

ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS FOR LATINO MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

By

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Almost one-third of the students attending public high schools in the United States dropout of school each year with Hispanic students being a significant percentage of the students failing to graduate. While, this is a national problem, there is a variation in the rates in which specific ethnic/racial groups are dropping out of school with Hispanics (36.5%) dropping out at a higher rate than Asian (8.6%) and White (19%) students. This study analyzes the group difference between Latino students' educational aspirations and academic achievement during eighth and 10th grade, as well as gender difference in aspiration level.

The findings of this study assessing the relationship of educational aspirations and academic achievement of Latino students who are participants of GEAR UP yielded varying results. The educational aspirations of the GEAR UP Latino students during eighth and 10th grade showed a growth in the variable over time. Further, the educational aspirations and the academic achievement of the student participants produced relationships of significance during the students' eighth grade year, but not during their 10th grade year. It was found during eighth grade, participants with

educational aspirations of a bachelor's or master's degree had better academic outcomes, based on California Standard Test (CST) performance, than student participants with higher educational aspirations of a professional degree (i.e., medical, law). This was not the case for 10th grade findings, which yielded non-significant results between academic achievement and educational aspiration after the transition to high school. Next, when analyzing aspiration level based on gender, there was no significant relationship, which may be attributed to the programming of GEAR UP. Lastly, a regression analysis to assess the predictability of 10th grade GPA was reviewed using the independent variables eighth grade GPA, CST performance, and educational aspiration. The analysis showed eighth grade GPA had the strongest relationship to 10th GPA.

These findings suggest there are factors beyond educational aspirations contributing to student persistence and academic achievement in high school, with eighth grade GPA having the strongest relationship to 10th grade GPA. Based on this, the perception students have about their possible education attainment level may be developed based upon educational experiences from middle school. Therefore, student's relationships, self-efficacy beliefs, and academic performance in this period of the educational pipeline are critical for educational attainment levels beyond high school.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT AND
EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS FOR LATINO MIDDLE
AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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CHAPTER 1
GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Background

Globalization is reconstituting and restructuring national economies and it is breaking down national borders and integrating the world economy into a single system (Wolf, 2013). Globalization has led to the prioritization of educational attainment rates for nations wanting to maintain or increase their position in the global market. The ability of the United States to compete in the global market is dependent on the productivity of its citizens. A contributing factor to educational attainment is the development of educational aspirations (Madarasova Geckova, Tavel, van Dijk, Abel, & Reijneveld, 2010). The student persistence rate through high school has been a concern in the United States for over two decades (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), for at one time education as a commodity lost value, and student dropout rates climbed. In recent years the student persistence rate through high school had reached such daunting numbers that it was deemed a silent epidemic. According to research, 1.2 million students who enter high school as freshmen will not graduate 4 years later with their peers (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010).

The traditional education pipeline in the United States is kindergarten through 12th grade. The formation of educational aspirations within this timeframe appears to be affecting student attainment rates (Lee, Hill, & Hawkins, 2012). The career and educational goals of students are established before students promote from middle school and the ability to accomplish these goals is influenced by student achievement. Further,

educational aspiration is one of the most important predictors of educational attainment (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969). The data on economic and political implications of low education attainment rates has garnered federal and state attention with an increase of funding and research to address student persistence.

Diplomas Count 2013 report stated the high school rate in the United States claims more than one million students a year, having an impact on the potential earnings, lost revenue, and social services on the national and state level (“Diplomas Count”, 2013). To combat not only the nation’s problem with student persistence, but to afford students opportunities from lower socioeconomic communities tools to acquire a higher education, the federal government has provided numerous forms of funding. This is to support the educational development of the nation’s human capital.

On March 1, 2010, President Barak Obama pledged \$900 million to assist in the reduction of the dropout rate in the United States. According to President Obama,

This is a problem we can’t afford to accept or ignore. The stakes are too high--for our children, for our economy, for our country. It’s time for all of us to come together--parents and students, principals and teachers, business leaders and elected officials-it is America’s dropout crisis. (White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2010) (Para.4)

The President was campaigning to increase the nation’s college graduate populace prior to funding being allocated to address student persistence through high school. In his address at a joint session of Congress on February 24, 2009, President Barack Obama proclaimed, “ by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world...So tonight I ask every American to commit to at least one year

or more of higher education or career training....every American will need to get more than a high school diploma”(para.58).

Programs addressing the constructs influential in maintaining student persistence and the development of education aspirations beyond high school can support the 2020 objective of the White House. Gaining Early Awareness Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federally funded program to address not only student persistence through high school as well as higher education. GEAR UP is designed to provide lower income students the academic and social capital needed to be successful in a higher education setting. The program, supporting a cohort of students from middle school through high school, provides students and families access to information designed to assist in the development of educational aspirations beyond high school. GEAR UP supports the development of collegiate aspirations; however, attributes of the program address the needs of students to maintain persistence through high school as well. While high school dropout rates are on the decline, the number students failing to graduate from high school, college and career ready, remains a concern (Adams, 2012).

The early indicators in a student’s decision to dropout has been reviewed by researchers, with the recognition and agreement that student dropout is a process, not an event of single occurrence (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Balfanz, Herzog, & Iver, 2007; Fall & Roberts, 2012; Finn,1989; Fitzsimmons, Cheever, Leonard, & Macunovich, 1969; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002; Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000; Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006; Rumberger, 1995). While the percentage of Hispanic students dropping out of high school has continuously decreased since 1990, this minority ethnic group continues to have the highest dropout rate in the nation (National Center for

Educational Statistics [NCES], 2011). Further, the Hispanic population in the United States, as of 2011 is the nation's largest ethnic or race minority consisting of 16.7% of the total nation's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Thus, the educational aspirations, academic achievement and college completion rate of this group is influential on the political, social and economic norms of the nation. According to NCES (2010), Latinos have had a higher dropout rate than Whites and African Americans since 1972.

The decrease in the dropout rate of high school students over the last few years can be attributed to the amount of attention on the subject matter, however still nearly 1 in 4 Americans, and 4 in 10 minorities, does not complete high school with his or her class (NCES, 2011). There has been growing recognition of the critical role the middle grades play in enabling all students to graduate from high school prepared for college, career, and civic life. According to U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2011), "The middle grade years have been called the 'Bermuda Triangle' of K-12 education. It's the time when students sink or swim" (Secretary Arne Duncan's Remarks at the National Forum's Annual Schools to Watch Conference). Further, initiatives focused on middle school have been developed. Two initiatives focused on middle schools are the Bush Institute's Middle Grades Matter and the Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Education. In February 2011, the George W. Bush Institute introduced Middle School Matters, a school reform strategy aimed at dramatically increasing the number of students who enter high school ready to succeed. The second initiative, National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Education, has a mission to unite key stakeholders to speak with a common voice to leverage research, policy, leadership, and replicable model practices to drive middle grades reform (The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades Reform,

n.d.). The inclusion of middle school reform in conversations about high school persistence and student aspirations has been initiated in an effort to provide prevention versus intervention when addressing programming to reduce student dropout and support greater attendance in higher education.

Problem Statement

Almost one third of the students attending public high schools in the United States dropout of school each year (Snyder & Dillow, 2010; Stillwell, 2010), with Hispanic students being a significant percentage of the students failing to graduate. While, this is a national problem, there is a variation in the rates in which specific ethnic/racial groups are dropping out of school with Hispanics (36.5%) dropping out at a higher rate than Asian (8.6%) and White (19%) students (Stillwell, 2010). Numerous publications have provided recommendations for government, school districts, and educational leaders to consider as part of their comprehensive policies and programs to support student persistence of minorities (Bettendorf, 2008; Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006; Jimerson, Reschly, & Hess, 2008; Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Schargel & Smink, 2001); however, the academic achievement of minority students in the United States remains a concern having political, social, and economic implications on the nation. There is a need for population targeted research with empirical evidence to guide the development of policies and the implementation of specific programs and practices in schools to confidently affect Latino student achievement, aspiration and persistence in a more timely manner (Archerd, 2013; Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr, & Godber, 2001; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004).

There are educational experiences prior to high school contributing to a lack of student persistence through high school and this is gaining notice. This is evidenced by the fact that data from national and state-level graduation rate estimates has recently included middle school grades (Bowers, 2010). The educational aspirations as well as academic achievement of students needs closer assessment in middle school for there is an important population of students who may have dropped out before entering high school due to poor academic achievement (Balfanz & Boccanfuso, 2007; Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine, & Constant, 2004; Skinner, Zimmer-Germbeck, & Connell, 1998).

According to Howard Blume in the August 12, 2011 *Los Angeles Times*, in California about 3.5% of eighth graders dropped out of school. This data is based upon dropout and graduation rates of eighth-graders from the 2008-2009 school year released by the California Department of Education. On the national level, over 8% of middle school students dropout of school annually (NCES, 2010). Further, according to the data released by the California Department of Education, for the 2010-2011 school year in Los Angeles Unified School District over 29% of the adjusted dropout numbers for student dropouts were from grades 7 through 9 (California Department of Education, 2012). The adjusted dropout numbers take into consideration students who immigrate to another country or die.

The antecedents to student dropout and the development of aspirations for higher education needs to be addressed in middle school and high school because dropping out of high school is a gradual process, not a decision (Bridgeland et.al, 2006; Fall & Roberts, 2012; Finn, 1989). An educational institution's ability to support the aspirations of middle school students is limited by a lack of assessment tools to measure this

population's college-going beliefs (Gibbons & Borders, 2010). According to Asha Cooper (2009) most students make the decision about their educational future between their eighth and 10th grade school years.

Research focused on the relationship between academic achievement and aspiration levels for students in their middle school experience is important. Further, a focus on Latino/Hispanic students is needed considering the group's populace in the nation and the percentage not completing high school or entering higher education. There is a growing awareness that the ninth grade is a "make or break" year, which has led to the decision of several districts and schools throughout the country to establish early warning systems to identify students in need of intervention and support upon their arrival into the ninth grade. The development of early warning signals based on researched indicators influencing student achievement and aspiration levels is needed to address student persistence in the nation as a whole, but also specifically for Latino/Hispanic students who are the fastest growing population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to assess the relationship between Latino students' aspirations and student achievement from middle school to high school. This study will utilize a conceptual framework based upon status attainment, blocked opportunities, and social support models as well as Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) as a lens to view how aspirations is related to student achievement and persistence.

Research Questions

In review of the relationship between student aspiration, student achievement and persistence, the following research questions are being used for this study:

1. To what extent is there a difference between eighth and 10th grade aspirations for GEAR UP Latino students after 2 years of high school experience?
2. What is the group difference between a Latino student's level of aspiration and CST score during his or her eighth and 10th grade experiences?
3. What is the gender difference in the level of aspiration of Latino and Latina students during their eighth and 10th grade years?
4. What is the relationship between eighth grade GPA, CST scores, and educational aspirations to 10th grade GPA?

Conceptual Framework

There are numerous variables that contribute to the level of aspiration of a student including social economic status, an educational institutions programming, teacher and peer relationships, as well as social cognitive development. For the purposes of this study, a conceptual framework based upon the following models and theories is being used to support the constructs influencing student aspiration. Status attainment, blocked opportunities, social support models as well as Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) have been used in the literature to conceptualize the process of aspiration development.

Based upon the conceptual framework for this study identified in Figure 1.1 the foundation of a student's educational aspirations are based on the social capital acquired from their home life, the experiences and interactions with his or her parents or caregivers, as defined by the Status attainment model. Income, education level and type

of employment of a parent/caregiver of student are the first examples a student has of “life.” Status attainment model suggests the socioeconomic status (SES) highly influences educational aspirations (Barr & Dreeben, 1983). Status attainment model states, a student’s level of aspiration is influenced by their parent or caregiver’s income, level of education, type of employment, and the educational expectations held for the student (Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011; Mau, 1995; Sewell, Haller, & Ohlendorf, 1970).

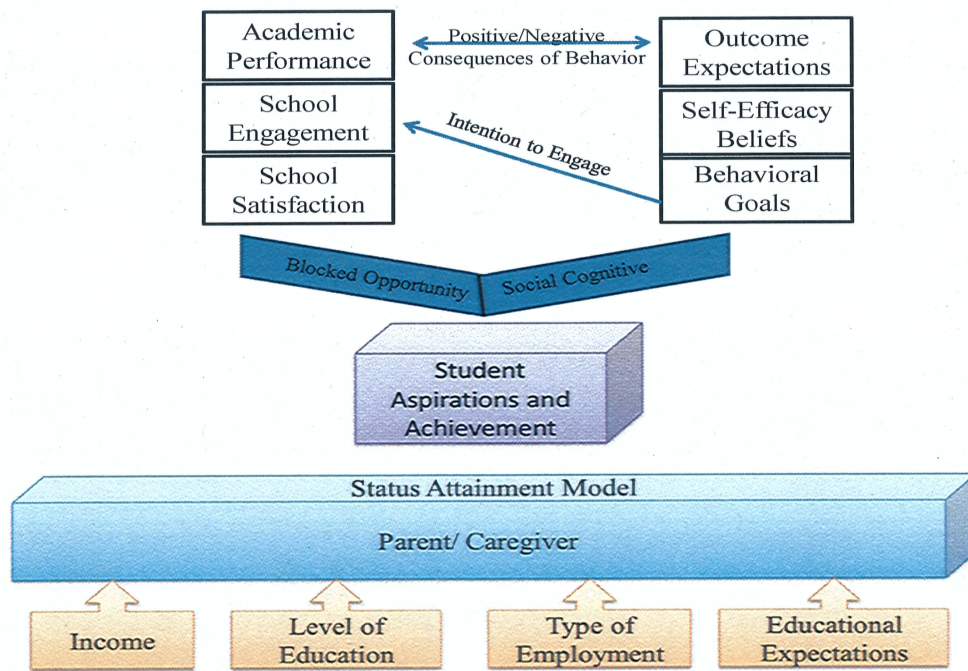


FIGURE 1.1. Conceptual framework.

The educational expectations of parent/caregivers based upon their experiences have an influence on student aspirations (Sciarra & Ambrosino, 2011; Mau, 1995; Sewell et al., 1970). Researchers have suggested that adolescents first develop ideas of the possible life outcomes and develop goals based on societal norms and parent expectations

(Froiland & Davison, 2014; Nurmi, 2004). The development of these goals motivates achievement. However, this model alone is not sufficient to address influences on student aspiration levels, as it fails to take into consideration the education institution and peer influence on student aspiration (Berzin, 2010). Kao and Tienda's (1998) Blocked Opportunity Framework addresses the influence of an education institution on student aspiration and the negative perception a student may have about the ability to achieve goals.

Based on the research of Ogbu and others (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Mau, 1995; Wilson & Wilson, 1992), blocked opportunity framework states poor educational and learning experiences contribute to low levels of aspirations as students do not have the perception of being able to acquire a higher SES due to their education. Therefore, students may perceive if their parent has acquired a high school diploma and the family is living in an undesirable environment, that a high school diploma holds no value. Further, the parent/caregiver who has provided for the family without a high school diploma may influence a student's perception of the need to acquire a high school diploma. This perception may be heightened if a student is unable to have experiences outside of a community with low educational attainment.

The significant variables in the blocked opportunities model are academic performance, school engagement and school satisfaction (Berzin, 2010). The social support of a student also influences his or her aspiration level. The academic performance of students is related to the outcome expectations of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986). An element of Social Cognitive Theory is outcome expectations, which is associated with the personal beliefs about the positive and negative

consequences of performing a particular behavior (i.e., studying). Students who have decided completing high school having what their parent/caregiver has provided is goal, they may be more likely to be satisfied with a high school diploma and not have educational aspirations beyond high school. Students could also have the impression that a high school diploma has not been provided for the family, therefore they do not need a high school diploma and this affects their academic performance. Personal goals for students are linked to their perception about the purposes of education (Haji & Cuypers, 2011; Nicholls, 1989; Nicholls, Chueng, Lauer, & Patashnick, 1989; Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985).

The relationships students have not only with family, but teachers and peers as well have an impact on aspiration levels. These relationships have been identified in the literature as having influence on student achievement, attainment, and persistence all of which have a relationship to aspiration in the psychological form of student engagement (Levitt, Guacci-Franco, & Levitt, 1994; Majoribanks, 2004; Richman, Rosenfield & Bowen, 1998; Wentzel, Baker & Russell, 2012). The psychological and behavioral engagement of students influences a second element of Social Cognitive Theory, behavioral goals. Behavioral goals can be defined as the intention to engage in a particular activity. According to the research there is a strong relationship between student success and student engagement in school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). A student is unlikely to identify with school without a consistent pattern of participation in school activities, which may need to be reinforced by successful academic experiences (Finn, 1989). These activities support an increased level of student engagement, which can support the behavioral goal of a student to complete high school and attend a higher

education setting. The level of intention defined in a behavioral goal is addressed by the self-efficacy element of Social Cognitive Theory. Self-efficacy, refers to people's beliefs about their ability to perform particular behaviors, as well as effort expenditure and persistence when provided challenges or stressful conditions. The level of school satisfaction students have is dependent on multiple variables from academic achievement to student engagement influences their effort and belief, self-efficacy, students have as they establish educational aspirations. Thus, parental/caregiver experiences, a students' belief in their ability to achieve a behavioral goal, supported by high levels of student engagement, and the accomplishment of desired outcomes based on academic performance influence the educational aspirations and academic achievement of students.

Assumptions and Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to a population of students residing in Southern California, from an urban school district. Further, this study will be conducted with a specific ethnic population of students, Latino/as, limiting the generalizability of the findings, thus a delimitation of the study. The participants in this study have been the recipients of grant monies to support the readiness of low-income underrepresented students for higher education. This is a select population of students, not the entire school district to which the participants are enrolled. In this study other factors beyond ethnicity, in regards to participant's demographics, are not being taken into consideration. Personal demographics such as SES and culture are other factors associated to student persistence, achievement, and aspirations and are not analyzed in this study (Gándara, 2010; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Wagner et al., 2010).

There are a couple of assumptions based upon the means used to acquire the data set for this study. First, there is an assumption that the survey participants answered the questions in a truthful, honest manner to the best of their abilities. This assumption is necessary because the responses provided by the participants are based on their personal experiences and thus, not independently verifiable. The second assumption is that all published scholarly works were written without the intent to deceive and are based on accurate data. All of the delimitations and assumptions identified in this study contribute to the ability of other researchers to take these factors into consideration when studying a similar topic.

Significance of Study

Latinos have historically had a significant percentage of the population identified as student dropouts. A study published by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation cited the national dropout rate of approximately 30%, with nearly half of all Latinas/os failing to complete graduation requirements, as the “silent epidemic” (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Studies have shown early school leavers to have less stable job careers and more problematic lives than students who graduate (Natriello, 2007; Saddler, Tyler, Maldonado, Cleveland, & Thompson, 2011). The reality is that some students have an increased risk of early school leaving and that boys, certain ethnic groups, and students in the lower educational tracks are overrepresented among the group of early school leavers. The risk of early dropout is uniformly high amongst all generations of Hispanic students (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010). The educational aspirations and student achievement of the Latino student needs to be addressed in middle school to maintain student persistence through high school and college.

As an educational administrator, the factors contributing to a lack of student persistence and the educational aspirations of students needs to be addressed in a timely manner, during critical periods in the education pipeline. An administrator's ability to acknowledge and develop preventive measures for factors detrimental to the success of students is imperative for progress in a school community. The sharing of information about the factors leading to higher student aspirations can contribute to the empowerment of teachers and administrators to develop effective solutions for all students to earn their high school diploma have higher education goals.

Conclusion

The student persistence rate from middle school through high school in the United States is an issue of concern and student's aspirations influence this statistic. It is estimated that in the 50 largest U.S. cities, the dropout rate is approximately 50%, contributing to the 3.5-6 million students dropping out each school year (Bloom, 2010). Along with poverty, researchers have associated an individual's status as a racial or cultural minority with academic achievement (Bromberg, Theokas, & Education Trust, 2013; Gordon & Yowell, 1994; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). According to researchers, Latinos have had less persistence through high school based on the dropout rate for Latino/as being almost double that of the national average (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Dolan, 2009). Further, according to the NCES(2010) the dropout rate is 18.3% for Latinos aged 16 to 24, which is almost 3 times the rate of Whites at 4.8%.

A student's aspiration level has been identified as a factor in maintaining student persistence through high school to acquire the goal of attending college. This is a focus

for this study. The research further states a lack of student persistence is do to numerous events and is a process, not a decision, based on experiences from middle and high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Fall & Roberts, 2012; Finn, 1989). A focus to improve student aspirations in middle school academic achievement should provide benefits later in their school career. This study provides an opportunity to assess student aspiration of Latino students from an urban city during their attendance in middle school and high school to review whether there is a relationship between aspiration and student achievement, factors contributing to student persistence through high school.

In this study the remaining chapters will provide a literature review, the methodology, the findings of the group difference between student aspirations and student achievement during middle school and high school, as well as the conclusion and implications related to the findings. The literature review provides the history of the definition of aspiration, the social and academic development of middle school students, Latinos and student achievement, as well as gender difference in student achievement and persistence within the Latino community. The literature review is followed by a description of the methodology, which addresses the form of quantitative analysis used to measure the relationship between student aspirations, student achievement, and gender. Following the methodology chapter, Chapters 4 and 5 are presented. Chapter 4 presents the findings from data inquiry as to the relationship of student achievement and aspiration, as well as the gender difference in outcomes. The interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations based on the findings in Chapter 4 are addressed in Chapter 5.

Definition of Terms

Aspiration: A student's ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996)

Academic achievement: Students achieve satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance as they progress through school.

Self-efficacy: The conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes (Bandura, 1977).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Research scholars have shown there is a difference in the level of academic aspirations of students dependent on their race/ethnicity, gender, and SES (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Perry, Link, Boelter, & Leukefeld, 2012). For the purposes of this study, the relationship between the aspirations and achievement of Latino students during middle school and high school is addressed. The term Latino will be used throughout this paper to denote a person that has a cultural association via the Spanish language and resides in the United States. This population could include individuals of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish descendants (NCES, 2010).

According to Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese, and Garnier (2001), although Latino students' transition from middle school having educational and career aspirations as high as the majority population, the attainment of such goals is significantly less with a high percentage of Latinos failing to complete high school. This study is relevant because Latino students' ability to persist through high school and attend college has social, economic, and political implications for the United States, as Latinos are the largest and youngest minority group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Addressing the academic achievement and educational aspirations of students in middle school is needed to increase high school graduation rates and meet the 2020 college attainment objective of President Obama, in order for the nation to return as the world leader with the highest

proportion of college graduates. To meet this goal, the educational experiences of students influencing educational attainment levels needs to be known. According to Messersmith and Schulenberg (2008), educational experiences prepare students for their future educational pursuits and academic achievement, while educational aspirations influence a student's willingness to enter and maintain persistence in unfamiliar territories such as high school and college. According to the literature, previous academic achievement has a direct effect on a student's educational aspirations (Hill et al., 2004; Rothon, Arephin, Klinberg, Catell, & Stansfeld, 2011). This study looks at these variables independent of one another in addition to there relationship to each other with a student population receiving support from middle school through high school to develop the collegiate self-efficacy within a cohort of students.

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) has been designed to bring a college-going culture to students, developing the self-efficacy of students to pursue higher education. In this literature review the goals and objectives of GEAR UP will be reviewed, followed by a discussion of the initial targeted group of the program, middle school students. A discussion of middle school students' social, emotional, and academic development precedes the deliverance of literature on the transition from middle school to high school, and the social and academic implications. The academic performance of Latino students in the United States, as the sample population of this study is reviewed next, followed by literature on student aspirations and student achievement, two variables measured in this study. The relationship between self-efficacy, as an objective of GEAR UP, and aspiration and achievement is followed by how Latino parents/caregivers influence their students' educational aspirations. Prior

to the conclusion of the chapter, gender differences in educational aspirations and academic achievement of Latino students will be reviewed.

GEAR UP

The Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) is a federally funded program through the U.S. Department of Education. GEAR UP was authorized by Title IV of the Amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965 and was signed by President Clinton on September 29, 1998. GEAR UP grants have served over 700,000 low-income students in 48 states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, and the Federated states of Micronesia, Guam, Palau, and Puerto Rico. The following is the program goal of California GEAR UP:

To develop and sustain the organizational capacity of middle schools to prepare ALL students for high school and postsecondary education through the establishment of a statewide infrastructure, or network of support, for the adults who influence middle school students, specifically their faculty, counselors, school leaders, and families. As a result of this expanded capacity, a higher proportion of students, particularly those from backgrounds and communities that have not historically pursued a college education, will enroll and succeed in postsecondary education (California GEAR UP, n.d., Purpose).

For the selected site of this study, the major activities of the GEAR UP program to support its goals focused on improving academic performance through in-class and after school tutoring, academic counseling, college preparation workshops, educational and cultural enrichment activities, career exploration, and a Saturday Academy. Further, a GEAR UP University Summer Program was implemented in order to enable

participants to attain the skills necessary to complete a rigorous program of study, pass the California High School Exit Exam, and successfully enroll at a higher education institution. Throughout the grant period there was close coordination with target schools, community personnel, and parents to enhance project activities, taking into consideration numerous stakeholders to meet student objectives. To support this effort, GEAR UP provided workshops to increase the social capital of parents, as they received information about the requirements for acceptance into a higher education institution, and financial aid. Further, at one of the researcher-selected sites, a Parent Coordinator was provided for the development of workshops, parent support groups, and to provide outreach for at-risk students and their families.

The following are examples of the programming provided to GEAR UP students during the summer prior to their transition to high school:

1. A Summer Institute designed to prepare students for the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which is administered to California students for the first time during their 10th grade year.
2. A Mathematics Intensive Summer Session (MISS) program designed to support female students' preparation for their Algebra I or Geometry class in the fall. Upon completion of the 4-week course participating students received a graphing calculator.
3. MISTER program designed for male students to support their Algebra I skills. Upon completion of the 4-week course participating students received a graphing calculator.

Based on the support provided through GEAR UP to increase the self-efficacy of a cohort of students over a 6 year period there is an expectation to have data growth that

supports an increase in student achievement to prepare students to complete high school and be prepared for higher education. One expected result of grantee schools is measured by student performance on the California Standards Test (CST), or the increase in the number of students scoring proficient or above on the exam. The CST is used in this study as a variable to measure student achievement. Schools are also measured by their school-wide increases on the California Academic Performance Index (API) and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

The conceptual framework designed by GEAR UP to adopt a college going culture starting in middle school in an effort to support high school completion and higher education attendance targets the constructs identified in the research influencing student achievement, student persistence, and student aspirations. There are other programs such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) designed to support an increase in academic preparation and educational aspirations with the objective of growth in the retention rate of minority and low-income students in higher education settings. A comparison study conducted by Lozano, Watt, and Huerta (2009) of the educational anticipations among AVID, GEAR UP, AVID/GEAR UP, and Control group did not yield any significant differences. A discussion point to this study was a demographic difference amongst the participants with the Control group having a higher percentage of students reporting their parent had at least some college or a bachelor's degree completed. These findings support the need to address social cognitive development of students through programs as well as parental engagement to increase student persistence through high school and higher education aspirations, variables

addressed in the implementation of GEAR UP over a 6-year period, starting in middle school.

Adolescence and Middle School

Middle school is a period of time in the educational pipeline where students have transitioned from elementary school and their levels of psychological and behavioral engagement starts to impact students' academic and cognitive engagement as they prepare for high school. Students' goals and expectations have consistently been linked to academic achievement during middle school (Kirk et al., 2012; Rothon et.al, 2011). The experiences students have in middle school has an impact on their academic success in high school as students attempt to answer "the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational prototypes of the day" (Erikson, 1963, p. 261). Adolescence in middle school is a time of increased biological, social, cognitive, and emotional changes as students are transitioning into adulthood being neither fully dependent on their parents nor completely self-sufficient (Andrews & Bishop, 2012; Buchmann, 1989; Klimstra, Hale, Raaijmakers, Branje, & Meeus, 2010; Rosow, 1985). According to Cohen and Smerdon (2009), adolescence is a time when individuals begin and are expected to develop their own identity, academically and socially prepare themselves for adulthood, and explore and contribute to their families, communities, and society. This period of a student's social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development may be the best environment to identify and implement interventions for students determined to be at risk for dropping out of school to support high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Andrews & Bishop, 2012; Eichhorn, 1996; National Middle School Association, 2003).

Support for programs to increase the aspirations and academic achievement of students during middle school has been garnered by researchers who have observed that middle school students begin displaying signs of behavioral and psychological disengagement from school during this period of time in the educational pipeline (Balfanz, 2009; Balfanz & Boccanfuso, 2007; Juvonen et al., 2004; Skinner et al., 1998). According to the research, individual differences in students' motivational characteristics can be reliably assessed at the fifth- and sixth-grade levels with less motivated students being less engaged during this period (Froiland & Oros, 2014; Harter 1981,1982; Ryan & Patrick, 2001;Wentzel, 1997). Further, there are significant declines in students' ability, perceptions, and intrinsic motivation during middle school adolescence, affecting the self-efficacy of students regarding future educational attainment (Harter & Connell, 1984; Karakus, Salkever, Slade, Ialongo, & Stuart, 2012; Paris & Oka, 1986).

Researchers have found course failures and poor attendance in eighth grade could be used as predictive measures for a student's failure to matriculate and later dropout out of high school (Balfanz, 2009; Mac Iver, Messel, & Council of the Great City, 2012; Neild & Balfanz, 2006a, 2006b). In the study conducted by Mac Iver et. al (2012), early warning indicators were assessed for a population of students during their eighth and ninth grade school year. The early warning indicators (EWI) included student behavior, identified by school suspension, class failure, and attendance. According to the findings, almost 50% of eighth graders without EWIs acquired an indicator in the ninth grade. The population of students acquiring an EWI graduated at a rate of 61% in comparison to 92% of their peers who did not have an EWI in eighth or ninth grade. Further, 30% of the students with EWIs in eighth and ninth grade graduated on time. A small population of

study, 15% was identified as having an EWI in eighth grade and they were able to recover, not having an EWI in the ninth grade. This group had an 85% on time graduation rate. According to Balfanz et al. (2007) the combination of adolescence, the transition from elementary to middle school with higher academic and more complex social demands, and SES, produces conditions to make it a challenge for students to be successful in school. The same conditions are present as a student transitions from middle school to high school.

Transition from Middle School to High School

The successful transition of a student through the education pipeline occurs when a student has made an institutional commitment based on his or her academic performance and relationships with faculty and peers (Tinto, 1975). A student's identification with school is associated with student participation and participation is related to achievement (Fall & Roberts, 2012; Finn, 1993). Further, previous research has established a relationship between the structural and cultural elements of a school and academic achievement (Baker, 1999; Brenner, Graham, & Mistry, 2008; Goodenow, 1993; Koth, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2008). The ability of students to adjust to the new social system in which they are placed by establishing positive peer-group and faculty interactions is important for student persistence and academic achievement (Tinto, 1975). According to the research, the social system a student experiences has an impact on academic achievement (Goodenow, 1991,1993). Further, due to the relationship between middle school experiences and high school graduation rates (Balfanz, 2009) the transition for adolescents between grades garners special attention (Andrews & Bishop, 2012).

From a social perspective, Van Gennepe's (1960) study explores the transition of a student from one educational institution to another.

Van Gennepe's (1960) study, *The Rites of Passage* describes the transition a student experiences from high school to higher education, this process can be transposed to the middle school to high school transition due to the focus on peer relationships and a sense of belonging, which are variables associated with student persistence throughout the education pipeline (Goodenow, 1991; Finn & NCES, 1993; Roeser, Midgley, & Urdan's, 1996; Tinto, 1975). Van Gennepe (1960) describes three stages in the progression from young person to adulthood: separation, transition and incorporation. Within these stages there are ceremonies and rituals symbolizing the shift of the members into their new social group. Van Gennepe's *Rites of Passage* phases can be compared to the change of membership experienced by student participants from this study, middle school to high school students.

Van Gennepe's (1960) first stage, *separation*, parallels the promotion of middle school students. This stage describes the loss of past relationships from the group with whom they previously associated. After the advancement there is minimal personal interaction with the previous group and this growth may involve a ceremony to mark the adherence to the views and social norms of the group. As a student completes middle school, often there is a ceremony to demonstrate the student has met the designated requirements by the institution to obtain high school membership. The move to the new membership group is the second stage in Van Gennepe's, *Rites of Passage*, *transition*.

The second stage, *transition*, is the period when the new member has its initial interactions with the new group with whom membership and acceptance is sought (Van

Genep, 1960). The *transition* period described by Van Genep can be identified in student's education career as the experience of a student moving from elementary to middle school and when transferring to high school. In research by Goodenow (1991) a sense of belonging and its relation to the level of effort (*goal commitment*) had the highest correlation during seventh grade. The findings suggest the importance of a student to have connectedness at that transitional grade periods.

Freshmen in high school seek acceptance from peers as they enter an environment with established social groups. Students who have difficulty assimilating to the norms of the high school environment may experience separation, guidance, and sometimes adversities (Van Genep, 1960). According to Van Genep (1960), these tactics are employed as a means to ensure the division of the individual from past associations and the development of behaviors and norms appropriate to membership in the new group. When a student has adapted to the culture in which they have been transitioning, incorporation is achieved, the third phase of Van Genep's *Rites of Passage*. In this phase, a student is accepted and becomes a participant member of the group increasing the engagement of the student influencing their education aspirations and academic achievement. According to Roeser, Midgely, and Urdan (1996) when a sense of belonging is achieved, as described in Van Genep's *Rites of Passage*, a student's academic self-efficacy is positively impacted. Further, students' sense of belonging also affects their educational expectations (Andrews & Bishop, 2012) and academic effort (Beesley, Clark, Barker, Germeroth, & Apthorp, 2010; Goodenow, 1993). Therefore, the social and academic expectations during a transition from middle school to high school can influence education aspirations and student persistence.

From an academic achievement perspective research has shown there is an adjustment students need to make as they transition from middle school to high school. A study by Vasquez-Salgado and Chavira (2014) completed a longitudinal assessment of students from a charter school in the Los Angeles area as they transitioned from middle school to high school. According to their findings, students with higher grades in the fall of their eighth grade year had a decline in their academic achievement, measured by grade point average, at a faster rate than students who earned lower grades. While this study found students maintained the same academic trajectory throughout middle school contrary to previous research (Juvonen, Wang, & Espinoza, 2011), the decline in academic achievement after a student's transition from middle school to high school presents similar outcomes from previous research (Benner & Graham, 2009; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, 1994; Roderick, 2003; Roeser, Eccles, & Freedman-Doan 1999; Seidman, Aber, Allen, & French, 1996). The most successful transition programs from middle school to high school recognize the transition is a process and not an event where continuous support that involves families, students and teachers to advocate for the social and academic success of students is required (Williamston & Education Partnerships, 2010). Declining achievement during the transition to high school influences student persistence and is impacting the graduation rate of Latino students (Balfanz, 2009).

Latino Students and Academic Achievement

Latinos are now the largest (50.5 million) and youngest minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Therefore the educational attainment rate of Latinos impacts the social and economic growth of the United States. According to

researchers, the dropout rate for Latinos has been almost double that of the national average, (Aud, Fox, & KewalRamani, 2010; Dolan, 2009). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2010), the status dropout rate is 19.9% for Latinos aged 16 to 24, which is more than three times the rate of Whites (6.1%), and almost two times that of Blacks (11.5%). Further, the percentage of Latinos ages 16–24 identified as dropouts was higher than that of Blacks and Whites throughout the 37-year period of 1972–2009 (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, KewalRamani, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2011).

There are numerous factors that may contribute to the achievement gap between Latino and Non-Latino students, with poverty being one of them (Gándara, 2010). While Whites nationally have a higher percentage of students 16 or older employed, at 28.8% compared to 17.6% of Latinos, the hours worked display the effects of poverty (NCES, 2010). An average of 35.4% of White students reported working more than 20 hours a week; Latinos at 54% had the highest percentage of any ethnic group meeting the reporting standards (NCES, 2010). In association with these work hours, within racial and ethnic minority populations, Latino students typically miss more school than any other group with one of the reasons being employment. Absenteeism has been identified in the research as being an antecedent to student dropout (Mac Iver & Messel, 2012; Rumberger, 1995).

Researchers report other contributing factors impacting Latino academic achievement are: racism, lack of educational leadership, poorly prepared teachers, inadequate early childhood literacy development, impersonal education environments, failure to establish a cultural context, low teacher expectations, insufficient parent

support, negative peer pressure, instruction not aligned with student needs, inadequate assessments, and a lack of mentors and positive role models (Becerra, 2012). Regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, teachers who value and guide Latino students can have a positive influence increasing the sense of belonging of students even those challenged by poverty (Hamm, Farmer, Dadiman, Gravelle & Murray, 2011; Nieto, 2003). The obstacles of Latino students have not deterred growth as the Latino-White achievement gap since 2002 has narrowed (Kober & Center on Education, 2010). These findings align with the implementation of No Child Left Behind, making schools and teachers more accountable for student outcomes on state testing. According to the Center on Education Policy report (2010), the eighth grade math gap has decreased in 27 of 35 states and in 23 of 28 states assessed for high school math. While the gap has decreased the proficiency level in reading and math remains well below those of White and Asian subgroups, thus the strong aspirations for academic growth and improvement remain.

History of Aspirations in the Literature

The construct of aspirations originates from experimental research conducted in the 1930's, investigating "level of aspiration", which contributed to the literature on human behavior (Dembo, 1931). The findings were produced in the controlled environment of a laboratory therefore few implications have been made from this research for students or schools (Quaglia & Cobb, 1996). In the experiments conducted by Dembo (1931), participants were given tasks either very difficult or impossible to perform in an effort to evoke frustration and anger. The unintended result of the experiment was findings in regards to the adaptation of participants. Participants, to compensate for the emotional distress of a difficult or unachievable task, devised a

medial goal, which was easier to accomplish, while representing progress toward the challenging task. Dembo identified this intermediate goal as a “momentary level of aspiration” (Gardiner, 1940). This form of compensation of goal achievement when considering higher education attainment is observable when reviewing the statistics regarding the percentage of Latino students who graduate from high school and matriculate into a higher education setting. According to the Condition of Education 2013 report, from 1990-2013 Latinos made significant gains in closing the achievement gap in regards to high school completion rates narrowing the percentage points gap from 32 to 20. However it can be argued, Latinos acquired a “momentary level of aspiration” of high school completion with the identification of a widening of the higher education attainment gap from 18 to 25 percentage points in the same report.

Hoppe (1976, 1931) conducted the first psychological experiment to measure level of aspiration seeking to examine the relationship between success or failure of an individual and their decision to raise or lower their level of aspiration. In this research a successful experience is one where the momentary level of aspiration has been met; while a failure experience does not meet the intermediate objective. Thus, Hoppe’s (1976, 1931) findings suggest “the experience of a performance as a success or failure does not depend alone on its objective goodness, but on where the level of aspiration appears to be reached or not reached” (Frank, 1935).

Aligned with the work of Dembo (1931) and Hoppe (1931), Frank (1935) addressed how past performance influences the level of aspiration of individuals. According to Frank (1935a), strength of the following needs influences relationship of past performance on level of aspiration: (1) the need to keep the level of aspiration high

(2) the need to have the level of aspiration associated the level of future performance, and (3) the need to avoid failure. Frank also took into consideration how personal attributes influences performance with the development of four personality profiles (Frank, 1935b; Tinto, 1975). The four profiles are described as: (a) the person who demonstrates the need to keep their level of aspiration parallel to their level of past performance, described as “his feet to the ground” (b) the person who sets idealistic, high aspirations described as “head in the clouds” (c) the person whose aspiration level is lower than their previous performance level is described as “cautious” and (d) the person who sets their aspiration level realistically high, described as being “ambitious” (Frank, 1935b).

During the 1940’s the definition of aspiration continued developing with the identification of culture’s, context and individual factors influence on the construct. The research began to make comparisons of the performances on tasks were complemented by references to the performance of the group (Lewin, Dembo, Festinger, & Sears, 1944; Sears, 1940). Frank (1941) proposed two manners by which level of aspiration are manipulated by the context in which it is placed, one with an incentive to improve performance the other to protect persons from the effects of failure. The level of aspiration moderated to a level higher than the past performance in effort to motivation toward a goal or the level of aspiration can be lower than the previous performance in an effort to the reduce of the level of anxiety of an individual. Both expected levels of aspiration have the objective of producing high levels of achievement. In a second instance the level of aspiration remains high, without moderation, protecting the self-esteem of persons from the effects of failure, as poor performance is deemed insignificant due to the high expectation. Further evidence of social and cultural factors influence on

level of aspiration is literature depicting findings of group affiliation effect on level of aspiration with groups having a tendency to adopt a collective level of aspiration.

Quaglia and Cobb (1996) define aspiration as “a student's ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals”. Thus, inspiration and ambition influence student aspiration. Quaglia and Cobb (1996) describe the student being inspired without ambition as the student who completes tasks in the present without any goals for the future. Further, the student who is ambitious but not inspired has goals for the future, however does not invest in present day tasks to achieve the future goal. Therefore, student aspiration is defined by present activity and the development of future goals. The present day activity of students, inspiration, is often measured by their level of academic achievement; while a student’s motivation and goal setting ability, aspiration, is defined by their self-efficacy. The self-efficacy of students has been identified in the literature as a construct having an effect on student achievement and persistence (Close & Solberg, 2008; Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, & Royer, 2009). This definition of aspirations and the cultural, context, and individual factors contributing to the fluidity of one’s level of aspiration is supported by Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (1986), which states an individual will choose to engage or avoid a specific task based on their self-judgment of their ability to accomplish a goal. Thus, self-efficacy has a relationship to the level of aspiration of an individual when taking into consideration the impact of past performance on one’s ambition and goal setting.

Sherwood (1989) defines aspiration as future oriented and motivation measured by the goals individuals are willing to invest time and effort into in order to attain. Other theorists have utilized similar concepts defining aspiration as “ambition,” “active pursuit

of goals,” and as “a willingness to work to achieve goals”(Kerckhoff, 1974; cited in Spenner & Featherman, 1978; Turner, 1964). Sherwood (1989) describes an individual’s commitment to an aspiration in two dimensions: intensity and duration. Intensity is measured by what the person is willing to devote to the goal. Duration of the aspiration can be measured by the amount of time elapsing between the initial investment in the aspiration and the accomplishment or abandonment of the goal (Sherwood, 1989). Sherwood’s definition shifts the definition of aspiration from the goals sought by individuals to the resources and strategies people are willing to employ to pursue their goals. This definition of aspirations aligns with constructs used to measure cognitive engagements relationship to student achievement. Further, in sociological theory, status attainment stresses aspirations as a cognitive state that motivates or drives students to seek academic success (Khoo & Ainsley, 2005). The social cognitive theory of Bandura, addresses how self-efficacy supports aspiration, which is a facet of GEAR UP as the program develops a college going culture.

Aspirations of Students

The development of self-regulation strategies has been associated with a student’s willingness to set goals for gathering information and knowledge, their ability to select strategies to obtain their goals, and consistently monitor their own progress (Tabachnick, Miller, & Relyea, 2008). Choice of tasks, effort expended, and perseverance in the face of obstacles is connected to self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 2001; Schunk, D& Usher, 2012;). The educational aspirations of a middle school or high school student to attend college is developed through self-efficacy: a willingness to set a goal, persistence in the face of difficulties, and committing to long term planning while encouraging self-

regulation and self-correcting actions (Bandura, 2001). Actions such as enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) classes and participation in tutoring are examples of practices of a student with college aspirations. Students with high levels of self-efficacy perceive school tasks as being instrumental to attaining future personal goals (de Bilde, Vansteenkiste, & Lens, 2011).

Bandura (2001) identifies direct personal agency as one of the modes of agency for Social Cognitive Theory, agency being defined as an act intentionally done. Thus, self-regulation by a student is a form of direct personal agency of Social Cognitive Theory as a student implements strategies in an effort to obtain their personal goals. A student's strategic plan to take AP courses implies the student has a goal of continuing their education in a higher education setting. The personal goal of attending college makes student persistence through high school and enrollment in AP courses purposeful and relevant for students.

The academic aspirations for students have been linked to their perception about the purposes of education (Nicholls, 1989; Nicholls, Chueng, Lauer, & Patashnick, 1989; Nicholls, Patashnick, & Nolen, 1985) consequently, motivation to complete tasks for the purposes of an education has a relationship to student achievement (Appleton et al., 2008). According to achievement goal theory, the purposes students have for engaging in achievement tasks will influence their level of task engagement or motivation, aspects of self-efficacy. Further, students will approach a task, such as high school completion and college enrollment, with personal perceptions and beliefs about the particular achievement activity in which they are engaged (Dennett, 1978; Johnson & Sinatra, 2013; McArthur & Baron, 1983; Nicholls, 1984, 1989). Thus, academic aspirations are affected

by the perceived purpose of education as well as the personal perceptions and beliefs of high school completion and college enrollment (King & Watkins, 2012). For Latino students, research has exposed a gap between educational aspirations and expectations during their high school experience.

In a study by Flores, Navarro, and DeWitz (2008) the relationship between college self-efficacy, college outcome expectations, and the choice goals of educational aspirations and educational expectations of Latino students was explored. The purpose of the study was to measure several social cognitive variables on the educational aspirations of Mexican American high school students. The participants were 89 English-speaking, high school senior, Latino students, 27 males and 62 females, from a public institution. All of the student participants in the study stated they had intentions of attending a college or university after high school. Students' educational goal expectations and aspirations were measured using individualized items from prior studies (Farmer, 1985; Farmer et al., 1981; Flores, Ojeda, Huang, Gee & Lee, 2006; McWhirter, Hackett & Bandalos, 1998; McWhirter, Larson & Daniels, 1996). While students stated they had intentions of attending a college or university, the findings suggested the student participants did not expect to achieve their educational aspirations. This may be attributed to perceived barriers supported by the blocked opportunity framework, which states educational aspirations are affected by a student's perception of being able to acquire a higher social economic status due to their education (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; Mau, 1995; Wilson & Wilson, 1992). According to the research, barriers that may contribute to the blocked opportunity framework are finances, a lack of parental support, and low academic expectations of teachers (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Ogbu, 1987).

Student Academic Achievement

According to the research, high sense of efficacy for self-regulated learning and mastery of academic coursework fosters academic aspirations and achievement (Gaylon, Blondin, Yaw, Nalls, & Williams, 2012). Further it has been found that it is the motivational component of self-efficacy beliefs that appears to be critically linked to academic performance (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Gaylon, et.al, 2012; Mercer, Nellis, Martinez, & Kirk, 2011; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005). A student's belief in their ability to achieve goals affects the level of motivation held to participate in tasks toward the goal (King & Watson, 2012). It is the establishment of programs that emphasize the development of self-efficacy that can impact student achievement levels, as students are trained about the tasks and skills required for an academic performance suitable for student persistence through high school and acceptance into a higher education setting. However, the influence of self-efficacy on academic motivation, learning, and academic achievement is also dependent on the perceived barriers and the level of commitment to the goal (Becerra, 2012; Mahyuddin et al., 2006). If students do not believe they can achieve their academic goals, the development of aspirations and motivation to produce desired outcomes through high levels of self-efficacy and difficulties is attempted without an authentic or relevant incentive (Gaylon et al., 2012). Therefore, a student's self-efficacy influences aspirations and strength of commitments to them, the quality of analytic and strategic thinking, level of motivation and perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks, as well as resilience to adversity (Leung, Chen, & Lam, 2009).

Students with higher self-efficacy have higher aspirations, a higher commitment to their goals, and are able to endure setbacks (Bandura, 1986). A student's self-efficacy can influence their academic achievement and the study by Fast, Lewis, Bryant, Bocian, Cardullo, Rettig, and Hammond (2010) addressed the relationship of math self-efficacy and math performance on standardized tests. Student performance on standardized tests like the CST has increasingly become a high stakes test since the passing of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002. To address the social, economic, and political implications of a poorly educated community, the federal government's NCLB Act was instituted requiring states to establish an assessment of basic skills to be given at grade levels 3-8 and high school in order to be eligible for federal funding in an effort to increase graduation rates. This has led to the need to study how self-efficacy influences academic achievement in this performance-based educational environment.

In a study by Fast et al. (2010) the relationship of math self-efficacy as measured by items adapted from Pajares and Miller (1994) and the Patterns of Adaptive Learning Scales (PALS) from Midgley et al. (2000) to measure academic self-efficacy, student belief that they were able to learn what was being taught in class. Along with participation in the survey, Mathematic CST scores of a sample population of fourth, fifth, and six grade students from an urban school in Southern California were obtained. In the study, math self-efficacy was significantly related to math performance with students who had higher levels of math self-efficacy having higher levels of math performance. Further, female students were found to have lower math self-efficacy than males during one of the assessment years.

In their discussion Fast et. al (2010) acknowledges how Bandura's (1993) theory states self-efficacy is an agentic mechanism for academic achievement with academic experiences affecting self-efficacy, which affects student achievement. This study was used to measure the relationship between math self-efficacy, perceived classroom environment, and academic achievement on standardized math test performance. However, the findings were consistent with the previous research on self-efficacy beliefs for math and math achievement with math self-efficacy positively affecting student performance (Ozgen & Bindaka, 2011; Pajares & Miller, 1994).

Self-efficacy expectancies are important in predicting academic achievement as students with high academic efficacy achieve good academic progress and have high educational aspirations. There are numerous stakeholders influencing the self-efficacy, aspirations and academic of students, two being parent/caregivers and the education institution (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). According to Bandura et al. (2001), the aspirations parents have for their children are very influential on the academic aspirations and academic achievement of their children, with parental aspirations influencing their children's self-efficacy. Further, in a study of Latino middle and high school students, the perception students had of support from their teacher and of the school environment being safe contributed to student's educational aspirations (Haggerty, Elgin, & Woolley, 2011).

Contributing Factors to Academic Achievement

According to the research there is a strong relationship between student success and student engagement in school (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Four forms of engagement are academic, behavioral, psychological, and cognitive engagement. Academic

engagement has been distinguished by observable variables such as time on task, credits earned toward graduation and homework completion (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008) and as an aggregate of specific classroom behaviors: writing, reading aloud, reading silently, talking about academics, and asking and answering questions (Greenwood, Horton, & Utley, 2002). In a report for the Australian Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee, student academic engagement is defined as a concept “that includes aspects of students’ attention, motivation and effort in learning, along with aspects of teachers’ encouragement and support for student participation and confidence in learning” (Ure, Gray & Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood, 2012, pg.7). Previous studies (Greenwood et al., 2002; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008) suggest that academic engagement may not only predict students’ academic learning, school grades, and standardized achievement test scores in the short term.

An observable antecedent of a student’s level of behavioral engagement most prominent in the research is attendance due to school attendances’ significant relationship to student achievement and student dropout (Balfanz et al., 2007; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Kieffer, Marinell, & Stephenson, 2011; Rumberger, 1995). According to a research by Kieffer, Marinell and Stephenson (2011) there is a positive correlation between attendance during middle school and a student being on course in ninth grade to graduate in four years.

Psychological engagement includes students’ emotional reactions and connections to teachers, peers and the school (Berti, Molinari, Speltini & , 2010), and the level of belongingness or relatedness to a school community (Fall & Roberts, 2012). When

students believe their teachers or others are treating them in an unjust manner in a school environment, this affects their psychological engagement in school (Berti et al, 2010). This can affect a student's cognitive engagement for the ability of students to connect to individuals at a school site provides an opportunity to have their cognitive engagement increased as affiliations are made with the common goal of culminate or graduation.

According to the research, cognitive engagement is one of the primary constructs useful for preventing student dropout, especially for students identified as being at risk based on academic performance and behavior at school (Appleton et al., 2008). Cognitive engagement addresses student's psychological investment to learning, the use of self-regulation strategies, and commitment level, all which may affect psychosocial adjustment and academic achievement (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009).

Parental Influence on Latino Student Aspirations

In research conducted by Martinez and Ulanoff (2013) one of the central themes to address academic achievement in the Latino community was the need to have support beyond aspirations, to focus on academics. Enrollment in classes that support student aspirations aligned to a desire to attend higher education institutions has not been a strong practice of the Latino community. According to Hill and Torres (2010), Latino students are underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes and are more likely to be placed in classes to be only career ready versus college and career ready regardless of their academic performance.

It has been argued that social and intellectual alienation within school systems has contributed to the high dropout rate of minority students, including Latinos (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). These forms of alienation effect the psychological, academic, and

cognitive engagement of students producing disengagement from the school affecting academic achievement and lowering the academic aspirations of students, two aspects of a student's identity influencing the probability of them dropping out (Balfanz, 2009; Griffin, 2002).

The parent/caregiver of Latino students seeks to provide their student the skills needed for them to achieve the American Dream. These desired skills align with concepts within Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory to support student achievement. Latino parent/caregiver(s) seek to develop a drive and will to succeed termed *ganas* (Auerbach, 2006; Padilla, Pedraza, & Rivera, 2005); goal oriented, displaying dedication and commitment to a task or aspiration, termed *empeños* (Auerbach, 2007); and study skills and effort to acquire success, termed *estudios* (Auerbach, 2006, 2007; Reese, 2002). However, immigrant parents place more restrictions on females which may influence the difference in academic achievement between Latina and Latino students, with Latina students being more academically engaged (Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Gender Differences in Aspirations and Academic Achievement

It has been documented in the research that Latina girls are outperforming their male counterparts academically (Colón & Sánchez, 2010; Henry, Merten, Plunkett, & Sands, 2008; Sánchez, Colón, & Esparza, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Qin-Hilliard, 2004). According to the report *Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2009–10*, the "event dropout defined as the count of dropouts from a given school year divided by the count of student enrollments within the same grade span at the beginning of the same school year" is 5.4 for males and 3.9 for females in

California (Stillwell, Sable, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Within the Latino/a community there is a gender difference in academic performance with Latinas being more likely to have better grades, graduate from high school, and attend college than Latinos (Colón & Sánchez, 2010; López, Ehly, & García-Vázquez, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995). In a research study by Sánchez et al. (2005) Latinas had a higher academic achievement than Latino boys. This may be attributed to the research that has found female students from an urban community are more optimistic about the possible social and economic outcomes due to the acquisition of an education (Colón & Sánchez, 2010; Fine, 1986; Lopez, 2002). Further, the research findings of Alfaro, Umana-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, Bamaca, and Zeiders (2009) showed Latinas have a greater sense of belonging than male students might explain the gender differences in academic performance amongst the group.

While males are dropping out of school at a higher rate than females, the dropout rate for Latina students has a greater economic and social impact on communities. In 2009, the National Women's Law Center (NWLC) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF)(2009) conducted a study that produced findings regarding the challenges of Latinas in school. Some of the challenges of Latina students, contributing to increasing dropout rates of the group, were found to be based upon stereotypes, discrimination, and cultural gender expectations by their family. According to the study, while Latina students graduate at a higher rate than their male counterparts, Latinas are more likely to be dependent on government subsidies, be unemployed and receive less pay when employed if they have not earned a high school diploma (NWLC & MALDEF, 2009).

There is growing interest in gender differences in the academic achievement of minority youth (Spinath, Eckert, & Steinmayr, 2014; Voyer & Voyer, 2014) due to the observable gap in regards to gender in minority groups compared to Whites (Perry et. al 2012). According to the report Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972–2009, there were no measurable differences by sex between the status completion rates of Hispanics, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asians/Pacific Islanders, and persons of two or more races (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, KewalRamani, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). While there appears to be no gap amongst minority groups by gender, Stearns and Glennie (2006) found Latinas were more likely to leave school for family reasons than White females. This lends to the continued need to assess the numerous factors that contribute to the development of an achievement gap between minority and white youth.

Overall, the research demonstrates that Latina females are more likely to finish high school than Latino males due to their level of student engagement based upon their sense of belonging and perceived purpose of academic success (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012; Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995). Based on this, a strategic effort to increase the psychological and cognitive engagement of Latino males may decrease the student success rate gap within this minority group. The implementation of programming that addresses the academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological engagement of minority students can support efforts to increase student persistence from middle school to high school and close the achievement gap.

Summary of the Literature

GEAR UP is a federally funded program designed to support a college going culture in underrepresented communities. The development of student's educational aspirations through the implementation of programming addressing the variables effecting student persistence such as academic achievement, self-efficacy and parental engagement is an objective of GEAR UP. The largest and youngest underrepresented group in the U.S. is Latino/as (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010), therefore the academic achievement and educational attainment level and of this group has a direct effect on the economy of the United States. Historically, Latinos have a dropout rate twice the national average (Aud et al., 2010) and this has contributed to the focus on the academic achievement of this population. The previous academic achievement of student's has an affect on their educational aspirations (Rothon, et al., 2011) with educational aspirations being linked to the perception of the purpose of education (Cox, 2011). The understanding of the purpose of education is a topic to be addressed in middle school in an effort to motivate students to complete tasks to increase student achievement (Appleton et al., 2008).

Middle school is an early period in adolescence where goals and expectations have been linked to academic achievement (Kirk et. al., 2012; Rothon et al., 2011). Further, middle school is when students start displaying early warning indicators as signs of behavioral and psychological disengagement (Balfanz, 2009). Course failures and poor attendance in middle school have been used as predictive measures to student dropout from high school (Mac Iver et al., 2012). The research has also shown the transition from middle school to high school has an impact on the academic achievement

of students (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). A student's successful social transition (Van Genneep, 1960) of separation, transition, and incorporation into a high school environment from middle school is directly related to academic achievement and graduation rates (Balfanz, 2009). A student's ability to assimilate, develop self-efficacy and educational aspirations independent of perceived barriers is critical for student persistence through high school and in a higher education setting (King & Watson, 2012; Becerra, 2012; Gaylon et al., 2012).

Conclusion

GEAR UP, through the development of student's self-efficacy, is addressing the educational aspirations and academic achievement of students to support student's persistence through high school and preparation for college. The completion rate for Latino students in the United States has an economic, social, and political impact, as Latinos are the largest and youngest minority group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The influences on a Latino student's aspiration and academic achievement are based on cultural components of ethnicity and social economic status, as well as peer and teacher relationships within an educational institution. The academic aspirations of students begins early in the educational pipeline and GEAR UP is designed to start addressing the variables impacting educational aspirations of college attainment starting in middle school by addressing the self-efficacy and the belief in students' ability to attend higher education. The research has shown, student persistence is an objective to support earlier than high school, as educational aspirations are established in middle school, as such students' decision to dropout out is a process (Fall & Roberts, 2012; Finn, 1989; Rumberger, 1995).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between Latino student academic aspirations, academic achievement and gender in the form of a longitudinal study. This chapter provides the methods implemented for this study including: a detailed description of the research design, an overview of the study, research questions, the research setting and sample participants, the procedures for implementation, data collections methods, general methodological design of the study with a defense of its use, the instrumentation, data analysis, information on how participants were protected, the validity and reliability of the data, as well as the positionality of the researcher.

Introduction

While the percentage of Latino students maintaining persistence through high school has continuously decreased since 1990, this minority ethnic group continues to have the lowest student persistence rate in the nation (NCES, 2012). Further, the Latino population in the United States, as of 2011 is the nation's largest ethnic or race minority consisting of 16.7% of the total nation's population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Thus, the high school and college completion rate of this group is influential on the political, social and economic norms of the nation. The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88) selected a national representative sample of eighth grade students, re-interviewing the students 10th and 12th grades and the second year of college that produced data capable of providing early and late predictors of student persistence. In a

similar manner, for the purposes of this study the aspiration levels of Latino/a students from Keys High School District (KHSD) have been measured. These student's levels of aspiration were assessed during the student participants' eighth and 10th grade school years. The student participant's level of aspiration to attend college and academic achievement was measured to test for a relationship between these variables in this study.

The following research questions for this study have been developed to discuss the relationship between educational aspiration and academic achievement of Latino students:

1. To what extent is there a difference between eighth and 10th grade aspirations for GEAR UP Latino students after two years of high school experience?
2. What is the group difference between a Latino student's level of aspiration and CST score during their eighth and 10th grade experiences?
3. What is the gender difference in the level of aspiration of Latino and Latina students during their eighth and 10th grade years?
4. What is the relationship between eighth grade GPA, CST scores, and educational aspirations to 10th grade GPA?

Site

Keys High School District

Founded in 1898, the Keys High School District (KHSD) has a student population of approximately 32,000. KHSD is the third-largest employer of the city. KHSD is one of the largest school districts in the state, with an average daily-attendance rate of 31,000 students. The district population is diverse having students who speak 46 different languages in their homes, attend 20 campuses and come to us from five feeder

elementary districts. There are 2,734 employees in KHSD, with approximately 1,300 of the employees being teachers. The physical plant consists of 20 campuses.

Four of the KHSD campuses have been recognized by the state in which they reside, receiving Distinguished School awards. The education department also has recognized “B” High School with a California Title I Academic Achievement Award. Title I funds assist schools in meeting the educational needs of students living near or at the poverty level, and to earn this award a school's socioeconomically disadvantaged students must have doubled the achievement targets set for them for 2 consecutive years.

Table 3.1 is a graph of the ethnicity/race distribution for KHSD in comparison to the county in which the school resides and the state of California. According to the table 64% of KHSD is comprised of students who have been identified as “Hispanic or Latino of Any Race” in comparison to the county having 48% and the state, 53% of this population.

Table 3.2 displays the ethnicity/race distribution for the participant schools for this study and recipients of the GEAR UP grant. GEAR UP is a discretionary grant program in the U.S. Department of Education designed to increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in higher education. GEAR UP provides six-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. GEAR UP grantees serve an entire cohort of students beginning no later than the seventh grade and follow the cohort through high school. GEAR UP funds are also used to provide college scholarships to low-income students (California GEAR UP, n.d.).

TABLE 3.1. Ethnicity/Race Distribution of Keys High School District

Level	Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	American Indian or Alaska Native, Not Hispanic	Asian, Not Hispanic	Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic	Filipino, Not Hispanic	African American, Not Hispanic	White, not Hispanic	Two or More Races, Not Hispanic	Not Reported	Total
Keys Union High School District	20,582	152	3,911	236	1,260	878	4,005	1,057	4	32,085
County Total	242,613	2,281	74,290	2,132	9,428	7,660	148,089	12,995	2,313	501,801
State Total	3,282,105	40,414	536,970	33,958	154,891	394,695	1,589,393	149,806	44,757	6,226,989

Source: California Department of Education (2012)

GEAR UP provides multiple programs to support students having educational aspirations beyond high school including but not limited to: summer programs designed to provide enrichment courses and activities that encourage them to pursue higher education, college preparatory workshops during and after school to increase awareness about higher education options and ways to finance the education, as well as college tours, information about entrance requirements, and matriculation in a more in depth manner than non-GEAR UP students.

“D” Junior High School

“D” Junior High School was established in 1962 and supports students during their seventh and eighth grade years. During the 2011-2012 school year the site included nine portable classrooms and 34 regular classrooms, and a number of portable classrooms

not identified by the School Accountability Report Card (SARC), and 13 labs to support specific departments. The site is 25 acres to support the student population of “D” Junior High School, which has had a steady decline in the student population rate since the 2006-2007 school year.

TABLE 3.2. Ethnicity/Race Distribution of Participant School Sites

School	Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	American Indian or Alaska Native, Not Hispanic	Asian, Not Hispanic	Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic	Filipino, Not Hispanic	African American, Not Hispanic	White, not Hispanic	Two or More Races, Not Hispanic	Not Reported	Total
Keys High	3,004	10	32	10	34	31	87	24	0	3,232
A High	2,324	3	76	14	30	33	190	16	0	2,686
B High	1,960	7	223	20	77	51	246	39	1	2,624
C Junior High	1,419	2	38	9	18	13	69	6	1	1,575
D Junior High	1,402	7	14	6	14	8	33	6	0	1,490

Source: California Department of Education (2012).

The racial demographics of the school site is not representative of the district having a Latino/Hispanic population is over 30% higher than the district average. “D” Junior High School is almost 95% Latino/Hispanic, 2.3% Caucasian/White, 1% Asian/Filipino, and less than 1% Black/African American. The school has other subgroups that are significant in number in regards to the impact they have on student achievement based on research, having over 75% of the population identified as English Learners and over 92% identified as being Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (Battin-Pearson, Newcomb, Abbott, Hill, Catalono, & Hawkins, 2000; Callahan, Wilkinson, & Muller, 2010). During the 2011-2012 school year, seven students from the seventh

grade were part of the adjusted dropout rate for this school site: four Latinos, one Asian, one African-American, one White, and one student identified as “None Reported” in regards to racial/ethnic identity. There were two dropouts identified from the eighth grade, one Latino and one White (<http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/DropoutReporting>).

“C” Junior High

“C” Junior High School was established in 1964 and supports students during their seventh and eighth grade years. During the 2011-2012 school year the site included nine portable classrooms and 40 regular classrooms, and 16 classrooms with labs for specific programs. The site is 22.6 acres with a budget of over \$20 million dollars used to modernize the campus.

The racial demographics of the school site was not representative of the district having a Latino/Hispanic population is over 20% higher than the district average. “C” Junior High School is almost 90% Latino/Hispanic, 4.4% Caucasian/White, 3% Asian/Filipino, and less than 2% Black/African American. The school has other subgroups that are significant in number in regards to the impact they have on student achievement based on research, having 68% of the population identified as English Learners and 87% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (Battin-Pearson, et al., 2000; Callahan et al., 2010). During the 2011-2012 school year, ten students from the seventh grade were part of the adjusted dropout rate for this school site: six Latino, one Asian, one African-American, and two Whites (California Department of Education, 2012).

Keys High School

Keys High School was established in 1898 and is the oldest of nine comprehensive high schools in the Keys Union High School District servicing students in

grades nine through twelve. During the 2011-2012 school year the site included 122 regular classrooms and 27 labs for specific programs. The site is 37.2 acres and was remodeled in 1994-1995.

Keys High School has a population of over 3,300 students. The racial demographics of the school site is not representative of the district having a Latino/Hispanic population is almost 30% higher than the district average. Keys High School is 92.9% Latino/Hispanic, 3.1% Caucasian/White, 1.9% Asian/Filipino, and less than 1.2% Black/African American. The school has other subgroups that are significant in number in regards to the impact they have on student achievement based on research, having 62.1% of the population identified as English Learners and 88.9% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Callahan et al., 2010).

Table 3.3 denotes the adjusted dropout rate for Keys High School. According to the data retrieved, all of the students identified as a dropout were Latino. Latinos have an annual dropout rate of 5%, with the highest number of students (83) dropping out in the 12th grade. African-American students have the highest dropout percentage rate at Keys High School at 10, with the total enrollment population being 40 students.

“A” High School

“A” High School opened in 1966. During the 2011-2012 school year there were 60 regular classrooms and 32 portable classrooms. At the school site there 26 labs, which are designed for specific programs (i.e. computer lab, science lab, choral music room, etc.) “A” High School has a mission of creating an environment in which students develop the desire to learn and subsequently become life-long learners. Further, student

learning will generate the skills necessary to function competently with personal, academic, and social success in an increasingly complex global society.

TABLE 3.3. Adjusted Dropout Rate for Keys High School

Ethnic Category	Adjusted Grade 9 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 10 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 11 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 12 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 9-12 Dropout Total	Grade 9-12 Enrollment Total	Annual Adjusted Grade 9-12 Dropout Rate
Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	12	13	48	83	156	3,093	5.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Asian, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	34	0
Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	12	0
Filipino, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	30	0
African American, Not Hispanic	0	1	0	3	4	40	10.0%
White, Not Hispanic	0	1	4	2	7	102	6.9%
Two or More Races, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	12	0

Source: California Department of Education (2012)

“A” High School has a population of over 3,300 students. The racial demographics of the school site is not representative of the district having a Latino/Hispanic population is more than 25% higher than the district average. “A” High School is 87.6% Latino/Hispanic, 6.7% Caucasian/White, 3.2% Asian/Filipino, and less than 1.2% Black/African American. The school has other subgroups that are significant in number in regards to the impact they have on student achievement based on research,

having 53.8% of the population identified as English Learners and 77.9%

Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Callahan et al., 2010).

Table 3.4 depicts the adjusted dropout rate for “A” High School. “A” High School has the lowest dropout rate amongst the three GEAR UP high schools of Keys Union High School District. Latino students have an annual adjusted dropout rate of 1%, Asians 1.1% and zero for all other ethnic groups.

TABLE 3.4. Adjusted Dropout Rate for “A” High School

Ethnic Category	Adjusted Grade 9 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 10 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 11 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 12 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 9-12 Dropout Total	Grade 9-12 Enrollment Total	Annual Adjusted Grade 9-12 Dropout Rate
Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	7	7	4	6	24	2,397	1.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	4	0
Asian, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	1	1	88	1.1%
Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	14	0
Filipino, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	34	0
African American, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	34	0
White, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	186	0
Two or More Races, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
None Reported	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Source: California Department of Education (2012)

“B” High School

“B” High School opened in 1963. During the 2011-2012 school year, the site accommodated students in 60 regular classrooms and 27 labs for specific programs (i.e. computer labs, science labs, choral music room, etc.) The site has a mission to provide instruction and support needed for the development of 21 Century Learner with skills in critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity.

“B” High School has a population of over 2,700 students. The racial demographics of the school site is not representative of the district having a Latino/Hispanic population is more than 25% higher than the district average. “B” High School is 73.5% Latino/Hispanic, 10.5% Caucasian/White, 8.5% Asian/Filipino, and less than 2.2% Black/African American. The school has other subgroups that are significant in number in regards to the impact they have on student achievement based on research, having 51.7% of the population identified as English Learners and 70.3% Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Callahan et al., 2010).

Table 3.5 is data acquired regarding the adjusted dropout rate for “B” High School. “B” High School’s Latino population adjusted dropout rate is 2.2%, with the African American percentage more than double at 5.1%. However, the enrollment numbers for these two populations differ as well with there being 2,014 Latinos and 59 African-American students. Thus, with all of the data the student enrollment size has an influence on the percentages when calculating the adjusted dropout rate of school sites.

TABLE 3.5. Adjusted Dropout Rate for “B” High School

Ethnic Category	Adjusted Grade 9 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 10 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 11 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 12 Dropouts	Adjusted Grade 9-12 Dropout Total	Grade 9-12 Enrollment Total	Annual Adjusted Grade 9-12 Dropout Rate
Hispanic or Latino of Any Race	1	3	5	35	44	2,014	2.2%
American Indian/Alaska Native, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	8	0
Asian, Not Hispanic	0	0	1	0	1	234	0.4%
Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	30	0
Filipino, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	0	0	77	0
African American, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	3	3	59	5.1%
White, Not Hispanic	1	0	1	3	5	289	1.7%
Two or More Races, Not Hispanic	0	0	0	1	1	30	3.3%

Source: California Department of Education (2012)

Participants

The participants are Latino/a students from Keys Union School District in Southern California receiving support from the federal grant, GEAR UP. Participants were age 12-13 when the survey was administered during the student’s eighth grade year, and age 15-16 during administration during their 10th grade year. During their eighth grade year there were 138 student participants, 69 Latinas and 67 Latinos. Survey data was acquired from 548 student participants during the 10th grade having 265 Latinas and

236 Latinos. The number of student participants from which survey data was acquired more than tripled between the time periods of eighth and 10th grade.

Instrumentation

Acquisition of the student perspective of their levels of engagement was retrieved from the Cooperative Institutional Research Project (CIRP) designed for middle school and high school students by program evaluators of the GEAR UP program. CIRP was developed in 1966 by the American Council on Education, and has been administered by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) at the University of California, Los Angeles, since 1973 (Astin, 1993). CIRP is a 40-item instrument that measures the characteristics of incoming first-year college students such as, their demographic characteristics, behaviors they established in high school, levels of academic preparedness, decisions that influenced their choice of college, expectations of the college experience, faculty and peer relations, attitudes and aspirations, and financial concerns regarding college (HERI, 2009). Further, the CIRP was administered twice over a period of time for longitudinal data of the student participants for this study. For the purposes of this study the following research questions were used to measure the aspiration level of student participants:

1. What is the highest level that you expect to obtain?
2. After high school, what is the highest academic degree that you will earn?

The protection of human subjects is a priority in research. This requires that data be used, stored, and disclosed in a way that ensures the privacy of individual research subjects researchers are expected to design and implement protocols that comply, at a minimum, with applicable regulatory and institutional policy requirements. In an effort

to protect the human subject participants of this study the data will be stored in an electronic notebook with security measures in a locked residence.

Reliability/Validity

An effort was made to ensure the survey was reliable and valid to measure the education aspiration level of students. Studies on student aspirations typically have used a single-item measure to the construct (McWhirter, Hackett & Bandalos, 1998; Reyes, Kobus & Gillock, 1999). Consistent with the literature to measure student aspirations this construct was measured in this study with the survey item question “After high school, what is the highest academic degree you will earn?” Further, a Cronbach alpha test was conducted to address the reliability of the survey. Cronbach alpha levels will vary between 0 and 1, with one being a perfect relationship between the variable determining the scale. The Cronbach results for variables used to measure the level of aspiration of students by the survey questions administered during the eighth and 10th grade was .603. According to Muijs (2011), a Cronbach level above 0.7 is acceptable for research purposes, while taking into consideration measure’s sensitivity to the number of items in the scale. A Cronbach alpha score of .603 for the variable educational aspirations may have resulted from a difference in the wording of the question between eighth and 10th grade. Table 3.6 displays how the questions are worded different from the survey as well as how the questions are aligned with the research on aspirations. Question A asks what a student expects to earn, while question B asks the student what will earn in regards to educational attainment. The variable, academic achievement provided different results. The Cronbach level to measure the reliability of academic achievement, measured by the students’ performance on all the subject areas of the CST was .920.

TABLE 3.6. Research Questions

Independent Variable Name	Survey Question	Relevant Literature (theoretical, conceptual, and/or empirical)
<p>Aspiration: <i>A. High school or Less, Some college but less than a 4-year college degree, 4-year college degree or higher</i> Coding:3-1 <i>B. None, Vocational certificate, Associate (A.A or equivalent), Bachelor's degree, Masters degree, Ph.D or Ed.D, M.D. D.O, D.D.S or D.V.M, J.D., B.D. or M.DIV</i></p> <p>Coding:1, 2 1= Bachelor's or less 2= Graduate Studies</p>	<p>A. What is the highest level of education that you expect to obtain?</p> <p>B. After high school, what is the highest academic degree that you will earn?</p>	<p>The model of Miller and Brickman (2003, 2004) which was a synthesis of work on future-oriented motivation (Marcus & Nurius, 1986) with social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), explains how personally valued future goals lead to the development of a system of subgoals that facilitate future goal attainment.</p> <p>Obtaining the student perspective results in a more valid understanding of the student's experience and meaning in the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1992)</p>

Procedure

The following is the procedure implemented for this case study depicting the data collection process and how received data was analyzed. For the purposes of this study, the variables aspiration and achievement are being measured. Further, the relationship between the aforementioned variables and gender is analyzed.

Data Collection

Based on the need to obtain data in a timely manner, the use of secondary data versus the development and administration of a survey was deemed appropriate. The use of secondary data allowed the researcher to manage time efficiently by eliminating the need to “develop a survey, administer it, and create a database” (Carter, 2003, pg.154). Further, the initial researchers likely have addressed any problems with the survey data when one is using secondary data. The implementation of a longitudinal study, acquiring data measuring the independent variables of aspiration and academic achievement during the student participant’s middle school experience and critical periods of high school was needed to answer the researcher’s question for this study. The completion of this methodological design was not feasible provided the structured and desired timeline for the completion of the researcher’s education program without the use of secondary data.

The following steps were adhered to for secondary research analysis as designed by Fortune and McBee (1984), according to Carter and New (2003). First, the research problem designating the need for more research on Latino student persistence through high school and college and educational aspirations by focusing on the middle school experience of Latino students was identified (Finn, 1989; Rumberger, 1995). Second, a formal request was made for the acquisition of secondary data from GEAR UP surveys

administered in KHSD during the school years 2009-10 and 2011-2012, the study participant's eighth and 10th grade years. With this formal request a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was requested documenting the conditions for access to the data. The MOU provided a statement of agreement about how the data will be used, the expectation of confidentiality, as well as the time frame the researcher has access to the data provided. Upon receipt of the MOU with a description of the data being released, research questions were re-designed to support a viable study. Third, the research design for measuring the relationship between aspirations and academic achievement of Latino students and whether there is a difference in the findings based on gender determined from the survey question and the other data was constructed. The data provided per the MOU had to be accessed by the researcher at the location of GEAR UP grant recipient, and could not be copied, stored or removed from the institution in accordance with the MOU. Next, upon receipt of the data, the key variables were identified, the data was analyzed, and the findings will be reported in this study (Carter & New, 2003).

Analysis

This study employs a quantitative research design. A quantitative research design was selected based upon the form of data being used, secondary data. Secondary data was acquired from a CIRP survey, previously administered and from the district database system. "Surveys are information-collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences and behavior" (Fink, 2009 pg. 59).

Initially descriptive statistics of the sample population were reviewed to determine if the sample size was large enough to continue with the study. Next, the

statistical methodology of cross-tabulations was used to measure the relationship between students' levels of aspiration and their academic achievement. The methodology to analyze the data includes the implementation of an ANOVA, least significant difference (LSD) as a post hoc, bivariate correlation analysis and t-tests. A t-test was used to measure the relationship between the level of aspiration of the study student participant population during their eighth and 10th grade school years. This form of analysis was used to answer the research question: To what extent is there a difference between eighth and 10th grade aspirations for Latino students after two years of high school experience and participation in GEAR UP? Bivariate correlation analyses were used to measure the relationship between a student's education aspiration level and academic achievement in response to the research question: What is the relationship between a Latino student's level of aspiration and CST score? This analysis was run for the data during the student participant's eighth and 10th grade years separately. T-tests were used to measure whether there was a gender difference in student education aspirations and academic achievement of the Latino student participant group of this study in response to the research question: What is the gender difference in the level of aspiration of Latino and Latina students during their eighth and 10th grade years?

Conclusion

The development of a methodology to meet the needs of the research question and the timelines of the researcher has been met with the implementation of a longitudinal study using secondary data. The data from the CIRP modified for use in middle and high school was acquired to assess identified student participants level of aspiration from Keys Union High School District during their eighth and 10th grade year. Multiple analyses

have been used to assess the relationship between the student aspirations and academic achievement of Latino students, as well as the gender outcomes for this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

For the purposes of this study, secondary data was collected from a school district in Southern California under the guise of a Memorandum of Understanding, specifying the data being offered to the researcher. The researcher acquired data on the students' performance on the California Standards Test (CST) during their eighth and 10th grade school years, as well as the responses from specific survey questions from a questionnaire addressing the college aspirations of students administered during eighth and 10th grade. All analyses were performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The identified school district was a recipient of a Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant, and the participants in this study are students from school sites receiving the program services of GEAR UP. This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses used to address the following research questions:

1. To what extent is there a difference between eighth and 10th grade aspirations for GEAR UP Latino students after 2 years of high school experience?
2. What is the relationship between a Latino student's level of aspiration and CST score during their eighth and 10th grade experiences?
3. What is the gender difference in the level of aspiration of Latino and Latina students during their eighth and 10th grade years?

4. What is the relationship between eighth grade GPA, CST scores, and educational aspirations to 10th grade GPA?

The following section provides the outcomes related to the research questions about the relationship of Latino students' educational aspirations and student achievement from eighth to 10th grade. Further, an assessment as to whether there is a difference in educational aspirations over this time period in relation to a student's gender is provided.

Research Question #1

The research question number one, asking to what extent is there a difference between eighth and 10th grade aspirations for GEAR UP students provided the following results.

TABLE 4.1. Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variable, Aspiration

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Eighth Grade Degree of Aspiration	2.8485	99	1.00370
10th Grade Degree of Aspiration	3.3939	99	.83076

Means and standard deviations for the aspiration levels of Latino students with Keys Union School District are presented in Table 4.1. The eighth grade and 10th grade school year of students were compared using a paired sample t test, with significant results, $t(98) = -5.525, p < .05$. The sample size of this analysis is 99 based on the implementation of a paired *t*-test, which required the student participant's completion of the survey during the eighth and 10th grade. The aspiration level for Latino students

participating in GEAR UP during their eighth grade year ($M = 2.8485$, $SD = 1.004$) was lower than during their 10th grade year ($M = 3.3939$, $SD = .83076$).

Research Question #2

For the purposes of this study the educational aspirations of Latino students in relationship to their academic achievement is an area of focus. A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences amongst GEAR UP Latino student's levels of aspiration and their actual CST scores during the eighth grade. Students' level of aspiration and academic achievement in the form of CST scores was significant in the subjects of Mathematics and Language Arts, $F(3,123) = 7.921$, $p = .000$ and $F(3, 123) = 4.176$, $p = .007$ respectively. Student participants with educational aspirations of an Associates Degree or lower reliably scored lower than students with educational aspirations of a bachelor's or a Master's Degree in the subject matter of Mathematics on the CST. Students with educational aspirations of a bachelor's degree or a master's degree scored reliably higher than students with educational aspirations of a professional degree on the Mathematics portion of the CST during eighth grade.

In regards to Language Arts, student participants with educational aspirations of an Associates Degree or lower reliably performed lower than students with educational aspirations of a bachelor's or master's degree on the CST. Further, students with educational aspirations of a professional degree reliably performed lower on the Language Arts CST than student participants with educational aspirations of a Bachelor or Master's Degree. Tables 4.2 and 4.3 display the descriptive of the student participants, the performance on the CST and the educational aspiration selected on the survey administered. The CST outcomes of the student participants were re-grouped into

performance levels as identified by the California Department of Education for the descriptive table, not for the analyses of the relationship of the variables. Research question number two addresses the relationship of academic achievement and educational aspirations for student participants of this study.

TABLE 4.2. Descriptive of Degree Aspiration and Mathematic CST Scores

		Mathematics					Total
		1.00(FBB)	2.00(BB)	3.00(B)	4.00(P)	5.00(AP)	
Degree	1.00	1	3	4	2	0	10
Aspiration	2.00	0	4	12	8	11	35
	3.00	1	3	8	10	7	29
	4.00	8	7	22	10	3	50
Total		10	17	46	30	21	124

Note: Associates Degree or Less (1), Bachelor's degree (2), Masters Degree (3), Professional Degree (4); Far Below Basic (FBB), Below Basic (BB), Basic (B), Proficient (P), Advanced Proficient (AP)

TABLE 4.3. Descriptive of Degree Aspiration and Language Arts CST Scores

		Language Arts					Total
		1.00(FBB)	2.00(FB)	3.00(B)	4.00(P)	5.00(AP)	
Degree	1.00	2	1	5	2	0	10
Aspiration	2.00	0	3	14	15	3	35
	3.00	0	2	12	12	3	29
	4.00	1	12	20	15	2	50
Total		3	18	51	44	8	124

Note: Associates Degree or Less (1), Bachelor's degree (2), Masters Degree (3), Professional Degree (4); Far Below Basic (FBB), Below Basic (BB), Basic (B), Proficient (P), Advanced Proficient (AP)

A one-way ANOVA was used to test for differences amongst Latino student's level of aspiration and their CST scores. Differences in students' level of aspiration and their academic achievement in the form of CST scores was not significant in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and History. Comparisons indicated there was a

significant difference in the participant students' level of aspiration and their academic performance on the Language Arts section of the CST, $F(3, 102) = .985, p > .05$. A comparison of the participant students' level and CST performance in the subject of Mathematics produced did not produce significant results, $F(3, 102) = 1.560, p > .05$. A comparison of the aspiration level of student participants in the subject area of Science was significant, $F(3, 102) = 1.727, p > .116$. Lastly, a significant difference was not found in the level of aspiration of student participants and their performance on the History section of the CST, $F(3, 102) = .210, p = .889$. For the student participants of this study there was no significance between their educational aspirations and performance on the CST in the subject areas of Language Arts, Math, Science or History.

Research Question #3

The relationship between the educational aspirations of students and gender was assessed in this study as well with the research question, what is the gender difference in the level of aspiration of Latino and Latina students during their eighth and 10th grade years? Data was retrieved addressing the difference in the level of aspiration by gender between their eighth and 10th grade educational experiences.

Means and standard deviations for the aspiration levels of Latino students by gender from Keys Union School District are presented in Table 4. As identified in Table 5, a t-test was conducted to assess the relationship between a student's gender and their level of aspiration during the eighth and 10th grade. The variable aspiration was placed into four categories for analysis. The educational aspiration of an Associates Degree or lower was coded as (1), bachelor's degree (2), master's Degree (3) and professional

degree (4). The analysis of aspiration gender differences was not significant for the eighth grade, $t(134) = 1.810, p > .05$. The aspiration level for Latina students in the eighth grade ($M = 3.116, SD = 1.022$) was not significantly different from Latinos in the eighth grade ($M = 2.806, SD = .9729$), as denoted in Table 4. There was no significant difference in the level of aspiration for the student participants in this study during their eighth grade school year.

TABLE 4.4. Means and Standard Deviations of Study Variables, Aspiration and Gender

Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Degree	Female	69	3.1159	1.02234
Aspiration	Male	67	2.8060	.97295
eighth				
Grade				
Degree	Female	52	3.5192	.77940
Aspiration	Male	51	3.2745	.85037
10 th				
grade				

Comparisons of students level of aspiration during the student participant's 10th grade year failed to produce significant results as well, $t(101) = 1.523, p > .05$, per Table 4.5. The aspiration level for Latina students in the 10th grade ($M = 3.5192, SD = .7794$) was not significantly different from Latinos ($M = 3.2745, SD = .8503$), as denoted in Table 4.4 and 4.5.

Comparisons of students level of aspiration during the student participant's 10th grade year failed to produce significant results as well, $t(101) = 1.523, p > .05$, per Table 5. The aspiration level for Latina students in the 10th grade ($M = 3.5192, SD = .7794$)

was not significantly different from Latinos ($M = 3.2745$, $SD = .8503$), as denoted in Table 4.4 and 4.5.

TABLE 4.5. Statistical Analysis of the Difference in Level of Aspiration by Gender

	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Degree Aspiration eighth Grade	.661	.418	1.810	134	.072
Degree Aspiration 10 th Grade	.853	.358	1.523	101	.131

TABLE 4.6. Frequency of Degree Aspiration, Eighth Grade

	Highest academic degree you want to earn										Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Other	
Female	0	1	4	17	12	5	18	7	0	5	69
Male	2	3	3	21	20	5	7	4	1	3	69
Total	2	4	7	38	32	10	25	11	1	8	138

None (1), Vocational Certificate (2), Associate Degree or equivalent (3), Bachelor's degree (4), Master's Degree (5), Ph.D or Ed.D (6), MD, Do, DDS, or DVM (Medical, Dental, Veterinary, Medicine)(7), Law (8), Divinity (9)

The frequency in which Latino student participants stated their educational aspirations is denoted in Table 4.6 and displays the following. There were an equal number of female and male participants. More than .50 of the student participants replied they wanted to earn a bachelor's degree ($n = 38$) or a master's degree ($n = 32$) of the 138 respondents. In regards to gender and aspiration and higher education, 45% of the total respondents wanting to earn a bachelor's degree were females, 55% were males. Beyond a bachelor's degree, 37.5% of the total of student respondents wanting to earn a master's degree were female, while 62.5% of the student respondents were male. The educational aspirations of a professional degree, defined as a Doctorate, medical or law degree was

higher for females than males. Females were 65.2% of the total respondents stating they wanted to earn a professional degree, 34.8% of the males.

TABLE 4.7. Frequency of Degree Aspiration, 10th Grade

	After high school, what is the highest academic degree that you will earn?									Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Other	
Female	1	1	3	13	19	2	8	5	1	53
Male	0	2	7	17	19	2	4	-	4	55
Total	1	3	10	30	38	4	12	5	5	108

None (1), Vocational Certificate (2), Associate Degree or equivalent (3), Bachelor's Degree (4), Master's Degree (5), Ph.D or Ed.D (6), MD, Do, DDS, or DVM (Medical, Dental, Veterinary, Medicine)(7), Law (8)

The frequency in which 10th grade Latino student participants provided their educational aspirations is denoted in Table 4.7 and displays the following. There were 33 missing responses. More than with the eighth grade respondents 63% of the student participants replied they wanted to earn a bachelor's degree (n=30) or a master's degree (n=38) of the 108 respondents. In regards to gender and aspiration and higher education, 43% of the total respondents wanting to earn a bachelor's degree were females, 57% were males. The number of students of each gender wanting to earn a master's degree or doctorate was equal. The educational aspiration of a medical degree was higher for females than males. Females were 67% of the total respondents stating they wanted to earn a professional degree, 33% of the males.

Research Question #4

Correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between 10th grade GPA and various potential predictors. The predictability of the 10th grade GPA of a student based on their eighth grade GPA, CST scores in

Mathematics and Language Arts, as well as their educational aspirations was assessed in this study. As a form of analysis, a multi-linear regression was used to interpret these variables on 10th grade GPA as an outcome. Therefore, the dependent variable was 10th grade GPA and the independent variables were eighth grade GPA, actual CST scores in Mathematics and Language Arts, and educational aspiration.

TABLE 4.8. Descriptive of Relationship Between 10th Grade GPA and Independent Variables

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
CST Language Arts	.000	.001	.020	.159	.874
CST Mathematics	.001	.001	.181	1.480	.141
Degree of Aspiration Eighth Grade	-.007	.036	-.015	-.189	.850
Eighth Grade GPA	.271	.060	.400	4.498	.000

Table 4.8 summarizes the descriptive statistics and analysis results. As can be seen, eighth grade GPA positively and significantly correlated with 10th grade GPA, indicating those with higher eighth grade GPAs tend to have a higher 10th grade GPA. The multiple regression model with all three predictors produced $R^2 = .259$, $F(4, 122) = 10.318$, $p < .001$. The regression analysis provided findings of eighth grade GPA having significant positive regression weights, indicating students with higher a eighth Grade

GPA will have a higher 10th grade GPA when controlling for all other variables. None of the other independent variables contributed to the multiple regression model. The analysis yielded a *R* square of .259, which means the identified independent variables are a modest fit in their ability to predict 10th grade GPA (Muijs, 2011).

In conclusion, GEAR UP has been successful in developing a college going culture supported by the student participants of this study, as students' educational aspirations increased over time and an insignificant number of students stated they had no educational aspirations beyond high school; two students in eighth grade, and 18 from the 10th grade survey. While the findings of no significant relationship between educational aspirations and academic achievement, in response to research question number two, is inconsistent with a majority of the literature on the topic, these findings lend to other research that has identified other contributing factors to academic achievement and educational aspirations. Some of these factors being addressed by GEAR UP may be evident in the results of the findings for question number three inquiring about a gender difference in educational aspirations amongst Latino and Latina students. Sense of belonging and self-efficacy, factors in the literature identified as being contributing variables to higher educational aspirations of Latinas (females) may be attributed to the finding of Latinos and Latinas in this sample population having no significant difference in the educational aspirations. Finally, when analyzing variables from eighth grade to assess their influence on 10th grade GPA, it was eighth Grade GPA that had the strongest relationship to 10th grade GPA. The findings of these research questions can contribute to the literature, possible policy, and practices in our schools as goals are set to increase student persistence and college attainment of Latino students. It is apparent from these

findings that there are other factor not identified in this study contributing to student educational aspirations and academic achievement.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Introduction

A growth in the educational attainment in the United States is needed and the President of the United States made a 2020 goal for college enrollment to support this claim. While the student persistence rates for high school has increased over the last few years, due to the national attention the “silent epidemic” has received, the numbers of students failing to complete high school to become career and college ready continues to be a concern. According to a Diplomas Count 2013, the high school dropout rate in the United States exceeds more than one million students a year, having an impact on the potential earnings, lost revenue, and social services on the national and state level (“Diplomas Count”, 2013). Further, almost one third of the students attending public high schools in the United States dropout of school each year (Snyder & Dillow, 2010; Stillwell, 2010), with Hispanic students being a significant percentage of the students failing to graduate.

Although high school persistence is a national problem, there is a variation in the rates in which specific ethnic/racial groups are dropping out of school with Latinos (36.5%) dropping out at a higher rate than Asian (8.6%) and White (19%) students (Stillwell, 2010). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), Latinos are the largest and youngest minority group in the United States there for the educational attainment of this group is critical to the development and growth of the nation. Thus, Latinos are the sample population of this study to assess the variables that contribute to student

persistence through high school and educational aspirations to attend college. The sample population for this study is GEAR UP students, a federally funded program designed to support the educational aspirations of students to complete high school and be prepared for undergraduate programs.

While the number is astonishing for high school dropout for the nation and Latinos, researchers and GEAR UP have noted such numbers can be attributed to educational experiences prior to a student's entrance into the high school setting, for the act of a student dropping out of school is not a decision but a process (Finn, 1989). GEAR UP supports a cohort of students for six years, from a period in middle school through high school to address the critical periods in the educational pipeline. Further the need for support earlier than high school has not gone unnoticed, as National leaders have identified middle school as a critical period in the education pipeline being described by as the "Bermuda Triangle" of K-12 education in the United States by U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to is to assess the relationship between Latinos student's aspirations and student achievement from middle school to high school. Further, an inquiry was made as to whether there are education aspiration differences based on gender within this group. The study utilized a conceptual framework based upon status attainment, blocked opportunities, and social support models as well as Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) as a lens to view how aspirations is related to student achievement and persistence.

The methodology for the purposes of this study includes the analyses of the variables educational aspirations and academic achievement. The educational aspirations of this Latino student sample population where measured using two survey questions

acquired through a MOU with a school district. The questions utilized are part of a larger survey administered to this sample population of students during their eighth and 10th grade years as participants of GEAR UP. The academic achievement of students was assessed utilizing the student's outcomes on California Standardized Testing and GPA. In this chapter, the findings and interpretation of the analyses will be provided, followed by the implications of the study and recommendations to support the educational attainment of students.

General Discussion

In response to research question number one inquiring about the difference in the level of aspiration of Latino students from eighth to 10th grade, the education aspiration level of students increased from eighth to 10th grade. The GEAR UP programming may be a contributing factor to these findings, as all students had opportunities to participate in activities during the summer of their eighth grade year that would support their persistence through high school and provide preparation for college.

The findings for question number two: the relationship between academic performance and educational aspirations over a period of time for Latino students from eighth to 10th grade does not align with the literature with their being no significant relationship between the two variables in this study. The relationship between students' educational aspirations and academic achievement in the field of sociology has been provided in the literature on the "status attainment model" (Blau & Duncan, 1967). In this model, the educational aspiration of a student highly influences their academic achievement. While the relationship of educational aspiration and academic performance is not supported by most literature, there has been a study recently with similar findings.

In a study by Flores, Navarro, and DeWitz (2008) the relationship between college self-efficacy, college outcome expectations, and the choice goals of educational aspirations and educational expectations of Latino students was explored. A finding of this study was that college self-efficacy was not a significant predictor of academic persistence, which is contrary to a previous study on Latino students (Torres & Solberg, 2001). The findings in regards to the non-significance relationship between educational aspirations and academic achievement lends to the research about other factors beyond aspiration contribute to academic achievement.

In this study there was an inquiry about the gender difference in educational aspiration levels of Latino and Latina students, addressing research question number three. Inconsistent with the literature Latino and Latina students had no significant difference in their level of aspiration. It has been documented in the research that Latina girls are outperforming their male counterparts academically (Colón & Sánchez, 2010; Henry, Merten, Plunckett & Sands, 2008; Sánchez, Colón, & Esparza, 2005). In previous research it was found that female students from an urban community are more optimistic about the possible social and economic outcomes due to the acquisition of an education and this has attributed to higher educational aspirations (Fine, 1986; Lopez, 2002). Self-efficacy and a sense of belonging, variables contributing to the development of aspirations may be factors addressed by GEAR leading to these findings in regards to gender. GEAR UP provides services and programming to increase the self-efficacy, belief in their ability to attend college. The “network of support” provided by GEAR UP supports a student’s sense of belonging at an educational institution, a known variable for student persistence for all students, however Latinas report a greater sense of belonging

than Latinos. The research findings of Goodenow and Grady (1993) reports Latinas have a greater sense of belonging than male students might explain the gender differences in academic performance amongst the group, which influences educational aspirations in most research. This had contributed to the fact that Latina females are more likely to finish high school than Latino males with this higher level of student engagement based upon their sense of belonging and perceived purpose of academic success (Wojtkiewicz & Donato, 1995). The programming of GEAR UP, which provides a connectedness within a cohort of students, may attribute to our findings inconsistent with the literature in regards to gender and aspirations of Latino students.

The ability to predict the 10th grade GPA based upon data from students' eighth grade was assessed. According to the findings, eighth grade GPA has the strongest relationship to 10th grade GPA. Therefore, it can be hypothesized the variables contributing to eighth grade GPA has a relationship to the 10th grade GPA of students.

Conclusion

The findings in this study are based on the assessment of data retrieved from Latino students who were attendees at a GEAR UP grant warranted school in Southern California during their eighth and 10th grade. Research questions inquiring about changes in the educational aspiration level of student participants over a three year period from eighth to 10th grade, the relationship between students' educational aspirations and their academic achievement during these periods, gender differences in educational aspirations, and the predictability of 10th grade GPA based upon eighth grade data are the components of this study.

The educational aspirations of the student participants of this study reflect the objects of the GEAR UP program, designed to support low-income students in the development of their self-efficacy to attend an undergraduate program. There were variations in the levels of higher education desired, according to the data of this sample population, from an Associates Degree to medical and professional degrees such as law. The percentage of students stating they would be attending a higher education institution was high. The survey questions used to measure the educational aspiration of this Latino student population yielded results where over 90% of the student sample stated they had intentions of attending college. Further, analyses of the data showed the student participants educational aspirations significantly increased between their eighth and 10th grade years, in response to research question number one. These findings may be attributed to the programming of GEAR UP the student participants received, including but not limited to summer courses for mathematics and high school exam preparation, counseling on college entrance requirements and financial aid education. Further, GEAR UP has a parent engagement component, which is supported by the Status Attainment Model used as part of the conceptual framework of this study. The Status Attainment Model states a student's level of aspiration is influenced by the educational expectations parents hold for their student (Mau, 1995; Sewell et al., 1970). Parent engagement and the aforementioned components of GEAR UP are facets shown to impact student persistence through high school and increase the likelihood of enrollment in a higher education institution.

The relationship between educational aspirations and academic achievement provided different outcomes dependent on the school year of the student. The

educational aspirations of the student sample and academic achievement yielded significant results during eighth grade. Students with educational aspirations of an Associates Degree or lower had lower academic achievement scores on the CST in comparison to students with educational aspirations of a Bachelor's or Master's Degree. This was the case for both CST subject areas, Mathematics and Language Arts. Previous research has shown the motivational component of self-efficacy beliefs appears to be critically linked to academic performance (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Valentine, DuBois, & Cooper, 2004; Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005).

Interestingly, students with educational aspirations of a Bachelor's or Master's degree performed significantly better on the Language Arts and Mathematics sections of the CST than students who had higher educational aspirations of a professional degree. The findings of possible cognitive dissonance of students, as students with lower educational aspiration levels outperformed the students with the highest educational aspirations in both Mathematics and Language Arts during the eighth grade can be attributed to the where students were in reaching their goals. According to Frank (1935), one influence of the relationship of past performance (academic) and level of aspiration is dependent on a student's need to keep the aspiration high. GEAR UPs development of a college-going culture was just being initiated therefore, the students may have been establishing educational aspirations based on future performance. Students were administered this survey during their eighth grade year, therefore a perception of time to achieve designated educational goals may be in effect.

When analyses of the students' educational aspirations and academic achievement were conducted during the participant's 10th grade year. There was no significant

relationship between the CST in Mathematics, Language Arts, Science, or History and a student's educational aspirations. This shows, while there was a significant growth in the educational aspiration of the student population from eighth to 10th grade, there was not a significant growth in academic achievement as well in relation to their increase in educational aspiration. These findings on the relationship between educational aspirations and academic achievement during student participant's eighth and 10th grade school years respond to research question number two of this study.

An inquiry about whether there was a difference in the educational aspiration levels of students based on gender was made in research question number three. The analyses of this GEAR UP student sample population of Latino and Latinas yielded no significant results. The student's gender did not produce significant differences in educational aspiration levels. Previous research has shown Latinas having higher levels of education aspiration, however this is not the case in this study. The variables attributed to different levels of educational aspiration, such as sense of belonging and self-efficacy may have been addressed through the programming of GEAR UP. GEAR UP's implementation of programming in the form of a cohort lends to providing an environment similar to that of a Small Learning Community (SLC) or small school. Research has shown, SLC's produce school environments that increase connectedness of students to educational institutions, a known variable impacting student persistence. Further, GEAR UP's college-going culture increases the self-efficacy of students, as their belief and preparation for undergraduate programming is an objective of GEAR UP.

The predictability of a student's 10th grade GPA based on student data from a student's eighth grade year was the premise of research question number three. Through

a regression analysis it was found when the independent variables eighth grade GPA, CST scores, and educational aspirations are used to predict 10th grade GPA there are moderate results. Amongst the identified independent variables, only one had a significant relationship to 10th grade GPA according to the post-hoc analysis, eighth grade GPA. The variables eighth grade CST scores and educational aspirations had no significant relationship to 10th grade GPA. These findings support the research regarding student persistence and the time periods in the education pipeline influencing a student's decision to dropout out or persist. Events in middle school produce GPA outcomes that influence a student's GPA in the 10th grade. The next step in the address the factors influencing eighth grade GPA.

The findings of this study assessing the relationship of educational aspirations and academic achievement of Latino students who are participants of GEAR UP has yielded varying results both consistent and inconsistent with the literature. According to the literature, minority students have higher levels of educational aspirations than White students, however barriers based on educational experiences and self-efficacy influence academic achievement which is highly correlated to education attainment. The non-significant relationship between academic achievement and educational aspiration brings a conclusion that there are factors beyond educational aspirations contributing to student persistence and academic achievement. Most of the research in this area attributes engagement as the main factor influencing student persistence through high school and higher education.

Implications

The findings of this study suggest more research is needed in the middle school environment to assess the needs of students to be successful in high school and maintain the academic achievement needed to support their educational aspirations. The significant relationship between eighth and 10th grade GPA displays the need of education practitioners to provide high levels of support in middle school, as this is a critical period in the education pipeline. This study shows Latino students establish education goals before high school, therefore there are educational experiences providing barriers impacting Latino education attainment levels. Further, the education aspirations of 10th GEAR UP Latino students were not related to their academic achievement assessed by their performance on the CST and 10th grade GPA. Again this implies, there are other factors influencing student persistence. An educational environment that simply focuses on the development of a college-going culture supports the development of educational aspirations, however the other elements contributing to student persistence need to be addressed as well.

The literature and this study supports the need to take into consideration student engagement when conducting assessment of educational aspirations, academic achievement, and student persistence through high school to increase education attainment levels in the United States. According to Rumberger and Lim (2008) there is a strong relationship between student success and student engagement in school, which has a relationship to academic performance. Research has consistently stated there is a relationship between academic engagement and academic performance (Galla, Wood, Tsukayama, Har, Chiu, Langer, 2014; Greenwood, Horton & Utley, 2002; Marks, 2000;

Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). Academic performance has been found to be a strong predictor of student dropout (Casillas, Robbins, Allen, Kuo, Hanson, Schemeiser, 2012; Battin-Pearson, Newcomb, Abbott, Hill, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2000), however in this study there was no relationship between the student's academic performance on the CST and their educational aspirations which was higher education for a majority of the student participants. This finding suggests factors beyond aspiration need to be discussed when assessing the relationship between academic achievement and student persistence. Finn and Zimmer (2012) state, many students who dropout are expressing an extreme form of disengagement from school that has been foreshadowed by indicators of withdrawal exemplified by poor attendance and unsuccessful school experiences, such as having academic and behavioral difficulties. The academic achievement of students was analyzed in this study and it was shown to not have a relationship to the education attainment goals of the student participants, therefore other variable identified in the research need to be assessed.

According to the research, academic achievement of students is dependent on their academic effort, school behavior and involvement, their self-efficacy, and peer and teacher relationships at the institution (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011; Juvonen & Wentzel, 1996). Further, according to a research study by McCollum and Yoder (2011), school academic culture and student-teacher relationships are two aspects of the middle school experience related to students' educational aspirations denoting how early interactions in the educational pipeline are impactful on student persistence.

While the self-efficacy of students appears to have been addressed with the support of GEAR UP based on the a majority of students participant's educational

aspirations, that does not appear to be enough to support the academic achievement of students according to the findings in this study. While the behavioral engagement of the student sample population can be assumed to be high based on their participation in the survey during their eighth and 10th grade school year, school behavior and involvement of the student participants in GEAR UP programming is not addressed in this study. The student participation of GEAR UP students may have a relationship to the academic achievement of the student participants. Results from several studies have identified a positive relationship between measures of behavioral engagement, which includes participation in school and school activities, and achievement test scores (Alivernini & Luici, 2011). Lastly, the peer and teacher relationship effect on academic achievement of Latino students needs to be taken into consideration. Studies conducted by Martinez and Ulanoff (2013) as well as Croninger and Lee (2001) revealed that teachers were an important source of “social capital” and that students who had academic difficulties from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefited from the guidance and assistance from teachers. The study further stated, “teacher-based forms of social capital reduce the probability of dropping out by nearly half” (Croninger & Lee, 2001, p.548). The findings from this study suggests previous research stating factors associated with student engagement are highly related to student persistence and educational attainment are accurate, as educational aspiration and academic achievement in the form of CST outcomes have no relationship in high school.

Recommendations

The recommendations from this study are based on the education experience of a middle school adolescent and the literature on expectations and academic achievement.

In California there is a policy practice of social promotion in middle school. This research believes this policy contributes to concern about education attainment levels in the United States. The implementation of this policy provides an environment where adolescents are not held accountable by the educational institution for their academic performance. The impact of social promotion as a policy and how it contradicts the objectives of education are provided in this section. Further, a number of practices to support student persistence through sharing academic data, implementing collaborative projects and attending to vulnerable populations are recommended (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). The following are a few recommendations based on Schargel's (2012) research:

1. The development of ninth grade academies to support the transition of students from middle school to high school.
2. The implementation of programming to identify students with early warning signals such as poor attendance and academic achievement to provide support.
3. A student action plan agreement to meet designated short-term goals within school semesters.

Policy

The implementation of district-wide programming within a school district starts with recommendations for a changes in policy to the school board. The execution of policy to address the antecedents to student dropout, a lack of goal commitment and institution commitment, begins by addressing the social and academic needs of students in middle school to meet their aspirational goals. Researchers have found course failures and poor attendance in eighth grade could be used as predictive measures for a student's failure to matriculate to the 10th grade and later dropout out of high school (Casillas et

al., 2012). The end of social promotion and the implementation of measures to address student engagement that supports an environment for attainment of educational aspirations need to be addressed in education institutions. Social promotion is the practice of promoting a student to the next grade only at the end of the current school year, regardless of when or whether they learned the necessary material. The argument has been this is the best practice in order to keep students with their peers by age, for appropriate social grouping. Social promotion is sometimes referred to as promotion based on seat time, or the amount of time the child spent sitting in school. Social promotion has been a practice of concern for the last 15 years.

The history and purpose of education is to provide students the skills deemed necessary to be productive members of society. Social promotion has led to an increase in the number of students not completing school, with a contributing factor being the student's academic performance. According to the research, students have stated they stopped attending school because they were too far behind academically. These students begin to struggle academically prior to high school, however the practice of social promotion has allowed students who are not meeting designated academic standards to promote to the next grade during their middle school years. If students, teachers, parents, and educational institutions were held accountable for academic performance during middle school with the elimination of social promotion, students may take their education more seriously. The current practice is setting students up for failure, not in middle school, but high school where statistically there is the highest percentage of dropouts. The lack of respect for education displayed by social promotion continues onto high school for those students who are not socially and academically integrated into the

educational system. The removal social promotion provides an opportunity to ensure students have the foundation they need to continue to acquire skills they will need in high school.

Without social promotion, it is understood a student has demonstrated the necessary skills to acquire a higher level of knowledge. The necessary curriculum standards being mastered prior to promotion places the responsibility of the education of students on more than an individual student. The teacher, parent, and educational institution in which a student is enrolled is responsible and accountable for the academic performance of their students.

Practice

Research by Andrews and Bishop (2012) found the most effective transition programs for students from middle school to high school employed a multi-faceted approach to support students. The implementation of programming with the cooperation of stakeholders such as students, families, and teachers contributed to the sustainability of the transitional programming initiated months before the start of school and into the school year for schools identified as being comprehensive. The following are recommendations for practice to address the accountability of teachers, parents, and the educational institution starting in middle school to increase student persistence through high school and increase the education attainment level of students:

1. Increase classroom relevance by establishing real life connections to the curriculum in middle school through linked learning.
2. Improve teacher, parent, and student relationships through professional development displaying an institutional commitment to student retention.

3. Establish programming to increase a sense of belonging for students, specifically for students identified as being at risk for disengagement (i.e. transfer students, previously retained students).
4. Operationally and systemically identify students at risk for dropout in middle school and provide research based effective interventions.
5. Middle school teachers visiting neighborhood high schools to share information about students and participate in joint staff professional development opportunities.
6. Establish, support and enforce attendance policies across middle and high school to address attendance challenges.
7. Develop a systematic way of documenting student interventions that can be accessed by teachers, counselors, administrators, etc. across both middle and high school.
8. Forwarding of academic data in a timely basis from middle school to high school to support the implementation of instruction at the appropriate level to meet student's educational needs.

The development of policies to address the needs of students at risk for dropout is the first step to increase student persistence rates and education attainment rates. The implementation of practical programming to meet the objectives is the second when devising a plan to maintain student persistence through high school and increase college attendance rates. The following section discusses the research needed to support the development of programming to increase student engagement to increase education attainment levels of all students.

Future Research

The future research to support the education attainment levels of students in the United States needs to take into consideration the impact of educational experiences in middle school on student persistence through high school and collegiate educational aspirations. There were numerous limitations to this study contributing to questions for future research. The current study was limited to a small sample size of Latino students attending school in Southern California. The sample size was dependent on the student's participation in GEAR UP survey, based upon the CIRP, during their eighth and 10th grade. Further, this student population was receiving services through GEAR UP designed to support the awareness and preparation of students for undergraduate programs. There were also limitations in regards to access to the data to assess the relationship between eighth grade experiences and student persistence through high school based on the MOU. Therefore, a sample size more generalizable to the population and data addressing the student engagement of students could support the development of findings to contribute to the literature on student persistence and educational attainment.

The previous research on student persistence identifies that as a student progresses through the education pipeline there are internal and external influences affecting the student's level of goal commitment to graduate and their commitment to the institution (Tinto, 1975). The list of interdependent factors influencing early school departure is not only large but complex, which has led to an inability to have a complete theoretical model to address student dropout for the K-12 setting (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Rumberger, 1987). It is recommended for future research that the academic, behavioral, cognitive and psychological engagement levels relationship to academic

achievement in a 6-12 setting be analyzed through a conceptual model, as academic achievement is correlated with student persistence (Appleton et al., 2008). For future research the following conceptual model has been developed by the researcher based upon the theoretical frameworks of Tinto's Social Integration Theory (1975), Finn's Theory of Engagement (1989), Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory(1986), and Meleis's Theory of Transition(1986).

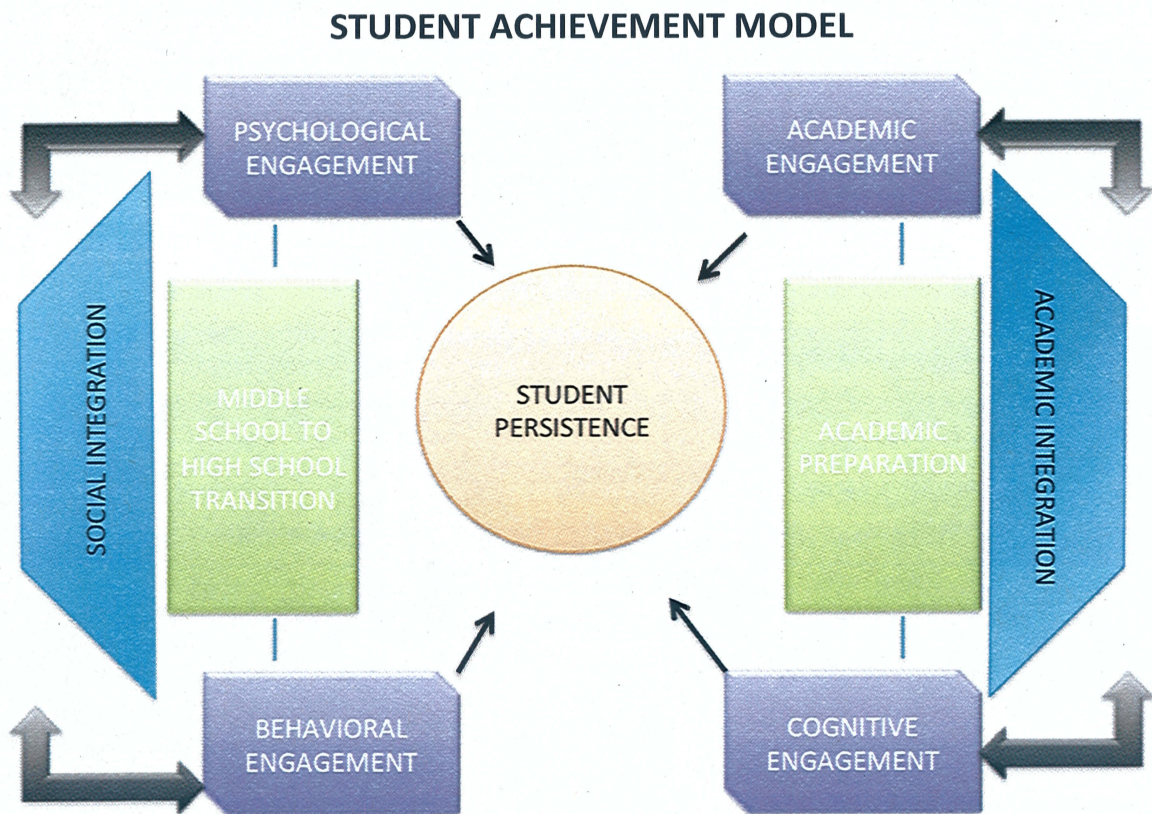


FIGURE 5.1. Student Achievement Model.

Figure 5.1 denotes the middle school to high school experience and how the independent variables of academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological engagement

contributes to student persistence. In conceptual model the influence of the middle school to high school transition on the psychological and behavioral engagement is identified as a student attempts to achieve social integration. The academic preparation of students and its relationship to academic achievement (i.e. grade performance) and cognitive engagement (i.e., self-efficacy) in the pursuit of academic integration is acknowledged as well. Future research would entail the development of a survey addressing academic, behavioral, cognitive, and psychological engagement in a longitudinal study administered in the distinct time periods of seventh grade in middle school and 10th grade of high school. Implementation of the survey during these time periods allows the researcher to acquire data one year removed from the student's transition to a new education environment. These forms of analyses can support the implication of practices to address constructs that show significance in relationship to student persistence.

Final Conclusion

The educational aspirations of Latino students in the United States is a matter of concern, as this the largest and youngest minority group in the Nation (U.S. Census, 2010). While there has been an increase in the high school graduation and college attainment rate, the gap in education attainment has historically been so large a significant gap still remains. The study assessed the educational aspiration levels of a sample population of Latino GEAR UP students from a district in Southern California. The student participants were surveyed during the eighth and 10th grade by the grantee of the GEAR UP. Through a MOU agreement, specific questions from the survey were provided to the researcher, along with limited data from the district's database

(Addendum A). The questions survey provided were from a modification of the CIRP, typically used in a higher education setting.

For the purposes of this study the educational aspirations of the GEAR UP Latino students during eighth and 10th grade showed a growth in the variable over time. The educational aspirations and the academic achievement of the student population produced relationships of significance during the student's eighth grade year, but not during their 10th grade year. Further, students with educational aspirations of a Bachelor's or Master's Degree had better academic outcomes, based on CST performance, than student participants with higher educational aspirations of a professional degree (i.e. medical, law). When analyzing for significant difference in aspiration level based on gender, there was no significant relationship. This finding may be attributed to the programming of GEAR UP addressing the variables contributing to Latinas historically having higher educational outcomes, according to the literature. Finally, a regression analysis to assess the predictability of 10th grade GPA was reviewed. The analysis showed eighth grade GPA is the variable having the strongest relationship to 10th GPA.

Based on these findings the academic performance of students, measured by their GPA is the strongest predictor of student success in high school in this study. Van Genep's (1960) stages of transition exemplifies the experience students endure from middle school to high school as they attempt to adapt their academic, behavioral, and psychological levels of engagement in a new environment. The relationships students have with their parent/caregiver influences their educational aspirations as well as that of their peers (Wentzel et. al., 2012). These relationships are not established in high school

alone, middle school is influential on the academic performance students, which has a strong relationship to student persistence (Fall & Roberts, 2012; Balfanz et al., 2007)

This contributes to the research by providing findings that supports previous literature stating the educational aspirations of students are developed in middle school. Further, a student's academic performance in middle school, in regards to GPA has a strong relationship to 10th grade GPA, therefore the variables influencing eighth grade GPA have a significant relationship on student persistence through high school. These findings are important as the ability of researchers to establish the relationships influencing student persistence early in the educational pipeline provides practitioners the opportunity to implement preventive programming versus intervention in high school to increase graduation and college-going rates of students.

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