurate phone numbers and addresses for its families. The district’s student information system data indicated that over to 28% of Roosevelt Middle School students transferred in or out of the school during the 2010-20011 school year. Two parents discussed this phenomenon in relation to their work, in the following exchange:

Donna: But I work in the housing authority and I find they change their phone numbers like they change their underpants.

Ana: I work for a medical doctor and we have the same problem

Donna: Yeah, you can never get in touch with anybody.
Although one of the favored forms of communication; many participants remarked on difficulties with student-dependent information delivery. When asked about suggestions to improve contact a parent acknowledged, “Other than that sending notes home, I don’t know. They never get there, sometimes they don’t get there.” Lori confirmed this dilemma when she stated:

They could have like meetings like twice or three times a month. Cuz there’s always kids that don’t bring home papers or they just sit in the bag.

*Informal networks.*

Informal information communication networks, social networks, are useful tools in relaying messages. An analysis of interview and focus group transcripts revealed some references to informal networks or channels that parents and students used to share important education related information. Although schools were viewed as the primary source of information, some parents discussed the importance of work and social contacts with whom they either gave or received guidance. Students cited exchanges with like-minded friends and acquaintances as being helpful. Linda said:

What I did was I went online too and I just looked for FAFSA and how to fill it out. And a couple of my friends had already done it, so they told me what to do.

Donna spoke of support for her son, she stated:

…she’s my helper in the summertime and she works with me at the housing authority. And she has literally taken my son by the hand and has brought him to different places and has shown him stuff on the internet and said to him “Look at how important this is. I am going to speak for you for a scholarship because I think you’re worth it.”

Matthias, who was not in a college readiness program, discussed the importance of having peer support:
Like it’s not easy but it’s like entertaining because you are around people that are also like going to college so you get like everything done with them too. So it doesn’t make it all dragging and stuff. And we just like got together and tried to get the college stuff done together so…

The analysis of communication-related data made clear that New Bedford Public Schools is not consistent in providing current and timely information to families. It implied that because of the complicated nature of large schools and urban populations, that reliance on a single communication channel will not succeed in reaching all families. Although readily understood, these communication breakdowns must be addressed if strong collaborations between schools and families are to be forged in support of students’ college access. Evidence suggests that informal social networks are secondary, but important conduits of information that may support school efforts to inform families.

Communication and parent participation.

Study participants suggested that communication and outreach strategy considerations can help promote parent participation. Given the limited family member attendance at the workshop sessions and widely reported in other school-based activities, interview participants were asked if they understood why this occurred. Parents did not have definitive answers to these questions, but several had suggestions about causes, as well as practices to promote involvement. It was most frequently suggested that communication, the use of different forms of media, as well as engaging and encouraging messaging, would bring more parents to school events. Many parents charged that language barriers discouraged underrepresented family member’s involvement in college-access activities. A few parents related poor participation to causes associated with parents’ lack of awareness of the topic’s importance, lack of effective
relationships with schools, and lack of comfort or feelings of intimidation on the part of parents. A high school parent stated, “Honestly and truly, I hate to say this again. I think that parents are so lackadaisical about this stuff; that they don’t truly pay attention to how important that it is.” Two parents mentioned parents’ lack of familiarity with the topic or poor self-confidence as possible contributors. Donna said:

And I am not saying that they don’t think that education is important but I think that a lot of people feel…I hate to use the word stupid…but they don’t feel like they are intelligent enough to grasp that concept. It is overwhelming, so they get confused, they don’t want to feel dumb in front of their kids or they don’t want to feel like—it’s almost like they don’t have any right answers.

Participants indicated in numerous ways that parents will be less involved if they do not believe the school values their children or if they do not feel welcomed in schools. Ana spoke of the lengths she would go to in support of a school that demonstrated interest in her child. She made the following case for effective communication between parents and school:

I know it’s very hard, the school is very big, we cannot assist everybody. But if I feel, if parents feel, one more time, that the school are showing interest with my child I will be the parent that will be there if you need me to clean the floor I’ll be cleaning the floor for you because I’m feeling that you are giving back something to my son- show interest. It has to be the school. But one of the reasons I think the parents didn’t respond to the workshop, it could have been because they didn’t have no relationship with the school.

Language barriers and parent participation.

Study participants believed that attention to removing language barriers will improve underrepresented family member involvement in college-access activities. Language barriers
were cited by eight of eleven parents as interfering with effective communication with diverse populations and contributing to poor parent participation. This was further evidenced by the fact that two parents needed language translation to fully participate in this study’s focus groups and interviews.

Spanish-language dominant parents indicated that they are able to speak English, but the pace of typical school presentations does not allow them to fully understand. Unable to follow without translation they explained how they felt unwelcomed and uncomfortable in their children’s schools. Marisol, a Spanish-speaking parent spoke of this impact of language barriers in this statement:

Because right now when you go any place, right now they have the people speak Spanish and the people translated. I think you have more translated when you have a meeting like this and parents go there. Because sometime I feel bad because you go there and she speak English and you don’t speak English. That the reason I think.

Rosalia, the parent who came from Guatemala with a first grade education, also told of discomfort she overcame when going to school events:

It would be nice to have something just for Hispanic speaking. A lot of the time, most of these meetings there’s a lot of English speaking people I feel very “odd”… a little uncomfortable. But if you are interested in the meeting for your children you go whether you feel that way or not.

Later during the interview she explained why some parents do not go to school activities, she believed that the schools are not interested in their families because they are minorities, she said:

You know I hate to say this but a lot of the time when we go to open houses, people like myself; the teachers don’t even turn around to acknowledge our
existence. Could it be because we’re different? Because maybe I’m distinct from
other people so they’re not interested in us?

Ana explained the benefit of overcoming this barrier, she said:

That’s very important, that’s why I keep saying my perspective, I’m a for- I’m not a
foreigner, I am legally but a lot of time I find, I work in a doctor’s office and I speak
Portuguese and Creole; so when people come in they don’t speak no English at all and
they know that I speak their language— they change! Now I’m learning Spanish, so when
the Spanish-speaking come I just speak a little bit of Spanish. Everything changes! So
right there once you break that barrier, right now everything will go smooth. Cuz I do
believe that the parents do want the kids to go to college but they’re on the limbo… I
don’t know, I don’t speak the language. Whose gonna help me?

The preceding evidence supports the idea that when schools are not responsive to the
diverse cultures of their students and don’t provide translation, these families feel devalued; the
resulting lack of parent participation marginalizes them from an important part of their child’s
life and future. However, when schools acknowledge and respond to parents’ desire for
information and address existing language barriers important forms of parent involvement can be
activated.

**Communication methods.**

Employing multiple communication methods was viewed as the most effective way to
convey information. According to participants there are communication strategies that could be
employed to encourage parent involvement and improve their access to information. The
secondary schools in New Bedford employ numerous methods to convey information and notice
of events to families, these included web-site pages, an “All-call” automated telephone call
system, and flyers. According to some participants, Spanish and Portuguese radio are culturally responsive forms of media that the schools do not make full use of. The following section outlines parents preferred communication method and their suggestions to improve practices.

The data analysis of survey, focus group and interview data did not identify one method of preferred communication; but rather along with the results that illustrated the communication gaps, indicated the need to utilize multiple methods to assure information reaches as many families as possible. Automated phone calls and sending home paper-based information home via students were the two methods most preferred by parents.

![Bar chart showing parents' preferred communication channels]

Table 4: Parents’ preferred communication channels.

The workshop exit survey asked participants to rank communication methods according to preference, choices included were: Phone calls, Email, Sending information home with student, through community organizations or churches, or Personal contact from school staff. Table 4 illustrates the data outcome for parent ratings of Preferred or Most Preferred categories. Parents rated the newly instituted phone call system as ‘most preferred’ more frequently than any other choice. Although parents and students recognized challenges associated with the traditional student-reliant method of delivering notices and flyers, survey participants gave the highest combined ratings of ‘preferred and most preferred’ to this practice.
Automated phone calls.

Interview data analysis found evidence of parents’ preference of the automated phone calls. Peter, a parent with children at the elementary, middle, and high school level said, “But that ‘All Call’ system is a nice system. If they get a phone call and they don’t go… I mean, you know …shame on them! You can’t say that you didn’t know.” Two parents suggested that more detail be added to the message. Ana stated:

The flyers tend to get lost. My son’s backpack…he loves to draw so there’s a lot inside that. I rather have the phone call and email whatever. I like that better. I definitely like that phone call.

Notices.

Notices and flyers were discussed by parents, when coupled with other strategies they were perceived as most effective. One student suggested the use of notices in response to a question about improving parent involvement in the college enrollment process, he said, “They could send out more notices about it. You know kind of be aware, tell us to be aware of what they’re doing to help their kids for college and help them with everything.” Lena, another middle school mother said:

I heard the workshop through my son’s school. They sent paperwork and also we received a phone call remind us that my child was gonna bring a package that in case that we were interested, just to sign it. Send it back to the school.

Media.

Forms of media not consistently used by the schools were not included in the survey but some were discussed by parents. They suggested utilizing the local paper, getting cable television access and using social media. Several parents identified local radio stations as helpful, one parent also described its benefits for her culture. She stated:
What about advertising on FUN 107. Cuz they’re always on the radio. Maybe you could get them to say, or you can go and say I know I realize its young, you got four years ahead of you, just remember four years does go by fast. But people need to know what’s going on out there for colleges. Advertising on the radio, people listen to the radio.

Even put it on the Portuguese, announce it on the Portuguese station. You know people, all lot of the community are listening to that. You know they don’t realize that but if someone says okay you know there’s a program – I was gonna say ‘Portuguese programma.’ ….There’s a program for the Portuguese community, for kids, you can have benefits. I know your kids are young but you know start thinking about colleges, being prepared, what to know. Things like that.

A researcher’s memo notes a conversation with a Colombian woman during which she described how Latino populations in the U.S. utilize radio as a conduit of information. The memo said “Latinos often rely on culture-based radio outlets to receive and disperse important information among its population. This practice is employed by many organizations, to include the Colombian Consulate.”

Social Media.

Social media and web-based communication channels were identified by a few parent participants as possibilities to explore in order to improve parent participation and access to information. Interestingly not one participant indicated they used these forums. Web-based messaging would also have limitations in this urban school district, since only fifty-nine percent (59 %) of middle school workshop survey respondents indicated that they had internet access in their home and only four of seven high school parents discussed using computer based strategies to assist in the college search and enrollment processes. One parent said. “Coming back to
access to information to go to college….they can use media, Standard Times, FUN 107, everyone have access to Facebook right now.”

It has been clearly demonstrated that communication with a diverse population of students and families is challenging for this urban school district; both family and school-based factors can complicate information exchange efforts. A review of existing communication practices in New Bedford and an investigation into the communication needs of families indicates that an updating of information as well as procedures and strategies is warranted. This study’s findings suggest that important information is best communicated through multiple channels, and improved communication practices will support parent collaborators in the college access process and result in improving these students appearance on college campuses.

**College Access Information Context**

This study’s investigation has revealed families rely on schools for information to support their children’s quest for a college education; they expressed the need for: 1) early information so they can be prepared; 2) a map of the college pathway so they understand the order of actions they must undertake; 3) access to a broad range of information on college-related topics so that they may be valuable and effective guides for their children; 4) counseling throughout middle school and high school so that they may help their children make important educational decisions about high

![Figure 8: Families' identified informational needs.](image)
school and college; 5) access to information in a language and context that allows them to feel valued and comfortable; and 6) comprehensive information on financing their children’s college education.

An analysis of data from multiple sources was used to identify what college-related information is typically available to students and parents at New Bedford High School and Roosevelt Middle School and how well it addresses parents’ informational needs. This was important to not only establish an understanding of the context for this study’s intervention but to inform plans to improve future outreach. Artifacts, web-based sources, meeting notes, and emails were employed to identify and confirm the existence of various activities, events, programs, and services related to college access at New Bedford High School and Roosevelt Middle School. A spreadsheet was developed (Appendix G) that outlined each identifying the source of the information as well as the target participants. A review of this document was conducted by the lead guidance counselor at New Bedford High School and the principal of Roosevelt Middle School to ensure accuracy. Further examination was completed to identify among the college access supports available at each school which informational supports existed specifically for parents and family members. The spreadsheet, accompanying artifacts and researcher memos were analyzed to evaluate how effectively the informational needs identified by the parents in this study are addressed by offerings at New Bedford High School and Roosevelt Middle School.

The review found within these schools thirty-three programs, services, courses and events are in place to support students’ college enrollment. New Bedford High School provides students a range of information and supports for career and college readiness and Roosevelt Middle School provides a college and/or career influencing activity at each grade level. Most
significantly however, the analysis found that parent/family focused activities at both schools do not fully address the informational needs identified by study participants. Table 5 gives an overview of these findings, indicates the level to which each ‘college knowledge’ need is addressed and which of the two schools (RMS- Roosevelt Middle School; NBHS New Bedford High School) does so. What follows is a summary of each schools’ efforts.

**Roosevelt Middle School.**

According to a researcher’s memo, the principal of Roosevelt Middle School frequently confirms the school’s commitment to respond to parent requests for “support in building college pathways for children.” Though not a common focus in middle schools, this school has instituted career college-related engagement activities for all students, sixth through eighth grades. In grade six (6) all students take a career readiness course. Students to take an interest inventory utilizing the *Bridges* computer software program. This is designed to help students build meaningful plans related to occupation and post-secondary schools and programs. Grade seven (7) students take part in a career networking day where local professionals attend a breakfast with the students and discuss with them how to they began preparing for their current positions. During the Ladies Tea for the girls or Gentlemen’s Roundtable for the boys, the students interview the community participants in order to begin to understand ways to prepare

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Table 5: Parent informational needs addressed by schools.
for college or a profession. Students in grade eight (8) take part in a “getting ready for college day.” During this event local college officials and professionals discuss their experiences with college readiness and enrollment, as well as college life and career path experiences. Parents are invited to join students during this event. These students also take a tour of a local college campus.

The evaluation of identified parent needs and existing practices revealed that Roosevelt holds two events the *Pathways to Success Dinner* and the *Families Building a College Pathway in Middle School* workshop series and has developed practices that have begun to address some of the informational needs of its families. The events addresses middle school parents’ need for early information and a range of college readiness information, however the need for college financing information and a clear map of the steps along the college pathway is considered only partially addressed. The school does not have programming to help parents making a high school choice for their children. However, results indicated that Roosevelt Middle School is able to address the language barriers experienced by its families through its AMIGOS center. These events and practices are more fully described in the following sections.

The *Pathways to Success Dinner* is presented according to the principal, as a college awareness night, during which “families may learn about various school and community services and programs that are available to assist their student in having educational success.” This annual event is for families with students who may be considered at-risk of school failure as the result of being English language learners or struggling learners. During this well attended event, twenty separate organizations set up tables, distribute materials and talk to families. Information about pre-collegiate programming like Upward Bound and Gear Up, after school academic and extracurricular activities, as well as community support available during times of difficulty is
offered. This event provides a range of supportive information to parents and an introduction to college access resources. Though helpful this does not fully meet parents’ need for early information on a range of post-secondary topics.

It is important to note that Roosevelt Middle School has become responsive to the diverse community of families it services. Its AMIGOS center provides bilingual volunteers to serve as interpreters and mentors within the school. According to the Immigrant’s Assistance Center’s director, its purpose is “to facilitate the communication challenges between the schools and the non-English speaking students/parents, the Immigrants' Assistance Center, Inc. partnered with Roosevelt Middle School to develop A Multicultural International Guidance Outreach Service (AMIGOS) that is housed in the school (Marques, 2010).” As a result of this important collaboration, translation support is offered in three languages, Spanish, Portuguese, and Creole to families during the school day and at most of the schools’ events.

New Bedford High School.

A review of the spreadsheet revealed numerous and varied college readiness and access supports for students at the high school. Through programming, partnerships, course offerings and events, students have access to many forms of academic enrichment, career readiness, and college enrollment support that has been found to be vital by college access researchers. NBHS has a Guidance Department of thirteen counselors whose mission statement is: “to help improve self-understanding which will enable the student to make decisions that will promote intelligent planning involving educational, vocational, and personal problems.” It has dual enrollment programs with UMass Dartmouth, and Bristol Community College, the local community college. The high school also hosts three federal TRIO college access programs, Upward Bound, Gear Up and Talent Search, servicing low-income and first general college bound students. Courses for
career exploration and college entrance testing preparation are offered. In addition an Occupational/Educational Career Media Center is available to all students. High school events include two annual college fairs and several celebratory or recognition events like National Decision Day. Multiple college advising structures such as Americorp College Advising, North Star Learning tutoring, and mentoring through ‘My Turn’ are available to students. Seniors receive materials and resources such as a senior advising packet and senior monthly bulletins.

There are several noteworthy community partnerships and proposed initiatives. Webster Bank, Babson College and CS² (Communities and Schools for Success) provide programming in support of entrepreneurship and career development. In addition there are two proposed initiatives for the upcoming school year; one, a former pilot program, will utilize Yourplanforcollege.org a state supported web portal, to engage all high school students in career and college exploration at least twice annually. The second initiative will pilot the Choices career exploration and planning curriculum within a cohort of students in Freshman Academy Seminar classes.

The data analysis revealed that resources for parents at New Bedford High School provides important information but does adequately address all their informational needs. The high school successfully addresses parents’ need for early information, college finance counseling and provides a range of pertinent college access topics. Pathway mapping and decision-making support are partially addressed. However there was no evidence of programming or services that could be described as a way of addressing language or cultural barriers.

Activities designed for families at the high school include a college readiness workshop for freshman and sophomore families intended to assist in college and career planning and course
scheduling. These seminars offer early information and help with educational decision-making for parents in these grades. Although not usually well attended these events provide ‘early information’ and cover a broad range of post-secondary topics. Pathway mapping is available for those who participate in the Gear Up, Talent Search, or Upward Bound programs located at the high school. Since all parents do not have access to this resource this need is considered only partially addressed.

Parents are invited and encouraged to attend the two annual college fairs. Guidance counselors and college-readiness programs’ staff provide support to many parents, however a systematic way of helping all parents with educational decisions during the entire four years was not evident. There are two events that address the need for college financing information, a financial aid workshop, which informs parents of the process and support available for college financing, and a MEFA college admissions and financing seminar structured to assist with financial planning. In addition there is an evening event held for families of undocumented and international students that provides legal and enrollment resources.

New Bedford High School and Roosevelt Middle School provide a wide range of information and supports for career and college readiness for its students. Pertinent to this study’s intent, the analysis found that parent/family focused activities at both schools do not fully address the informational needs identified by study participants. Roosevelt Middle School has programming which provides early college-related information and a broad range of introductory topics. This school has a model partnership program that provides language support and cultural bridges between the school and its diverse families. Parents at this school do not have guidance in making high school choice, nor are they offered advice on how they can prepare to finance a college education. High school parents are offered opportunities to access a range of college-
related topics during freshman and sophomore year; and several events help parents investigate college financing. A clear college pathway map is not available to parents at the high school, decision-making support programming is not in place and comprehensive ways to address language barriers were not present.

Though gaps exist in providing the information families have indicated is important, these schools do provide many opportunities for parents to access support along the college access pathway during middle and high school years. This study’s findings suggest that by understanding families first, who they are, and what they value; schools can build effective communication and informational pathways that meet families where they are. Once this occurs parents feel valued and more able to collaborate with schools in delivering their children onto college campuses.

**Study Propositions**

A review of relevant literature as well as the researcher’s practice-based knowledge identified important propositions upon which this study rested. The following section discusses whether findings resulting from this study’s empirical investigation coincided with these propositions or not. As is so often sought in a qualitative study, most findings were neither proved nor disproved, but rather extended discussion surrounding the propositions’ and explained “how” participants experienced a phenomenon or “how” they viewed their experience.

The proposition that families of students typically underrepresented on college campuses have cultural capital/wealth that typical schools’ college access efforts do not acknowledge has been supported by this study’s findings. Interviews and focus group comments offered valuable evidence concerning the source and strength of families’ cultural wealth related to college attendance. Most participant families did not have the cultural capital available to families who
have had college-going experiences. They shared how the hardships and educational challenges faced by generations have shaped the determination that their children will attend college and how they encourage and support them. In most cases they had not shared these hopes, dreams and efforts with the school. It appears that their encouragement and actions, or what can rightly be termed as their “cultural wealth,” is not seen or understood by the schools their children attend.

The proposition that family member encouragement and involvement have a great impact on students’ aspirations and college enrollment behaviors appears to be supported by the study’s findings. Both student and parent participants discussed the important influence encouragement and involvement had in supporting a college access pathway. This was not only true for the students, but perhaps was more powerfully demonstrated by the parents’ experience. Grandparents’ previous discouragement or lack of support for the study’s parents education resulted in thwarted aspiration. These parents’ unfulfilled goals, their yearnings, have been transformed into the encouragement that propels their children along the college access pathway.

Findings support the proposition that family involvement in post-secondary planning is influenced by the amount of information they possess on the college enrollment processes was also given some support by the findings. Participants cited access to information as a way to improve their support to their children’s college aspirations. High school parents that had a strong source of information about college, such as that provided by Upward Bound, had a better understanding of the processes and reported more active involvement in the process. Most interestingly, parents suggested that improving communication could improve parent involvement.
This study's participants can be described as predominantly low-SES and diverse, whether or not they attended college they expressed a need for college-related information and guidance. This is congruent with the proposition that family members of students traditionally underrepresented on college campuses have limited access to college access information. The parents and students interviewed looked to the school or school-based programs for current and timely information. Middle school parents expressed an appreciation for the college readiness workshop series and the high school parents that helped shaped it, wished they had been given a similar opportunity when their children were younger. When the school did not provide sufficient support some families turned to social networks for guidance with mixed results. These participants' experiences in conjunction with the review of current practices at Roosevelt Middle School and New Bedford High School make is easy to conjecture that information and events that exist in most urban schools have not been effective in bridging the college access gap in for families without post-secondary experience.

Along with the evidence supporting the promotional effect of information on parent involvement and encouragement, the high school parents and students’ suggestions for improved and earlier information and middle school parents’ positive responses to the workshop series, supports the proposition that improving the communication of relevant college access information to families beginning in middle school will improve involvement and encouragement, and result in increased aspirations and college enrollment behavior of disadvantaged students in this urban school setting.

An analysis of this study’s parent and student interview and focus group transcripts was conducted to accumulate evidence in response to this study’s research questions. These results offered valuable insight into how these families have developed college-going dreams and plans
for their children. Important findings were presented in this chapter related to parents’ aspirations and what they believed were helpful college-related informational supports. An examination of this urban district’s existing communication practice and its college access information context revealed important strengths and weaknesses in meeting these families’ needs. The next chapter will attempt to answer this study’s research questions in light of these findings, through the theoretical framework and in relation to existing research. Most importantly the discussion will offer practice-based suggestions for this urban school district’s professional development and college access programming in collaboration with families.
Chapter 5

Discussion of Research Findings

This study offers insight into the very pressing need faced by urban schools in America to educate an increasingly diverse student population. The population of the United States is changing at an unprecedented rate. Projections by the U.S. Census Bureau foretell a cultural shift in schools since the nation's Hispanic and Asian populations are expected to triple in the next three decades (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). As public schools become more diverse, demands increase to find the most effective ways to help all students succeed educationally and build a strong future for themselves, their families and the nation. The findings of this study offer insight into important conceptual and programmatic shifts that urban school districts, like New Bedford, must consider in order to help students and families who have traditionally been underrepresented on college campuses gain equitable access.

The purpose of this study was to improve college access for these families by understanding and building on their existing cultural wealth. Among its goals, this study intended to utilize the insights gained from its interventions and investigations to shape effective communication and college access practices with all families in this urban school context. Accordingly, the following empirical research questions were posed: 1) What are the aspirations, views, and beliefs of New Bedford Public Schools’ families concerning college attendance? 2) What college-related information and practices are viewed as helpful and/or not helpful by family members? 3) What communication strategies do these families find most and least effective? 4) What information do schools in New Bedford convey to families about college access and how is it delivered?
With respect to existing research, this study responds to a gap in the literature with regard to “how” minority and low-SES families experience a college access pathway. In addition, it answers researchers’ calls for investigations into the combined topics of parent involvement, access to information and/or college readiness, which were involved in this investigation. This study attempted to “give voice” to diverse families’ perspectives, recognizing that although educational aspirations and expectations play an important role in all students’ predisposition development, there are some significant differences found for diverse students (Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, Edward, & Dunbar, 1995; Pitre, 2006). Interview and focus group sessions were conducted with family members along the college access continuum, from middle school through high school, to understand how to improve college access collaboration with parents of students typically underrepresented on college campuses.

Overall, the findings in this study demonstrated that the participants’ families, who were predominantly minority and lower-SES, valued education and believed access to post-secondary schooling would improve their children’s futures. It was found that the actions they undertook varied and were shaped by their background, experiences, and access to important and timely information from their children’s schools. What follows is a discussion of the findings in response to each research question, through the lens of the theoretical framework, and in relation to extant literature. The limitations of the study are discussed and implications for practice are outlined. Finally, conclusions and considerations for further research are offered.

Families’ Aspirations, Views and Beliefs

The proposition that families of students typically underrepresented on college campuses have cultural capital/wealth that typical schools’ college access efforts do not acknowledge (Tierney & Auerbach, 2005), compelled an investigation into the ways families in this urban
contextual value education that are not readily recognizable or appreciated by its schools. As a result, this study’s first research question asked, *What are the aspirations, views, and beliefs of New Bedford Public Schools’ families concerning college attendance?* Responses to interview questions found that in this urban context (a) family background and culture are important factors influencing a student’s educational pathway; (b) a steadfast determination that their children will attend college is often related to the parents’ life challenges and/or their own unfulfilled educational aspirations; (c) parents possess different ideas about their role in their child’s college access pathway and the actions they undertake toward that end vary; (d) financing a college education is the single greatest concern among these families. These findings provide valuable insight into forms of cultural wealth, the assets and support that these families activate to pave their children’s post-secondary pathway. They also have important implications for this urban school district’s practices surrounding college access and staff professional development.

**Family background.**

As the focus of this study concerned building parents’ capacity to support their children, it was important to begin to understand the origin and form of the educational values and aspirations that families held who were traveling the college access pathway. As discussed in the literature review, the import of family variables has been extensively documented and these variables have been found to be among the highest predictors of college enrollment and especially influential during the predisposition stage in effect during middle school (Hamrick & Stage, 1995; 2000; 2004; Gandara & Bial, 1999; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). This study’s results coincided with the literature, finding that in this urban setting factors related to family background and culture were important influences shaping a student’s educational pathway. Three factors were most frequently found to shape parent participants’ college aspirations and
dreams for their children: their culture, their families’ immigration pattern and the hardships the families had endured. For some participants there were indications that family culture or ethnicity had influenced the educational values they held; however, due to the small participant sample, the findings could not be held as conclusive for any particular group.

A focus on hard work and concern for the financial security of the family, were some of the factors that shaped these parents’ educational experiences; especially those whose parents were immigrants to this country. Though not described in the literature, this study offers evidence that the immigration status and pattern of families impacts educational aspirations. It was reported that most times the first generation to emigrate to the U.S. have experienced hardships and often focus on working and earning money to improve the living conditions of the family. Parent study participants who were the children of immigrants told of their parents’ focus on financial security and support for the family over education; some were required to leave school to go to work. These thwarted educational experiences formed the aspirations that these parents now held for themselves and their children.

Most interestingly, it was widely reported that the same immigrant generation, the parents of the parents in the study who had interrupted their children’s education, had transformed their beliefs. These immigrant grandparents presently value education and support their grandchildren’s college aspirations. Furthermore some of the grandparents now use the example
of their life experiences and hardships to encourage their grandchildren’s college enrollment. Initially appearing as a dramatic change, this shift in values may actually be explained as an extension of this generation’s earlier focus on their families’ economic security. Whatever the source, this interaction is a form of cultural wealth that can be capitalized on to support students’ college-going aspirations. Similarly, ‘cultural wealth’ was in evidence as family members, such as siblings, cousins, aunts and uncles shared their experiences to help guide a child on a college pathway, as the “whole family goes to college.”

Regardless of the origin, these extended families have important beliefs and values, which, according to research, will improve the likelihood that these children will attend a postsecondary institution. This study’s findings support the validity of its cultural wealth lens and suggest implications for schools practice. The evidence confirms this approach’s underlying assumption that these diverse families do value education and that they bring with them values that have important and positive effects on these children’s educational experiences--if they are validated by schools (Bergerson, 2010). This lens highlights the importance of a collaborative relationship between schools and parents, where the cultural wealth these families possess can be uncovered, understood and valued. Uncovering families’ educational values that are not readily apparent to schools is a first step in supporting parents’ efforts to improve their children’s future. Most importantly, this approach moves away from a deficits views and allows instead for systemic and institutional barriers to be identified and addressed.

**Parents’ life and educational experiences.**

This investigation uncovered strong evidence that for participants in this urban context, a steadfast determination that their children will attend college is often related to the parents’ life challenges and/or their own unfulfilled educational aspirations. This concides with extant
literature which asserts that regardless of ethnic background or SES, these parents do have college aspirations for their children even though they continue to be underrepresented on college campuses (Gandara & Bial, 1999; Solorzano, 1992). It also supports and extends the discussion concerning the three main predictors of college enrollment: parent education, parents’ aspirations, and parent encouragement (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005) by suggesting ‘how’ these factors may be linked to each other.

Participants’ reported that their strong conviction of the importance of a college education for their children was a product of three factors; the hardships they had endured in their life, their education experiences, and their past and current educational aspirations. This is consistent with Bourdieu’s principle of habitus, which is an individual’s perspective or “state of mind” that is not always conscious but rather the result of a long process of inculcation of tendencies that begin in childhood. Parents in this study felt the financial difficulties they experienced would have not existed had they had a better education when they were younger. They believed that their quality of life would be improved and their employment opportunities would have been greater with more schooling. Importantly, the fact that they believed that this would also be true for their children inspired their insistence that their children access postsecondary education. The emphatic manner in which so many of their parents expressed their determination that their children will have the education they were denied, compels acknowledgement.
Among the more noteworthy findings, was that the majority of these parents cited the fact that they were prevented from pursuing educational goals as the source of their insistence that their own children will go to college. These parents’ habitus was shaped by their thwarted educational aspirations and has influenced college-going dreams for themselves and their children. The fact that 70% of parents interviewed expressed a desire to attend college now, also suggests how highly they value education. In addition, these parents reported with relative confidence that schools are unaware of this desire. This finding calls attention to the literature that describes the negative impact that low parent educational level and limited financial resources has on students’ college predisposition (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001) suggesting that a more complex dynamic is in place and it merits further investigation.

This study’s cultural wealth lens acknowledged the existence of forms of cultural capital that schools do not recognize, such as parental valueing of education, awareness of parental sacrifices, hard work of these parents. Acknowledging and capitalizing on students’ and their families’ cultural capital/wealth can be accomplished by informing college readiness practices and school professional development activities in this urban school context. This study’s findings suggest that through collaboration with families that will rise from such efforts, students in New Bedford will achieve higher levels of success.

**Family encouragement and involvement.**

Another foundational principle of this study comes from the proposition that family members’ encouragement and involvement have some of the greatest impact on students’ aspirations and college enrollment behaviors, regardless of students’ economic or cultural background. Interviews revealed that participants possessed different ideas about their role and involvement in their child’s college access pathway and as a result the actions they undertook
toward that goal varied considerably. Similarly, the concept of parent involvement is not clearly
defined in empirical studies (Catsambis, 1998; Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2002). This study’s
findings add to the discussion, suggesting that parent involvement with their children’s college
access existed on a continuum from almost exclusively consisting of verbal encouragement, to
daily directive and active participation in the college readiness, search and enrollment processes.

Figure 5: Parent involvement forms.

The verbal forms of encouragement found in this study have not been considered to be the
mainstream forms of ‘parent involvement.’ Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that schools do not
usually recognize the “invisible strategies” diverse families use to encourage college attendance
such as verbal encouragement and financial sacrifice that participants discussed. In other words,
what might be viewed as a lack of parent support for college is actually a failure to understand
diverse families’ ways of encouragement and involvement, their important forms cultural wealth.

Parents in this study viewed themselves as important in supporting their children’s
education in general and college pathway specifically. They gave many examples of their efforts
that rose from this belief. Many researchers confirm this assertion, having found that parent
involvement positively impacts a child’s educational performance, school attendance, and access
to postsecondary education; and it is among the highest predictors of students’ college
enrollment (Catsambis, 1998; Patrikakou, 2004; Hamrick & Stage, 1995; 2000; 2004). Given
the impact of parent encouragement and involvement and the importance of postsecondary 
education in contemporary society, school efforts to improve college access are vital. Helping 
the school staff understand and acknowledge both the obvious and invisible forms of 
encouragement these families employ will strengthen collaboration and improve student 
educational opportunities.

A conceptual model.

This study’s findings identified a 
relationship among family-related factors 
that has suggested a conceptual model 
consistent with a critical lens as it 
illustrates how important college-going 
cultural capital and wealth rise from 
families. This nested model offers a 
structured way to discuss the 
development of educational aspirations 
for families with school-based staff to 
promote improved awarenesses and 
collaborative practices.

As described in the results section, this model rose from the data that found that family 
background was the backdrop or a “nest” for each parent participant’s education and life 
experiences. It explains how certain family-based factors provide a context and shape other 
influential factors. Family economic strain, as well as the influence and bias of their ethnic 
background deprived some participants of educational experiences, which in turn gave rise and
shaped the college attendance dreams and aspirations that parents held for themselves and ultimately their children. These ideas, along with access to information, shaped how they conceptualized their role in supporting their children’s college access. Moreover, their role definition influenced the type and important forms of involvement and encouragement each parent enacted to support their child’s college enrollment path.

**College financing concerns.**

This study found that financing a college education was the single greatest concern of its subjects, who were predominantly minorities and/or of low SES. Most parents did not demonstrate an understanding of financial aid mechanisms that could allow their children to attend college. Similarly, other research has found that families of students from underrepresented groups are consistently misinformed when it comes to information about college costs and financial aid, (Ikenberry & Hartle, 1998). Study participants indicated that they believed that, for some minority families, perceived financial barriers resulted in students’ and families’ self-exclusion from the college access pathway. This can be explained as part of these families’ *habitus*, which produces specific actions in particular context or *fields*, and the fit between the two accounts for individuals’ actions. Findings coincide with the correlation between parent awareness of tuition costs and increased encouragement found by Grodsky and Jones (2007). Since encouragement and involvement are important forms of cultural wealth that sustain their children’s college aspirations, the need for more effective means of informing lower SES parents about the financial aspects of a college education is vital.

Born of its theoretical framework, this study’s intent is to promote this urban school district’s use of a cultural wealth lens by highlighting the assets its families bring to educational forums that are typically unrecognized. This approach puts an end to school’s reproduction of
the social order, that rise from the perception that these families have low educational aspirations that are due to their own shortcomings. Researchers have discussed how this “deficits” approach absolves schools and their staff of responsibility for students’ failures, and discourages individuals from effecting change (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). In contrast, a cultural wealth perspective focuses on the assets students and families bring to educational settings and places the responsibility for supporting the educational dreams of families on their schools. Adopting such an approach will influence the quality of the interaction between schools and families in all educational matters, including student college readiness. It also assigns schools’ leadership the responsibility of addressing the informational gaps and communication barriers these families experience.

The preceding discussion of parents’ aspirations, views, and beliefs, the theoretical approach, and existing research offers valuable insight that can be utilized to shape practical responses to the problem of practice. Due to the complexity of the college access process students are more likely to become predisposed to college when parents, the school and community partners work together (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). It has been adequately demonstrated through this study that central to any effort to increase the appearance of New Bedford’s students on college campuses, is collaboration with families. This suggests that plans to build this important partnership should include assembling of additional data, identification of important stakeholders, and the design of specific activities to engage parents and influence staff. The Implications for Practice section of this discussion will include specific considerations for this urban school district’s parent college access engagement efforts that consider these insights.
Helpful College-Related Information

Central to this study’s goal to improve college access in this urban school setting was the intention to understand the promotional effect of accurate and timely information on parent involvement and encouragement and take advantage of the resulting positive influence on student college enrollment. Research has demonstrated that parents’ level of awareness or access to information about college impacts their expectations, as well as the role they undertake in support of their children’s college enrollment (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hossler & Stage, 1992; Kern, 2000). Two propositions compelled an investigation into understanding the informational needs of New Bedford’s urban families: the first was that family members of students traditionally underrepresented on college campuses have limited access to college-related information, and the second being that family involvement in post-secondary planning is influenced by the amount of information they possess on the college enrollment processes.

In order to inform an informational protocol designed for these parents, the second research question sought to uncover what college-related information and practices are viewed as helpful and not helpful by family members? An analysis of interview, focus group and survey data resulted in four pertinent findings: a) family members benefit from college access information regardless of their college-going experience; b) schools are viewed as a primary source of early and valuable information for many families; c) practices like workshops can provide helpful college and education-related information; d) pre-collegiate programs transmit information that promotes informed and involved families. These findings are discussed in the next sections in relation to the theoretical lens, extant literature and implication for practice.
**Informational need.**

While there are many factors that contribute to college enrollment disparities among low-SES and diverse students, researchers found deficits in “college knowledge” helps maintain a less than level playing field for diverse and low income families (Vargas, 2004). As also observed in this study, researchers have demonstrated that inequities in the college knowledge of underrepresented students are often the result of families’ lack of experience or familiarity with the educational system. A critical theory lens views families’ understanding of the schools’ systems as a form of “cultural capital” that enables them to guide their children toward educational advantages. (Grodsky & Jones, 2007). In the case of college enrollment, those families who possess the appropriate forms of “college knowledge,” have the cultural capital that enables them to navigate college access systems more easily and more successfully. Coinciding with this theory, parents in this study who did not have post-secondary education expressed their need for all forms of college-related information. These participants discussed their need to understand the college system in general, as well comprehend the specific processes required for college enrollment if they were to help their children.

Researchers have primarily focused on the informational needs of families without college experience. Challenging this practice, the parents in this study reported that they benefited from college-related information regardless of their college-going experience. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the workshop participants graduated from college, yet all of the exit surveys completed for the workshops rated the information as *Very Helpful*, the highest category available. Although the desire for information was expressed by all families, the reason, the focus, and depth of need varied. The fact that parents who had been to college sought information about current processes and resources, adds to existing literature that has
demonstrated that parental education determines the extent to which parents are knowledgeable about college choice (St. John & Noell, 1989; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Research has found that these parents are better able to access college guidance and navigate the process, but has disregarded their need for information or the schools’ role in providing it.

Families with very diverse educational experiences expressed the need for, and appreciation of information that would outline, or provide a map to the college choice and enrollment pathway they would travel with their child – as the entire family makes its way to college. These findings suggest that although efforts to improve the appearance of underrepresented students on college campuses is rightly focused on minority and lower-SES families, information about navigating the college choice and enrollment process, the transmission of this cultural capital, will benefit all of the families it reaches.

**School Role.**

As previously discussed, the concept of cultural capital is frequently used to explain the college attendance rate disparities among American students by suggesting that lower-SES students and students of color do not acquire those cultural competencies, skills, or abilities necessary to successfully navigate the educational system through familial and community relationships. Coinciding with findings in this investigation, research has shown when parents lack such information, they must rely on the school to inform their children as well as provide them with the resources necessary for college exploration, planning, and decision making (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). As confirmed in this study, typically, they are not provided these vital forms of capital through their schools. When this occurs, Bourdieu (1977) explained that schools contribute to the “reproduction of the existing social order,” by not providing all students with the capital that is valued by the system; and as a result the uneducated remain uneducated.
Aligned with critical theory and college access literature, this study found that parents relied on schools, or programs within schools, as a primary source of valuable college access information. In most cases participants failed to identify a single alternative source of guidance and information as they attempted to navigate the confusing and complicated path to college enrollment. Researchers found that beginning in middle school, knowledge about post-secondary education plays an important role in cultivating college aspirations and securing college access. Access to “college knowledge” may determine whether or not qualified students will actually go to college (Vargas, 2004). Wimberly and Noeth (2005) suggested the creation of college readiness plans in middle school to help families and students to connect courses and school experiences to their long-term academic and career goals.

Coinciding with the literature, this study found that parent participants turned to schools to fulfill their need for information as early as middle school, for information that covers a range of college-related topics, and for a clear step-by-step map of the college readiness and enrollment process. Creating plans for providing low-SES and diverse families with the support and information needed to navigate the college choice process will prevent New Bedford schools’ participation in a system of social reproduction.

**Early information, vital information, workshop format.**

Bourdieu (1977) considered cultural capital as crucial to education as money is to economic capital because the culture of the dominant groups is embodied in schools; therefore, it is their cultural capital that is valued and rewarded. This lens highlighted the vital importance of
transmitting knowledge about the academic requirements for college, the application process, as well as understandings about college-going in general, for families this urban school setting who are frequently low-SES and diverse (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008; McDonough P., 2004). The workshop series, around which this empirical investigation was circumscribed, had been designed for middle school families designed with high school parent focus group input and included topics described in the literature as important to families without college-going experience (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Conley, 2008; McDonough, 2004; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). When evaluating the literature review topics considered vital, the focus group participants indicated that understanding the academic requirements for college and financial aid were considered most important to them. Having knowledge of the college system was of next importance and understanding the enrollment process’ and entrance exams was considered of lesser significance for middle school parents.

The fact that 100% of the workshops’ exit surveys gave the session’s topics top ratings in importance indicted that the parents perceived that their need for information at this particular point had been met and confirmed extant literature. Although significant, this result should be interpreted with caution, as it could be attributed to the fact that these families “don’t know what they don’t know.” However these findings more than adequately demonstrated that these parents needed and appreciated the range of information transmitted by the workshops.

Many survey and interview participants remarked on the importance of including representatives from the local colleges and pre-collegiate program during the workshops, confirming partnerships between secondary schools, programs and institutions of higher education are beneficial in this context. The researcher of this study noted in a memo that for
most of the workshop participants it may have been “the first opportunity they had to engage
with college personnel” or individuals with such expertise.

**Pre-collegiate programs.**

In this study there was evidence that pre-collegiate programs had practices that promoted
informed and involved families. The high school students all mentioned either Gear Up (GU) or
Upward Bound (UB) as having helped them along the college access pathway. During
interviews some parents highlighted the important role the program played in providing services
and conveying information that helped them be involved with their child’s college readiness
process. It was evident to the researcher that student and parent participants who were involved
in UB were more informed and confident. These parents shared what they considered to be
important information and discussed helping other families who were not in the program.

These findings should be viewed with caution; consideration must be given to the
possibility that parent participants who signed their children up for the pre-college program were
involved, engaged, and committed parents who then took advantage of what the program offered.
Additionally, it must be noted that Upward Bound program is present at the Roosevelt Middle
School site and helped solicit two of the parent participants. Nonetheless this finding coincides
with the ongoing discussions in literature about the effectiveness of pre-college programs in
general. The TRIO programs are federally funded programs founded between 1965 and 1966
that include Upward Bound, Talent Search and Student Support Services that have been well
respected but have lacked important efficacy data. When Gullatt and Jan (2003) reviewed the
existing literature on pre-college outreach programs 45 years after their inception, they
concluded that most evaluation data was unreliable and provided little information about the
actual impact of the program. More recently however, a Mathematica Policy Research study
submitted to the U. S. Department of Education, found that Upward Bound had “substantiative positive effects” on students’ college outcomes (Seftor, Mamun, & Schimm, 2009). Although parent participation is cited in the majority of these pre-college programs’ materials and websites, the combined subjects of parent involvement and program effectiveness remains unaddressed in the literature.

Most significantly this study’s findings suggest that the practices being employed by the local Upward Bound program of UMass Dartmouth are supportive to families. How this particular local program engages and informs parents is worthy of further investigation and could suggest beneficial practices for replication by schools or programs in this urban school district. Study findings also infer that a collaborative between the schools and UB effort could extend beneficial outreach to more families.

Families in this study needed and wanted information to help their children attend college. They look to schools to provide “college knowledge” or the cultural capital they needed to help their children navigate the school and college systems; and to successfully choose and enroll in a postsecondary institution. This study’s findings suggest several ways to improve practices in New Bedford’s urban school setting that would benefit families and increase students’ college access opportunities. Consideration must be given to designing a comprehensive approach to college access that would build on families’ existing cultural wealth by delivering important and timely information.

Communication

Preceding discussions suggest when schools understand their families and what they value, they will work to uncover the best mechanism to transmit information they need to support their goals. This study proposed that improving the communication of relevant college
access information to families beginning in middle school would improve involvement and encouragement and result in increased aspirations and college enrollment behavior of disadvantaged students. Therefore it was important to uncover what communication strategies these families found most and least effective. The analysis of interviews and focus groups transcripts gave rise to four claims related to communication in this urban school context: a) communication challenges exist between schools and families; b) communication and outreach strategy considerations can promote parent involvement; c) attention to language barriers will improve underrepresented family members’ involvement in college access activities; and d) employing multiple communication methods is viewed as an effective way to convey vital college-related information. How these findings coincide with the literature, are viewed through the theoretical framework, and implicate practice-based considerations are discussed in the next sections.

This study’s critical lens has supported the identification of college-related information as an important form of cultural capital needed by families in order to successfully navigate the college pathway. Its second theoretical lens, communication theory, suggests that the development of these forms of cultural capital is an important function of communication (Papa, Daniels, & Spiker, 2008) that must be considered by this study. As a result of the theoretical lens and this study’s findings, effective communication design is considered central to a plan that would build on families’ cultural wealth by transmitting important forms of cultural capital. Communication is the vehicle for the vital information that would improve college access of students traditionally underrepresented on college campuses. Researchers view “ongoing communication about college preparation” as one of the essential components to improving college access for low-income families (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). It then
follows that if this urban school district is to fulfill its mission to give all students access to postsecondary institutions’ attention has to be given to discerning effective from ineffective communication practices.

**Communication challenges.**

This study’s findings suggest that communication challenges exist between schools and families. According to organizational communication theory’s traditionalist approach, assessing the effectiveness of communication involves two conditions: first that the process of sending and receiving messages is accurate and reliable, and second, that the message receiver understands and responds to the message the way in which the message sender intended (Papa, Daniels, & Spiker, 2008). Utilizing this lens to examine communication channels between families and schools confirmed there are “breakdowns” due to both school and home-based factors. First, this study found that schools did not have reliable communication processes in place, there were many sources of information related to college readiness and access but no central resource or identified method to communicate it to all families. In addition, the messages were not accurate because forms of published and web-based information were not kept current. According to the participant families, communication between school and home did not occur as frequently as needed, nor did it occur in a manner considered timely for planning and involvement. Clearly existing communication practices did not meet the second standard of assessment; messages had not been received and responded to in the way it had been intended.

Other factors challenging communication centered on the transient nature of families in this urban setting, as well as the unreliability of the traditional paper and student dependent forms of communication. Given the crucial nature of effective communication to improving college access, these findings suggest an survey of NBPS’s communication practices be
conducted to assure that messages, such as those associated with college readiness are successfully reaching families, that they contain current and relevant information, and are delivered in a manner that will reach members of a highly transient urban community.

**Communication and parent involvement.**

Study participants indicated that they believed that communication and outreach strategy considerations can promote parent involvement. These findings align with the interpretivist view, which holds that communication structures impact the culture of an organization and the perspectives of its participants. This supports the finding that *effective communication can help build a culture supportive to parent involvement.* However this study also demonstrated that a lack of outreach and attention to communication can send negative and harmful messages to families. Some parents relayed experiences of feeling devalued when the schools did not keep them informed of their child’s educational life or about school activities and resources that could help their families. Sadly, they interpreted the school’s lack of communication to mean the school didn’t care about their children or about including them. Coinciding with these findings, communication and outreach to parents beginning as early as elementary school has been found to be instrumental in overcoming barriers by creating an atmosphere that is more welcoming to underrepresented families (Auerbach, 2004; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005).

Communication was the tool most frequently suggested by participants to help engage parents in the education of their children. This is congruent with researchers (Patrikakou, 2004; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005) who highlighted the importance of maintaining two-way communication between parents and schools. Focusing on communication can help send important messages to staff, parents and students. When parents are involved in ongoing
communication with school, they demonstrate their belief in the value of education to their children (Patrikakou, 2004). Developing effective communication channels allows schools to acknowledge and build on families’ forms of cultural wealth that are activated when they are involved in their children’s educational lives.

**Language barriers.**

The diverse populations of the U.S. have increased dramatically over the last two decades. Data from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey revealed that the 20.4% of the Massachusetts population over 5 years old speak a language other than English at home (Census Bureau, 2011). A critical approach to communication structures caution that traditional communication and organizational structures will need to be modified in response to an increasingly diverse as U.S. population. These facts coincide with this study’s claim that attention to removing language barriers will improve underrepresented family members’ involvement in college access activities.

This study’s organizational communication’s critical perspective lens promotes attention to language and cultural differences; it “criticizes organizational discourse with the goal of consciousness raising and emancipation for oppressed organizational classes” (Papa, et al., 2008, p. 14). Mostly focused on deliberate efforts to distort or filter messages to manipulate or deceive lesser-powered persons, critical perspectives (Deetz, 1982) also focused this study’s attention on dismantling the barriers to opportunity and information that are present when the existing cultural wealth of diverse families is not recognized or rewarded by schools.

Coinciding with this study’s finding about the necessity of language and translation services in improving college access, numerous studies have confirmed the importance of communicating in families’ native language (Auerbach, 2004; Clark & Dorris, 2006; Rowan-
Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Along with publishing translated material, it has also been shown that arranging presentations and personal contact by individuals of similar background are ways to support these parents participation (Auerbach, 2004; Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008). Study participants also suggested that although some parents do speak English with some proficiency the pace of presentations and the use of specialized terminology necessitated translation if they were to fully comprehend the information being conveyed during school programs.

**Multiple communication methods.**

According to the data analysis *employing multiple communication methods is viewed as an effective way to convey vital college-related information*. Study participants did not have a single preferred communication method; neither did specific strategies appear to address the complex communication needs of the families in this urban setting. Through a critical lens, these communication barriers are considered a structure of oppression by which families are marginalized or disadvantaged (Miller, 2003). Differing from higher-SES families, low-SES families cannot easily access college-related information, or the appropriate cultural capital through their social network. Participants preferred their children to carry flyers and published materials home though admittedly unreliable; they also highly approved of the phone messaging system employed by the schools (iAlert) to deliver important school news and event information. In addition to study findings which suggested employing traditional communication channels, novel approaches, such as broader use of culturally-based radio, web-based mechanisms and social media should be explored.

This study documented some families’ use of social networks comprised of extended family members, friends, workplace colleagues, in securing guidance along the college
enrollment path. According to the literature, building on these social networks through the use of peers, school counselors, and/or mentors, is an effective way to disseminate information to families as they navigate the college access pathway and becomes an important strategy to improve college enrollment opportunities (Bonous-Hammarth & Allen, 2005; Gandara, 2002). In this way families have multiple resources at their disposal. Utilizing these networks in developing important college-going aspirations and building a sense of self-efficacy has been found to be important by many authors (Conley, 2008; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). This suggests that if all parents in New Bedford could learn about steps in the pathway to college as part of a collaborative community or network of families and educators, students who are traditionally underrepresented will have greater opportunities to enroll in institutions of higher education.

Attention to improving communication is viewed as integral to achieve this study’s practical goals of relaying college knowledge and supporting affirmative interactions between school and families. This study’s examination of how college-related information is best shared has made clear that the elements that must be integrated to shape college access pathway for all students are dependent on effective communication. In order for communication to be effective it must be tailored to and respond to the needs of the recipients, which in this case are the diverse families of New Bedford Public Schools. Communication is reciprocal; an effective collaboration between diverse and low-income families and school can be fully activated with practices designed to allow schools to deliver and receive input from its students and family members.
College Access Information Context

This study’s final interrogation asked, *what information do schools in New Bedford convey to families about college access and how is it delivered?* Through a critical lens, interrupting the existing social order comes from recognizing and building on families’ cultural wealth. In this case their cultural capital needs must be uncovered and addressed by schools. In other words, in order to understand how college access could be improved for families in this urban school setting it was important to understand how their informational needs were addressed by the current practices. The interview and focus group data revealed families seek: 1) early information; 2) a map of the college pathway; 3) access to a broad range of information; 4) counseling throughout middle school and high school; 5) access to information in a culturally responsive manner; and 6) comprehensive information on financing a college education. A review found within New Bedford High School and Roosevelt Middle School, thirty-three programs, services, courses and events are in place to support students’ college enrollment (See Appendix F). A comparison of these practices with parents’ stated needs revealed that *programs and activities presently in place at both schools do not fully address the informational needs identified by parents in this urban school district.*

Findings show that Roosevelt Middle School and New Bedford High School meet families’ needs for early

![Figure 8: Families' identified informational needs.](image-url)
information and provide a broad range of information ranging from introductory college-related topics to addressing the complicated concerns of undocumented students and families seeking college access. The high school offers several events to help high school parents understand college financing, while there is only one opportunity for middle school parents to learn the basics of financial aid. The ability for families to work with the school to develop a clear college pathway map or have consistent decision-making support is not available at either school examined. Unfortunately, it is also widely reported that most of the parent-focused events that do exist are not well attended. Poor family participation at many events reviewed and witnessed during this study, highlights the need to evaluate and reconfigure communication practices.

A remarkable partnership program, the AMIGOS Center at Roosevelt Middle School, provides language support and cultural bridges between the school and its diverse families. The collaboration between the school and the Immigrant Assistance Center in bridging cultural and communication gaps with diverse families is worthy of further examination and should be considered for possible expansion or replication in other schools. Most concerning in this diverse urban school context was the fact that comprehensive ways to address language barriers were not evident at New Bedford High School.

Conclusion

Although there are informational gaps in this urban school district’s college access engagement with families, this study represents the district’s willingness to evaluate what is in place and identify what is needed. Findings suggest that by understanding families, who they are, and what they value, these schools can build effective communication and informational pathways that meet families where they are. Once this occurs, parents feel valued and are empowered to collaborate with schools in delivering their children onto college campuses.
The practical goal of this study was to provide guidance for the development of a college access protocol and plan to effectively communicate with families in this urban context. This study’s findings have provided valuable insight into the cultural wealth and capital or informational needs of families and also offer ample evidence on which to base schools’ college access improvement efforts. To begin, student demographic information, immigration patterns, data concerning diverse populations attending each of New Bedford’s secondary school, as well as insight offered by this study, should be used to suggest pertinent characteristics of a leadership team focused on improving college access. According to Katzenbach and Smith (1993) a team is defined “as a small number of people with complementary skills” who are committed to a common purpose, with shared goals and mutual accountability.

This team should engage secondary guidance and instructional staff, family members and other community collaborators, in reviewing and making recommendations for a comprehensive college access protocol designed for New Bedford’s families. As a result of this study’s findings the team should develop a plan of action based on the following four goals: a) conceptualize a plan that is designed to give postsecondary educational guidance to all families; b) develop the ability to communicate college access information to all parents; c) build effective collaborations between the schools and community partners to bridge communication and informational gaps in
this urban school setting; d) initiate district-wide staff professional development programming to build schools’ capacity to be culturally responsive. Appendix G offers detailed suggestions for a course of action that is related to these goals.

Qualitative inquiries such as this are effective ways to help organizations like schools to understand outside stakeholders’ perceptions and concerns. Employing this type of inquiry has offered a richness and depth of understanding of families’ college access experiences unlikely to be achieved with quantitative approaches. It is however, important to acknowledge study limitations inherent in this type of investigation in general and within this study in particular. Although due to the small sample size and the participant recruitment practices, the study group may not be representative of the larger population of families in the New Bedford Public Schools, the detailed and relevant information and understandings gathered can be used to develop a culture-sensitive investigation into improving family engagement within many aspects of education. This survey could build on the preliminary knowledge of families’ cultural wealth, experiences, desires and fears and collect similar relevant information for the larger population. The study’s findings suggested goals and practical guidance based on insights gained about families’ beliefs, goals, and aspirations; as well as their need for effective communication and information from the schools. These shouldn’t be considered definitive or exhaustive of the college access needs of students or their families but more appropriately viewed as guidance for initiating improvement efforts.

This study did not seek school staff or leadership input, nor did it investigate gaps in the college access programming for students. Although important, these inquiries were beyond the scope of the study. As a result, the data and discussion should rightly be accepted as a starting
point for strategic planning in which school and community stakeholders’ contributions will be central to building effective college access pathway in this urban school setting.

Although important findings related to communication were uncovered, this study’s investigational scope proved to be a limitation in fully comprehending or suggesting effective reciprocal communication practices between families and schools in this urban context. Rather, the study strongly suggests the need for an assessment of existing communication practices to inform the development of district-wide communication protocol between schools and families and the New Bedford community.

This study’s findings also offer insight to future directions for college access research in general. Understanding how to leverage the promotional effects of social networks and extended families’ cultural wealth is a critical area of inquiry as urban schools attempt to send more students and more diverse students onto postsecondary institutions. Discovering how experiences and encouragement offered by grandparents, siblings, family members and other community members may be formalized into important forms of collaboration with schools is an area ripe for study. The importance of further research into the combined topics of college access and school communication practices with families is suggested by this study’s findings. Such inquiry could help understand optimal timing and communications channels to transmit college-related information to lower-SES and diverse populations, as well as families with college-going experiences.

Understanding the college-related informational needs of parents of all educational levels is an existing gap in the literature. This topic is worthy of investigation for schools whose goal is to give post-secondary educational access to all students. By looking into the combined topics of pre-collegiate programs and parent involvement, researchers can offer important guidance to
schools about the most effective timing and formats to engage parents of students traditionally underrepresented on college campuses. A follow-up study could also gain important insight by reconnecting with middle school parent participants over the next few years to ascertain how successfully they are able to support their children’s college access pathway and to uncover their insights about helpful practices and information.

This study responded to the call for research regarding the importance of family involvement within college access programming. Its qualitative investigation illuminated some of the nuances in “how” students’ predisposition is influenced by families’ beliefs and expectations. Exploring the promotional effect of accurate and timely information on parent involvement and encouragement and the resulting positive influence on student college aspiration was the focus of this study’s intellectual goals. Critical theory’s concepts of social stratification, cultural capital, and cultural wealth framed the examination of urban middle schools’ families’ college knowledge, their college access understandings, their manner of valuing education, and their perceptions of their roles in their child’s college access pathway. This study rested on the premise that if students’ and their families’ cultural wealth is recognized and valued they will achieve higher levels of success. Organizational communication theory supported this study’s findings and assertion that improving communication practices is a method of transmitting cultural capital and recognizing families’ cultural wealth. Most importantly, by adopting a cultural wealth paradigm New Bedford Schools moves away from a deficits view and attempts to identify and remove barriers to the successful engagement of its families.

Circumscribed around a middle school family college readiness workshop series, this investigation uncovered some of the beliefs, needs, and experiences of New Bedford families in relation to college access. Using case study methodology, it documented what information
families received and what they needed, how information is being transmitted, and existing gaps. Recommendations for a college access information protocol and a plan to communicate it to students and families in middle school is an important outcome of this inquiry. This inquiry led to practical suggestions that will inform schools’ partnerships with families in building effective college access pathways for their children.

This study’s findings suggest with compelling evidence that “if structures and systems are created that meet parents where they are geographically, culturally, and in terms of their unique needs, parents of all walks of life will be partners in the college-going process” (Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, & Perna, 2008, p. 584). In order to fulfill this proud city’s dream of a bright 21st century, New Bedford’s educational community is addressing its distressing high school dropout rate. Working with families in providing its youth with access to college is believed to be a powerful antidote to this crisis. This partnership will improve the individual lives of its youngest citizens while securing a vibrant community’s bright future.
Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol

A Case Study Building College Access in New Bedford
Focus Group Protocol

Welcome Participants and Introduce Myself and the Study

The session will begin by welcoming everyone and introducing myself as the researcher (or the facilitator for the Spanish-language focus group) and the co-facilitator/note-taker. The researcher’s role in the school community will be explained.

Purpose of the Discussion

SAY: “The New Bedford Public Schools is committed to working more closely with families to help all students graduate on time, ready for college or technical school. We want to learn from you about how we might do a better job of this. The purpose of this discussion is to learn how you think the schools might do this, in an atmosphere of confidentiality, with no consequences to you or your school. All ideas are welcome and will be treated with respect.”

You are being asked to participate because your child or family member is currently a senior at New Bedford High School or has recently graduated and gone on to college. This study is hoping you will share your understanding of the challenges when planning for college for your child or family member.

Distribute Informed Consent Form and Explain Ask Permission to Record

SAY: We want to talk with you about your experience in New Bedford High School with preparing your child to attend college. We will use this information so that we may improve the way we support families with college-related information as early as middle school. This should take about an hour and a half – or maybe a little more if you have a lot of ideas!

We would like to review a form with you; it will help us make sure that we are clear about our project and your participation (researcher will review the entire informed consent form). The form has names and numbers of people they can call if you have any questions or concerns.

“I want to be sure that everyone feels free to speak his or her mind. Please listen to the ideas of others with an open mind and respect their privacy. What we say in this room should stay in this room – will you agree to do that?

“With your permission, I’d like to tape our conversation and write down your thoughts and ideas on chart paper. Everything you say will be treated confidentially; no specific opinions will be attributed to any particular person, unless you first give us explicit permission. Is that OK?

“Any questions before we get started?

Ask Participants to Introduce Themselves
SAY: “Now, tell us a little something about yourself. Let’s go around the table [room/circle] and introduce ourselves – what is your first name, how many children do you have in school, and what grade(s) are they in or college they are attending?”

Begin the Discussion

Now I am going to ask you to think back to the time since your child was in middle school. I would like to ask you some questions about the pathway to college that you and your child traveled since then. Please understand when I say college I actually mean any post-high school education.

*Important:* Wait at least 15 seconds after asking a question to give people time to respond. Prompts will be used only if no one speaks up or to get the discussion back on track.

Information/communication

First I would like to talk about post-high school education and college-related information:

1. Has it always been important to you that your child goes on to college after high school? When did you first talk to your child about what you thought? (expectations and aspirations) Do you remember what prompted that talk? Or what you said?

2. Some family members have some college experience and some don’t, some seem to have a lot of information about college others have less. Parents of all types tell us that getting information about navigating the path to college is challenging. Where did you get helpful information or support? (access to information, networks, cultural capital)

   *Prompts:*
   Neighborhood or community activities or sports, college readiness program activities or staff, teaching staff, guidance staff, neighbors, family members, community or church connections

3. How has New Bedford Schools reached out to you to make sure your son or daughter graduates on-time and goes to college? (support)

   *Follow up questions*
   - Do the teachers or counselors keep you up to date on how your kids are doing?
   - Does the school let you know what classes your child should be taking?
   - Offer information on, or trips to, colleges?
   - Inform you about financial aid?
   - Help you fill out forms?

4. What do you think is the best way for the schools to get college-related information to families? (communication networks)
Follow up questions:

- Did you have personal contacts that were helpful? (friends, community members, school staff, coaches)?
- Flyers about events like college fairs are sent home, is this a good way to get information home?
- Do you consult the school or district website?
- Do you use email? Would you like more communication this way?
- Are automated phone calls helpful reminders? If yes, would they help with important deadlines and events?
- Do you use the school website?

Is it the same during middle school?

Workshops

5. We are planning a college readiness workshop for middle school parents, what do you think about this idea? I would like to review some of the information with you to see if you think it will be helpful. (on chart)

What college-related information do you think has been most important? (or rank order 1-6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To learn about academic requirements for college admission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about the college system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about tests required for college admission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about the time frame and process of applying to college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To learn about financial aid-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything else you wish you knew then? Career exploration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Where do you think it is best to receive this information?

Prompts

At school, at a community center or church?

Follow up questions:
When? Evening? Daytime?
Is daycare imp? Is transportation?
Do you think a webinar (an online meeting format) would help some people?

7. What type of door prizes do you think will encourage attendance?

Prompts
One bigger prize or several small ones? Gift card to Walmart? Marketbasket? A gift basket?

Family Experiences, Capital and Wealth

Now I would like to talk about how you and your child navigated the college enrollment pathway.

8. Please think back to when your child was in middle school. What were your thoughts and plans about college then?
   • Did you have worries about your child getting into college?
   • What did you find encouraging?
   • What might have discouraged you or made you worry? (support for cultural wealth)

9. Based on your experience, what advice would you give to other parents on how to help their child to get college ready? (cultural capital)

Prompts
Starting earlier? Career exploration? Leading or supporting your child in finding interests or working with a program or school staff?

10. What would you suggest are community groups or activities that might be helpful along the college pathway? Why did you find these helpful? (Some parents discuss church groups, organizations like Big Brother, mentors, or sports coaches that were helpful.)

11. Some parents have shared how their cultural or community background shaped their educational hopes and expectations for their child. Do you believe there are some values, talents or beliefs that come from your background that support strong educational pathways?

Prompts
Like personal connections and stories, helpful friends and neighbors, These can also be community values, (or cultural capabilities, values, knowledge, and competencies… This can be like having a second language or special cultural skills or abilities.

12. What are the ways that you supported your child’s college path that perhaps the school would not be aware of? Or What did you say or do to encourage your child to go to college?
Prompts
Some parents insist on good grades, some save for tuition, others talk a lot about getting a good education. (more specific prompt if needed—make sacrifices, encourage with personal or family stories, by closely monitoring homework and grades, dates and deadlines; by seeking information from friends, family community or directly from colleges, saving or planning for tuition, demonstrating how to do hard work)

Follow up question: Were there any family-based influences that helped your child get this far? (cultural wealth) –values, stories, traditions

13. As your child is about to go to college or has gone, what are your dreams? Do you have any concerns?

~~Lastly I would like you to review a survey that I am planning to use after the college workshops. Would you please tell me if it is understandable and easy to use or if there are questions you think I should ask differently?

Close the Discussion

Thank you for your help and participating. (Pass out the gift cards.)

Please refer to the consent form and call if you have any more ideas or questions about this study.
Appendix B: Workshop Handouts

**Workshop I**

**Slide 1**

Families Building a College Pathway in Middle School
Workshop I
March 17, 2011

**Slide 2**

Current Statistics

- Graduation Rate 61.8% (4 yr. adj. 2008)
- 82.5% of our seniors enter some form of postsecondary education.
- 10% increase in college attendance since 1999.

**Slide 3**

Delivering on the College Dream in New Bedford Public Schools

Goals:
- Increase the graduation rate
- To create college access pathways for all students-100%
Slide 4

The Workshop Series

- Tonight! Workshop I
  Families and College Opportunities
- March 24th Workshop II
  High School and the College Enrollment Steps
- March 31st Workshop III:
  Financing College
  Helpful Tools, People & Programs
* Certificate awarded for participation in the entire series

Slide 5

Topics

- Family Strengths
- Benefits of College Education
- Types of Colleges and Educations
- Preparing Your Middle School Students

Slide 6

Family Strengths

Family encouragement and support is the single greatest influence on a child’s college attendance.
Families that gather information early are better prepared to support college access.
Why go to College?

A college education can provide your child with a better life.

More job opportunities + Greater knowledge = Greater potential

Slide 8

Over 60% of current Massachusetts jobs require education after high school.

Slide 9

Types of Post-secondary Institutions

- Community Colleges, Technical Colleges, Junior Colleges
- Four year Colleges and Universities
Slide 10

Community, Technical and Junior Colleges

- May lead to an associate's degree
- Academic programs comparable to the first two years of four-year colleges
- Many also offer technical and occupational training
- Often work in collaboration with local businesses, agencies and organizations
- Many two year colleges offer "open admissions" policy

Slide 11

Community Colleges

- Public two-year colleges. Mostly serve students in the local community.
- Academic, technical and continuing education courses
- Lead to an Associate's Degree A.S. or A.A.

Slide 12

Technical Colleges

- Emphasize training in technical fields
- Some academic courses and programs
- Some lead to an A.S. or A.A.

Junior Colleges

- Two year private colleges
- Some are residential
Slide 13

**Associate Degree Job Opportunities**
- Administrative Assistant
- Automotive Mechanic
- Commercial Artist
- Computer Technician
- Dental Hygienist
- Funeral Director
- Medical Lab Technician
- Registered Nurse
- Surveyor

Slide 14

**Four-Year Colleges and Universities**
- To pursue a general academic program
- May be public or private
- Lays the foundation for advanced studies
- Over 200 in Massachusetts
- Admissions requirements are more complex

Slide 15

**Four-Year Colleges and Universities**
- Colleges provide four-year educational programs in the arts and sciences. These colleges award a bachelor's degree.
- Universities include a college of arts and/or sciences, one or more professional schools, and graduate programs. Universities may grant bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees.
Bachelor Degree Job Opportunities

- Accountant
- Engineer
- Journalist
- Investment Banker
- Pharmacist
- Social Worker
- Teacher

Jobs Opportunities with more Education

- Architect
- Dentist
- Doctor
- Geologist
- Librarian
- Psychologist
- University Professor
- Veterinarian

Helping Your Child...

Think about the future - Activity:
- Together make a list of interesting jobs of friends and family, or have seen on TV. Or list jobs related to a favorite subject
- Investigate the education level needed for each (www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm)
- Find courses in middle and high school that may offer a preview of the knowledge needed for these careers
Slide 19

Helping Your Child...

Build a college pathway now:

• Prepare for college preparatory courses in high school
  – Taking courses in mathematics and languages in 7th or 8th grade and get grades of C or more.
  – Consult with guidance counselors they are knowledgeable in this area.

Slide 20

Building a College Pathway

In middle school:

• Inform school counseling staff your child will attend college
• Monitor performance
• Ensure good attendance
• Communicate with teachers or school members
• Attend school activities
• Take advantage of after-school programming

Slide 21

• Set clear rules about school behavior
• Encourage your child to read
• Ask about school often
• Praise good grades
• Offer help or seek academic support when needed
• Arrange a quiet place for your child to study.
• Visit high school and colleges
Get out …

• To local museums, libraries, concerts, plays, and fairs.
• Help your child talk to people you meet about their jobs and education.

Interesting experiences expose children to new ideas and ways of understanding the world; making school work more meaningful.

Please and Thank You!

• Survey to help improve the workshop and better meet your child’s needs
• Raffle ticket
• Doctoral Study Interview Volunteers. Please consider participating

On Behalf of Your Child…

• We thank you for spending this time with us.
• We look forward to seeing you for workshops II and III
Thank you,
Sue Anne Marks
PPS Director New Bedford Public Schools
And the Roosevelt Middle School Community
Workshop II

Slide 1

Families Building a College Pathway in Middle School

Slide 2

The Workshop Series

• Workshop I
  Families and College Opportunities
• Tonight! Workshop II
  High School and the College Enrollment Steps
• March 31st Workshop III:
  Financing College
  Helpful Tools, People & Programs

Slide 3

Welcome

• Introductions

• College dream activity
Slide 4

Topics

• The Steps to College Enrollment in high school
  – Planning
  – Coursework
  – Application process

• Helpful People and Programs

Slide 5

College Readiness

• Rigorous Coursework
• Extracurricular Activities/Community Service
• Financial Planning: Savings
• Testing
• College search
• College application process
• College enrollment
  [http://www.college.gov/wps/portal]

Slide 6

Rigorous Coursework

Plan with your child and guidance counselor to take more demanding coursework
  – Considered a predictor of college success
  – Looks favorable to colleges

• Consider dual enrollment and college credit courses
Slide 7

MassCore High School Program of Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of Units</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>4 Units</td>
<td>College Preparatory English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>4 Units</td>
<td>Including Algebra I &amp; II and Geometry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>3 Units</td>
<td>Technology/Engineering, Earth Sciences, Biology &amp; Physics, Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Educ.</td>
<td>1 Unit</td>
<td>All grades for all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History/Social Science</td>
<td>3 Units</td>
<td>U.S. History and World History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Language</td>
<td>2 Units</td>
<td>(May be same language, many colleges require 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Arts</td>
<td>1 Unit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Core Courses</td>
<td>5 Units</td>
<td>Business Ed, Career and Technical Ed, Health, Technology, and related areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Learning Opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Enroll in a college readiness program, extracurricular activities, career exploration, college investigation, part-time work related to career interest, start a college file, take advantage of MCAS prep summer courses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Slide 8

A High School College Pathway

• 9th Grade: Starting down the pathway
• 10th Grade: Laying the foundation
• 11th Grade: Searching and Testing
• 12th Grade: Applying, Financing and Enrolling

Slide 9

Ninth Grade Checklist:

• Meet with guidance counselor
• Take College preparatory courses (at highest level)
• Remember every course counts
• Enroll in a college readiness program
• Extracurricular activities
• Career exploration
• College investigation
• Part-time work related to career interest
• Start a college file
• Take advantage of MCAS prep summer courses
Slide 10

Helping Your Child Think About College

• What are favorite hobbies or free time activities? Interests point to career possibilities and help college selection.
• What are favorite or strongest school subjects and learning style? Helps determine college or major.
• What careers seem interesting? Ask about their education.
• Who are admired people? What qualities shaped their path?

Slide 11

10th Grade:

Begin to research college options and interests
Consider college types:
• Community Colleges, Technical Colleges, Junior Colleges
• Four year Colleges and Universities

Slide 12

Student 10th Grade Checklist

• Meet with guidance counselor
• Review 9th and 10th grade classes
• Ask for help
• MCAS - 100% effort-strong performance = scholarship, free state college tuition
• Update college file
• Begin visiting nearby colleges; admissions offices will welcome you and arrange tours
• Request catalogs from colleges of interest
• Start learning about financial aid
• Take PSAT as practice
Slide 13

11th Grade: The Search

When looking for the ideal college consider:

- Location
- Student Body
- Academics
- Type
- Qualifications
- Support
- Enrichment
- Cost

Slide 14

Student 11th Grade Checklist

- Meet with guidance counselor
  - Review courses
  - Ask for help
- Take PSAT—may help qualify for scholarships
- Prepare for SAT or ACT (prep credit course)
- SAT and ACT in May or June
- Attend college fairs and presentations
- GPA and class rank

Slide 15

Checklist continued

- Visit colleges
- Use the school or library to review colleges
- Update college file include information about scholarships: deadlines, and eligibility requirements
Slide 16

A Minute on Testing

• PSAT -
  – What is it? A shorter version of the SAT may enable students to qualify for National Merit Scholarships, National Achievement Scholarship (for Black American Students) and the National Hispanic Scholar Award.
  – When to take it? Offered in October. Take it in 10th grade for practice and in 11th to qualify for scholarships
  – www.collegeboard.com

Slide 17

SAT

• SAT-Reasoning Test
  – A 3-hour and forty-five minute test of critical reading, writing, and math skills. Admissions committees consider these scores
  – Often required by colleges
  – Offer from Oct.-Jan. & Mar., May, June
  – Taken in 11th or 12th grade or both

Slide 18

ACT

• A test to assess general educational development and ability to do college work
• Some colleges require it for admissions instead of SAT, most common in Midwestern states
• Offered in Oct., Dec., Feb., April, June
Slide 19

Grade 12: Time to Apply!
The main components to the college application process:
• Application form
• Fees or waivers
• Letters of recommendation
• Deadlines
• College entrance exams

Slide 20

• Application essay
• College interview
• High school transcript
• Financial aid forms
• Standardized test scores (SAT, ACT)
• Decisions

Slide 21

Yourplanforcollege.org
NBHS and many others are beginning to use YourPlanforCollege. It is an online tool that allows students to:
• Create a secure personal portfolio,
• Search for college and career information and
• Apply to colleges and universities online without having to enter in the same information again and again. They can also
• Explore college and career options based on interests. Plus, they can
• Share the information with counselors and parents to help students stay on track.
Slide 22

Please and...

• Survey-to help improve the workshop and better meet your child’s needs
• Raffle ticket
• Doctoral Study Interview Volunteers. Please consider participating

Slide 23

Thank you!

We thank you for spending this time with us.

We look forward to seeing you for workshop III
March 31st 6:30 p.m.
College Finance
Helpful Programs and People

Slide 24

Thank you,
Sue Anne Marks
PPS Director New Bedford Public Schools
And the Roosevelt Middle School Community
Workshop III

Slide 1

Families Building a College Pathway in Middle School

Workshop III
March 31, 2011

Slide 2

The Workshop Series
• Workshop I
  Families and College Opportunities
• Workshop II
  High School and the College Enrollment Steps
• Tonight! Workshop III:
  Financing College
  Helpful College Readiness Tools, People & Programs

Slide 3

Our Guests
Michael Lynch
Director of Admissions
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Undergraduate Admissions Office
Phone: 508 999 8605
World Class. Within Reach.

Wayne Ramos
Director Upward Bound
University of Massachusetts Dartmouth
Phone: 508 999 8723

An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.” - Ben Franklin
Paying for College
One of the biggest concerns of students and families is whether they can afford college.

- The purpose of financial aid is to make it possible for students of all incomes to attend college.
- Scholarships are available through many sources, including your high school.
- Financial aid is available based on both your merit and financial need.

Financial aid: Based on need and merit.
College can be expensive, but financial aid is there to help.

- Merit-based aid is awarded based on academic achievement or special talent in the performing arts, athletics or other areas.
- Need-based aid awarded based on financial need as decided by the government and the college.

Financial Aid
- Money to help students meet the costs of college attendance based on need.
- Need is the difference between the cost of attendance (COA) and expected family contribution (EFC).
  For example:
  
  $10,000 (COA)
  -$4,000 (EFC)
  $6,000 Eligibility for financial aid
Slide 7

The Cost of Attendance

- Tuition and fees
- Books and supplies
- Room and board
- Personal Expenses
- Travel or transportation to and from college

Slide 8

Types of Financial Aid

Grants and scholarships are most desirable:

- Money that does not have to be repaid.
- Grants are awarded based on need
- Scholarships are awarded based on merit.
- Grants: federal government, the state government, colleges and universities, and private sources and organizations.

Slide 9

Federal College Work-Study is what is

- Referred to as "self-help" aid
- Need-based, but must be earned through work.
- Loans are also "self-help" aid. Loans are
- Low-interest self help aid and
- Must be repaid to the lender. They are
- Available through the federal and state government, colleges, banks, and private loan companies.
- Repayment: six months after they leave college
Financial Aid Forms

- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
- College Scholarship Service (CSS) Profile - private colleges may require it be completed to be considered for any money (usually scholarships)
- Institutional financial aid form sometime required at individual colleges

Slide 11

FAFSA

- All colleges and some scholarship programs require you to complete the FAFSA.
- FAFSA is an application for both federal and state need-based grants and loans, Federal College Work-Study, state merit scholarships, and institutional grants and scholarship programs.
- There is no fee for completing the FAFSA.

Current Statistics

Graduation Rate: 61.8%
- 82.5% of our seniors enter some form of postsecondary education.
- 10% increase in college attendance since 1999.
Slide 13

Helpful People

• Mentors, teachers and coaches
• Family and Friends
• Community connections
• Guidance counselors
• College readiness program staff

Slide 14

Guidance Counselors

Scheduling an appointment when questions arise concerning:
• Courses
• Electives
• Failure or academic difficulties
• Preparation for various fields of work
• College
  • Entrance requirements
  • Examinations
  • Application support

Slide 15

New Bedford High School

College Readiness Programs:
• Upward Bound: U-Mass Dartmouth
• Gear Up
• AmeriCorps. College Advising
• Talent Search
Slide 16

• Bristol Community College Partnership-on sight application process
• Naval Underwater Program
• Entrepreneurship Summer Program with Babson College and Webster Bank
• Workforce Investment Board
• NFTE Entrepreneurship Program (Teacher of the Year)

Slide 17

New Bedford High School

Activities:
• Guidance Staff – schedule, college advising and application process
• College Track
• Career Dynamics courses
• Advanced Placement
• Pre-Advanced Placement courses
• Two college fairs
• College Readiness Workshops
• Dual Enrollment

Slide 18

• Parent Financial Aid Workshops
• Senior Advising Day in September
• Monthly Senior Bulletins
  – Open House dates
  – Scholarships
  – Announcements: New college majors, special programs, financial aid info and resources
• PSAT outreach
• SAT Outreach
• SAT Prep courses
Slide 19

Helpful links
- http://www.college.gov/wps/portal
- http://www.offtocollege.com/

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

Slide 20

Please and Thank You!
- Survey to help improve the workshop and better meet your child’s needs
- Raffle ticket
- Doctoral Study Interview Volunteers. Please consider participating

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

Slide 21

Thank you,
Sue Anne Marks
PPS Director New Bedford Public Schools
And the Roosevelt Middle School Community

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________

___________________________________
Appendix C: Workshop Survey

Please do us the honor of completing this survey,
So that we might improve this workshop the next time it is offered.

Please (X) the choice that best describes you.

1. My child is in: ___6th grade ___7th grade ___8th grade

2. I have:
   __ Completed some high school
   __ Graduated from high school
   __ Completed some college or technical school
   __ Graduated from college or technical school
   __ Other __________

3. I have a computer at home. ____Yes ___No  I have internet access. ___Yes ___No

4. Counting tonight, how many workshop sessions did you attend? ___1 ___2 ___3

5. How did you hear about this workshop? [check all that apply]
   _____My child told me  
   _____A teacher told me  
   _____A school counselor told me  
   _____The school principal told me  
   _____I saw a flyer or advertisement

6. Tell us what was important to you or helped you decide to attend the workshops? [check all that apply]
   _____To learn about financial aid
   _____To learn about the college system
   _____To learn about the process of applying to college
   _____To learn about academic requirements for college admission
   _____To learn about tests required for college admission
   _____My child asked me to attend  
   _____My child’s teacher asked me to attend  
   _____The opportunity to meet other parents
   _____Door prizes and refreshments
   _____To attend with a friend
7. With this evening’s workshop:
   Very satisfied___   Somewhat satisfied___   Not satisfied___

8. With the time and location of the workshop:
   Very satisfied___   Somewhat satisfied___   Not satisfied___
   Please suggest a preferred time or location. ______________________
   ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

9. The information was:
   Very helpful___   Somewhat helpful___   Not helpful___

10. Tonight’s handouts were:
    Very helpful___   Somewhat helpful___   Not helpful___

11. Indicate your desire to attend more workshops in the future
    Would attend___   Might or might not attend___   Would NOT attend___
    ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

12. Can you suggest a good way to get information to middle school parents? [check all that apply]
    ___ Phone calls
    ___ Email
    ___ Sending information home with student
    ___ Through community organizations or churches
       like__________________
    ___ Personal contact from school staff
    Other suggestions __________________________

13. List the two most valuable things you are taking from this night.
    ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~
14. Did the workshop change your ideas (dreams, hopes, plans) about your child’s college attendance?

Yes____  No ____

If yes, please tell us how or why:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

15. Please list any additional comments you have in this space, including any ideas you have for improving our plan to get more information about college out to families.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Please remember to fill out the Interview Volunteer form in your packet if you are willing to help our research study and be interviewed about developing college attendance plans with your child.
Appendix D: Interview Protocols, Middle School Parents, High School Parents, High School Students

Building College Access Parent (Phone) Interview

Opening remarks:

Hello this is ___________. I am calling about the college access workshop series at Roosevelt Middle School. Is this __________? You volunteered to participate in a telephone interview or face-to-face interview. It will take about 30-40 minutes. Would you be willing to talk with me and is this a good time? With your permission I would like to tape record our talk. This is how we are keeping good record of the information people share with us for our study.

Thank you for filling out a form at a college readiness workshop and telling us that you were willing to talk to us. We sent you a consent form that discusses our project and your participation. It gives us permission to use any information you wish to share. I would like to remind you that all information you give will be confidential and you will not be identified by name in any of the study reports. We are grateful for your contribution but want you to know that your participation is voluntary and you can opt out at any time. Do you have any questions? Are you willing to continue with our discussion?

First I will be asking you about the workshop(s) you attended and then I will ask questions about your family and college hopes and dreams.

Which workshops did you attend?

- Workshop I: Families and College Opportunities 3/17/11_______
- Workshop II: High School and the College Enrollment Steps 3/24/11______
- Workshop III: Financing College Helpful College Readiness Tools, People & Programs 3/31/11_______

Communication

- How did you hear about the workshops?
- What’s the best way to let you know about events like this?
- Phone, mail, flyer sent home with child, flyer distributed before or after school when you’re picking up your child, etc.
- If you heard about it from more than one source, was one source more influential than the others?
- Was the workshop offered at a convenient time and in a convenient location?
- How important were the door prizes in your decision to attend the workshop(s)?
- Can you tell me what we can do, or how we can market this workshop, so that more parents are motivated to attend?
DELIVERY

- Did you feel welcome at the workshop(s) you attended?
- What made you feel this way?
- We try and get as many parents to attend these workshops as we can… do you think that’s a good thing? Or would you prefer a smaller group? Why?

CONTENT WORKSHOP #1 (Ask only if respondent attended this workshop)

- We talked about the different types of colleges and universities that exist. Which one of those types, community college, technical college, 4 year college or university do you think may be the better option for your child?
- How do you think you’ll use this information as you help your child plan for college?
- What information in the handouts do you think you might make use of later on? How do you think you might use it?
- Did you do the future planning activity with your child? Please tell me about it? How did it go? What did you plan?
- Was there something in that workshop that you thought was especially helpful? and how about something that was not very important?
- If you had a friend who wanted to go and couldn’t, what would you tell her about the workshop to summarize?

CONTENT WORKSHOP #2 (Ask only if respondent attended this workshop)

- During this workshop we covered grade by grade, starting in the 9th grade, what courses your child or children should take to prepare for admission to college. How did that help?
- What courses are you thinking your child should take?
- Have you started talking to your child about high school courses yet?
- Was there any part of this presentation you thought was especially important for middle school parents? Or not necessary?

CONTENT WORKSHOP #3 (Ask only if respondent attended this workshop)

- What were your concerns about financing your child’s education before this workshop on financial planning for college?
• Do you still have those concerns? Did they change?

• Sometimes all this information about college costs makes people anxious. Does it make you worry? What makes you anxious?

• We talked about some college readiness activities, like Upward Bound and helpful people, like guidance counselors, here at the middle school and the high school. Was this information helpful? How will you use it?

• How likely are you to sign your child up for Upward Bound or another college readiness program? Why?

• Was there anything that you had hoped would be covered in the final workshop, but was not?

QUESTIONS FOR THOSE WHO ATTENDED MORE THAN ONE:
• Which of the workshops you attended was most valuable to you? Why?

• Which of the workshops you attended was least valuable to you? Why?

GENERAL

• What can we do to improve the workshops?
• Was there anything that you had hoped to hear about that was not covered? What? Could the presentation itself be improved?
• Is there anything that you learned from the workshops that I have not asked about yet?
• What?

We want to thank you for coming to the workshops, we hope the information will help you and your child. We thought it went well and enjoyed meeting you. We were surprised that so few parents attended and even some who signed up did not come.

• Do you have any idea why we were not more successful in getting parents to attend the workshops?

• Some parents have said they didn’t get the information, some said that they forgot and some seemed to feel a little shy or unwelcomed….

• What do you think we might do better to reach more parents?
ROLE OF PARENT/FAMILY

- Overall, how did attending the workshop(s) impact how you think about your involvement in your child’s college planning and choice process?

- What do you think parents can do to get their child to college?

- Did attending the workshop suggest other things that you had not considered yet?

- What support would you like from your child’s school? (to help you to continue to be involved in your child’s college planning process? ) What are they doing now that helps you?

- Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience in the workshops?

BACKGROUND INFO:

How many children do you have? _______
What Schools are they attending & grades?
  1. _______________________
  2. _______________________
  3. _______________________
  4. _______________________
  5. _______________________
  6. _______________________

What is your and your spouse’s highest level of education?
  a. You _______________________
  b. Your spouse ______________________

What is your occupation? __________________________
What is your spouse’s occupation? __________________________

EXPECTATION AND ASPIRATION

- What do you say to your child about college? Is this different since attending the workshop(s)?

- Has it always been important to you that your child goes on to college after high school?
• How old was your child or children when you started thinking about their college education?
• What made you start thinking about it?
• How important is it that your child gets a college education? Why?
• When did you first talk to your child about what you thought? (expectations and aspirations) Do you remember what prompted that talk? Or what you said?
• Have you ever spoken with anyone at your child’s school – either on the telephone or in person – about your college plans for your child? Who was it? What did you discuss?

____________________________

INFORMATION

• Some family members have some college experience and some don’t, some seem to have a lot of information about college others have less. Parents of all types tell us that getting information about navigating the path to college is challenging. Where did you get helpful information or support?

Prompts:
Neighborhood or community activities or sports, college readiness program activities or staff, teaching staff, guidance staff, neighbors, family members, community or church connections

• What is the best way for the schools to get information to families?

Follow up questions:
• Did you have personal contacts that were helpful? (friends, community members, school staff, coaches)?
• Flyers about events like the workshops are sent home, is this a good way to get information home?
• Do you consult the school or district website?
• Do you use email? Would you like more communication this way?
• Are automated phone calls helpful reminders? If yes, would they help with important deadlines and events?
• Do you use the school website?

____________________________

CULTURAL WEALTH EVIDENCE

• Did you have worries about your child getting into college? What did you find encouraging?
• What might have discouraged you or made you worry?
• Some parents have shared how their cultural or community background shaped their educational hopes and expectations for their child.

• Can you think of people or programs in your community that would be good supports for a college pathway?

• What are the values or beliefs that come from your cultural background that support strong educational pathways or college dreams? Are there some that might not encourage college attendance? Which is stronger?

• Are there family influences that might be helpful to encourage your child’s college dream? Have others in your family gone to college?

  Prompts: Like personal connections and stories, helpful friends and neighbors, These can also be community values, (or cultural capabilities, values, knowledge, and competencies… This can be like having a second language or special cultural skills or abilities.

• What do you do to encourage your child to do well in school that teachers or school people may not realize?

  Prompts: Some parents insist on good grades, some save for tuition, others talk a lot about getting a good education. (more specific prompt if needed—make sacrifices, encourage with personal or family stories, by closely monitoring homework and grades, dates and deadlines; by seeking information from friends, family community or directly from colleges, saving or planning for tuition, demonstrating how to do hard work)

• When you think about your child’s college attendance what is your dream or hope? Do you have any concerns?

AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

Thank you very much for your time. We believe the information you have provided may help us to improve college access workshops and information in New Bedford Public Schools.
Building College Access High School Parent Interview

Opening remarks:

Hello this is ______________. I am calling (or have come to talk to you) about college readiness in New Bedford. Is this _________? You volunteered to participate in a telephone interview or face-to-face interview. It will take about 30-40 minutes. Would you be willing to talk with me and is this a good time? With your permission I would like to tape record our talk. This is how we are keeping good record of the information people share with us for our study.

Thank you for participating in our focus group and letting us know that you were willing to talk to us again. We sent you a consent form that discusses our project and your participation. It gives us permission to use any information you wish to share. I would like to remind you that all information you give will be confidential and you will not be identified by name in any of the study reports. We are grateful for your help but want you to know that your participation is voluntary and you can opt out at any time. Do you have any questions? Are you willing to continue with our discussion?

BACKGROUND INFO:

How many children do you have? ______

What schools are they attending & grades?_______________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What is your and your spouse’s highest level of education?
   a. You _______________________
   b. Your spouse ______________________

What is your occupation? __________________________

What is your spouse’s occupation? ______________________

1. During the focus group we discussed college readiness workshops and some of the information you thought was important for middle school. We also talked about how to encourage parents to attend, so we sent out flyers and did the automated phone calls and even called some parents directly. We were surprised that so few parents attended and even some who signed up did not come.

Do you have any idea why we were not more successful in getting parents to attend the workshops?
Some parents have said they didn’t get the information, some said that they forgot and some seemed to feel a little shy or unwelcomed….

What do you think we might do better to reach more parents? What encourages you to attend school events?
- When your child is being recognized or given an award?
- When you have someone to go with?
- When you have a ride?
- When someone from the school call?
- When your child asks you to attend?

2. We believe that as a parent with a child about to go to college that you have an important story to tell?
- Did your child always want to go to college?
- Were all members of the family in agreement that college was a good option?
- Did your child have positive examples for college attendance from siblings or other family members?
- Or were there negative examples that discouraged him or her?
- Who else in the family or community played a role?
- Do you remember different things you did?

3. We understand how busy life is these days, why did you decide to attend the focus group? Some people said they were confused and thought it was about getting information and help, others said they were curious about the study, what about you?

4. Not all children in New Bedford go to college what do you believe has encouraged your child to go?
   Has the school played a role? Anyone in particular?
   How about programs like Gear Up or activities like college fairs?
   What has been your role? Do you see yourself as a director, a supporter?
   What do you feel has made the difference for your child?

5. Some schools do a better job than other getting kids into college. How has your high school been helpful or not helpful? What could they do a better job at?

6. During the focus group we discussed how your child was supported in getting to college. Some parents told us they didn’t think about college until lately and other told us stories about how they have talked about it with their child for a long time. Which one are you? Would you tell me about that? Can you tell me about why you think it happened that way?
Prompts:
• Has it always been important to you that your child goes on to college after high school?
• How old was your child or children when you started thinking about their college education?
• What made you start thinking about it?
• How important is it that your child gets a college education? Why did you think this way? What influenced you?
• When did you first talk to your child about what you thought?
• Do you remember what prompted that talk? Or what you said?
• Have you ever spoken with anyone at your child’s school – either on the telephone or in person – about your college plans for your child?
• Who was it? What did you discuss?

7. We have heard and believe that encouragement from parents and family is one of the main ingredients to helping students get into college. Do you think this is true? What is it about you, your family or background that has been important?

8. Do you mind talking about your cultural background? Do others in this group value education as much as you and your child has? How is that shown to children?

9. Can you tell me about your child’s plans for next year?
   What are you excited about?
   What are you worried about?
   • Finances
   • Being away
   • Not finishing

10. Before we end is there anything you would like to tell me or ask me about your experience with getting ready for college?

AT THE END OF THE INTERVIEW

Thank you very much for your time. We believe the information you have provided may help us to improve college access workshops and information in New Bedford Public Schools.
Building College Access Student (Phone) Interview

Opening remarks:

Hello this is _______________. I am calling (or have come to talk to you) about college readiness in New Bedford. Is this __________? Your parent ____________ said it was fine if you volunteered to participate in a telephone interview or face-to-face interview with me. It will take about 30-40 minutes. Would you be willing to talk with me and is this a good time? With your permission I would like to tape record our talk. This is how we are keeping good record of the information people share with us for our study.

Thank you. We sent you a consent form that discusses our project and your participation. It gives us permission to use any information you wish to share. I would like to remind you that all information you give will be confidential and you will not be identified by name in any of the study reports. We are grateful for your help but want you to know that your participation is voluntary and you can opt out at any time. Do you have any questions? Are you willing to continue with our talk?

1. I understand that you plan to go to college next year. Where are you going? Is everything ready for you to go?

2. The college enrollment pathway is very confusing. What has been the most difficult and What has gone easy for you?

3. Some schools do a better job than other getting kids into college. How has your high school been helpful or not helpful? What could they do a better job at?

4. Not all students go to college. What OR who encouraged you to go?
   a. How was school encouraging or not?
   b. How did your friends encourage or discourage you?
   c. How did your family show support or disapproval?

5. What has your parent said to you about college and your future? Do you remember when these talks started?

6. Research tells us that family involvement or encouragement is important in getting kids into college. Is that true for you? Can you tell me why?

7. What has been your parent’s role or job in getting you set to go to college? Do you wish it was different?

8. Do you think that your parent had good information or enough of it? Why or why not?
9. How do you think schools could help more parents be involved? Like workshops on financial aid or a college readiness night? Do you think your parent would be able to attend?

10. Is there anything in your family background or culture that supports the importance of getting a good education?

11. Do you think your parent is comfortable with your college decision? Why or why not?

12. What are your dreams for your future? Do you have any concerns?

13. Before we end is there anything you would like to tell me or ask me about college readiness?

Closing

Thank you very much for your time. We believe the information you have provided may help us to improve college access workshops and information in New Bedford Public Schools.
## Appendix E: College Readiness Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th># served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>College Fairs</td>
<td>Over 100 colleges represented</td>
<td>Flyer, handbook, senior bulletin</td>
<td>2 per year</td>
<td>150 parents and students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Parent Financial Aid Workshop</td>
<td>Evening meeting</td>
<td>Flyer, meeting notes, senior bulletin</td>
<td>Explanation and FAFSA support</td>
<td>10-15 parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>National Decision Day</td>
<td>Celebrate college decisions</td>
<td>Flyer, meeting notes, senior bulletin</td>
<td>Recognition, cake for accepted seniors, college wear by staff</td>
<td>all college bound students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Monthly Senior Bulletin</td>
<td>College prep news, deadlines, college visits, scholarship info</td>
<td>Hard copies</td>
<td>Open houses, scholarships, financial aid info, announcements</td>
<td>all NBHS seniors-550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Senior Advising Day and Packet</td>
<td>Guidance for college enrollment</td>
<td>Hard copy, meeting notes</td>
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<td>all NBHS seniors-550</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>International Student Workshop</td>
<td>College support: undocumented and international</td>
<td>Flyer</td>
<td>Evening workshop with lawyer</td>
<td>students and parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>MEFA College Admission Seminar</td>
<td>Family- info on admissions and resources</td>
<td>Flyer</td>
<td>MEFA sponsored Evening event</td>
<td>students and parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>College Readiness Workshop</td>
<td>Evening for families underclassmen</td>
<td>Meeting notes, Flyer</td>
<td>Freshmen &amp; Sophomores</td>
<td>10 families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>RMS</td>
<td>6th Grade career exploration</td>
<td>Bridges program/ survey, class discussion</td>
<td>Meeting notes, email</td>
<td>Positive student response</td>
<td>10 families</td>
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<td>Event</td>
<td>RMS</td>
<td>7th Grade Women’s Tea</td>
<td>Career networking breakfast</td>
<td>Invitation, website, email</td>
<td>75 local professional and business women</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>RMS</td>
<td>7th Grade Men's Roundtable</td>
<td>Career networking breakfast</td>
<td>Meeting notes, website</td>
<td>local professional and business men</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>RMS</td>
<td>Pathways to Success Dinner</td>
<td>Parents and students at-risk visit with 30 local service groups</td>
<td>Invitation, website</td>
<td>Fully translated for Portuguese and Spanish</td>
<td>75 families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>SAT Preparation</td>
<td>Testing preparation</td>
<td>Handbook, meeting notes</td>
<td>May be updated ACT prep planned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>ACT Preparation</td>
<td>Testing preparation</td>
<td>Meeting notes, email</td>
<td>beginning SY 2011-2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>MASCA course</td>
<td>State approved counseling curriculum</td>
<td>Meeting notes</td>
<td>Proposed to reinstitute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Upward Bound</td>
<td>Fed. College readiness</td>
<td>Handbook, brochures, prog. website</td>
<td>Recruits RMS students</td>
<td>80 regional students</td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>NMS Gear Up</td>
<td>Fed. College readiness</td>
<td>Handbook, brochures, prog. website</td>
<td>Eligibility requirements, tutoring, helps others</td>
<td>675 middle and high school students</td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Talent Search</td>
<td>Fed. College readiness</td>
<td>Handbook, brochures, prog. website</td>
<td>Eligibility, specialize in college visits</td>
<td>270 students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>CS²- Communities and Schools for Success</td>
<td>Career support</td>
<td>Handbook, meeting notes</td>
<td>Specialize in internships</td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship with Babson College and Webster Bank</td>
<td>Course-create project</td>
<td>Meeting notes</td>
<td>Summer program</td>
<td>4-6 students</td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>NFTE- Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>Course-create project</td>
<td>Handbook, meeting notes</td>
<td>Award winning program, recognized students</td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Umass Dartmouth</td>
<td>Dual enrollment</td>
<td>Handbook, meeting notes</td>
<td>Proposed to expand</td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>yourplanforcollege.org program</td>
<td>Web portal, career and college planning, applications</td>
<td>Meeting notes, proposal</td>
<td>All students to be registered interaction w/guidance and parents</td>
<td>2800 students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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<td>Service</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Americorp College Advisor</td>
<td>College advising, activities</td>
<td>Handbook, meeting notes</td>
<td>During and after school</td>
<td>50-60 students</td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Bristol Community College</td>
<td>Dual enrollment, on-site applications</td>
<td>Handbook, meeting notes</td>
<td>Expanding</td>
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<td>Service</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>North Star Learning</td>
<td>Counseling and College Planning</td>
<td>Meeting notes</td>
<td>During and after school</td>
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<td>Program</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>My Turn</td>
<td>Mentoring, summer program first gen college</td>
<td>Handbook, meeting notes</td>
<td>Selective</td>
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<td>Service</td>
<td>NBHS</td>
<td>Occupational Educational Career Media Center</td>
<td>Technical career, college information</td>
<td>Handbook, meeting notes</td>
<td>Available to all students</td>
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Appendix F: Coding Samples

Families’ Aspirations, Views and Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript selection</th>
<th>Open/ Emic Coding</th>
<th>Etic Coding</th>
<th>Thematic Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lena (middle school parent): I don’t think anybody’s helped me make that decision (that son will go to college.) I think it’s just me. It’s been in me, it was planted in me cuz I always had a dream of finishing high school cuz it couldn’t be cuz I had to quit to work for the family. Nobody ever pushed me to go to college. I never had the push so I guess the eagerness somebody should have had to give to me I’m giving to my kids. So it was actually like a seed that was planted in me already.</td>
<td>Parent deprivation as the force behind encouraging a child’s college attendance</td>
<td>Encouragement is cultural wealth</td>
<td>Valuing education as the result of life challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marisol (high school parent): Example the parents, the immigrants when he come here to find a better future. As part of the better future the kids go to college. Because you know their country is struggling, because is poor, the situation is not good.</td>
<td>Connection between immigration, better future and education for children</td>
<td>Parent aspirations</td>
<td>Immigration as an action taken in support of college access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda (high school parent): I think it just because some people think it’s the financial statistics, you know what I mean? They ain’t gonna be able to afford it or they just. I think parents in general will say Ugh—I don’t even want to encourage my kid to go to college cuz we can’t afford it. Without knowing what’s out there, what they can do.</td>
<td>Parents do not understand financial benefits of college attendance</td>
<td>Financial fears and lack of information about financial aid</td>
<td>Lack of effective information impacts parent encouragement and involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Helpful College-Related Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transcript selection</th>
<th>Open/ Emic Coding</th>
<th>Etic Coding</th>
<th>Thematic Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elise (high school parent): Upward Bound gave you a booklet with every possible deadline. As far as the scholarships and the essays you have to write and everything. They go over with the kids, they are constantly writing. Like Kyle wrote an essay two years ago and they just critiqued it and she used it this year for her stuff. They are constantly giving you information. They have a parent group as well. I didn’t join but I still know everything, I am constantly looking. They give so much information.</td>
<td>Parent approves of Upward Bound</td>
<td>Need pathway mapping</td>
<td>Conveys helpful information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana (middle &amp; high school parent): The third one (workshop). Probably cuz it focused on the financial assistance and that’s my major concern. I mean we will support our children whatever they want to do but don’t know how to bring them there; and that so that’s what we been worrying about. With all the info that we go that alleviate it a little bit.</td>
<td>Liked third workshop</td>
<td>Value of early financial aid information</td>
<td>Financial And Pathway map is vital information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori (high school senior): I got one (senior bulletin) today, it tells us information like scholarships to sign up for, if they have like any events coming up. Or any college things to talk about—college visits. Reminders about deadlines and all that.</td>
<td>Parent gets and reads this?</td>
<td>Published materials are helpful</td>
<td>Senior year guidance only</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:**

- **Open/ Emic Coding** refer to individual experiences and perspectives.
- **Etic Coding** refer to general or collective perspectives.
- **Thematic Analysis** categorizes the information into broader themes and insights.
### Communication

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<th>Thematic Analysis</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana: I think if it wasn’t for me and my husband what we know, what we are expecting for our children...we would have to shop around on our own. Cuz the school, the high school so far hasn’t given us any support so far. Yes here’s your child, he has the potential to go to college. I think that’s one of the problems with dropout, the school is not caring at all to give that information to parents. It’s up to you if you want any of your kids to go to school you have to do it.</td>
<td>Parent is frustrated</td>
<td>School not filling need of parents</td>
<td>Communication gaps</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High school failure</td>
<td>Possess cultural wealth</td>
<td>Give impression of indifference to families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connection with dropout</td>
<td>Organizational communication critical theory-oppression, social reproduction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“school is not caring at all to give that information to parents”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Jane (middle school parent): This information (about coming workshop series) could get sent home with students. I think she (principal) could probably put more on that than you can in a voice message leaving for parents. But I knew nothing about it, just what (son) had brought home and then the voice message so I was just intrigued by it because I wanted to find out more.</td>
<td>Suggests students carry info</td>
<td>Limitations of phone messaging</td>
<td>Preference on traditional written communication</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Didn’t receive iAlert message</td>
<td>Single communication method employed</td>
<td>Supports use of multiple communication channels</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flyer was interesting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rosalia: yes it’s (“All call” message) in English. I understand when they call. The reason why I don’t go even though I understand some English because I don’t know how to respond. I don’t understand that much when they’re talking, so I don’t know how to respond to any of the questions that they might be asking about.</td>
<td>iAlert message not translated</td>
<td>Critical theory-communication</td>
<td>Most preferred system- flaws</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Immigrant parent understands English message</td>
<td>Oppression, social reproduction – through communication gaps</td>
<td>Language barrier</td>
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Appendix G: Survey Outcomes.

### Child’s Grade

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Attended workshop to learn about financial aid

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To learn about the college system

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To learn about the process of applying to college

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To learn about academic requirements for college admission

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To learn about tests required for college admission

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### My child asked me to attend

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### My child's teacher asked me to attend

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### The opportunity to meet other parents

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### Door prizes and refreshments

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### Satisfaction with time and location

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Tonight's handouts were

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Indicate your desire to attend more workshops in the future

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Phone calls

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### Through community organizations or churches

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### Did the workshop change your ideas about your child’s college attendance

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Appendix H: IRB Approvals, Informed Consents

Notification of IRB Action

Date: February 1, 2011
IRB #: 10-12-02

Principal Investigator(s): Angela Bermudez
Sue Anne Marks

Department: College of Professional Studies
Education

Address: 40 BV
Northeastern University

Title of Project: A Case Study: Building College Access in New Bedford

Participating Sites: New Bedford Public Schools – approval received

Informed Consent: One (1) unsigned consent – focus groups
One (1) signed consent – interview

As per CFR 45.46.117(c)(2) signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required.

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #5, #7
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

Approval Expiration Date: JANUARY 31, 2012

Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. Informed consent forms bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina
Director, Research Integrity

Northeastern University FWA #: 4630
Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
As a Focus Group Participant

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, and when the focus group meets the researcher will also explain the study. You will be able to ask this person any questions that you have. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. This is a copy to keep for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate because your child or family member is currently a senior at New Bedford High School or has recently graduated and gone on to college. This study is hoping you will share your understanding of the challenges when planning for college for your child or family member.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to find out what information you think is helpful when you make decisions about college and how this information could best be shared with families. This information may help us make the schools’ college readiness activities more helpful to families in this community and help get more students in college.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to join in a focus group discussion about what helped you get your child into college. The group will have 6-8 members along with the researcher and a note-taker.

- You will be asked to talk about your experience in preparing your student for college.
  You will also be asked to review information to be given during a college readiness workshop series to help us decide what information is important and what is not as important. We hope you will help us understand how we can best reach most families, where a good place to hold the workshops is, and how we help can make families comfortable.

APPROVED
NU IRB
VALID: 11/12/62
THROUGH: 11/31/12
Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

The discussion groups will take place at the New Bedford Public Schools' administration building at 455 County St. in room 102. It will last about 90 minutes. A tape recorder will be used to keep accurate record of the discussion.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There will not be any risk to you for participating in this study.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There is no direct benefit to you as a participant of the focus group. However the information learned in this study may help the families of younger students in New Bedford. Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers of this study and members of this focus group will hear the information you share. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

Only researchers on this study will listen to recordings, which will be turned into a written script. No names will be included in the transcript, participants names will be changed into a code. Once transcriptions are made the audio tapes will be destroyed.

In rare instances, we would permit people who are authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University to see this information. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly.

If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?

You may decide not to participate in the study at any time.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you do not have to answer any question and you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a parent or family member of a student enrolled in New Bedford Public School.

Will I be paid for my participation? Will it cost me anything to participate?

As a "thank you", you will receive a $5 gift certificate to Dunkin Donuts at the end of the focus group.
Is there anything else I need to know?

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study please email Sue Anne Marks the researcher of this study at marks.su@husky.neu.edu; or email Angela Bermudez the advisor at abermudez@neu.edu

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-4588, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for your records.
Thank you.
Sue Anne Marks

There will be up to 16 family members involved in the focus groups for this study.
To: Rita Jones, family member to a (former) New Bedford student  
From: Sue Anne Marks, Director of Health, Guidance and Pupil Personnel Services,  
        New Bedford Public Schools  
Subject: Northeastern University Study Focus Group – A Case Study: Building College Access in New Bedford

Dear Mrs. Jones,

I am Director of Health, Guidance and Pupil Personnel Services in New Bedford Public Schools and also a student of Northeastern University. I am doing research about assisting our students with success acceptance into college. The purpose of this study is to find out what information you think is helpful when you need to make decisions about college and how this information should be given to families.

I would like to invite you to participate in the focus group study that will discuss college access information and the needs of families. This information will help us make the schools’ college readiness activities more helpful to families in this community and help get more students into college.

You are being asked to participate because your child or family member is currently a senior at New Bedford High School or has recently graduated and gone on to college. I am hoping you might be willing to share your understanding of the challenges when planning for college for your child or family member.

This focus group is being conducted on (Date) at (time); it will take approximately 90 minutes. Your responses will be handled carefully and confidentially and the results from this focus group will only be used for this study to hopefully improve programs in New Bedford Public Schools.

You may also receive another letter to remind you about the event as the time approaches.

I will be glad to arrange for transportation for you to attend the focus group. If you are interested in participating and need other assistance, please let us know how we might help. Also as a “thank you”, we will provide a $5 gift certificate to Dunkin Donuts to each participant at the end of the focus group.

I am enclosing a form (informed consent) that will give you more information about the study. We will review it at the beginning of the focus group and answer any questions that you might have at that time. If you have any questions, please email me at marks.su@husky.neu.edu or call (508)997-4511 ext. 3371 (NBPS office phone).

Thank you for your participation,

- Sue Anne Marks

Approved

NU IRB# 10-12-22
Valid: 2/1/21
Through: 1/3/23
Focus Group Phone Recruitment Script

Hello,

This is __________________ of New Bedford Public Schools. Is this __________________? I am helping a doctoral student at Northeastern University who is doing research about college access. We sent you a letter about this. Did you receive it?

If the response is yes, say: Will you be able to attend?

If yes say: Good! Thank you for your help. Do you have any questions about the focus group? Use information below to answer questions.

Say: Do you need help getting to 455 County St. on __________________ (date and time)?

If yes- confirm address and say: We will contact you about transportation. Thank you

If the response is no, say:

Do you have a moment so that I can tell you about this study?

I am helping with a study to hopefully find out what information you think is helpful to families when you need to make decisions about college. We would also like how this information should best be given to families.

We would like to invite you to participate in the focus group study that will discuss college access information and the needs of families because your child is in college or about to enroll. This information may help us make the schools’ college readiness activities more helpful to families in this community and help get more students into college.

Are you interested in helping us?

If no say: Thank you for your time

If yes continue with the following:

This voluntary focus group is being conducted on (Date) at (time) at the school department building at 455 County St. It will take approximately 90 minutes and will be tape recorded.

Your responses will be handled carefully and confidentially and the results from this focus group will only be used for this study and may improve programs in New Bedford Public Schools.

APPROVED

NU IRB# 0-12-02
VALID: 2/1/14 THROUGH 1/31/16
We will be glad to arrange for transportation for you to attend the focus group. Please let us know how we can assist your attendance. Also as a thank you- you will receive a $5 gift certificate to Dunkin Donuts at the end of the focus group.

May we confirm your address? We will be sending you a letter (informed consent) that will give you more information about the study. If you have any questions, please ask me now or you can email the researcher at marks.sui@husky.neu.edu or call (508)997-4511 ext. 3371 (NBPS office phone).

Thank you for your help.
Informed Consent to Be Interviewed as a Participant in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, and the interviewer will explain it to you before the interview begins. You may ask this person any questions that you have. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, please sign the attached statement and mail it back in the return envelope. You may keep this information for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate because your child or family member is currently a middle school student in New Bedford Public Schools and you have attended a college readiness workshop. It is hoped that as a part of this study you will share your understanding of the challenges of planning for college for your child or family member.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to find out what information you think will be helpful in order to make decisions about college and how this information should be given to families. This information may help us make the schools’ college readiness activities more useful to families in this community and help get more students into college.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you if we can either meet with you for an interview or call you for a phone interview. During this interview we will ask you to tell us more about how you think the workshops might be better. We will also ask you to tell us about your hopes, worries about getting your child in college and how we might help you to plan.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

If you agree to be interviewed, you will be called on the telephone or asked to meet at a time and place that is convenient to you. It will take 30-40 minutes to answer 25-30 questions. The interview will be tape recorded.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?

There is no risk to you as a participant.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

APPROVED

NU IRB# 10-02-02
VALID THROUGH: 1/31/17
There is no direct benefit to you as an interview participant. However, the information learned in this study may help the families of other students in New Bedford.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

Only researchers on this study will listen to the recordings of the interview. The audio recording will be turned into a written transcript. No names will be included in the transcript, participants' names will be changed into a number code (interview member 1, interview member 2 etc.)

In rare instances we would permit people who are authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University to see this information. This would be done only to be sure that the research is conducted properly.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you do not have to answer any questions and you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a parent or family member of a student in New Bedford Public Schools.

**Will I be paid for my participation? Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There is no payment or charge for participation.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

You must be at least 18 years old to participate. There will be up to 16 family members involved in interviews during this study.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

If you have any questions about this study please email Sue Anne Marks the researcher of this study at marks.su@husky.neu.edu; or Angela Bermudez the advisor to the study at abermudez@neu.edu.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 900 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-4588, email: rbi@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
Informed Consent Interview 3

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Investigator Sue Anne Marks
Title of Project: A Case Study Building College Access in New Bedford

Informed Consent to Be Interviewed as a Participant in a Research Study

I understand my rights and agree to take part in this research study as an interview participant.

__________________________   ______________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part   Date

__________________________
Printed name of person above

+++Please return this form in the self-addressed stamped envelope.

APPROVED
NU IRB#   107-10-02
VALID: 3/1/12
THROUGH 11/30/12
Northeastern

Notification of IRB Action
Modification

Date: April 13, 2011
IRB #: 10-12-02

Principal Investigator(s): Angela Bermudez
Sue Anne Marks

Department: College of Professional Studies/ Education
Address: 40 BV

Title of Project: A Case Study: Building College Access in New Bedford

Modification: Addition of two new subject groups: a) parents/family members
previously participated in a focus group; b) the children of these
parents who are in high school or freshmen in college.

Participating Sites: New Bedford Public Schools – approval received

Informed Consent: One (1) unsigned consent – Focus Groups
One (1) signed consent – Interviews with Parents and Minors

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #5, #7

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

Approval Expiration Date: JANUARY 31, 2012

Investigator’s Responsibilities:

1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting
participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new
information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be
reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior
to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any
other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina
Director, Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #: 4620
NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION
MODIFICATION APPROVAL

Date: July 5, 2011   IRB #: 10-12-02
Principal Investigators: Claire W. Jackson
Staci Anne Marks
Department: Doctor of Education Program
College of Professional Studies
Address: 42 Beckwith, Northeastern University
Title of Project: A Case Study: Building College Access in New Bedford
MODIFICATION: Change in PI from Dr. Angela Hernandez to Dr. Claire W. Jackson.
Approval Status: Project is Ongoing and Open to Enrollment
Participating Sites: New Bedford Public Schools
Original Protocol Approved: February 1, 2011
Most Recent Approval Date: April 13, 2011 - modification
DRIIS Review Category: Expedited #5, #6, #7
Informal Consent: One (1) unsigned consent form for Focus Groups
One (1) signed consent form for interviews with Parents and Students
As per CFR 45.46 (117.62) Signed consent is being used as the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is not required.

This project is being approved under 45 CFR 46.404 which applies to children as research subjects and involves research not involving greater than minimal risk. Adequate provisions are made for safeguarding the welfare of the children and the protection of their parents or guardians, as set forth in 45 CFR 46.403.

Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: JANUARY 31, 2012

Investigator's Responsibilities:
1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter the perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit at any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

C. Ronald, Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subjects Research Protection

Northeastern UniversityFWA 00014030
Informed Consent Interview 1

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
Investigator Sue Anne Marks
Title of Project: A Case Study Building College Access in New Bedford

Informed Consent to Be Interviewed as a Participant in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, and the interviewer will explain it to you before the interview begins. You may ask this person any questions that you have. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, please sign the attached statement and mail it back in the return envelope. You may keep this information for your records.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You had participated in a focus group for this study in March 2011 and the researcher is interested in speaking with you further. You are being asked to participate in this interview because your child or family member is currently participating in a college readiness program, is a senior at New Bedford High School or has recently graduated and gone on to college. This study is hoping you will share your understanding of the challenges when planning for college for your child or family member.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this study is to find out what information you think is helpful when you make decisions about college and how this information should be given to families. This information may help us make the schools’ college readiness activities more useful to families in this community and help us get more students into college.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you if we can either meet with you for an interview or call you for a phone interview. During this interview we will ask you to tell us more about how you think the workshops might be better. We will also ask you to tell us about your hopes, worries about getting your child in college and how we might help you to plan.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

If you agree to be interviewed, you will be called on the telephone or asked to meet at a time and place that is convenient to you. It should take about 20-30 minutes to answer the questions, but it will depend on how much you have to say. The interview will be tape recorded.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
Informed Consent Interview 2

There is no risk to you as a participant.

Will I benefit by being in this research?

There is no direct benefit to you as an interview participant. However the information learned in this study may help the families of other students in New Bedford.

Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

Only researchers on this study will listen to the recordings of the interview. The audio recording will be turned into a written transcript. No names will be included in the transcript, participants names will be changed into a number code (focus group member 1, interview member 2 etc.)

In rare instances we would permit people who are authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University to see this information. This would be done only to be sure that the research is conducted properly.

Can I stop my participation in this study?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you do not have to answer any questions and you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as a parent or family member of a student in New Bedford Public Schools.

Will I be paid for my participation? Will it cost me anything to participate?

There is no payment or charge for participation.

Is there anything else I need to know?

You must be at least 18 years old to participate. There will be up to 16 family members involved in interviews during this study.

Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?

If you have any questions about this study please email Sue Anne Marks the researcher of this study at marks.su@husky.neu.edu; or Angela Bermudez the advisor to the study at abermudez@neu.edu.

Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-4588, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.
NORTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY, College of Professional Studies
Investigator Sue Anne Marks
Title of Project: A Case Study Building College Access in New Bedford

Informed Consent to Be Interviewed as a Participant in a Research Study

I understand my rights and agree to take part in this research study as an interview participant.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part Date

________________________________________________________________________
Printed name of person above

+++ Please return this form in the self-addressed stamped envelope.

APPROVED
Informed Consent Interview 4

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies
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Title of Project: A Case Study Building College Access in New Bedford

You had participated in a focus group for this study in March 2011 and the researcher is interested in speaking with your child. He or she is being asked to participate in this interview because your child is currently a senior at New Bedford High School or has recently graduated and gone on to college. This study is hoping he or she will share an understanding of the challenges they and their parents face when planning for college.

Informed Consent for a Child to be Interviewed as a Participant in a Research Study

Parent/Guardian

I understand my rights and agree to allow my child_________________________ to take part in this research study as an interview participant.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of parent or guardian                        Date

__________________________________________________________
Printed name of person above

Student

I understand my rights and agree to take part in this research study as an interview participant.

__________________________________________________________
Signature of person agreeing to take part                        Date

__________________________________________________________
Printed name of person above

+++Please return this form in the self-addressed stamped envelope.
Appendix I

Suggestions for practice:

Convene a college access leadership team

To develop a plan that will:

- Address gaps identified by participants this study related to the provision of early information; a map of the college pathway; access to a broad range of information; counseling throughout middle school and high school; access to information in a culturally responsive manner; and comprehensive information on financing a college education.

- Begin college readiness and awareness activities for parents in each middle school

- Structure college access activities for immigrant and diverse families. Attempt to dispel myths.

- Identify various workshop and seminar structures, content and schedules considering varying needs of families.

- Provide information needed by low-SES families and diverse families as identified by extant literature and supported by this study. Include topics such as, postsecondary and career goals, high school graduation requirements, middle and high school courses needed to prepare for college, standardized test students will take in middle and high school and how results will be used, potential extracurricular and community activities, available pre-college programs, college finance plans, college admissions steps” (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005, pp. 17-18).

- Consider findings related to families educational values and aspirations, parent encouragement and involvement, family immigration, the import of family background and college financing concerns.
  - Help parents identify ways to activate the important influence of encouragement and involvement to support college access.
  - Design mechanism to activate important influence of grandparents and extended family members.
  - Highlight the important financial gains and security offered by postsecondary education when publicizing events.
o Offer multiple opportunities to gain access to information concerning financing a college education.
o Use the idea of missed opportunity to appeal to parents. Investigate the possibility of connecting parents with educational opportunities in acknowledgement of their own aspirations.

Beneficial collaborations.

• Collaborate between NBPS, local college representatives and pre-college programs to coordinate outreach and informational sessions that would strategically address gaps identified
• Engage with precollegiate program leadership to identify the manner and timing of parent outreach activities for possible replication

Communication.

• Survey communication practices, looking for gaps in connecting with all families.
• Establish practices that support collaboration with reciprocal communication between schools and families
• Identify and address gaps in existing practices for parents with specific language needs
• Employ multiple strategies to deliver information and messaging
• Formulate a plan to address communication barriers that also considers the use of local and culturally-based radio, as well as other web-based and social media outlets
• Develop practices to assure published web-based informational sources are kept current
• Develop a college access event calendar and publish in multiple forms
• Translate all published materials, signage, and informational resources
• Seek to identify and capitalize on existing social networks to transmit information
Design staff development.

The following suggestions are helpful activities suggested by study findings, but not considered exhaustive of the efforts required as urban schools attempt to respond to swiftly increasingly diverse family population:

- Use this study’s conceptual model to present portions of the case study during professional development activities in order to support the use of a cultural wealth lens, and the adoption of the assumption that all families seek the best for their children.
- Establish the role of the school and its staff in understanding and building on the various ways families activate cultural capital in a quickly changing diverse school environment.
- Share statistical evidence of the changing student populations and resulting challenges faced by urban schools in the nation.
- Offer seminars to support culturally responsive schools
  - Include discussions to expose mechanisms of social reproduction that may exist in this urban school context. (Staff can outline the attributes of students and families that staff typically access college and compare with families profiles from this study. Attempt to identify ways the cultural wealth and educational values of these families was or was not recognized and supported.)
  - Use examples derived from this case study and others to highlight how families’ values and aspirations are formed. Use transcript excerpts to ‘give voice’ to their experiences.
  - Share literature suggesting ways of engaging diverse families in schools and the college enrollment process.
References


