

Supportive Teacher-student Relationships in Early College High Schools: Perceptions of  
Students, Teachers, and Principals

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Kate, and daughter, Emily, whose patience, love, and support throughout this journey have made it possible for me to persevere. I also dedicate this to my parents, Lawrence Bulson and Maria Bulson, who contributed so much to who I am, with special consideration for my mom who slowly but surely recruited me to the field of education during my visits to her classrooms over the years.

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## **Abstract**

### **Supportive Teacher-student Relationships in Early College High Schools: Perceptions of Students, Teachers, and Principals**

Supportive relationships between teachers and their students help create an environment for student success, but there remains a need for additional understanding about how to effectively promote positive teacher-student relationships in order to support stronger policy and practice in modern schools. In this qualitative analysis, I seek to deepen the research about supportive teacher-student relationships by analyzing how students, teachers, and principals described their experiences in early college high schools (ECHS) in North Carolina. Early college high schools represent a relatively new school model in which high school students earn college credits while working toward their high school diplomas. Quantitative analyses of the performance of ECHS students suggest students in early college high schools outperform their peers from comprehensive schools on a variety of measures. One important design element of these schools suggests that teachers must know students well to help them achieve academically and it is my assertion that supportive teacher-student relationships may contribute to ECHS students' success.

For this study, I analyze qualitative data previously collected as part of a larger longitudinal study from students, teachers, and principals studying and working in 19 early college high schools in North Carolina. I employ Giddens' theory of structuration as a lens for understanding the relationships between the agents (students, teachers, and principals) and the social structures that influence the experiences of those in the schools. I consider the leadership practices of the principals to promote supportive teacher-student

relationships as well as teacher practices, and compared the adults' claims to the students' perceived experiences with their teachers. My findings reveal three elements in the social systems of the ECHS contribute to supportive teacher-student relationships which include the following: (1) the beliefs of teachers, students, and principals; (2) deliberate actions of principals and teachers; and (3) programs that create social spaces for such relationships to grow.



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## Chapter 1: Introduction

*For 30 years, I've been covering school reform and we've basically reorganized the bureaucratic boxes—charters, private schools, vouchers—but we've had disappointing results year after year. And the fact is, people learn from people they love. And if you're not talking about the individual relationships between a teacher and a student, you're not talking about that reality. But that reality is expunged from our policy-making process.*

David Brooks from TED Talks, 2011

### Overview

There is a wealth of research about teacher-student relationships available to guide policy makers and educational leaders. Yet, as educators face new challenges and new educational circumstances, they will benefit from a greater understanding of how those personal relationships influence student outcomes. Despite the fact that researchers have amassed research over many decades about teacher-student relationships, the landscape constantly changes as new school models emerge and foci shift along with policy and perceived best practices. Thus while researchers have studied teacher-student relationships in many settings, new openings appear in the research base as new school models take hold.

One new school model, the early college high school (ECHS), promotes relationships as one of its core design principles. Such schools have existed since approximately 2001 and are just reaching maturity as an approach that has demonstrated success with regard to student outcomes while growing in popularity across the country. The results for the first few graduating classes from ECHS have been positive, so they are worth studying to better understand how to replicate positive student outcomes in other education settings.

A key element of the ECHS design is a collaboration between a high school and

an institution of higher education. Early college high school students earn college credits while also working toward their high school diplomas. The models vary across schools as students in some ECHS are expected to earn two-year college degrees while others require a specified number of college credits without necessarily demanding a degree.

Early college high schools first appeared in 2002 as an offshoot of the small schools initiative of the Gates Foundation, and their roots date back to the 1970s with the establishment of Middle College High School which opened on the campus of LaGuardia Community College in New York City. Many of the current design elements found in early college high schools emerged from the middle college model. One notable element of middle colleges was the concept of distributive counseling in which all staff members shared the responsibility for supporting students. Born (2006) stressed the “relationship between caring adults and the students they instruct” as a “hallmark of the MC-EC model” (p. 53).

In 2002, the Gates Foundation kicked off the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) which expedited the emergence of early college programs across the country. This initiative incorporated schools such as LaGuardia Community College’s Middle College High School which reinvented itself as an early college at that time while contributing many of its design elements to the ECHS model. Those elements included easing the transition from high school to college by providing support to students through seminars, mentors, and other relationships with caring adults (Born, 2006).

The Gates foundation provided support to the ECHSI through 13 partner organizations also known as intermediaries. Jobs for the Future (JFF) is a national organization that coordinates and supports the work of the intermediaries on behalf of the

Gates Foundation. Some independent early college high schools exist beyond the purview of the ECHSI but may not align with the mission and values of the schools affiliated with the ECHSI, so generalizations about the ECHS design will not apply to every school with that label, but the majority of ECHS endorse the basic tenets of the ECHSI. Since 2002, the partner organizations in the ECHSI have modified the language they use to describe the common design elements of the schools they support. These elements include a commitment to providing access to populations of students who are underrepresented in postsecondary education including racially and culturally underrepresented groups, students from families in poverty and first-generation college-going students. Other commitments of the ECHSI include providing free access to postsecondary education through collaboration between public schools and institutions of higher education, and the importance of a small, personalized, school design (Berger, et al., 2009; Berger, et al., 2013; [earlycolleges.org](http://earlycolleges.org), 2015; [ncnewschools.org](http://ncnewschools.org), 2015). I have included the comprehensive list of ECHS commitments as published on the website, [earlycolleges.org](http://earlycolleges.org), in the Key Terms section at the end of this chapter.

According to [earlycolleges.org](http://earlycolleges.org), a website maintained by JFF, there are 280 ECHS operating across the United States with 76 (27%) in the state of North Carolina ([earlycolleges.org](http://earlycolleges.org), 2015). The intermediary responsible for the early colleges there is North Carolina New Schools (formerly The North Carolina New Schools Project). NC New Schools developed six common design principles based on the shared tenets of all partners in the ECHSI. Those design principles also appear in their entirety in the Key Terms section at the end of this chapter. Among the six design principles is the one most pertinent to this study which establishes that early college high schools are committed to



personalization, which reads, “Staff in partner districts and schools understand that knowing students well is an essential condition of helping them achieve academically. These high schools ensure adults leverage knowledge of students in order to improve student learning” (ncnewschools.org, 2015).

In this qualitative study I analyze this emerging successful school model by first considering how school administrators described their efforts to promote supportive teacher-student relationships, I then analyze what teachers reported about the manner in which teachers characterized how they promoted supportive relationships with students. Finally, I analyze how students characterized their relationships with teachers in their schools. My goal was to determine how well administrator intentions aligned with the school design principles translated to both teacher intentions and then student experiences. I then seek to better understand how students characterized their supportive relationships with teachers in early college high schools.

### **Problem**

Brooks’ quote (above) underscores the fact that, despite a wealth of existing research, current policy and practices have failed to adequately account for the importance of relationships between teachers and students in effecting positive student growth in education. There remains a need for additional understanding about how to effectively promote positive teacher-student relationships in order to support stronger policy and practice in modern schools. This study focuses on a school model that has demonstrated measurable success compared to more traditional schools while claiming to promote positive teacher-student relationships as one of its key strategies for achieving such success. The Early College High School model continues to grow as does the

research base focused on the model. However, the qualitative research on the ECHS model remains limited. To be specific, there were no other analyses that focus entirely on the topic of teacher-student relationships with the additional element of analyzing the link between principal and teacher intentions with regard to those relationships in the context of ECHS as this study has done.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to seek information about how contemporary school leaders can achieve better student outcomes by promoting powerful teacher-student relationships as is done in the ECHS approach. This qualitative study fills a gap in the literature because of a shortage of qualitative analyses of the ECHS model at a time when current trends in educational policy tend to focus on assessment and accountability rather than more affective elements. This study analyzes the alignment of leadership intentions for supportive teacher-student relationships to the understanding and actions of the teachers and to the experiences of their students. This study seeks to provide insight into four questions associated with teacher-student relationships in the ECHS model. The research questions are as follows: (1) How do ECHS principals describe their deliberate efforts to promote positive teacher-student relationships in their schools? (2) How do ECHS teachers describe their efforts to promote supportive teacher-student relationships and how do their statements compare with principals' intentions? (3) How do ECHS students characterize the relationships with their teachers and what are the characteristics they identify as positive in such relationships? (4) How do students' experiences compare with the stated intentions of principals and teachers? Through the analysis of these four questions, this study addresses a gap in the academic literature and should help

educators understand what students in a successful school identify as elements of a supportive teacher-student relationship and how those elements reflect the intentions of principals and teachers.

### **Potential Significance**

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing insight into the deliberate leadership actions of the ECHS principals and how they promoted positive teacher-student relationships in their schools aligned with the ECHS design principles. Additionally, this study deepens the understanding of how teachers in a successful school model interpreted and transmitted their principals' intentions and how students characterized their relationships with their teachers. While a large body of research exists regarding teacher-student relationships in school settings, this study is the first to closely analyze how students characterized such relationships in the ECHS model. Thus the unique quality of this study is the convergence of three elements: (1) a new school model that quantitative analyses have revealed as successful; (2) the inclusion of teacher-student relationships as a core design principle; and (3) the spoken words of the students, teachers, and principals who have experienced or influenced these relationships. Taken together, these three elements contribute to a greater understanding of how to promote and recognize supportive teacher-student relationships and this information could potentially influence better-informed practice and more thoughtful policy.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

This study employs Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration as a theoretical foundation. Giddens' take on the relationship between agents and structures suits the premise of this study and provides a useful filter for understanding the impact of

individual agents' deliberate actions on their environment and the social structures that surround them. Giddens posited that social structures strongly influence individuals' experiences yet individual agents can, with deliberate and persistent actions (agency) influence and ultimately shape the structures they exist in. Thus, Giddens presented a theoretical model where the structure has great influence but the agent can work to affect and modify it. In our society, school structures assume predictable patterns and student outcomes similarly follow predictable patterns. Since the students entering early colleges tend to come from traditional comprehensive middle schools, they inherit many of the predictable patterns of other schools such as the achievement gaps between white and non-white students and poor and affluent students. These patterns appear in early college high schools as well, but the deliberate design of ECHS and the deliberate actions of the staff within them may serve to mitigate those effects and lead to less dramatic differences in outcomes between different groups of students. Structuration is an apt model for this study because the agents within the schools—the administrators, the teachers, and the students—follow deliberate patterns of behavior related to the design of the schools to affect the outcomes for students and thus affect the overall structure of the schools. This study sought to understand the deliberate actions of the leadership in these schools and how students experience those actions. Thus, the theoretical basis for this work posits that schools' traditional social structures follow predictable patterns, so persistent, deliberate action is required to effect change within them. Early college high schools operate based on a carefully-crafted set of design principles which may contribute to why these schools are uniquely successful in obtaining positive outcomes more consistently than more traditional schools.

## **Conceptual Framework**

While employing Giddens' structuration as a theoretical basis for understanding the relationship between the social structures that exist to influence student outcomes and the actors who operate within schools, this study analyzes the relationships between the ECHS design principles, the school principals, the teachers, and students. Principals interpret the ECHS design principle related to personalization and teacher-student relationships and communicate their intentions about how to effect such relationships to teachers. Teachers interpret their principals' intentions and interact daily with students. Students interact daily with teachers and interpret their teachers' intentions. Students' descriptions of their relationships with teachers may or may not align with the stated intentions of principals and teachers. However, the students' characterization of their relationships with their teachers is arguably the most accurate description what influences their experiences and subsequently their academic outcomes. Principals and teachers can only express their intentions and describe the influence they hope to have on students' experiences. In his 2007 meta-analysis of teacher-student relationship research, Cornelius-White posited that students and outside observers were better able to predict teachers' influence on student success than teachers themselves. Other researchers have suggested that students credit teachers with greater levels of influence over student outcomes than teachers themselves believe they possess (Decker, Dona & Christenson, 2007; Dryden, et al., 1998; Oswald, Johnson, & Howard, 2003).

In addition to using Giddens' Theory of Structuration as an organizing lens for this study, I reference theoretical works from other researchers that add depth to the themes of leadership intentions and teacher-student relationships. With regard to the

leadership perspective, I reference work focused on models of school leadership that drew from the research bases of distributed leadership and transformational leadership. And on the theme of teacher-student relationships, I include references to resilience theory along with other works that serve to reveal elements of teacher-student relationships.

Figure 1 depicts how the various bodies of research I have included in my literature review influenced elements of the study. I have noted the bodies of research that corresponded with the three different populations I included in the study—principals, teachers, and students—under those groups. The box at the bottom of Figure 1 represents how Giddens’ Theory of Structuration serves as the foundational theory to depict my own approach to the relationships between all of the agents included in the study. Other elements that cut across the three groups which will become part of the broader analysis of the data include the actions of the agents; an analysis of the school

### Conceptual Framework

<i>Agents</i>	Principals $\longleftrightarrow$ Teachers $\longleftrightarrow$ Students $\longleftrightarrow$		
<i>Research Base</i>	ECHS Design Principles	Relationships Literature	Relationships Literature
	ECHS Performance Data Leadership Literature	Resilience Literature	Resilience Literature
	Structuration		

Figure 1.1

structures to establish an understanding of the social structures and programmatic school structures; and finally a discussion of how the unique nature of the ECHS setting influenced student outcomes.

I have included works to represent the following bodies of research literature: Giddens' own work describing his theory of Structuration and analyses from other researchers who incorporated structuration in their study designs; ECHS design principles and performance data, leadership models, and finally research about teacher-student relationships which also includes resilience theory research.

According to existing research, the early college high school model is effective in many ways (Berger, et al., 2009; Berger, et al., 2013; Edmunds, et al., 2011; Edmunds, 2012; Edmunds et al., 2012; Edmunds, 2013; Fischetti, McKain & Smith, 2011; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Kaniuka, 2012; Oliver, et al., 2010). However, I developed this study to explore how one element of the ECHS program's design may contribute to its overall success rather than to further establish the efficacy of the ECHS model. This conceptual framework is unique because of the link between the deliberate design of the schools based on the ECHS model, the analysis of the intentions of the principals and teachers, and the ultimate comparison with the stated experiences of the students.

## **Methodology**

Establishing a case for their study of 33 students from a Virginia comprehensive high school, Certo, Cauley, and Chafin asserted, "There is clearly a need for descriptive studies that focus specifically on students' own perspectives on their high school experience and their levels of engagement in school" (Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003, p. 709). The current study supports their assertion by presenting students' perspectives on

their high school experiences while focusing on a different school design. The data for this study emerged from individual interviews with ECHS principals and teachers, and focus-group interviews with ECHS students. Researchers affiliated with the SERVE Center from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro collected these data as part of a comprehensive longitudinal study about ECHS in North Carolina. In addition to gathering a wealth of quantitative data, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals representing ECHS principals, teachers, college liaisons, and college instructors. They also conducted focus-group interviews with ECHS students. For the purposes of this study, I coded and analyzed the responses from specific questions in three of those groups. See Appendices C, D, and E for copies of the interview protocols. I first analyzed principals' responses to principal interview protocol questions 13 and 13a which read as follows, "Developing strong relationships with students is an expectation of this model. Please describe the relationships you have with students" and "What is your school doing to build positive relationships between teachers and students?" Next, I analyzed teachers' responses to teacher interview protocol questions 11 and 11a which read as follows, "Developing strong relationships with students is an expectation of this model. Please describe the relationships you have with students" and the sub-question, "What is your school doing to build positive relationships between teachers and students?" Finally, I analyzed students' responses to question 6 of the student focus-group interview protocol which reads as follows, "Tell us about the relationships you have with the adults in your school."

Researchers from the SERVE Center have coded and utilized these data as one part of a mixed methods study published in 2013 (Edmunds, 2013), but for the purposes



of this study I worked from a sanitized version of the same data I obtained from the SERVE Center in a data-sharing agreement (Appendix B). I recoded the data from scratch to identify my own themes and develop my own findings.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

The limitations and delimitations for this study are consistent with those of other qualitative studies. With regard to delimitations, I specifically chose to focus only on ECHS students, teachers, and principals in schools in North Carolina. In effect this is both a geographical delimitation as well as a programmatic delimitation as the schools included in this sample have the common feature of working with the organization, North Carolina New Schools (NCNS). While the designs of the majority of ECHS across the country are aligned with the national Early College High School Initiative, NCNS has further refined their design principles to be aligned with, yet somewhat distinct from, those of the ECHSI. Thus, the experiences of the principals, teachers, and students in this study represent agents within schools affiliated with NCNS.

Another important delimitation of this study emerged from my choice to employ pre-collected data that external researchers collected as part of a much larger comprehensive analysis of ECHS. This means I did not create the initial interview protocols for the ECHS principals or students that the researchers used for collecting the initial data. This study represents my independent analysis of their pre-collected data which means I was not able to probe further into participants' statements and explore their thinking. This is similar to quantitative studies that access pre-collected data from large data sets as is common for educational research with the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) data. However, despite this delimitation, the questions the

SERVE Center researchers employed in their original interview and focus group protocols are worded in a way that provided adequate detail to address my research questions. Also—consistent with the semi-structured approach—the researchers did probe the participants beyond the specific wording of the protocols for the purposes of exploring participants’ comments more thoroughly (Merriam, 2009).

As an additional result of my decision to use pre-collected data, a limitation that was beyond my control related to Merriam’s (2009) suggestion about seeking variance while selecting participants for the study. In the site protocol the SERVE researchers provided to the participating schools, they requested that schools select 4-6 students to participate in the focus groups. The protocol did not provide any direction to the schools about seeking students who would represent a variety of perspectives. While it is conceivable that the schools did seek variation in the students they selected, I have no evidence to support this and it was beyond my control.

It is also important to note that I did not attempt to demonstrate that the student participants in this study necessarily performed any better or worse with regard to any measures of student achievement. I posit that based on the quantitative data I reference later in chapter two, students in ECHS tend to outperform students in non-ECHS environments (Berger, et al., 2009; Berger, et al., 2013; Edmunds, et al., 2011; Edmunds, 2012; Edmunds et al., 2012; Edmunds, et al., 2013; Fischetti, McKain & Smith, 2011; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Kaniuka, 2012; Oliver, et al., 2010), but I did not establish such a link specifically for the student participants in this study. I suspect many of these students experienced academic success due to their inclusion in their respective ECHS, but I only established an associational link to their success rather than a concrete

demonstration of it.

As this is a qualitative study, it was not appropriate to ascribe relative significance to the various characteristics of teacher-student relationships described by either the students or the school leaders. The themes I identified during the course of this analysis represent the opinions of the study participants and I did not analyze them in a quantitative manner to assign relative value.

### **Key Terms**

*Early College High School (ECHS):* An innovative school designed as an outgrowth of the Early College High School Initiative by the Gates Foundation often in collaboration with a community college or university in which high school students earn college credit in addition to high school credit. ECHS generally serve underrepresented student populations including first-generation college goers, students from families in poverty, and students from groups who are racially and culturally underrepresented in higher education. A simple definition from the *earlycolleges.org* website reads, “Early college high schools are small schools designed so that students can earn both a high school diploma and an Associate’s degree or up to two years of credit toward a Bachelor’s degree (earlycolleges.org, 2015)

*ECHS Design Principles:* These are the six design principles of NC New Schools that guide the majority of North Carolina’s early college high schools. The six principles include:

- “Belief in a common set of high standards and expectations that ensure every student graduates ready for college – schools maintain a common set of

standards for all in order to eliminate the harmful consequences of tracking and sorting students.

- “Upholding common standards for high quality, rigorous instruction that promote powerful teaching and learning.
  - “Demonstrating personalization – educators must know students well to help them achieve academically.
  - “Redefining professionalism, creating a shared vision so that all school staff take responsibility for the success of every student.
  - “Working from a purposeful design where the use of time, space and resources ensures that best practices become common practice.
  - “Empowering shared leadership embedded in a culture of high expectations and a collaborative work environment to ensure the success of each student.
- (ncnewschools.org, 2015)

*Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI):* The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation launched this initiative in 2002 in an effort to increase the opportunity for students from traditionally underrepresented populations to earn post-secondary degrees. As of the publication of this dissertation, there are approximately 280 early college high schools nationwide.

*ECHSI common design elements:* according to *earlycolleges.org* a website maintained by Jobs for the Future, all early college high schools possess the following elements:

- “Students have the opportunity to earn an Associate’s degree or up to two years of transferable college credit while in high school.

- “Mastery and competence are rewarded with enrollment in college-level courses and the opportunity to earn two years of college credit for free.
- “The years to a postsecondary degree are compressed.
- “The middle grades are included in the school, or there is outreach to middle-grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of the early college high school option.
- “Schools provide academic and social supports that help students succeed in a challenging course of study.
- “Learning takes place in small learning environments that demand rigorous, high-quality work and provide extensive support.
- “The physical transition between high school and college is eliminated—and with it the need to apply for college and for financial aid during the last year of high school. After graduation many students continue to pursue a credential at the partner college (earlycolleges.org, 2013).

*Structuration:* A theory promoted by Anthony Giddens in multiple publications, most notably his 1984 work *The Constitution of Society*. Structuration analyzes the recursive relationship between social structures and the agents who are influenced by them while also influencing and creating those structures.

*Structures:* As defined by Giddens, structures are the “rules and resources recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (Giddens, 1984, p. 377). Structures exist in the minds of people as rules and habits that govern our decisions, actions, and interactions with others.

*Agents:* Term used by Giddens to describe the individuals whose actions recursively

influence and create structures. This concept represents inherent power to exert influence over structures and other individuals.

*Resilience Theory:* Research on resilience focuses on how students with perceived risk factors overcome adversity and succeed despite their challenges. Resilience theorists alternately focus on resilience as a trait some individuals possess or a process by which individuals overcome barriers to success. Central to Resilience Theory is the concept of protective factors that are both internal and external supports that contribute to individuals' successful outcomes.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I described the need for additional qualitative research related to students' perceptions of supportive teacher-student relationships as they experience them in the context of a successful school model. I also introduced the major themes I will review in my consideration of the literature in chapter two which include the following: discussion of how Giddens' Theory of Structuration shapes the understanding of leadership and change in the school setting; studies of the early college high school design and performance data; models of leadership that may affect the work of ECHS principals; and research on teacher-student relationships. In chapter three, I will describe the methodological design of this qualitative study to seek a deeper understanding of how principals' intentions with regard to promoting supportive teacher-student relationships translate to teachers' intentions and enactment of such relationships and ultimately students' descriptions of their experiences. In chapter four I will present an overview of the data from the three participant groups. I organized that description of the data to correspond with the four research questions I introduced earlier in this chapter. In

chapter five I analyze the data through the lens of the various theories I introduce both here in this chapter and during the literature review in chapter two and at the end of chapter five I suggest areas for further analysis and summarize my findings.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In chapter one, I introduced the purpose, research questions, methods, and major themes that influenced this study. In the most simplistic sense, this is a study about relationships in education but many factors helped shape the existing knowledge connected with this broad topic. In this review, I focus on the bodies of research connected to the elements of my conceptual framework as outlined in chapter one including the theoretical base for the study found in Giddens' work, research on early college high schools to establish them as the setting for the research, leadership literature to address the emphasis on principals' intentions; and I close with literature about teacher-student relationships and structures schools can employ to support those relationships.

This descriptive qualitative study focuses specifically on students who attended early college high schools (ECHS) in North Carolina. This literature review addresses three factors that contributed to my selection of students in early college high schools as a worthwhile population to study, including: (1) due to the relatively recent appearance of the ECHS model there is limited research on the design; (2) ECHS have demonstrated early success particularly for nontraditional students; and (3) an emphasis on personalization and supportive relationships is a deliberate element of the ECHS design. While the available literature about ECHS is limited, the studies that exist present the ECHS design as one worth further analysis. This review includes information about the quantitative and qualitative research on the outcomes emerging from ECHS programs across the country with an emphasis on those in North Carolina.



From a leadership perspective, this review focuses on literature related to two models of school leadership, including (1) distributed leadership and (2) transformational leadership. Each of these models has relevance for the ECHS design. The North Carolina New Schools ECHS sixth design principal speaks of empowering shared leadership. This design principle may influence how the school principals work to enact the other five design principles, so this section focuses particularly on how some of the leadership themes influenced principals' intentions with regard to promoting relationships. For this review I reference some of the foundational work related to these approaches to leadership, but focused more energy on work released in recent years.

The premise of this study was to analyze how school leaders and teachers promote positive teacher-student relationships and how students characterize the relationships with their teachers with a particular emphasis on the relationships students view as supportive. While it may be a generally agreeable assertion to claim that supportive relationships are good for students, this literature review analyzes various themes within the existing research on teacher-student relationships to help education leaders determine how to create a deliberate focus on such relationships among the many important school design elements and instructional priorities available to them.

Conducting a literature review on the topic of supportive relationships in the secondary education setting was a daunting process as there is a wealth of information about relationships to sift through. This literature review focuses predominantly on supportive relationships. The review includes some earlier work if it appeared foundational to current work and thus relevant. Such a wealth of relationship research exists that a comprehensive review would be both impossible to produce and too long to

digest. The wealth of research newly available on this topic suggested a continuing need to understand relationships in the current context of education.

Echoing the sentiment of the Brooks quote from the beginning of chapter one, McHugh et al., wrote in the conclusion of their 2013 study on adolescent perceptions of teacher-student relationships, “Despite this evidence that student-teacher relationships matter to youth outcomes, policymakers tend to focus on increased student achievement rather than the social processes and relational aspects of schooling that may strongly influence this achievement” (p. 32). Thus, despite the overwhelming evidence pointing to the importance of positive relationships in education, dominant policy and practice continue to pay too little attention to the deliberate promotion of supportive teacher-student relationships. There appears to remain a need for additional research that may influence leadership to change both practice and policy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This section of the literature review describes the theoretical framework for the study which I based primarily on Giddens’ (1984) theory of structuration. His work served as the organizing theory for the study, which was grounded in a constructivist epistemology and most closely represents my personal beliefs about the relationship between agency and structure, and thus, the manner in which the three different types of agents included in this study—students, teachers, and principals—create and are influenced by the social structures of their schools.

This review includes references to Giddens’ own writing and ideas about the interplay between social structures and the agents who exist within them who both shape and are shaped by those structures. I have also included references to other research

studies whose researchers employed Giddens' thinking in their theoretical frames. The purpose of this section is to help explain the relationship between school structures as they exist in our society and the agents who operate within those structures. I contend through this theoretical framework that school leaders, while operating within societal norms and existing patterns of secondary schools, may influence the social structures of their schools through deliberate action. These deliberate actions appear in the school design decisions they promote, and for the purposes of this study, the specific actions they take to promote supportive relationships between teachers and students.

In a simplified sense, Giddens' Theory of Structuration is a lens for understanding change and the role of the individual agent in effecting change. This qualitative study is an analysis aimed at helping educators understand the characteristics and the influence of supportive teacher-student relationships on student success, and I posit that such relationships are not the norm that exists in all school settings. Since ECHS students performed better on a variety of measures in the ECHS model than similar students in traditional school settings (as supported by the quantitative analyses discussed later in this chapter), then it is reasonable to conclude that something about the structure of the ECHS and the actions of those inhabiting the ECHS is different from other school settings. Thus, the actions a leader takes to create the conditions for supportive teacher-student relationships may cause a change to the normal state of relationships in schools. Structuration theory helps researchers understand the relationship between the roles of the structures and the agents in the phenomena they study.

Giddens provided a basic description of structure, stating "Structure is both the medium and the outcome of the human activities which it recursively organizes"

(Giddens, 1986, p. 533). To Giddens, structures are not physical entities so much as rules and constraints that exist in the minds of those who live by them. These structures influence how we behave, but through our actions we influence the structures as well. In his 1984 work, *The Constitution of Society*, Giddens provided an example of how his use of English served as an example of the relationship between him as an agent speaking or writing the language and the structure of the English language. He wrote:

One of the regular consequences of my speaking or writing English in a correct way is to contribute to the reproduction of the English language as a whole. My speaking English correctly is intentional; the contribution that I make to the reproduction of the language is not (Giddens, 1984, p. 8).

Through this example, Giddens highlighted the fact that speakers of English (or any language) influence its ultimate structure over time. He also introduced the concept of reproduction of the social structure which in this case is represented by the English language. Individual agents contribute to the reproduction of all societal structures through their repeated actions. In a school setting, a teacher may meet with a student to provide homework help and thus deliberately promote the school's goal of improving student learning, but perhaps the less intentional impact of the teacher's actions may also help contribute to that student's sense of connection to the school. In her analysis of actor-centered social work, Kondrat (2002) provided a useful explanation of structuration. She stated:

In this framework, one would ask not only 'what effect does the social environment have on individual behavior and life chances' but also 'what routine and recurring interactions contribute to the production of the structures that make up the social environment'" (Kondrat, 2002, p. 444).

These questions helped illustrate the recursive relationship between the processes and

interactions that individuals engage in and the structures they subsequently form. Sewell provided insight into the genesis of the name of Giddens' theory. He explained that the name of the theory is 'structuration' because Giddens regarded structure as a process rather than a steady state (Sewell, 1992, p. 4). Johnson made a similar point in his study of resilient students as he described how teachers' micro actions influence school structure: "Small and repeated actions to connect with and relate to students by teachers at the micro-level can disrupt seemingly hegemonic school processes that threaten the wellbeing of students" (Johnson, 2008, p. 396). Due to the constant influence of the agents' actions, structures constantly change.

Education researchers have applied Giddens' structuration theory to understand how individuals in schools reproduce certain conditions that influence educational outcomes for students. Bair and Bair (2011) employed Giddens' structuration as a theoretical lens in their ethnographic study of a high school's implementation of a college-readiness curriculum. Their stated goal for the study was to understand policy implementation in a school setting through the eyes of those who were implementing it. They described Giddens' influence on their work as "one that best captured the recursive relationship between structure and agency" (Bair & Bair, 2011, p. 18). They discussed how teachers' and administrators' implementation of the college-readiness curriculum ultimately failed to have the intended positive impact due to the structures teachers unintentionally created. The school in question was attempting to implement a state mandated college-readiness curriculum. School leaders created well-meaning structures by de-tracking classes and establishing a trimester schedule but did not provide adequate training or resources for the teachers to successfully implement the required changes.

Subsequently, teachers' well-meaning interpretations of how best to operate within the new structures led to some re-tracking behaviors and watering down of the curriculum which ultimately led to worsening performance of the students. So, despite an effort to increase rigor for all students, the structures that emerged in the classes achieved the opposite due to the structures the teachers established in their efforts to implement the changes the new state policies required of them. Bair and Bair contended that only when educators acknowledge the role of agents such as the teachers in their study and understand the structures as socially constructed practices, would they be able to successfully effect a change such as the implementation of the college-readiness curriculum (Bair & Bair, 2011, p. 28).

Similarly, Johnson (2008) utilized Giddens' structuration theory in his study of student resilience. Johnson highlighted the benefits of structuration for its focus on understanding the recursive relationship between structure and agency. He stated, "Giddens' theory helps to explain why local activities and relationships *matter* because they have the potential to reinforce traditional structures and processes, *or* to transform them" [emphasis in original] (Johnson, 2008, p. 389). This concept is meaningful for the current study because it focused on the intentions of administrators and teachers while comparing those intentions to the reality students experience. The reality the students experience should reflect the structures that sustain and characterize the supportive relationships between teachers and students and the stated intentions of the adults would highlight the agency enacted in a deliberate way.

Researchers identified structuration as a useful lens for finding a middle ground between pure objectivist theories or pure subjectivist theories. Parker conducted a

discourse analysis on the topic of change and stasis in the United States' public school system. He described Giddens' theory of structuration as striking a balance between the two extremes of 'structural determinism' and 'romantic individualism' (Parker, 2011, p. 413). Much like Parker, Johnson described structuration as a means of reconciling the tension between "deterministic analyses of trait related human resilience and 'heroic, beating-the-odds' analyses of 'survival' despite institutional repression" (Johnson, 2008, p. 388).

Reconciling these extremes leads researchers who use Giddens' theory of structuration toward a critical theory epistemology which focuses on the influence of the existing structures while promoting the potential of the agent to serve as a disruptive force. Both Kondrat (2002) and Johnson (2008) described their use of structuration as an alternative to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory which is another frequently-used theory in social research. In their description of their decision to choose Giddens over Bronfenbrenner, both Kondrat and Johnson described forces in ecological theory as external to the agents, and thus ecological theory did not provide as useful a lens for examining the recursive nature of the relationship between the actor and the structures (Kondrat, 2002; Johnson, 2008).

Research studies that align more with critical theories focus similar attention on the relationship between the agents and the structures, but critical theory research tends to focus on circumstances with negative outcomes for certain populations as in the Bair and Bair study referenced earlier. Other studies to exemplify this include a study by Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright of Youth Participatory Action Research viewed through a critical theory lens (Akom, Cammarota & Ginwright, 2008); Brown and Rodriguez's

ethnographic qualitative study analyzing the process leading to two students dropping out of school with a focus on both the structural and individual influences (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009); and a study by Jimerson, et al., who analyzed retention practices and concluded that “student failure typically reflects the failure of adults to provide appropriate support” (Jimerson, et al., 2006). Not all critical theories, however, focus on negative outcomes. Carter’s grounded theory study of nine high-performing black students led her to develop the theory she entitled Critical Race Achievement Ideology (CRAI) (Carter, 2008). She analyzed the actions and knowledge of the individual students who succeeded despite the factors that negatively influence black students’ outcomes. Carter identified components of her CRAI which include students’ beliefs, attitudes, consciousness, and deliberate strategies designed to be aware of and confront the racial and societal obstacles they face. Along a similar vein, Giddens described agents’ awareness of their actions through three lenses including discursive consciousness, practical consciousness, and the unconscious (Giddens, 1984). Since this study is based on principals’, teachers’, and students’ spoken perceptions we are dealing with the structures and actions within their discursive consciousness. I have applied this theory as a means of understanding the process whereby principals described their influence over the structures in their schools that lead to supportive teacher-student relationships.

The goal of this research study was to gain insight into how ECHS students describe their relationships with teachers in their schools. Giddens’ theory of structuration serves this study well because the ECHS model promotes the inclusion of deliberate relationship structures through the focus on personalization. The principals



and teachers in the ECHS setting interpret the expectation of personalization as a key design principle and make deliberate decisions about how best to actualize that expectation. My goal is to describe the structures the principals and teachers establish and what the students report about their experiences within those structures. Additional elements of this study as outlined in the research questions include the following: (1) understanding how principals described their intentions with regard to promoting supportive teacher-student relationships; (2) describing how teachers interpreted principals' intentions; and also (3) describing how they described their own behaviors with regard to promoting supportive relationships with their students. I included these additional elements based on my hypothesis that there would be some variance among the reports of the principals, teachers, and students.

### **Early College High Schools**

Due to the relatively recent emergence of the ECHS model on the educational scene, there was limited empirical research available about these schools. However, while the research remained limited, there was some quality work available to demonstrate the promising nature of the early college high school model. I have organized this section of the literature review to cover independent quantitative or mixed methods studies first, followed by the literature from three large multi-year studies on early college high schools, and I conclude with an analysis of independent qualitative studies.

In the realm of quantitative research on early college high schools, some of the independent studies which analyzed the performance of ECHS include Kaniuka (2012) whose study of ECHS students compared to a random sample of non-ECHS students

from North Carolina high schools found that disaggregated data across subjects revealed ECHS students performed better on state assessments in 90% of the comparisons and significantly better in 66% of the comparisons. An important finding of this study related to the performance of black males who passed at higher rates than their non-ECHS counterparts. Their performance reflected narrowing achievement gaps in the ECHS setting. This study with over 1300 subjects reinforced earlier findings by Kaniuka and Vickers (2010) from their mixed methods case study with 268 subjects per group where they found that students in the ECHS performed better than their peers in traditional high schools and the achievement gap in their ECHS was 8% compared to the gap in the study's traditional schools of 25.5 %.

Two other independent studies Oliver, et al. (2010), and Fischetti, McKain, and Smith (2011) analyzed ECHS students' preparation for college based on different assessments of college readiness. Both studies noted the challenge of comparing traditional college freshmen who would have already completed about four years of high school prior to entering college against ECHS college students who may still be in their third, fourth, or fifth year of high school. Oliver, et al. employed the College Student Inventory form B (CSI-B) which is a tool frequently given to college freshmen and used by colleges for retention management. Oliver, et al. administered this survey to 103 ECHS students and then compared the results with the responses of students from over 800 traditional college freshmen. Oliver, et al. found ECHS students less emotionally prepared for college work compared to traditional college freshmen and suggested college counselors should be prepared to address the unique needs of ECHS college students when they attend their institutions (Oliver, et al., 2010). Fischetti, McKain, and

Smith studied students' transition to and preparation for college with two tools: (1) the Student Adjustment to College Questionnaire (SACQ); and (2) the LASSI, which provides standardized scores and national norms for 10 different scales related to preparation for college. They compared ECHS students in the study to traditional college freshmen and found little difference in college preparation between the two groups. ECHS students reported less attachment to their institution than traditional college freshmen, but this makes sense due to the fact that ECHS students do not live on campus and thus do not possess a similar physical attachment to their institution as most traditional college freshmen. They contended that the lack of significant differences between the preparation of ECHS students and traditional students supported their conclusion that compacting the high school curriculum into two years is a viable approach and deserves additional study (Fischetti, McKain & Smith, 2011).

The SERVE Center is a research organization affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. They are conducting one of the three major studies of ECHS under the title Learn and Earn Early College High School Research Study which is an ongoing longitudinal study of ECHS in North Carolina. North Carolina is the state with the most early college high schools in the country. In a series of reports related to the Learn and Earn Early College High School Research Study, Edmunds and colleagues analyzed the performance of students in North Carolina early colleges. In 2010, they reported on the impact of ECHS on ninth-grade students. This study employed an experimental design in which the researchers selected student participants from schools that used a lottery in their student-selection process. Students who did not gain a seat at an ECHS became the control group, and the students who were offered attendance at an

ECHS served as the treatment group. In the 2010 paper, more ninth-grade students were taking and progressing in college pathway courses in ECHS than in traditional schools. Additionally, while nearly all ECHS students took college-preparatory courses in ninth grade, a significant number of students in the control group from traditional schools did not. Thus, even by the end of ninth grade, a gap began to emerge between ECHS students and non-ECHS students with regard to staying on track with college-preparatory courses (Edmunds, et al., 2010). In 2012, they released two follow-up reports to the 2010 paper which reinforced earlier findings from the longitudinal study (Edmunds 2012, and Edmunds, et al., 2012). In the first report, early college students were more likely to be taking and staying on track with college-preparatory courses than the students from the control group with significant results for college-preparatory math classes. ECHS students had better attendance, lower suspensions, and were more likely to remain in school. And similar to the findings of Kaniuka and Vickers (2010) and Kaniuka (2012), there were greater positive effects for underrepresented minority students, first-generation college goers, and free-and-reduced-price meal eligible students—particularly for college prep math courses—for students in early colleges. In general, Edmunds asserted that course-taking expectations for math courses appear to be much higher in ECHS (Edmunds, 2012). The other 2012 report included results for tenth-grade students. The treatment group was more successful in ninth- and tenth-grade course taking and was also more likely to succeed in those courses. After analyzing student performance in a number of specific college-preparatory courses, the raw scores were higher for ECHS on all measures and significantly higher on two of the five including college math courses and a biology course for tenth-grade students (Edmunds, et al. 2012).

In 2013, Edmunds published an article examining the manner in which ECHS engaged students. For the quantitative portion of this report, the researcher focused on two different aspects of engagement, including: (1) indicators of engagement which included attendance, suspensions, schoolwork engagement, challenge, and work perseverance; and (2) facilitators of engagement which included rigor of instruction, relevant instruction, high school instructor relationships, high school instructor expectations, and the academic and social support structure. With the exception of work perseverance with an effect size of -0.05 and scale means of 3.98 for ECHS students and 3.99 for students in the control group, the other nine of the ten categories considered had higher raw mean values with positive effect sizes ranging from 0.25 to 1.07. This suggested for both indicators of engagement and facilitators of engagement early colleges provide a positive treatment effect for their students with regard to engagement (Edmunds, 2013).

In a paper presented by Edmunds, et al., which at the time of this review remained unpublished, the researchers analyzed the impact of the ECHS model on high school graduation rates and how the results varied by subgroup. Their sample included 716 ECHS graduates from 6 schools who started high school in one of three different years and then collected graduation data and results from a survey they designed and administered to measure students' school experiences in a variety of areas. They found that graduation rates for ECHS students in the "all" category was approximately 6% higher than for non-ECHS students. Also, at-risk groups fared better in ECHS. Low-income ECHS students outperformed peers by 8%, and students who entered the program below grade level outperformed traditional-school peers by 18%. Due to the small

sample size, only the below-grade-level subgroup difference is statistically significant. The engagement survey addressed five areas, including the following: (1) academic expectations; (2) rigorous instruction; (3) relevant instruction; (4) academic and social support; and (5) relationships with teachers. Most pertinent to this study, the effect size was smallest for the category of “relationships with teachers” and grew smaller in each subsequent grade level (Edmunds, et al., 2013). In a personal communication with Edmunds in 2013, she theorized that the fact that ECHS students appear to have different relationships with their high school teachers as opposed to the professors who teach their college courses may have impacted this outcome. It is important to note that the deliberate design of the ECHS model applies particularly to the high school portion of the early college high school. While teachers in the high school receive specific training about the ECHS design principles, the support and training for college professors varies. This corresponds to the outcomes from the unpublished paper in which the effect size for relationships with teachers—while small to begin with—decreased for each subsequent year as ECHS students spent more time in college courses and less time with high school teachers (Edmunds, et al., 2013).

Research firms, SRI International (SRI) and the American Institutes for Research (AIR) collaborated to produce two major research studies for the Gates Foundation. The first study was *The Early College High School Initiative Evaluation Synthesis Report* with the final edition of six released in 2009. The second study to emerge from the collaboration of SRI and AIR was *Early College, Early Success: Early College High School Initiative Impact Study*, released in 2013, with a follow-up report in 2014. Combined, these two studies represent the largest studies of the ECHS model outside the

state of North Carolina. These studies represent collaboration between SRI and AIR on behalf of the Gates Foundation. This is notable as the research firms are independent of the Gates Foundation—who developed the ECHSI—but they do not represent truly independent research as the Gates Foundation also funded the studies.

The first study analyzed the roll-out of the ECHSI capturing such information as the number of schools established in the early years, comparisons with local school district student outcomes for graduation rate, grade point averages (GPA), rates of progression to grade levels, transfer rates to and from early colleges, academic engagement and attendance (Berger, et al., 2009). In addition to these high school-oriented results, this comprehensive study also included results about college outcomes and the partnerships with institutes of higher education. For their final report in 2009, they collected a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data in six subsequent years leading to the 2007-2008 school year. Their major finding was that in the 2007–2008 school year ECHS students outperformed students from their comparison districts on state assessments, but the design of this study did not lend itself to establishing similar samples for comparison, so there are many considerations to suggest the comparisons were unequal (Berger, et al., 2009).

The second major study to emerge from the collaboration of SRI and AIR began with a retrospective experimental design model to compare student outcomes from ten early college high schools to similar students in other high schools. For this study, Berger, et al., adopted an experimental design similar to the one employed in the Edmunds, et al., longitudinal study in which the samples emerged from the ECHS lottery process to identify similar control and treatment groups. Berger, et al. (2013; 2014)

collected data from surveys, National Student Clearinghouse data, and administrative records from schools for 2458 students from 10 early colleges and their feeder institutions. The key findings of the study included comparisons for high school graduation, college enrollment, and college degree attainment. They found that ECHS students had a significantly higher graduation rate of 86% compared to 81% of comparison students (Berger, et al., 2013). Eighty percent of ECHS students enrolled in college compared to 72% of comparison students, and 22% of ECHS students earned degrees during the study compared to only 2% of comparison students (Berger, et al., 2014) but gaps in these areas between two groups decreased over time. They also found that the early college impact generally did not differ by subgroup, and when the impact differed, the difference was generally in favor of underrepresented groups (Berger, et al., 2013; 2014). This aligns with findings referenced above (Kaniuka & Vickers (2010); Kaniuka, 2012; and Edmunds, 2012).

To summarize the benefits of ECHS as established in the quantitative research on the subject, ECHS students stay on track better for college by taking and succeeding in college preparatory courses at higher rates (Edmunds, et al., 2010; Edmunds, et al., 2012). ECHS students graduate at higher rates than their traditional school counterparts (Berger, et al., 2013; Edmunds, et al., 2013). ECHS students are more engaged in their schooling than their traditional school counterparts (Edmunds, 2013), and the ECHS model appears to benefit underserved populations most by closing the achievement gap when compared to non-ECHS schools (Berger, et al., 2013; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Kaniuka, 2012; and Edmunds, 2012). These are powerful findings to justify further analysis of the ECHS model.



There are only a few published qualitative studies relating to the ECHS design that adhere to any degree of methodological rigor. Foster (2008), Ongaga (2010), Thompson and Ongaga (2011), and McDonald and Farrell (2012) represent four qualitative studies that analyzed students' experiences in ECHS and each study noted the role teacher-student relationships played in those settings.

Foster's grounded theory analysis included data from individual interviews, student records, and school observations of 32 ninth-grade students in an early college high school. Foster placed great emphasis on her belief in the importance of including student voice in analyzing and evaluating educational programs. She posited in her conclusions that keeping students' voices central to decision-making during the evolution of programs such as the one she studied could serve as an "antidote to the considerable political and budgetary pressures threatening regression to the mainstream" (Foster, p. 118, 2008). She found that the ECHS model in the school she studied represented a learner-centered approach to education and that the students believe their teachers demonstrate authentic care and commitment to the students' academic success (Foster, p. 107, 2008). Most notable for my study is the manner in which Foster characterized the development of the relationship between the teachers and the students as a 'coconstruction' in the following passage: "The medium for change is the coconstruction of a nontraditional, intense, and personalized relationship in which student and teacher embark on what is essentially a corrective experience of school, teacher, and education (Foster, p. 118, 2008). This description bolstered my decision to view the relationships between teachers and students as the partly deliberate and partly unconscious product of the structures in the school which promote teacher-student relationships. McDonald and

Farrell (2012) conducted a qualitative study that included focus group data from 31 disadvantaged students from an ECHS. While their research questions took a broader approach to understand the experience of ECHS students with regard to their perceptions of their readiness for college work, their data included statements about the importance of teacher-student relationships. They stated in their conclusion that the ECHS model met students' needs by providing academic, social, and emotional support that supported their "acclimation to collegiate coursework and positively affected their scholarly development and identity" (McDonald & Farrell, p. 241, 2012). During their literature review for the study they provided an interesting rationale for the growing need to personalize instructional programs as they quoted a 2001 work by Drew. They quoted,

*Millennials* are today's students who possess a need for socialization and are highly sophisticated in networking. Personalization and relevancy are critical elements in their personal and educational lives, and generally, they are confident, social, civic minded, optimistic, and accepting of diversity [emphasis in original] (McDonald & Farrell, p. 220, 2012)

This concept suggested that the movement toward more personalized, relationship-driven education, as is found in the design of the ECHS, might be a necessary evolution of the structures in schools due to the changing characteristics of the students they serve.

In 2010, Ongaga published a paper on his case study of ECHS students in a school in southeastern North Carolina. The research questions for the case study asked why students attended the ECHS, what they attributed their success to, and what challenges they faced. While the study began more broadly than my study, his findings revealed three broad themes including family influence, caring relationships, and challenges. His findings produced many useful themes to explore on the topic of supportive relationships including the importance of listening, mutual respect,

responsibility, common focus, and high expectations (Ongaga, p. 381, 2010). These are not surprising statements as many of these themes also appeared in the non-ECHS literature about relationships between teachers and students.

In the following year, Ongaga collaborated with Thompson to publish a related case study with a particular focus on relationships using Noddings' ethic of care as a theoretical framework. Their findings presented two major themes of caring relationships and teacher constraints. They split their theme of caring relationships into two themes to include the following: (1) affiliative and intellectual relationships between teachers and students and relationships among peers; and (2) relationships based on continuity and support as embodied in the relationships between the institutions (Thompson & Ongaga, p. 47, 2011). While their second take on relationships goes beyond the scope of my study, the first half of their definition provided useful details to inform my study. They provided many details highlighting the presence of an ethic of care and posited there was evidence of the four components of a care perspective which include (1) modeling; (2) dialog; (3) practice; and (4) confirmation (p. 49). However, their study also provided data to indicate circumstances did not always support relationships. They provided evidence that structures within the district at times did not support the ethic of care as there are structural differences between traditional high schools and early colleges. At times, districts' rules required the ECHS in their study to abide by rules more structurally aligned with traditional schools (p. 52). They mentioned teachers feeling constrained by end-of-course assessments and a "narrowed focus on specific curriculum" as examples of traditional structures that were inhibiting their ability to personalize the experience for students (p. 54). This study by Thompson and Ongaga represented the closest design to

my study in that it was qualitative and focused specifically on the important topic of relationships in early college high schools, but it was distinct from my study in that it was a case study of one school rather than an analysis of students' perceptions from many schools and it analyzed relationships that went beyond the personal relationships between teachers and students.

A final qualitative study worth noting came from Alaie (2011) whose work was not about relationships per se, but was focused on the students' transition in the ECHS model from high school to college courses. Alaie's qualitative case study focused on ECHS students who failed a college biology exam was not presented as a particularly strong article from a methodological perspective, but that may be an editorial exclusion rather than a methodological weakness. The article described the events in which 37 ECHS students attended a large college biology course with some additional supports provided by the college. Thirty-one of the 37 students failed the exam. This told a different story from the predominant theme of success in ECHS that emerged in the majority of the ECHS literature. Alaie's findings pointed to the importance of the college professors being more deliberate in providing supports that meet the unique needs of the younger ECHS students. While this study focused more on supportive practices it revealed a circumstance where the college professors failed to establish strong personal relationships with the ECHS students as a result of structural challenges (up to 700 or more students in a class). It also revealed a lack of understanding about the individuals' differing academic needs and perhaps a mismatch between students' understanding of expectations in a high school setting and the more rigorous expectations of college (Alaie, 2011). This study highlighted the importance of relationships between teachers

and students by demonstrating what happens when such relationships are not present. The results suggested a need for further analysis of student outcomes in the college component of ECHS and what different institutions do to smooth the transition with a particular emphasis on ensuring the success of first-time college goers.

Each of the qualitative studies I reviewed above provides a different focus on relationships within the ECHS setting. They focused mostly on the qualities of the relationships between teachers and students. My study builds on their themes while digging deeper into the structures the schools create to foster those relationships and the role the principals, teachers, and students play in developing those structures.

## **Leadership**

The North Carolina New Schools' sixth ECHS design principle promotes "empowering shared leadership embedded in a culture of high expectations and a collaborative work environment to ensure the success of each student" (ncnewschools.org, 2015). The literature associated with two of the prevailing leadership models: (1) distributed leadership, and (2) transformational leadership provide insight into the work of ECHS principals. In this section, I briefly discuss elements of the two models of leadership while also noting the structures school leaders may create in their schools as either a deliberate outcome or a byproduct of their leadership.

Distributed leadership refers to a model in which those in formal leadership roles create circumstance to allow those in other formal or non-formal leadership roles to assume greater responsibility for decision-making and other leadership tasks. According to Harris, "the distributed leadership model emphasizes the active cultivation and development of leadership abilities within all members of a team" and it "assumes there

is a powerful relationship between vertical and lateral leadership processes” (Harris, 2008, p. 174). I contend there is a link between the concept of “empowering shared leadership” included in the ECHS design principle and distributed leadership as described above, but Harris provided the following warning by stating, “One common misuse of the term is as a convenient ‘catch all’ descriptor for any form of shared, collaborative or extended leadership practice” (Harris, 2012, p. 11). So, it was important to consider throughout the course of this study if the leadership behaviors of ECHS principals tended to align with distributed leadership practices the researchers reveal as productive.

Timperley (2005) suggested that leadership responsibilities have always been distributed to a greater or lesser degree in organizations, but it has only recently emerged as formal construct of leadership and thus there is much yet to be understood about it. My literature review revealed three significant empirical studies of distributed leadership along with a number of analyses of distributed leadership through the lens of different authors who built upon the empirical findings of the others. The analyses by Gronn (2008), Harris (2008, 2012), and Robinson (2008) provided useful insight into the emerging understanding of distributed leadership, but did not add new empirical findings to the research base.

The work by Spillane and colleagues (Spillane, Camburn, Pustejovsky, Stitzel Pareja, & Lewis, 2008; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004; Spillane, & Healey, 2010; and Spillane, & Zuberi, 2009) represented ongoing empirical work focused on establishing a theoretical construct for describing distributed leadership. While their work focused on *what* distributed leadership is, they have cautioned against attempting to measure its impact on student achievement.

Timperley (2005) and Mascall, Leithwood, Straus, and Sacks (2008) conducted empirical studies about distributed leadership. The former qualitative and the latter quantitative took very different approaches to their understanding of distributed leadership but they agreed on one central point. Timperley's (2005) study of school leadership in seven schools in New Zealand spanned four years and revealed some challenging truths about distributed leadership. Most notably she discussed how leadership distribution did not necessarily lead to experts making good choices. She indicated that teachers in her study did not make decisions about which of their colleagues to follow based on their expertise so much as their relationships or perceived experiences. She summed up her concerns by stating, "Distributing leadership over more people is a risky business and may result in the greater distribution of incompetence" (Timperley, 2005, p. 417). She suggested that leaders should only distribute leadership tasks if that action leads to improved instruction. Mascall and colleagues (2008) conducted a quantitative study that organized distributed leadership activities into four patterns of leadership distribution: (1) planful alignment; (2) spontaneous alignment; (3) spontaneous misalignment; and (4) anarchic misalignment (Mascall, et al., 2008, p. 215-216). Only the first category "planful alignment" had positive effects on what the authors called "academic optimism" which related to work by Hoy and colleagues. This is a construct which included teachers' beliefs about a school team's trust, collective efficacy, and academic emphasis. (Hoy, et al., 2006). "Spontaneous alignment" had a negligible positive effect and the other two categories had a negative impact on academic optimism. Robinson summed it up well by stating, "The challenge for those interested in improved student outcomes is not to increase the amount of leadership or change its distribution,

but to do so for those types of leadership that are most likely to improve student outcomes” (Robinson, 2008, p. 249). Thus, both empirical studies revealed findings that leaders should be deliberate in which leadership functions they choose to distribute.

Transformational leadership focuses on the reciprocal relationship between the leader and the follower. It is the reciprocal nature of this leadership theory that makes it pertinent to this study. Looking at the manner in which principals’ relationships with their followers—teachers—brings to mind the recursive nature between the structure and the agent in Giddens’ theory of structuration. Transformational leadership theory may also apply to the relationship between teachers as leaders of their classes with their students. According to Northouse (2010) transformational leadership first came to prominence thanks to the work of Burns, a political sociologist who authored a book entitled *Leadership* in 1978. Burns introduced the idea of leaders seeking to “tap the motives of followers in order to better reach the goals of leaders and followers” (Northouse, 2010, p. 172). Avolio and Bass later built upon Burns’ work and further developed the framework for transformational leadership to include the following three major elements: (1) charismatic; (2) individualized consideration; and (3) intellectual stimulation (Bass & Avolio, 1989). For the purposes of this study, the element of individualized consideration reveals a similarity between the types of relationships principals should strive for with teachers and the topic of this study which is about teachers’ relationships with students. Bass and Avolio define individualized consideration as giving personal attention to neglected members, treating each subordinate equally, coaching and advising (Bass & Avolio, 1989. p. 511).

Leithwood is one of the most prolific voices in the study of transformational



leadership, and the following quote from his first major study on the topic suggested the importance of such leadership:

Leadership only manifests itself in the context of change, and the nature of that change is a crucial determinant of the forms of leadership that will prove to be helpful. A second assumption is that school restructuring will dominate the change agenda for school leaders for some time to come (Leithwood, 1994, p. 499).

In light of the constant calls to achieve school reform, the statement that school leaders must be transformational remains true, and many of the elements associated with transformational school leadership have remained relevant in school leadership development. Leithwood identified six transformational dimensions of school leadership as follows: (1) identifies and articulates a vision; (2) fosters the acceptance of group goals; (3) conveys high performance expectations; (4) provides appropriate models; (5) provides intellectual stimulation; and (6) provides individualized support (Leithwood, 1994, p. 507). An important element of Leithwood's study is that he presented a list of practices that bolster structures to promote transformational leadership. These practices included actions such as distributing the responsibility for leadership, sharing decision-making power, takes staff opinion into account, ensures effective group problem solving, provides autonomy, and alters working conditions to allow for collaborative planning (Leithwood, 1994, p. 511).

Analyses of transformational leadership have attempted to measure the impact of leadership behaviors on teachers and students. Chin (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of school transformational leadership studies. His study found transformational leadership to have positive effects on teacher job satisfaction, school effectiveness perceived by teachers, and student achievement, with the impact on student achievement being the

smallest. His work revealed similar results as Griffith (2003) who found higher levels of teacher job satisfaction but little significant effect on turnover or student achievement; and Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) who found teacher perceptions of leader efficacy to be most impacted by their support for positive working conditions. Essentially, analyses of transformational leadership were better able to identify the impact such leadership has on teacher perceptions of leader efficacy than on student achievement.

Throughout the education leadership literature, the theme of trust-building emerged frequently and it revealed an interesting alignment between the leadership literature focused on principal-teacher relationships and the relationship literature focused on teacher-student relationships. In her quantitative study of teacher perceptions Tschannen-Moran stated, “Creating conditions that strengthen faculty trust in colleagues within the school may in turn allow greater faculty trust in students and parents to emerge” (Tschannen-Moran, 2009, p. 243). Handford and Leithwood identified five characteristics of a trustworthy leader which included the following: (1) competence, (2) consistency and reliability, (3) openness, (4) respect, and (5) integrity (Handford & Leithwood, 2013, p. 208). Wahlstrom and Louis’ quantitative study produced a slightly different outcome with trust among the teachers having the greatest effect with trust between the principal and the teachers being less significant. Two additional studies related to trust include Moye, Henkin and Egley who found teacher empowerment as a significant predictor of interpersonal trust in schools (Moye, Henkin & Egley, 2005, p. 271), and Chughtai and Buckley who found that trust in principals (TIP) was a significant determinant of school effectiveness (Chughtai & Buckley, 2009, p. 574)

Researchers also presented recommendations for creating structures in school

related to trust. Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) suggested the principal creates structures such as increasing common planning time to allow teachers to develop trust among each other. Slegers, et al., presented trust as among the structures principals establish to promote teachers' professional learning activities. The other two structures were collaboration among teachers and participative decision-making (Slegers, et al., 2011). Cosner recommended three strategies for creating trust including the following actions:

(a) to increase interaction time within department meetings, staff meetings, and site based professional development; (b) to increase interaction time by initiating new interaction forums; and (c) that appear salient for increasing the likelihood of fostering trust between teachers in interactive contexts (Cosner, 2009, p. 279)

Thus, the structures principals put in place to promote positive opportunities for teachers to collaborate and interact with each other promote trust in schools and hopefully this creates the positive outcomes for students as Tschannen-Moran suggested.

To summarize this section on leadership, I would not propose one best approach to leadership for ECHS principals, but I do suggest that elements of distributed and transformational leadership might inform their practice. I also point out that relationship building emerged as an important element for leaders, particularly the relationships they build with and among their teachers to create a trusting work environment. The focus of this study is on teacher-student relationships, and while the work leaders do to promote supportive relationships with and among their teachers may not directly affect teacher-student relationships, there is likely some correlation. While principals distribute the responsibility of establishing supportive relationships with students to the teachers, the principals also work to maintain supportive relationships with their teachers. This serves as both a means for the principals to model appropriate relationships they expect the

teachers to replicate while also establishing a culture of supportive interactions among those in the school. In chapter five I will discuss the importance of the principal modeling supportive relationships but I suggest principals must go beyond modeling and focus on deliberate actions to promote supportive teacher-student relationships.

### **Supportive Teacher-Student Relationships**

As I indicated earlier, extensive research exists relating to the topic of supportive teacher-student relationships. In this section I focus on research that lists and describes specific characteristics of supportive relationships as revealed in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method analyses of the topic. I continue by describing the role of resilience in teacher-student relationships and then I discuss research that focuses exclusively on the topic of teacher-student relationships. These studies identified specific characteristics of supportive teacher-student relationships and they contributed depth to the understanding of such relationships. I continue by discussing research that focused on circumstances that diminish the likelihood of productive teacher-student relationships, and I conclude with thoughts from researchers who suggested either a more cautious or a more skeptical analysis of accepted maxims about teacher-student relationships.

Because this study emphasized supportive relationships (as opposed to studying relationships that may have negative or neutral effects on students) many of the studies included in this review emerged from the field of resilience research, which seeks to understand the protective factors that lead to individuals' successes rather than taking the negative approach to understanding why some students fail. Oswald, Johnson and Howard described resilience as "that capacity to successfully overcome personal vulnerabilities and environmental stressors, to be able to 'bounce back' in the face of

potential risks, and to maintain well-being” (2003). Studies related to resilience revealed a broad range of definitions, but the general principle of success despite challenges remains the same throughout the research. Other definitions from the literature included, “successful adaptation despite risk and adversity” (Masten, 1994) or, “the capacity to overcome, or the experience of having overcome, deleterious life events” (Gordon & Song, 1994).

Four qualitative studies published in the past decade suggest that supportive relationships at school are important for student outcomes. Reis, Colbert, and Hébert (2004) conducted an ethnographic study seeking to understand the nature of resilience in a unique population including 35 economically disadvantaged, ethnically diverse, and academically talented high school students. The students’ academic success despite their economic disadvantages and identity as minority students made them appropriate candidates for contributing to the understanding of the phenomenon of resilience. They submitted in their findings that the presence of at least one supportive adult was a protective factor that enabled students to achieve academically and develop resilience (Reis, Colbert & Hébert, 2004, p. 15). Knesting and Waldron (2006) conducted a grounded theory study of 17 at-risk high school students and produced findings in three areas: (1) goal orientation; (2) willingness to play the game; and (3) meaningful connections (relationships with teachers). In Morales’ (2010) qualitative study based on interviews with 50 high-achieving low-socioeconomic students of color, four protective factors emerged including (1) their willingness/desire to move up in their social class, (2) the presence of caring school personnel; (3) their sense of obligation to their race or ethnicity, and (4) the presence of a strong future orientation in their beliefs. Scheel,

Madabhushi, and Backhaus (2009) conducted a phenomenological study of 20 ninth-grade students and six themes appeared in their findings including (1) self-efficacy; (2) purpose of school; (3) family influence; (4) relationships at school; (5) counselor influence; and (6) school structures and activities. While Scheel, Madabhushi, and Backhaus presented these as themes rather than protective factors, in their findings they stated, “The fourth finding is perhaps the most important. Positive relationships in school are crucial to academic motivation. With at-risk students, a key adult in the school is necessary to negotiate a better way” (Scheel, Madabhushi & Backhaus, 2009, p. 1173).

Supportive teacher-student relationships surfaced in quantitative studies related to various student performance analyses as well. In 2013, Phillippo and Stone conducted a quantitative study in which they administered surveys to 531 students and 45 teachers. They measured what they called “role breadth” as the degree to which teachers included social and emotional support for students as among their professional responsibilities. Those with greater role breadth believed in providing such support. They found that “students assigned to teachers with a high degree of measured role breadth reported higher levels of teacher support and also tended to report higher levels of academic press” (Phillippo & Stone, 2013, p. 369). Thus, the students in this study felt those teachers supported them more and held them to higher academic expectations. Lee (2012) conducted an analysis with data from 3718 students in 147 schools seeking information on the two domains of demandingness, which she described as academic press, and responsiveness, which she described as supportive relationships. In her findings she indicated that “teacher-student relationship had significantly positive associations with all three student outcomes...increase in behavioral engagement...increase in emotional

engagement... [and] increase in reading performance” She went on to state that when students perceived they had positive relationships with their teachers they demonstrated more effort and perseverance and had a greater sense of belonging in addition to higher reading scores (Lee, 2012, p. 355). McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones studied the effect of personalization which they indicated students perceived as fair relationships with teachers in a quantitative analysis that included data from 10,044 students over three years in 14 redesigned small schools. They found that higher levels of personalization significantly related to higher weighted grade point averages and English-language arts scores (McClure, Yonezawa & Jones, 2010, p. 8). And finally, Barile, et al. conducted an analysis of responses from 7,779 students from the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS) to determine the impact of involving student input in teacher evaluations. They stated in their findings that, “Schools with policies allowing students to evaluate their teachers exhibited a more positive school TSR [Teacher–student relationship] climate” (Barile, et al., 2012, p. 262). Interestingly, while their findings indicated that the use of student feedback in teacher evaluations correlated with improved teacher-student relationships, it did not correspond to improved mathematics scores (which they also analyzed). However, they did contend that positive teacher-student relationships did protect students against dropping out of school (p. 264).

In the realm of mixed methodology, researchers presented a variety of interesting findings that led to a greater understanding of teacher-student relationships. Gehlbach, Brinkworth, and Harris (2012) conducted a year-long study in a middle school to understand how the relationships between teachers and students changed over the course of the year. They noted a variety of changes that occurred in both the teachers and the

students which varied from person to person. The changes in relationships they identified associated with student outcomes for homework submission, self-efficacy, and student effort (Gehlbach, Brinkworth & Harris, 2012, p. 700). Gregory and Ripski (2008) conducted a mixed-methods study that included 32 discipline-referred students and 32 teachers. In their findings, teachers who focused on building relationships in their classes had fewer discipline problems and students in their classes viewed themselves as more engaged with the course material and activities (Gregory & Ripski, 2008, p. 345). And, reflective of the David Bradley quote from the introduction to chapter one, Shaunessy and McHatton (2009) made the following observation in the discussion section of their mixed methods study involving 577 high school students:

The need for teachers who are engaged in meaningful, supportive relationships with students transcends the waves of current politics and recent education issues, as students value care taken by educators to build relationships and support learning through persistence, innovation, and consistency (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009, p. 498)

This quote, like Bradley's, reflected the disconnect between policy leaders and the research on what educators should be promoting in schools.

In addition to studies about more general topics in which relationships emerged as an important contributor to student outcomes, there were many studies focused on understanding the specific characteristics of teacher-student relationships. These studies tended to be qualitative analyses in which the participants providing the data were students. Of the research referenced in this paragraph, only the 2008 study by Hallinan is a quantitative model. In these studies, students identified supportive teachers as those who are culturally responsive, flexible, and seek small successes for students (Calabrese, Goodvin & Niles, 2005), and they encourage students (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003;



Calabrese, Goodvin & Niles, 2005; Hallinan, 2008; and Morales, 2010). Supportive teachers care about their students and communicate their caring (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003; Calabrese, Goodvin & Niles, 2005; Knesting & Waldron, 2006; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; and McHugh, et al., 2013). They are good listeners (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003; Hallinan, 2008; and Johnson, 2008). They are motivated and helpful to students (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003), and they have high expectations for them which includes both behavioral and academic expectations (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003; Morales, 2010). Supportive teachers are available for their students, are positive around them, and are willing to intervene when their students are threatened (Johnson, 2008). These teachers have empathy for their students and understand their lives beyond school (Knesting & Waldron, 2006; Morales, 2010; and McHugh, et al., 2013). Supportive teachers are fair (Hallinan, 2008), they provide safe havens to students in their classrooms (Hallinan, 2008; and McHugh, et al., 2013), and they uphold students' identified personal boundaries by being supportive without crossing the boundary into peer friendships (McHugh, et al., 2013). They demonstrate persistence and commitment to students, and such teachers are a powerful presence in their classrooms (Murray & Naranjo, 2008). Students also expect teachers they would identify as supportive to teach them the basics of what they need to know (Johnson, 2008; and Murray & Naranjo, 2008). And finally, according to Morales (2010), teachers who promote positive relationships with their students are "down," which he defined as slang for being understanding of youth culture.

One particular characteristic of teacher-student relationships emerged which was notable due to its frequent appearance in the leadership literature. Trust appeared in

much of the research as an important element for promoting supportive teacher-student relationships. In Corrigan, Klein, and Isaac's quantitative study of student beliefs about their trust in teachers their findings revealed statistically significant relationships between trust in teachers and relationship to self-perceived character of students, student perceptions of school climate, and students' educational attitudes (Corrigan, Klein & Isaacs, 2010, p. 68-69). Phillippo's (2012) qualitative study of student perceptions focused on trust as one of the ways students express their personal agency with regard to relationships with their teachers. Students expressed an interest in maintaining a certain degree of privacy and that teachers who invade students personal boundaries related to privacy lost students' trust. Gregory and Ripski conducted a mixed methods study of students who had experienced discipline challenges and found that, "teachers who described the importance of relationship building for eliciting student cooperation were more likely to have students who reported trust in their use of authority" (Gregory and Ripski, 2008, p. 346).

Trust, however, is not a unidirectional phenomenon. As noted above, students' trust in teachers is important to supportive teacher-student relationships, but teachers' trust in students is important as well. Cornelius-White, citing a Poplin and Weeres study, stated in his findings, "Students desire authentic relationships where they are trusted, given responsibility, spoken to honestly and warmly, and treated with dignity" (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 115). Van Maele and Van Houtte analyzed trusting relationship within the school context found that teachers' trust in students is important, but school context factors such as school composition and size, particularly low SES, played a stronger mediating role on student outcomes (Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011).

Both studies presented teachers' trust in students as related to students recognizing their teachers as having high expectations for them. Thus, the literature revealed that trust is an important component of positive teacher-student relationships regardless of whether it was teachers demonstrating trust in students or students learning to trust their teachers.

In order to make sense of the variety of characteristics revealed in the research, Cornelius-White conducted a meta-analysis which synthesized 119 articles published between 1948 and 2004 which focused on the topic of learner-centered teacher-student relationships. He stated in his conclusion that "learner-centered teacher variables have above-average associations with positive student outcomes" (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 134). He identified five characteristics that had above-average correlations with student outcomes from among the many characteristics identified in the studies. These included (1) positive relationships; (2) nondirectivity which he defined as teachers who are not overly directive to students; (3) empathy; (4) warmth; and (5) and teachers who are encouraging of thinking and learning (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 134).

The research on teacher-student relationships fell into two broad categories with the data collection either being predominantly from the adult perspective or predominantly from the student perspective. Some studies included the voices of administrators or other adults in the schools and some studies included perspectives of both adults and students. Four qualitative studies contributed interesting details about teacher-student relationships from the teachers' perspective. Two of the studies were phenomenologies by Beutel (2010) with 20 teacher participants, and Oreshkina and Greenberg (2010) based on interviews with teachers from three countries. These two studies presented similar conclusions that effective teachers extend their relationships

with students beyond the classroom and in the Beutel study, beyond the student's years of schooling. Calabrese, Goodvin, and Niles (2005) conducted a case study that included administrators, teachers, and counselors and contended that effective teachers formed meaningful relationships, had caring attitudes and viewed themselves as difference makers. They claimed in their findings, that "These teachers understood that relationship building with students was often the precursor to greater student achievement" (Calabrese, Goodvin & Niles, 2005, p. 442). Ware (2006) conducted a comparative case study of two teachers to test how a warm-demander pedagogy combined with a culturally-responsive pedagogy created an environment that supported success for African American students. She described the concept of warm-demander as an authoritarian yet caring approach that often involves the teacher verbally disciplining students or "fussing" (Ware, 2006, p. 452). This supported the characteristics mentioned above where students want teachers who hold them to high expectations (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003; and Morales, 2010).

While the research which revealed the perspective of the teachers or adults contributed to an understanding of teacher-student relationships, the research from the students appears to provide the richest observations. In fact, many researchers noted the importance of conducting research from the student perspective and suggest that students are better observers of teacher practice than teachers themselves. In his meta-analysis of teacher-student relationship research, Cornelius-White stated, "A comparison of the measurement perspective of teacher variables shows that students' and observers' perspectives are more predictive of student success than teachers' views of themselves" (Cornelius-White, 2007, p. 132). Dryden, et al. (1998) and Oswald, Johnson, and

Howard (2003) suggested that students tend to have a greater belief in the amount of influence teachers have than teachers have for themselves. Oswald, Johnson, and Howard summed up this idea by stating, “Teachers tend to undervalue the degree of influence and help they are potentially able to exercise in providing those protective mechanisms for students at risk” (Oswald, Johnson & Howard, 2003, p. 62). These observations spoke to an understanding of teachers’ sense of efficacy and it related to the work of Phillippo and Stone (2013) described earlier about teachers’ beliefs about their role breadth. What Phillippo and Stone contributed is that role breadth varies between teachers. Gregory and Ripsky made a similar observation by noting that “Teachers who described the importance of relationship building for eliciting student cooperation were more likely to have students who reported trust in their use of authority” (Gregory & Ripski, 2008, p. 346). Decker, Dona, and Christenson (2007) conducted a mixed methods study with 44 student participants from grades kindergarten through sixth grade and 25 teachers. While their work was about a different population than my study, their findings related to teachers’ perspectives versus students’ perspectives apply. They found that while the “teacher perspective of the student-teacher relationship did not significantly account for explained variance in teacher-reported academic performance,” the student perspective did account for variance in such things as the behavioral referrals students received, the amount of time they spent engaged in academics, and even an academic outcome, specifically the kindergartners’ letter naming fluency (Decker, Dona & Christenson, 2007, p. 103). These findings made a strong case for the value of including student perspectives in research focused on understanding teacher-student relationships.

One of the reasons it was important to include student perspectives was to gain clearer insight into their experiences. At times, this led to revelations that they have both positive and negative experiences. During this literature review, I did not actively seek research that focused deliberately on negative elements of teachers, but many of the studies I have reviewed include observations by students about teacher traits or behaviors that were not supportive of student success. For example, in addition to the positive traits mentioned above, Calabrese, Goodvin, and Niles (2005) identified four non-supportive qualities that diminished the likelihood of supportive relationships. Those included blaming and racism, bureaucratic rigidity, co-dependency, and inflexibility and frustration (p. 441). Certo, Cauley, and Chafin (2003) indicated that students in their study “described uncaring teachers as those who did not try to connect with students, did not thoroughly explain concepts, and did not care about student achievement” (p. 714). Johnson (2008) included some of the more colorful negative characteristics described by his student participants as teachers who were “‘up themselves’, ‘arrogant’, ‘fight pickers’, and/or ‘power freaks’” (p. 394). Thus, with regard to teachers who are not effective in establishing supportive relationships with students, Scheel, Madabhushi, and Backhaus (2009) summed it up best by stating that poor relationships with teachers translated into students being less motivated for their class (p. 1166).

Other researchers identified barriers to supportive teacher-student relationships. Certo, Cauley, and Chafin (2003) stated, “School personnel and the public often attribute low levels of student engagement to factors intrinsic to the child or home environment” (p. 708). They then indicated that their research demonstrated ways in which schools contribute to student engagement and success. Oswald, Johnson, and Howard (2003)

contended the teachers believed the most influential factors contributing to student success related to students' personal predispositions and character strengths followed by conditions in the students' families or on some level that students' ability to rebound from challenges is a biologically-based trait (p. 61). In this way, teachers deflect ownership of students' performance by suggesting control rests with external factors.

While the research overwhelmingly supported the notion of supportive relationships as important for promoting student success, some researchers cautioned against taking an over-simplistic view of such relationships. In his qualitative study of five pre-service teachers and ten of their students, Toshalis (2012) warned against what he described as the rhetoric of care which he summarized in his conclusion as follows:

Rhetorical care...depends on a paternalistic and infantilizing ethic, appeals to the archetype of teacher as savior, employs deficit scripts as a way of framing the students' need for care, and ultimately produces symbolic violence through the deflection of accountability, the foreclosure of opportunity, and the disregard of sociopolitical inequities (Toshalis, 2012, p. 27-28).

Toshalis went on to suggest that such relationships may serve to advance a deficit thinking mentality and ultimately distance teachers from students. McHugh, et al., (2013), reflecting on the work of Toshalis and Valenzuela, warned against accepting an overly romanticized version of supportive relationships and suggested a distinction between 'aesthetic care' which is somewhat more superficial and 'authentic care' which takes into account more genuine considerations for the capacities of the specific students. In their study, McHugh, et al., identified a number of supportive traits and behaviors of teachers, yet one of their important findings was that their participants made clear the importance of teachers recognizing that close teacher-student relationships should not be

friendships of the kind one might have with peers. They stated that, “adolescents have different expectations for their relationships with teachers as compared to other social relationships” (McHugh, et al., 2013, p. 27). This finding is similar to Phillippo’s (2012) finding referenced above about students’ beliefs that teachers should not invade their privacy. Levy, et al., (2003) conducted a quantitative study including 3023 students and 74 teachers from 168 classes in seven schools seeking to understand the extent to which schools teachers and classes contributed to differences in students’ perceptions of their teachers’ interpersonal behavior. They found there is no simple answer and stated the following in their conclusion:

While the study revealed a number of significant influences on students’ perceptions—student and teacher ethnic background, student and teacher gender, report card grade, age, class size, grade level, subject taught and teacher experience—none were overwhelming in their effect” (Levy, et al., 2003, p. 25).

Additionally, two studies focused on social capital described circumstances in which it cannot be taken for granted that teacher-student relationships automatically lead to positive outcomes for students. The first was a quantitative research study by Muller (2001) that included data from 25,599 students with supplemental information provided by the teachers of the included students which sought to understand how teacher-student relationships became social capital for students. She analyzed the perspectives of both the teachers and the students to determine how the social capital students gained from teacher-student relationships translated into achievement test performance for the students. She concluded by stating, “Indicators of the relationship have a much weaker association with achievement test performance than the students’ prior grades or, in the case of proficiency levels, even the students own expectations, socioeconomic status or



race” (Muller, 2001, p. 253). Thus, while she acknowledged that teacher-student relationships may diminish the likelihood that a student would drop out of school, it did not necessarily translate into higher test scores. The second study by Ream (2003), focused on Mexican-American student achievement, introduced the idea of “counterfeit social capital” which he described as circumstances in which “school personnel offered a patronizing form of social support directed less toward Mexican-American academic achievement than toward a kind of social expediency in the classroom” (Ream, 2003, p. 252). In this analysis, Ream described a scenario in which teachers sought to maintain classroom harmony by giving in to students’ requests to maintain lower standards of academic behavior.

Overall, there was a wealth of research supporting the importance of understanding teacher-student relationships. However, what also emerged from the literature was the assertion that not all teacher-student relationships are supportive. And while the research above made the case for understanding supportive relationships, it was important to understand the deliberate measures principals and teachers took to promote supportive teacher-student relationships and how students described those relationships.

### **Structures for Personalization**

The ECHS design principles call for schools to focus on personalization. In order for the schools to personalize the experience for students, they create programs and other structures which serve as the medium for the relationships to develop. Rodriquez and Conchas (2009) discussed how leaders create the “space” for such relationships to emerge. They conducted a qualitative case study of a truancy prevention program to determine how it mediated the likelihood of students being truant, absent, or dropping out

of school. They found that four elements of the program served to influence student outcomes, including the following: (1) space for peer relationships; (2) incentives; (3) social capital; and (4) youth advocacy, and the element most relevant to my study is the role of space for supporting peer relationships. Rodriguez and Conchas described this space in both a physical and a metaphorical context. They found students need both physical space to meet with each other and the adult leaders in their programs as well as the metaphorical space provided by the time to be there and the programs that drive them to occupy those spaces. Thus the physical structures that represent the space students need to establish relationships provide a venue for the social structures that help create and sustain those relationships and thus served as a tool to promote personalization.

While Rodriguez and Concha's study took place in an out-of-school setting, schools can create a variety of programs to provide their students with the necessary space to support relationships outside the traditional curriculum offerings. One common practice involves the use of advisory periods. In their quantitative study of teacher-student relationships, McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) analyzed the impact of advisory programs on personalization and student achievement. They defined an advisory as "the concept and practice of gathering students and an educator together for brief, regular periods in a non-content specific setting to deal with cognitive and affective educational topics" (p. 5). Their findings were interesting in that student support for advisory programs associated with lower grade point averages in students. In their analysis the authors suggested that did not present a negative association for advisories, rather it indicated students with lower grades found advisories most necessary. McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones referenced an analysis by Galassi, Gullledge, and Cox (1997) on

middle school advisory programs as the most comprehensive study of advisories and indicated there was very little other research on the topic in the intervening years. Galassi, Gullledge, and Cox indicated that the concept of advisories emerged in the midst of the middle school movement, and school leaders often referred to them as the “Fourth R” with the R standing for relationships. They found that while theoretical research about supportive relationships suggested advisories should be successful, many schools did not use them. They found that advisories took on a variety of roles including the following: adult-student relationships, group identity, developmental guidance, relaxing and recharging, academic performance, and general school business (p. 310). Van Ryzin (2010) conducted a quantitative study that included 206 participants on the topic of students’ school-based advisors to determine if students considered their advisors as part of their attachment hierarchy. He suggested that school advisory programs may serve as a better option than community-based mentoring programs which may not offer similar consistency of service.

An additional strategy schools may employ is the age-old concept of tutoring. Much of the recent research about tutoring focuses on tutoring supports delivered through a variety of technology-based programs. However, going back to 1982, Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik conducted a meta-analysis of 65 independent analyses of school tutoring programs. They found students who received tutoring outperformed peers who did not receive tutoring, and those students also expressed more positive attitudes towards the subjects in which they received tutoring (p. 244). Cohen, Kulik and Kulik also noted a trend toward peer tutoring occurring at the time of their meta-analysis and they found positive effects for students who served as tutors as well (p. 244-245). A more recent

study by VanLehn (2011) compared the relative effects on students who receive tutoring from humans, from computers, and no tutoring. VanLehn found positive effects for students who received tutoring over those with no tutoring. Additionally VanLehn concluded that human tutoring, previously thought to have an advantage over computer-based tutoring, demonstrated a similar positive effect to the computer-based tutoring. Lodge (2000), a British researcher, provided a comprehensive description of the role of tutors, and focused particularly on the idea that tutors' roles are to support students' learning. She indicated that tutors serve to create a point of personal contact with both students and parents (p. 36). She also described the role leadership plays in providing support for tutors to succeed include providing time, ensuring professional development, and continuous dialog in the school about how to enhance learning (p. 41).

There are other structures schools might install to serve as supports for students spaces to develop relationships. However, there is limited current empirical research about the efficacy of these structures as strategies to improve learning as many of the strategies have been discussed extensively in articles but not empirically studied. One such strategy is student-led conferencing. Tholander (2011), a Swedish researcher, conducted a small case study analysis of a teacher conducting student-led conferences with parents and students. He described the growth of student-led conferencing as a practice in Sweden and acknowledged a study by Hofvendahl that indicated student participation in parent-teacher conferences rose from 69% in 1992-1993 to 100% in 2004 (p. 239). And, as noted earlier, Beutel (2010) conducted a study on the ways teachers interact with students and found that serving in a mentor capacity is the most significant for establishing supportive relationships. The two structures referenced in this

paragraph—student-led conferences and mentoring—may provide some support to the goal of enhancing teacher-student relationships in schools.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I engaged in a review of the literature that addressed the major themes of this study. I began by describing the theoretical framework for the study which built on Giddens' Theory of Structuration as a lens for understanding the relationship between the social structures of a school and the agency of those in the school. I then introduced literature on the major topics of early college high school design principles and performance, leadership, teacher-student relationships, and school-based structures to support personalization. As a result of this analysis, I revealed a gap in the existing literature to bring together the major themes in my qualitative study to analyze more deeply how principals, teachers, and students described teacher-student relationship experiences in the context of the successful school model known as the early college high school.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Overview**

This qualitative research study focuses on the relationships between students and their teachers while also considering how the deliberate actions of school leaders influence those relationships. The problem I sought to address in this study relates to my contention that current policy and practices fail to adequately account for the importance of relationships between teachers and students in effecting positive student growth in education. Subsequently, I chose teacher-student relationships within early college high schools (ECHS) because personalization is an important element in their school design and because ECHS students have demonstrated early success on a number of academic outcomes. In this study, I will describe the teacher-student relationships ECHS leaders seek to foster and students' perceptions of those relationships.

Conducting this study involved analyzing data from a larger longitudinal study that included pre-collected qualitative data from ECHS student focus groups, ECHS principal interviews, and ECHS teacher interviews. Researchers interviewed participants from all three groups about their ECHS experiences in 2009. Early College High Schools in North Carolina provided the setting for this study. Specifically, I analyzed the data pertaining to administrators', teachers', and students' responses to questions about how those working and studying within the ECHS experience, promote, and sustain supportive teacher-student relationships. As I analyzed the data, I sought to understand and describe administrators' intentions with regard to promoting supportive teacher-student relationships; teachers' interpretations of administrators' intentions as well as their own intentions with regard to such relationships; and finally how students

experience their relationships with teachers. This last element is of particular importance as many researchers point to the value of including student perspectives in education research (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Decker, Dona & Christenson, 2007; Dryden, et al., 1998; Foster, 2008; McHugh, et al., 2012; Mitra, 2003; Oswald, Johnson, & Howard, 2003; Wubbels, et al., 2011).

I employed four research questions in the course of this study. They are as follows: (1) How do ECHS principals describe their deliberate efforts to promote positive teacher-student relationships in their schools? (2) How do ECHS teachers describe their efforts to promote supportive teacher-student relationships and how do their statements compare with principals' intentions? (3) How do ECHS students characterize the relationships with their teachers and what are the characteristics they identify as positive in such relationships? (4) How do students' experiences compare with the stated intentions of principals and teachers?

Qualitative research based on an interpretive ontology suites this study because the relationships between the teachers and students are socially constructed and thus can be described and analyzed but would be difficult to quantify. Merriam (2009) described the role of interpretation as follows, "The experience a person has includes the way in which the experience is interpreted. There is no 'objective experience' outside the interpretation" (p. 9). Within the context of this interpretive study, I used Giddens' Theory of Structuration as a lens to better explain the interplay between the individuals within the schools and the social structures—particularly the relationships—that influence them which, in turn, they influence. Giddens contended that structures and the agents who exist within them have a recursive relationship in which the individual

actions of the agents serve to create, modify, and recreate the structures over time (Giddens, 1984). Through this theory, Giddens implied that social structures influence both the actions and the outcomes individuals experiences. At the same time he posited that individual agency—particularly where it is conscious, deliberate, and persistent—has the ability to both influence outcomes and change structures. I hypothesized that the deliberate and repeated actions of administrators and teachers in the ECHS setting might serve to create social and programmatic structures within those schools that support positive student outcomes.

In additions to Giddens’ Theory of structuration, I drew on the research of two theoretical leadership models in Distributed Leadership and Transformational Leadership as well as a wide variety of research focused on Resilience Theory because it includes many insights into the importance of teacher-student relationships. The leadership research focused on different elements of leadership that may align with or influence the work of ECHS principals. Distributed Leadership addresses the manner in which leaders such as principals share their authority or leadership functions with those in their schools. I referenced work by such authors as Gronn (2008); Harris (2008 & 2012); Mascall, et al. (2008); Robinson (2008); Spillane, Halverson & Diamond (2004); and Timperley (2005). Transformational Leadership addresses the manner in which leaders connect with their followers to effect change in their organizations. In this section I referenced the work of Chin (2007); Griffith (2004); Leithwood (1994); and Slegers, et al. (2011).

Resilience Theory contributed to the thinking on teacher student relationships, because supportive adult relationships are one of many protective factors that appear in resilience research. Resilience theorists take a range of epistemological approaches



depending on the aspect of resilience, the protective factors under consideration, and the method of inquiry they employ for their studies. Many quantitative studies by researchers follow a positivist perspective with a focus on large data sets and analysis of multiple risk and protective factors. Examples of such studies include Capella and Weinstein (2001); Cunningham and Swanson (2010); Hoy, Hoy, and Tartar (2006); Lee, et al., (1999); Li et al. (2011); Luthar (1991); Martin et al.(2010), Martin and Marsh (2008); Masten et al. (1999); Oswald, Johnson, and Howard (2003); Schelble, Franks, and Miller (2010); Wayman (2002); and Worrel (2001). At the same time, other researchers employed more interpretive or constructivist qualitative methods to study resilience such as Akom, Cammarota, and Ginwright (2008); Dryden et al. (1998); Feinstein et al. (2008); Freeman et al. (2004); Johnson (2008); Knesting and Waldron (2006); Lessard et al. (2009); Morales (2010); Murray and Naranjo (2008); Reis, Colbert, and Hébert (2004); Rouse et al. (2001); Scheel, Madabhushi, and Backhaus (2009); and Ware (2006). The current study attends more to the latter group in seeking to construct knowledge from the experiences of youth. The youth in this study may not have fit a traditional definition of resilience as these students had not been selected for participation in the study due to any particular risk factors, but the target population for ECHS tend to be first-generation college goers and other populations that are traditionally underrepresented in college.

Merriam (2009) described the epistemology underlying interpretive research as constructivist, indicating that reality is socially constructed. This aligned with Creswell's (2007) description of social constructivism in which he stated that individuals create subjective understandings of the world and that these understandings are often negotiated

socially and historically. Essentially, the subjective understandings are formed through interaction among people. Creswell stated that constructivist researchers focus on the interactions among individuals with emphasis on the processes of their interactions (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). Combining the focus on the processes of individuals' interactions and the idea that subjective understandings are socially constructed justified the linkage of resilience theory and structuration within this study. Ungar and Liebenberg (2011) described how resilience researchers waiver between analyzing resilience as a process—a constructivist leaning—or as a fixed trait which reveals a more positivist influence. Because the target population for early colleges tends to focus on students who are traditionally underrepresented in college settings such as students from poverty or first-generation college goers, it could be argued that they come from an at-risk population and thus their success might represent resilience. However, this is not a study about resilience per se so much as an analysis of supportive relationships between teachers and students.

While Creswell and Merriam's descriptions of constructivism appear to fit this study, Crotty (2011) distinguished between constructivism and constructionism as slightly different epistemologies. Crotty defined constructionism as the collective generation and transmission of meaning and thus distinguished it from constructivism which he described more in the realm of creating meaning in the individual mind. Crotty distinguished between these subtly different epistemologies in his analysis of Giddens' theoretical work (along with another researcher named Blaikie) where he applied *constructivism* to the analysis of scientific knowledge in the natural world and *constructionism* to exploration of scientific knowledge in the social world. Crotty

explained the distinction by suggesting that the term *constructivism* should be applied to the meaning-making of the individual mind, while *constructionism* should apply to collective meaning making (Crotty, 2011, p. 58). Thus, while Merriam and Creswell's definition of constructivism fits this study in general terms, Crotty's more refined suggestion of constructionism may be the best fit for this study which focuses on seeking better scientific understanding of the socially-constructed relationships between supportive teachers and their students.

### **Data Collection and Reliability**

The design considerations and strategies I have chosen for this study align predominantly with Merriam's (2009) work on qualitative inquiry. However, this study is somewhat unique in the realm of qualitative inquiry because I used previously-collected data from a larger longitudinal mixed-methods analysis of early college high schools. I have obtained information from the original researchers who collected the raw data about their methods of data collection. The qualitative data I will use for this study represented interviews with one principal, two teachers, and 4-6 upper classmen (sophomores, juniors, or seniors) from 19 different early college high schools in North Carolina. Researchers from the Learn and Earn Early College High School Research Study conducted two-day site visits in teams of two. During their site visits, they collected data from six different sources within each school, including the following: (1) conducting campus tours to orient them to the schools; (2) interviewing two teachers from the school and conducting observations in their classrooms; (3) interviewing two college instructors from the postsecondary institution associated with the school; (4) interviewing the principal; (5) interviewing the school/college liaison; and (6) conducting

student focus groups of 4-6 students in each school. For the purposes of the current study, I analyzed the data from the teacher interviews, the principal interviews, and the student focus groups. The site visit protocol indicates that the researchers preferred to have both members of the research team to be present in the teacher and principal interviews if possible, but would conduct them separately if necessary. The protocol states both researchers must be present for the student focus groups and only students with completed consent forms would be able to participate in the interviews. See Appendix A for the site visit protocol and Appendix F for a blank copy of the consent form. According to Merriam, the choice of student focus groups as a data-collection technique aligns with my theoretical perspective. She stated, “Since the data obtained from a focus group is socially constructed within the interaction of the group, a constructivist perspective underlies this data collection procedure” (Merriam, 2009, p. 93-94).

During the individual interviews and focus group interviews, the researchers followed pre-determined interview protocols while leaving room for follow-up to provide an opportunity to probe into participants’ responses. This approach aligns with Merriam’s (2009) description of a semistructured interview which allows room for the construction of knowledge and for the interviewer to improve the depth of the data by probing details as necessary. This format particularly suited this study as the interview protocols provide the reassurance that the interview data would address my research questions, but I did not know how rich the data were until I analyzed them and learned what emerged from the probing. I focus on participants’ responses to the following questions from the interview protocols:

- Questions 13 and 13a from the principal interview protocol which read,  
“Developing strong relationships with students is an expectation of this model. Please describe the relationships you have with students” and “What is your school doing to build positive relationships between teachers and students?”  
(Appendix C)
- Questions 11 and 11a from the teacher interview protocol which read,  
“Developing strong relationships with students is an expectation of this model. Please describe the relationships you have with students” and the sub-question,  
“What is your school doing to build positive relationships between teachers and students?” (Appendix D)
- Question 6 of the student focus-group interview protocol which reads as follows,  
“Tell us about the relationships you have with the adults in your school.”  
(Appendix E)

Since the researchers engaged in some probing of the participants beyond the questions listed on the protocols, I reviewed the full transcript of each interview for any data supporting the research questions that fell outside their specific responses to the questions listed above. At times, participants provided relevant information about supportive relationships in their responses to other questions from the interview protocols.

My choice to use pre-collected qualitative data impacted my ability to control the reliability of the data for this study, but there was much I could do to ensure the quality of the study. Merriam (2009) provided a simple definition for understanding what she meant by reliability by asking the following question, “Are the findings *credible* given the data presented?” (p. 213, emphasis in original). Merriam suggested eight

specific strategies for promoting the reliability or validity of the study. The first is triangulation of the data. While my study design did not employ three different types of data such as interviews, documents, and observations, it did include three different sources of data—principals, teachers, and students—whose differing perspectives provided some overlap around the descriptions of the supportive relationships between teachers and students. The second reliability strategy, member checks, will not be possible for me to conduct as the terms of my data-sharing agreement (Appendix B) did not allow me to be able identify the participants. I know based on a personal communication from the lead researcher that the researchers did not conduct individual member checks of any of the data, but they did make minor adjustments to their probing of themes that emerged in early interviews (Edmunds, 2014, personal communication). The third reliability strategy, adequate engagement in data collection, speaks to whether I would reach a point of saturation in the data I analyzed. While the data set I analyzed was finite and I did not conduct additional data collection, the data set included interviews from participants in 19 different schools, so the number of participants from each of the three groups is in the range research supports as adequate to reach saturation which I have addressed in greater detail below (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). Merriam’s fourth strategy is researcher’s position or reflexivity, and I have included a reflexivity statement near the end of this chapter. Strategy five is peer review or examination and she suggested that dissertation committees provide some degree of analysis to replicate a peer review and my dissertation committee included both the original researcher from the Learn and Earn Early College High School Research Study and the CEO of NC New Schools which is the entity implementing the ECHS model in

76 schools in North Carolina. The sixth strategy is an audit trail which considers how data were collected and I have included that below. Merriam's seventh strategy is rich, thick, descriptions, which I have provided in chapter four. And finally, Merriam's eighth reliability strategy is to include maximum variation in the data—in this case participants—chosen for the study. Unfortunately, I have no control over this element of the study.

The sample sizes provided in the precollected data provided adequate information to reach saturation. The data included information from 19 school sites which included 19 principal interviews, 37 teacher interviews and 19 focus-group interviews that included between four and six students each. According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson's 2006 study to determine data saturation rates, saturation is almost always reached after twelve interviews and at times as early as six interviews (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). I would argue that because I utilized pre-collected data and I was unable to probe the participants based on finer details of my study, the additional interviews I included were helpful without being too redundant. I am comfortable that I encountered enough detail in the data and reached adequate saturation around the themes related to my research questions.

Researchers from the SERVE Center, which is a research organization affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, collected the qualitative data I employed in this study. The researchers used a site-visit protocol to ensure consistency across the schools in the study and to communicate their process to the schools (Appendix A). Prior to providing me with the data, researchers affiliated with the SERVE Center removed all identifiable details from the transcripts. During my analysis,

I used the qualitative research analysis tool, ATLAS-ti to organize, code, and create memos and code categories that later evolved into my findings which I present in chapters four and five.

Thus, despite the limited control I had over the data collection process, there remained many ways I could enhance the reliability of this research study. Additionally, I contend that not being involved in the actual collection of the data provided me with a degree of removal from the data that provides me with a unique perspective from which to analyze it.

### **Data Analysis**

Merriam (2009) described data analysis as the process of “making meaning” from the data (p. 176). According to Merriam, data analysis is an iterative process that causes the researcher to fluctuate between concrete details and abstract concepts (p. 176). She suggested a process that moves from identifying a large quantity of small concrete bits of information, followed by organizing them into larger representative categories or themes, and finally evolves to further interpretation of a broader model that represents the relationship between the categories.

As a result of my decision to employ pre-collected data for this study, I did not have the opportunity to adhere to Merriam’s suggestion to conduct analysis of the data throughout the data-collection process. Merriam suggested using data collected early in the study to make mid-course adjustments and refinements to the data collection process. This approach creates a recursive process where the researcher learns from early data analysis to improve the quality of the future data to be collected. I understand from the researchers, that they did make midcourse adjustments during the data-collection process,



but again, this was not a process I had an opportunity to influence to address my own needs. That being said, I had the opportunity to bring a more removed perspective to these data unbiased by the personal interactions with the participants.

In order to address one of Merriam's major concerns related to data analysis, I established a deliberate plan. With regard to data analysis, she stated, "To wait until the end [to begin coding] is to court disaster, as many a qualitative researcher has been overwhelmed and rendered impotent by the sheer amount of data in a qualitative study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 207). This was clearly a warning to heed, but since I had no way of beginning my analysis phase in conjunction with the beginning of data collection it was critical that I developed a well-organized strategy for analyzing the data.

Prior to analyzing the data, I loaded the interview transcripts into the computer-assisted qualitative analysis program ATLAS.ti to help me manage the analysis process. I first engaged in what Merriam described as "open coding" (Merriam, 2009, p. 178). After performing a cold read of the raw data and identifying the small pieces of meaningful information, I began to identify categories for organizing the data. The development of categories was the first step in moving from concrete and disconnected bits of data to a slightly more abstract representation of the information. Merriam suggested three possible sources of category names, including: (1) researcher generated, (2) participant generated, and (3) literature generated. I expected the categories for this research study to evolve from the participants' contributions and my own synthesis of the ideas gleaned from the literature. Having reviewed a wealth of literature about teacher-student relationships, there was no authoritative list of teacher-student relationship

themes that emerged, but many different models to suggest common categories to consider.

Merriam described five important criteria of categories to help researchers develop them effectively. Those criteria are as follows: (1) categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research; (2) categories should be exhaustive; (3) categories should be mutually exclusive; (4) categories should be sensitizing; and (5) categories should be conceptually congruent (Merriam, 2009, p. 185-186). I employed these criteria as I developed and assessed the adequacy of the categories for my study.

Once I developed categories, it was my goal to discover the underlying relationships between those categories. The conceptual framework for this study included principals', teachers', and students' thoughts on teacher-student relationships. As it was my intention in this study to compare the intentions of the principals, with the understandings and the intentions of the teachers, and then to compare those to the experiences of the students, I needed to establish categories for each group first and then I sought the underlying relationship between the categories. Then, I was able to present findings about how well principal intentions about teacher-student relationships aligned with students' experiences while also explaining the teacher role in receiving and transmitting the principals' intentions to students. In chapter five, I include visual models to represent the relationships between the categories of the three different participant groups and how the various structures within the ECHS setting contributed to supportive teacher-student relationships.

Based on my literature review, I identified categories and codes related to the social (e.g. trust) and programmatic (e.g. mentoring) structures principals and teachers

promoted as well as characteristics (e.g. good listeners) they identified with teachers who developed supportive relationships with students. Along a similar vein, I included information about students' beliefs about relationships, teacher behaviors they viewed as supportive, and programs that helped support relationships in their schools.

### **Subjectivity Statement**

As a qualitative researcher, I understand that my personal experiences and beliefs may have influenced the analysis and findings of this work. With regard to my experiences, I have occupied the positions of each group of participants in this study having been a student, a teacher, and also a principal. I currently serve as a school system superintendent, which puts me in the unique position to be responsible for supervising and guiding principals, teachers, and students (among others). One of the schools I currently supervise is an early college high school, so I also have first-hand experience working with that school. At the time of publication of this study, I was in the process of establishing a second ECHS in the school district where I work. This reveals my support for the ECHS model which grew in no small part from my understanding of the ECHS model that emerged during my review of the literature for this study. As I have indicated, I used data collected by researchers from the SERVE Center for this study. They collected those data before I became the superintendent of a school district with an ECHS. The ECHS I currently supervise is not represented in the data I am using for the study because it did not meet the selection criteria employed by the researchers at the time of data collection. As a term of my data-sharing agreement (Appendix B), I do not know the names of the schools or any of the participants from them and I will not seek to learn those names.

With regard to my beliefs there are two observations that merit mentioning here. I have chosen Giddens' Theory of Structuration for inclusion in this study primarily because it works as an apt explanatory device for the relationship between schools' structures and the agents who inhabit them. However, beyond its applicability to this study, structuration aligns closely with my personal worldview because I believe individuals are neither purely driven by fate nor in possession of unhindered agency, and I believe existing societal structures influence our experiences and circumstances yet we possess the ability to affect them. Giddens captured that intersection of determinism and agency in his work. The second observation about my beliefs relates to my choice of qualitative inquiry over quantitative. My experiences with educational leadership and the elements of politics and influence pedaling that correspond with such work have led me to a skeptical view of quantitative analyses' implied claim of objectivity. I am skeptical about numbers and statistics unless I can understand the story behind them, and I rely on the qualitative elements of research to lead me to a truth I am better-prepared to trust than numbers alone can provide.

## Chapter 4

### Introduction

Students in early college high schools (ECHS) appear to have different experiences from their counterparts in traditional high schools. By and large, the data I analyzed for this study revealed that students, teachers, and principals felt their experiences in their early college high schools were special and unlike anything they might have experienced in a comprehensive high school. There were some exceptions to the norm where individuals described negative experiences and those details appear later in this chapter. At the time of the interviews, some of the schools included in this study were in their first few years of operation and were still evolving. The interview transcripts revealed that all of the schools operated in accordance with the ECHS design principles to a greater or lesser degree. The interviews exposed variance across schools as the participants described their beliefs and experiences with the design principles. In this analysis, I focus particularly on the ECHS design principle of personalization that suggests educators must know students well to help them achieve academically (ncnewschools.org, 2015).

I will provide first a description of the content of the data in chapter four, followed by a deeper analysis of the data in chapter five. The data I considered for this study included 75 interview transcripts gathered from 19 different early college high schools in North Carolina. There were interviews with 19 principals, 37 teachers, and 19 student focus-groups that included anywhere from four to eight students. It is possible that the transcripts from any one of the three participant groups could stand alone as a separate study, because all three groups told interesting stories that provided insight into

their experiences in the ECHS setting. Within the discussion of these schools, I use pseudonyms for the school names. The de-identified data came organized by letters, generally with a principal, two teachers, and a student focus group from a given school identified by one letter ranging from A to S. The pseudonyms correspond to those assigned letters.

I organized this chapter according to the four research questions that guided this study. The first section presents how principals described their work to promote supportive teacher-student relationships in their schools, and the second section focuses on the teachers' perspectives on the same topic. Section three addresses how students described their relationships within the school, and the fourth section brings the three groups back together to consider how the perceptions align across the three groups.

In the interviews, participants responded to questions posed by either one or two researchers based on predetermined interview protocols which appear in Appendices C, D, and E. Each of the protocols contained questions specifically about relationships among students and adults in the early colleges, but they also included questions on a variety of other topics. In these semi-structured interviews the researchers at times modified the specific language of the questions, occasionally changed the order of the questions, and in very limited circumstances skipped questions as time with the participants became tight. The researchers also probed into participants' thinking with follow-up questions at various points throughout the interviews. As a result the detail in the responses on the questions about relationships varied across the 75 different transcripts. Since these interviews originally served as part of a larger study of early college high schools, the questions in the interview protocols addressed many subjects

### Relationship Code Categories

Principals	Teachers	Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of the importance of relationships</li> <li>• Deliberate actions taken by leaders to promote relationships (modeling and training)</li> <li>• School programs that provided space for relationships to develop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of the importance of relationships</li> <li>• Deliberate actions taken by teachers to promote or communicate supportive relationships</li> <li>• School programs that provided space for relationships to develop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of the importance of relationships</li> <li>• Behaviors of teachers that students identified as supportive</li> <li>• School programs that provided space for relationships to develop</li> </ul>

Table 4.1

not related to this study. This influenced the quality and quantity of the answers about relationships in two ways: (1) Different interviews spent different amounts of time and energy on different topics which left either more or less time to discuss relationships; and (2) details about relationships emerged during answers on other topics so I was able to include them in my analysis. Subsequently, some of the quotes I include in this analysis emerged from sections of the transcripts not specifically focused on relationships.

Table 4.1 shows the major categories of codes which describe the ideas of the three different groups of participants. I use these categories to address research questions one through three in the upcoming section and to contribute to the description of research question four. With regard to the third bullet in each column, I use the term “space” in a broad definition of the term to represent physical, temporal, or even emotional conceptions of the word.

## **Research Question 1 – Principals’ Perspectives**

The principals included in this study represented a wide range of experiences. Some were founding principals of the schools they served and may have been in place for five years or more as of the time of the interviews. Others were new to their schools. The principals responded to the following two questions about personalization in the interview protocols: “[13] Developing strong relationships with students is an expectation of this model—Please describe the relationships you have with students;” and “[13a] What is your school doing to build positive relationships between teachers and students?” (Appendix C). Their answers took many forms but they also covered many similar themes which merged into the three categories listed in Table 4.1 which read as follows: (1) Awareness of the importance of relationships; (2) Deliberate actions taken by leaders to promote relationships; and (3) School programs that provided space for relationships to develop.

The principal interviews provided four themes within with regard to how they communicated their awareness of the importance of teacher-student relationships including the following: (1) relationships engage students in learning; (2) relationships are the foundation of the work in schools; (3) relationships build trust; and (4) to provide rigor, teachers must know their students. To arrive at these, I read the principal interview transcripts seeking instances when they were specifically discussing teacher-student relationships. The principal from Quebec ECHS stated it clearly, “I probably talk to my staff a lot about personalization and just the relationships, because my ultimate philosophy is if you get a kid and you build that relationship, they’ll move mountains for you. They’ll do whatever you want to do.” And in another comment, the principal of



Quebec ECHS promoted the importance of caring, “Yes, you need to set the tone the first couple of weeks, but your tone does not have to be of the disciplinarian and let’s—it’s the ‘I’m in control’ type tone, but I care about you.” In a similar way, the principal from Albemarle ECHS stated, “I believe, for me and for every adult in this building and for college instructors, building relationships with students and with staff, that’s the foundation of what we do.” The principal of Legation ECHS also explained relationships as a foundational element of teachers’ work, “I think that if you don’t connect with all people emotionally, then you don’t get but limited success.” Stated another way, the principal of Fessenden ECHS said, “It is trying to develop a positive relationship with the kids, knowing that that relationship is the basis for teaching and learning.”

The principal from Stephenson ECHS connected relationships with trust, “We’re building strong relationships with the young people and their parents to ensure that trust that maybe gets lost in the larger settings.” Statements such as these demonstrated the principals’ beliefs that relationships between teachers and students influence student outcomes. The principal of Ellicott ECHS expressed appreciation that the focus on relationships was such an important element of the ECHS design, “When I got to New Schools Project staff development and they said relationships were so important, I always knew that, but I had never been in a place where I was allowed to run with that, if that makes any sense.” The principal of Morrison ECHS explained how a focus on personalization connects students to school, “I think there are some little steps to get to that, and part of that has to do with the personalization piece, connecting so that kids feel connected to school and want to be a part of a school institution.”

The principal of Ellicott ECHS connected relationships to rigor, “Unless you know the kids, you know their readiness level, and you can see that every kid is not doing the same assignment. If every kid is doing the same assignment, it’s not rigorous for somebody, because somebody is over their head, and somebody is way under.” The same principal described the importance of students liking teachers as a source of motivation, “One of the questions that I ask when I hire people deals with the importance of kids liking you as the instructor ...but that liking of you because I know you’re going to push me. I know you’re coming to class prepared.” The principal of Davenport ECHS referenced the connection between relationships and rigor as follows, “We haven’t, not one day, veered from the three R’s – rigor, relevance and relationship. We fully understand that those three R’s form a triangle and none of them can get out of whack.”

One challenge in this qualitative analysis came from trying to determine whether principals’ responses to this question about personalization reflected their sincere beliefs about relationships or whether their responses merely sounded appropriate to them at the time. In some cases the principals may have been quite successful in promoting positive teacher-student relationships but they felt the need to improve and thus understated the circumstances in their schools. Other principals may have been the opposite and were very articulate in an interview setting about relationships in their schools while they overstated the reality of their teachers’ and students’ experiences. Of course, a third possibility exists in which the principals accurately stated circumstances in their schools. I attempted to zero in on whether a principal was understating, overstating, or accurately describing the experiences in their school by looking at the second and third categories of relationship codes that emerged from their interviews. I specifically sought instances in

the data of what principals said about their deliberate actions to model or train their teachers about supportive teacher-student relationships, and I also looked for evidence in their responses of specific programs they had in place in their school that would support those relationships.

Deliberate leadership actions pertaining to teacher-student relationships appeared as either modeling or training for teachers. The principals modeled for teachers in two ways. First, they modeled their expectations for how they expected teachers to treat students as in this statement by the principal of Newark ECHS who described a specific relationship protocol, “So I do a lot of the Critical Friends protocols, as I said, to model what I expect of them in the classroom.” The principal of Harrison ECHS described providing feedback to teachers in a supportive manner:

You have to always approach them in a question form, I think, and non-threatening and—‘Just help me understand. Did you see what I was seeing in there?’ So it’s not a cut-throat type thing, but it’s a what can we do to make it better.

This is a form of feedback that might be equally effective for teachers to employ to maintain trust among their students. Because the interview protocol asked principals to describe their relationships with students, principals described many examples of modeling supportive relationships in the manner in which they personally interacted with students. The principal of Fessenden ECHS recognized the importance of modeling support for students, “But it is as a part of a mentor of students and it’s a larger type of thing too because if the faculty’s doing it, I should be doing it.” The Calvert ECHS principal described the importance of being visible and available to students, “And so I think for me, it’s just spending time being around them when they’re in the hallways,

paying attention, greeting them, trying to ask them questions about academics or if I know something's going on in their family asking them about it." One theme that appeared frequently across all three participant groups was a sense of students having open access to teachers and principals as described here by the principal of Legation ECHS, "We hang out with them and they hang out with us, as you can tell by the office. It is shared space and they are welcome, even if sometimes I have to ask them to turn it down, but not too often." In some settings, principals described how they promoted greater ownership of the schools. The principal of Rodman ECHS articulated a connection between working with students and working with staff:

I want students to be able to come to me with anything, and if they've got a good idea, I go with it unless I've got a better one. But if they've got good ideas, we're definitely talking about it. I do that because I have—just as I have a teacher empowerment, I have a student empowerment too, and I think that's important, and they know that.

This statement revealed the principal's openness to taking input from both staff and students which is yet another strategy for fostering trust among the schools' stakeholders. In other cases, principals addressed the deliberate measures they took to train teachers about developing supportive relationships with students. The principal of Albemarle ECHS acknowledged the importance of providing training, "Building those relationships doesn't come naturally to everybody, so you have to tell adults what to do," and she went on to describe one approach she employed in her school, "We've taken a couple bus rides around the community so that they see some of the homes that [Albemarle] County students live in. It helps, and it helps to understand their story, and we talk about it often, because folks forget." The principal of Jennifer ECHS stated, "We trained the staff this semester on advising our kids. We are going to have our teachers not only be the high

school advisor, but the college advisor to that kid.” Examples such as those included above of modeling and training teachers indicated ways in which principals deliberately acted to promote supportive teacher-student relationships in their schools.

The third and final major category of codes that emerged from the principals’ interviews related to the references they made to programs within their schools, which they claimed promoted supportive teacher-student relationships. I have referred to them as programs for the sake of simplicity, but they represented a loose definition of program in that they may have been either actions taken deliberately by the school or something more representative of a program like an organized tutoring program. Some of the programs appeared in many schools and others were either less common or unique to individual schools. The more commonly mentioned programs included activities outside of school, school clubs, advisory programs, seminar classes, tutoring programs, and student-led parent conferences.

Activities outside of school took many forms, but principals mentioned them in correlation with relationship-building efforts because they provided shared experiences among the students and adults who attended those activities. The principal of Morrison ECHS indicated, “We have a stream in town that’s ours. It has our name on it. And twice a year we go on a Saturday morning and clean that up.” The same principal also described a bigger event, “We took a group of kids last year to Washington, D.C. and it had, of course, a lot to do with the civics curriculum that they just—all of them had just studied, but it was certainly a good opportunity for us just to have fun.” The principal of Calvert ECHS described an extensive college tour they took:

Our goal is that they will see every college campus, State campus, in North Carolina before their senior year and we just finished an overnight trip to the Raleigh-Durham area and they were able to see NC-State, NC-Central, Duke, Meredith and [Chapel Hill].

And while some of the activities had an academic focus, others were more social as the principal of Calvert ECHS described an event to engage students, teachers, and families, “The day after student-led conferences we have Adventure Days and we take the kids off-campus and do something fun and we always invite parents to go to that and we have a cookout.”

To some degree, clubs overlapped with activities outside of school as programs to support relationships in the school, but I treat them as separate programs because some schools have structured them as part of the school day while others kept them separate.

Albemarle ECHS has done both:

We have clubs. We first started clubs based on student interest, and really still on student interest and all of our staff members are involved with one club or another. And the first two years, we tried doing clubs during the school day, and had some challenges with that. We are doing clubs after school now.

Other schools used school time and combined it with other support programs such as Legation ECHS, “We put in place the 10:30 to 11:00 time, which is clubs and tutoring.” In the case of Stephenson ECHS clubs also filled a gap in the schedule for students, “We have Town Hall and it lasts for 30 minutes on Friday and then they have an hour for clubs that they get to decide what the clubs are.” Clubs served as a time to bring students together around personal interests, but they also served as a time for a teacher who sponsored those clubs to connect with students around that same interest.

Another common program was the advisory structures that many of the schools had in place. Many of the schools called that advisory “House” as in this statement by the principal of Harrison ECHS, “There’s a House—we also have House. It’s like an advisor/advisee type situation. And a student who comes in freshman year will have the same House all the way through. It’s eight to ten students usually.” The names of these advisory periods were different in some schools and the format appeared to vary as well. At one school their advisory was called “Focus” which the principal described as short for “focus group.” At another the name was “Crew.” At a third ECHS the advisory took the form of a homeroom period with 14-15 students called, “Our Time.” The principal of Brandywine ECHS described the many functions House played in developing and maintaining students’ connections to their school as follows:

It’s effective development. It’s relationships. The house teacher’s the one that does the home visit in the summertime. It’s, ‘Here are progress reports. Here are report cards. Go over them with your kids.’ It’s, ‘Here’s the list of kids that owe money for lunch. Be sure they get their money paid off.’ It’s, ‘These are kids having absentee issues. Pick up the phone and call home.’ It’s really what I view as an advisor/advisee model and it does meet daily.

At Calvert ECHS, the Crew program was slightly different:

We start every day with Crew. And we decided this year to assign an Expeditionary Learning—they don’t use the word design principle but it’s kind of the same thing. It’s really more character ed. This month is the natural world. And so in Crew we are engaged with projects related to that monthly theme and that time we’re expected to—and I have a Crew. We’re expected to make sure we have conversations with kids first thing in the morning, that we engage in projects that are meaningful.

The principal of Ellicott ECHS stated the importance of having a structure in place to ensure every student had an opportunity to connect with at least one adult:

So I think Our Time was—partly it was designed for that purpose so that there was at least one person who knew sometimes intimate details about a child’s life. Now, most often times it was way more than one person knew that, but that assured us that at least one would know.

Throughout the interviews, the advisory programs described above appeared to be among the most significant elements in place in the early colleges to both promote teacher-student relationships and to ensure all students had a close relationship with at least one adult in the school.

In addition to the advisory periods, another program many schools had in place was Seminar classes. These classes tended to be credit-bearing courses for students, but the topics varied depending on the grade level of students in them and the schools. I include them as a relationships-oriented program because they served as an alternate form of advisory in some cases and provided opportunities for schools and teachers to personalize instruction. In the case of Jennifer ECHS, the principal stated, “We also have the academic seminar lab for freshman and sophomores, and at-risk juniors, where if they’re not in a college class or a high school class they’re assigned to go to give them some support academically.” Then, for the seniors they have a different approach, “We have senior seminar for our seniors, and during that time Mr. D talks to them about the financial aid process, the deadlines coming up, what applications are due.” At Porter ECHS the principal described the seminar as a period of support for struggling students:

We have this seminar, which is another level of support throughout the day, where if they need help, so I think, overall, I think it’s making a huge difference because we’re not having students who traditionally don’t have help at home, and then come back to school without being prepared.



Therefore, while the seminar may not have provided the extended relationship with a specific teacher as advisories did, they provided time in the day for the ECHS to personalize instruction for students and help them work through individualized needs.

The principals frequently mentioned tutoring as another form of personalized support for students. Like the other programs mentioned above, tutoring took a variety of forms across the schools. In some cases they were unstructured to the point of sounding less like a program and more like teachers helping students as at Legation ECHS, “Teachers tutor before school, after school, during their planning period.” Or, they took a more structured approach and appeared similar to the seminar classes as at Quebec ECHS, “We also have tutoring during the school day. Our ninth graders and our tenth graders all have a tutorial period in their schedule. It’s built in.” And it also took a more traditional form as the principal described at Newark ECHS, “The teachers do, from 2:30 to 3:30 tutoring, and a lot of kids will stay for that extra help if they need it.”

The final program I have included in this section would be better described as a practice. Many of the principals mentioned student-led conferences during their interviews. While this practice served to sideline the teachers as students took charge of leading parent-student conferences (as opposed to parent-teacher conferences), teachers gained a unique perspective on their students and their students’ parents while empowering students to take greater ownership of their school experiences. At Harrison ECHS, the principal stated, “With the student-led conferences the HOUSE teacher meets with all the students and all their parents.” Later in the interview, the principal provided some insight into the impact the student-led conferences had on the school and the commitment of the principal to make it happen:

The student-led conferences, for instance, everybody was kind of flipping out about that. ‘How are we going to do this? We’ve never done this before,’ but then afterwards, everybody said, ‘This is the best thing we’ve ever done. This is great.’

The principal of Calvert ECHS included the student-led conferences in a comment about how teachers learned about individual students, “We do student-led conferences and portfolios, and that’s a big way that we really look at student work.” Thus this practice appeared to be one of the creative strategies employed in the ECHS setting to create tighter connections between students and the school staff which also allowed teachers to gain a sense of how students viewed their own work. In this way teachers learned more about their students as learners.

In addition to some of the more commonly mentioned programs, some school principals described programs that were only mentioned by small numbers of other participants. Some may have been mentioned by more than one principal, but perhaps no students or teachers commented on them. Others may have a limited number of mentions from all three groups. What these programs all shared is that they may have been good ideas, but they did not receive much notice from the study participants.

One such practice a few principals mentioned that appeared to be a meaningful activity for connecting staff and students was whole-school or large-group assemblies, but teachers and students almost never mentioned them. The principal of Calvert ECHS indicated the student body came together every Wednesday morning for an assembly called “Community Meeting,” and then they held “Closed Circle” on Fridays to celebrate student and school accomplishments. Irving ECHS held “Common House” meetings to provide teachers and students opportunities to discuss school-wide “concerns,” and

Stephenson ECHS conducted “Town Hall” on Fridays for 30 minutes. Despite the fact that these activities appeared to be opportunities for students and staff to grow a sense of connectedness to their schools and each other, neither students nor staff said much about the practices during their interviews.

Two schools mentioned personalized recruiting practices they had designed as a way to ensure parents and students understood from the beginning that their schools focused on personal relationships. Legation ECHS held a series of parent and student-oriented events during the summer to reach out to families, including information nights, a half-day summer bridge program for parents, and then a cook-out. The principal of Brandywine ECHS described how the House (advisory) teachers made home visits for every incoming ninth-grade student to make an initial personal contact prior to the school year.

And finally, three other practices appeared promising but only a small number of participants mentioned them: (1) creative use of social media; (2) student surveys to better understand their interests; and (3) formation of study groups. The principal of Harrison ECHS indicated the school had just opened a Facebook page with the administration of the page shared among the principal, a teacher, and a student. The principal of Calvert ECHS stated that students completed a “kind of Facebook profile” that the school used to create a student directory to allow students to contact each other. The principal of Quebec ECHS shared the following, “A few of the teachers did interest surveys, or some of them did learning styles so they’d know the students’ learning style, things of this nature just to get to know them.” Other schools referred to student surveys in passing remarks that suggested they administered them at their schools, but did not

### Principal Relationship Code Details

<p>Awareness of the importance of relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships engage students in learning</li> <li>• Relationships are the foundation of the work</li> <li>• Relationships build trust</li> <li>• Rigor relies on knowing the students</li> </ul>
<p>Deliberate actions taken by principals to promote relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modelled supportive relationships</li> <li>• Communicated the value of relationships to teachers</li> <li>• Maintained visibility in the school</li> <li>• Provided open access to teachers and students</li> <li>• Sought feedback</li> <li>• Trained teachers about relationships</li> </ul>
<p>School programs that provide space for relationships to develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities outside school</li> <li>• Clubs</li> <li>• Advisories</li> <li>• Seminar classes</li> <li>• Tutoring</li> <li>• Student-led conferences</li> </ul>

Table 4.2

describe how they used them. The principal of Garrison ECHS indicated that informal study groups had begun to emerge in their school, “I have a group of freshmen now who are off in the northern end of the county who have started a study group at the library after school,” and the principal of Calvert ECHS shared, “We’re trying to figure out how to do this better but we really encourage them to form study groups.” The implication for study groups appeared to be that they would be student led groups which may not have contributed directly to teacher-student relationships, but would have served as another form of personalization, particularly if teachers became involved in supporting them.

This section included details on a wide array of information gleaned from the interviews with the principal participants in the study. Their energy and enthusiasm in support of teacher-student relationships in their schools was hard to capture in isolated

quotes. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the data that emerged in the three relationship code categories for the interviews with the principals.

## **Research Question 2 – Teachers’ Perspectives**

The 37 teachers who participated in this study represented a wide range of experiences and perspectives. There were first-year teachers, end-of-career teachers, and every level of experience in between who were working in the ECHS setting. While their perspectives on students, school leadership, and instruction varied, they appeared to universally appreciate the ECHS model as unique and beneficial to students. The teachers responded to the following two questions about personalization in the interview protocols: “[11] Developing strong relationships with students is an expectation of this model. Please describe the relationships you have with students;” and “[11a] What is your school doing to build positive relationships between teachers and students?” (Appendix D). Like the principals, teachers’ answers took a variety of forms but they covered many similar themes which I organized into the three categories of codes listed in Table 4.1 which read as follows: (1) Awareness of the importance of relationships; (2) Deliberate actions taken by teachers to promote relationships, and (3) School programs that provide space for relationships to develop.

In general, teachers indicated the relationships between students and teachers were positive in their schools as in this quote from a teacher at Rodman ECHS, “Well, I feel like I’ve never had relationships with my students like I have with these kids.” Or, in this quote from a teacher at Stephenson ECHS:

Well, I think we have—well, I have positive relationships with the kids. We don’t always agree, or we don’t always love each other or anything like that, but the kids know that I care about them, and that I care about

their education, and I care about them as people. And in turn, they care about me, and just—I know the kids, I know their names, I know every kid here.

This first category of quotes from teachers reflected their personal philosophies about supportive teacher-student relationships. They commented about either the importance of strong teacher-student relationships or about what teachers could do to create them. A teacher from Ellicott ECHS described the importance of teacher-student relationships in this way, “I think they want to do better in your class and maybe in other classes as well when they feel like they have a connection with you as a teacher.” In this quote from Brandywine ECHS the teacher connected beliefs about relationships with a claim about the state of relationships at the school:

I mean there’s—you should—as an educator, in my mind, I should be able to walk into any educator and be like, ‘All right, tell me about students in your room,’ and they should be able to go down the list and say something kind of meaningful about all of them. I think that’s very important. I think here you find that that’s what happens.

In the statements below, teachers provided a number of ways to create supportive relationships with students. A teacher from Albemarle ECHS described how to create supportive relationships through purposeful interactions with students:

And if you’re positive around them, they’re generally more positive around you. And just the power of saying, ‘Are you okay?’ and taking two seconds to acknowledge their existence, and two seconds to say, ‘Good job’ or ‘I’m proud of what’—and not doing it to where it seems common that they’re like, ‘Oh, she says that to everybody,’ and dismisses it, but being very purposeful in what you say.

A teacher at Calvert ECHS highlighted the importance of teachers listening to students in order to create positive relationships:

And you’ve got to let these kids know that you care about them. You’ve got to be a great listener and you can’t judge. You can’t judge them

because you haven't walked in their—some of them—we've got several that I don't know how they even exist at school with all that they are handling at home.

A teacher from Legation ECHS described the importance of establishing trust to create supportive relationships, “I think the first thing you have to do is develop an atmosphere of trust, and sometimes letting them see that you're human, that you care. I think that comes through by talking to them, having small conversations about different things.”

And, a teacher from Morrison ECHS described respect between teachers and students, “If you treat kids with respect, consistently and maturely, they respond. So I don't have any problems with behavior.” Thus in the first category of relationships quotes from teachers I extracted comments in which they described why supportive relationships with students are important or they described strategies others might use to create supportive relationships such as being deliberate in interactions, listening carefully to students, and building a climate of trust. While it is likely these teachers also executed these behaviors in their classrooms, they did not directly state them as things they actually did.

In the second category of relationship quotes, I was looking for evidence of intentionality in comments where teachers described specific actions they had taken that might have contributed to supportive teacher-student relationships. At times, these quotes were difficult to distinguish from the third category of comments I addressed below which focused on school programs, because some of the actions teachers described in their statements may have been connected with school-wide programs found in the third category. I sought statements about how teachers interacted with students or with each other on behalf of students.

Teachers worked directly with students to support them both academically and personally. In this statement a teacher at Brandywine ECHS described working with students:

I try to be respectful of who they are as people. I do ask them how they're doing. I mean if I see them not being well, I ask them. I ask what's going on. I inquire a little bit about what their life's like at home if the opportunity arises. Things like that. So that personal nature, what's going on outside the classroom, and how's that being kind of brought—how they're bringing it into the classroom.

A theme many teachers and students mentioned captured the way teachers made themselves available to students for both academic and personal support. A teacher from Harrison ECHS described various ways students could access their teachers:

A lot of the kids have our phone numbers, like our personal cell phone numbers, so there have been plenty of times—I'm sure every teacher can give a story where a kid has been struggling with something at home or there's a situation outside of school where they just need—honestly, they just need to tell somebody.

Some schools formalized access to teachers as this teacher from Calvert ECHS explained, “We're available for struggling students in the mornings from 8 to 8:30 when everybody first gets here, so if there's a—it's an open door policy, if they are struggling.” Or, in some cases the access was more general as this teacher from Irving ECHS described, “They can come in and ask me questions if they want. I'm always available to them. They can knock on the door—now, there are times that they know, ‘Maybe I won't bother her right now’, but they know they can talk to me.” By providing this level of access to students, the teachers allowed the students to seek support on their own terms. However, teachers also discussed times when they approached students to provide needed support. Speaking of students in need of support a teacher at Brandywine ECHS stated, “We'll go



find them and say, ‘You need help. You need to come see me. You need to come do this.’” Or, in this example from a teacher at Fessenden ECHS:

So we actually go to them. They don’t have to come asking for help because sometimes they might feel embarrassed about that. We go to them. Sometimes if it’s just an issue that they’re not organized or they’re not putting in the effort, sometimes we ask them to draw up a contract.

This teacher from Harrison ECHS described a formal process to conference with students individually each quarter:

And then at the quarter, I always conference with them and say, ‘Okay, here’s the grade you got this last quarter. Here are the reasons that I think you got this grade. What do you think about that?’ Then we set goals together for what we want to do the next time, as far as numbers, but also as far as practices. I always give them the opportunity to tell me what I need to do differently to help them and that’s a very vulnerable position to put yourself in to say, ‘What do you need me to do to help you?’”

Teachers also described how communicating with parents enhanced the relationships they had with their students. A teacher from Ordway ECHS described the extent of parent communication at their school:

We spend a lot of time with our students and we spend a lot of time with their parents. We get to know their parents very well. We have monthly parent meetings where parents are here and talking and we’re here and talking and emailing back and forth so those kinds of interactions build relationships pretty quickly.

And, this teacher from Kenyon ECHS described a creative strategy for learning more about students, “Last semester, in creative writing, I had the kids do a math autobiography. This year, with every freshman that I teach, I had the parents write me a letter telling me about their children, their child.”

In addition to working directly with students and their parents, teachers described how they worked with each other to enhance their ability to personalize support for their

students. This teacher from Ellicott ECHS who described working with other staff members to create an atmosphere of collaboration to be able to support students in a personalized manner, “We have student services meetings where we just talk about what to do for certain students or students across the board,” or this teacher from Albemarle ECHS who recognized that different teachers may have connected better with some students than others, “What I do like about my team are the students that I don’t mesh with the best, there’s somebody on my team that does get that student.” This statement by a teacher at Newark ECHS described a formal approach teachers employed to collaborate on behalf of students:

Each day we have what we call Critical Friends, where we discuss not only what we’re doing in the classroom but how we can make things better, as far as the school environment, dealing with the students, talking about issues that the kids may be dealing with that we may not have been aware of and just trying to make the overall environment of the school conducive for everyone.

This next statement by the same teacher at Newark ECHS connected how the work to create a supportive environment for students mirrored the collaboration of the teachers in the school:

We also want to promote collaboration, not only between students but within staff, as well, integrating different subject areas, providing cross-curriculum. And even with the kids, helping them to understand that they need each other and they can utilize each other, whether it be doing collaborative group work or a scaffolding. A lot of times I tell the kids, ‘You’ll listen to each other before you’ll listen to me.’ So if I can convince them of what they know, then they can teach it to each other.

This quote from a teacher at Davenport ECHS captured the essence of how close teacher-student relationships could lead to higher expectations for students. The teacher described how teachers in the school supported students as a team and how the

relationships made it possible for the teacher to push the students to work on something that may not have appealed to them:

I feel like I have a really good grasp on who my students are as individuals, not just that they're in my third period and I see them then but I see them throughout the day. I am constantly talking to other teachers about how they're doing in their class. 'How are they acting today? Do I need to talk to them about it?' I feel like we have a fairly open relationship because there are times when I know that my students—like this morning—decide to pout because they don't get their way. And I feel like we have built a strong enough relationship, especially with respect for one another. They know what my expectations are and I know how most of the time they're going to react to certain things. And I know what they enjoy doing and I can kind of tailor that based on the relationship that we have. I can pull students aside and say, 'Listen. You've got to pull it together now. Now's not the time to pout. Sometimes we have to work together.' And that enables me to give them some more critical feedback that they don't take personally that says, 'Well, she doesn't like me because she's saying that to me now,' but they realize that. So that's extremely beneficial.

In the third category of teacher comments, I looked for indications that the teachers connected positive teacher-student relationships to the school-wide programs they had in place. As in the principal interviews, there were a few programs many teachers referenced frequently and some others only a few teachers mentioned. The more commonly mentioned programs included activities outside of school, school clubs, advisory programs, seminar classes, mentoring and tutoring programs, and student-led parent conferences.

The teachers recognized activities beyond the boundaries of the school building or the school day as a way they grew their relationships with their students. A teacher from Kenyon ECHS stated, "We do the field trips and things like that allow you to see the kids outside of school, get a different take on them." Some of the trips the teachers described

were simple field trips, and others were farther afield. A teacher from Ordway ECHS described the connection between the trips and their relationship with students as follows:

But I think a lot of them are really working for an adult relationship that they can have that's very consistent, so we're just here to provide it for them, and they just, this year more than last year, they're really kind of taking advantage of that, and we're going on our field trip to Washington D.C. in a couple of weeks, and they're really excited about that, and that will be another opportunity for us to spend some time.

Teachers and students from Rodman ECHS also travelled to Washington, DC and a teacher there said, “Even when we went to DC, took them on a field trip, that’s a long bus ride. So you talk to kids and interact with them that way.” Other schools such as Garrison ECHS took students to nearby universities such as UNC Chapel Hill and NC State. Teachers also identified other non-academic activities as opportunities to bond with students. A teacher from Porter ECHS described an event at that school:

And then I thought, ‘What better thing than, in March, to have a basketball tournament?’ So then we’re going to have the freshman, sophomores and juniors, and then a mix of whoever’s left over and we’ll have like a tournament for the day. We’ll have popcorn and drinks. I’ll charge enough to cover my costs. That’s what we did for the dance. We didn’t make any money, but the kids had fun and they’re building relationships.

Other schools such as Rodman ECHS drew on parent help for their activities, “Then we try—when we’ve had different events, PTA had a dance the other night, so we go to that. You get to learn more about the kids that way.” And, other schools like Davenport ECHS held events organized around their advisories (“Family” refers to their advisory as opposed to parents):

We either do a Family celebration or a club day and so they have the opportunity to participate with some other teachers that maybe they don’t see to strengthen some of those relationships, as well, maybe they had in the past or will have in the next year through clubs.

Teachers' thoughts on the value of non-classroom-based activities were consistent with those of the principals in their claims that they promoted stronger relationships with their students.

Other programs in which the activities overlapped somewhat with those I included above were clubs in schools. Across the schools in this study, clubs took many different forms and some schools had more formalized structures for them and others had trouble running them at all. However, where they did exist, teachers described how they contributed to teacher-student relationships. A teacher from Stephenson ECHS explained:

But then when you're with them in that not-quite-structured environment in the club, they open up to you in a completely different way and you learn about their friends and how they became friends with who. With my running club, we ran a 5K at midnight on December 31st, and you meet parents that way, too, when the parents are coming to pick them up and you talk about stuff.

A teacher from Legation ECHS described the specific structure of clubs at that school, "So it's those kinds of things; the Summer Bridge and the Orientation and the clubs that we have. They meet from 10:30 to 11:00. It's just a small amount of time, but every day, that builds relationships." And, a teacher from Quebec ECHS described a less structured approach to clubs:

Also, well, we don't really have as many defined clubs as I guess we could have. But like my student government, we meet. When we meet during lunch, it allows us to talk and to plan things, and to kind of continue to grow more; for them to grow more as leaders and me as an advisor.

Thus, regardless of the degree of structure for clubs in the schools, teachers identified them as a way to build relationships with students.

Similar to the principals, the school program the teachers attributed most frequently to promoting supportive teacher-student relationships was the advisory periods that operated in many of the schools. A teacher at Albemarle ECHS explained:

And then as far as the school is concerned, we've set up focus groups or kind of like an advisor/advisee situation, where we have small groups of students from a variety of grade levels, and we meet once a week and we discuss—I do a mini kind of meeting version where we connect at the beginning and just say what's on your mind, and nobody speaks.

At Brandywine ECHS the teacher described the advisory they called “House” as follows, “So we also have the House situation, so every student is assigned to a house teacher, so every house teacher probably has anywhere from six to maybe eight students that they monitor.” Morrison ECHS also called their advisory period “House” and the teacher described it as follows, “Our house is based on building relationships. That's what that whole curriculum is about.” The “Our Time” program at Ellicott ECHS also appeared to promote a relationships curriculum, and at Stephenson ECHS they call them “Wolf Teams.” Kenyon organized “Families” as their version of advisories that met daily. At Calvert ECHS they called the advisories “Crews,” and the teacher attributed them to helping create a family atmosphere in the school:

Well, our Crews in the morning—like our homerooms but they're our Crews and they're small—ten students to one teacher. And we do a lot of activities from our Crews. Each month we have a theme from the design principles that we work with and each Crew has to do a project and present it. So we work together as a family, more like it.

The teacher at Davenport ECHS described the ownership the teachers felt for their students in their advisory program they called “Campfire:”

I have 16 students that are my Campfire that I see every day, that I'm in charge of anything that needs to go home, any calls that need to be made. Those are my 16 kids. And that is just—those are my kids. I don't know

how else to describe it. And every teacher feels the same way about those kids.

One characteristic that was common among a number of the advisory programs was the expectation that teachers would stay with a group of students at least for an entire year if not for multiple years. The diversity of names for the advisory periods reflected the diversity of the content and structure of them as well, but regardless of the differences, the advisories appeared to be one of the most important programs for promoting supportive teacher-student relationships.

Seminar classes were another structure teachers frequently referenced as a way of personalizing support for students and building relationships. Seminars tended to have a somewhat more academic focus than the advisories as described by a teacher from Davenport ECHS, “We have—let’s see, this time, from 12:00 to 12:30 is what we call our seminar time, which is the time when the students have to get caught up on all their work.” A teacher from Rodman ECHS explained how students did not necessarily stay with a specific teacher as was common in the advisories, “I think the seminar class last year really helped with us getting to know that small group initially, then we began to rotate our seminar groups so we could do some different things, and that helped again.” A teacher at Calvert ECHS described a benefit of seminar as follows, “And seminar is very helpful as well, because they’re responsible to another adult in the building.” A teacher from Porter ECHS offered a similar statement, “So in Seminar, I learned everybody. I learned about them, what they like.” One notable challenge emerged where constraints in the student schedule caused some schools to eliminate the seminar class. This was the case as noted by a teacher from Rodman ECHS:

Last year, we had a built-in seminar time. It was an hour to 90-minute class in the middle of the day, and we worked with that specific group. We don't have that luxury, unfortunately, this year, and I can see the difference between the sophomores and the freshmen. Our sophomores, when they come to that group of teachers that they had last year, the relationship they have with us is far different than what they have with the new teachers, because so much of that personalization is left up to the individual teacher to accomplish during what little time they have allotted, but it's very difficult.

Like the advisories, the seminar courses provided teachers with slightly less structured time to interact with students, and teachers connected these programs to stronger teacher-student relationships.

Another program that was sometimes a structured program and at other times merely a practice a few teachers engaged in was tutoring. A teacher from Brandywine ECHS stated, "But individualized tutoring, I think we individualize tutor almost all of our kids here to some extent in some area." At Kenyon ECHS a teacher described how students could access personalized support in the subject of their choice, "Well, we have tutoring time also. During those club times we have several teachers who set up tutoring hours, so if they're not doing well in a particular class, they have access to at least one member from every subject area." As with other programs for students the tutoring took different forms at schools based on the teachers' availability, "To help build the relationships we do the tutoring. We tutor all the time. We ask them to come before school, we ask them to go after school. So that allows them to get that one-on-one time." A teacher from Quebec ECHS summarized the impact of tutoring on teacher-student relationships in this way, "Allowing teachers that tutorial time so that students can receive that extra assistance from teachers which will help them to have better grades, which usually helps them to just like teachers more when their grades are better." In



some cases, schools coordinated peer tutors for students to get more personalized support as at Legation ECHS where the teacher stated, “We have peer tutors who tutor during those times. Some of the time, peer tutors go into the classrooms with the teachers and they work with the students one-on-one.” Yet, as the teacher at Ordway ECHS described, the peer mentoring at times translated to more individualized teacher support as well, “We do a lot of peer support. If we see that a student is struggling, we’ll say, “Okay, you’re having a difficult time with this. Let’s try having so and so talk with you and you guys see if you work this out, then come to me and talk to me.” So, while the advisories and seminars created formalized structures for teachers to get to know small groups of students, the tutoring or mentoring opportunities were arguably the activities most focused on providing students with one-to-one support from teachers.

The final activity that emerged across many of the teachers’ interviews was the practice of student-led parent conferences. A teacher from Albemarle ECHS described the practice as follows:

One thing that I love that we do here that I’d always wanted to do were student-led conferences to where the parents come in. And it’s great to see the parents, especially parents that you don’t always see or don’t always come in for contact, to come in and be able to see what their student’s learning, and their student explain it to them and walk them through.

Teachers indicated these conferences required a significant amount of time, and some schools held them more frequently than others. This teacher from Kenyon ECHS explained, “We do have parents come in for student-led conferences. We’ve done that twice this year. After the first and fourth six weeks, they came in and the student led a conference with a group of teachers.” But, as with other practices in the schools, teachers

### Teacher Relationship Code Details

<p>Awareness of the importance of relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers should know their students</li> <li>• Acknowledge student progress</li> <li>• Listen to students</li> <li>• Develop trust</li> <li>• Gain respect with respect</li> </ul>
<p>Deliberate actions taken by teachers to promote relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learned about students' lives</li> <li>• Provided students access to teachers</li> <li>• Initiated support for students in need</li> <li>• Conducted individual conferences with students</li> <li>• Communicated with parents</li> <li>• Collaborated with other teachers to monitor students</li> </ul>
<p>School programs that provide space for relationships to develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities outside school</li> <li>• Clubs</li> <li>• Advisories</li> <li>• Seminar classes</li> <li>• Tutoring</li> <li>• Student-led conferences</li> </ul>

Table 4.3

connected this practice to enhanced teacher-student relationships. A teacher from Morrison ECHS stated, “And the way we lead our parent conferences—the student-led conferences, you learn so much about those kids, and they share a lot. Sometimes they share too much.”

In this section, I presented a descriptive summary of ECHS teachers’ thoughts on supportive teacher-student relationships. I organized the comments into the three categories of codes from Table 4.1 which included: (1) Teachers’ awareness of the importance of relationships; (2) Deliberate actions taken by teachers to promote relationships, and (3) School programs that provide space for relationships to develop. In Table 4.3, I summarized the themes that emerged from the teachers’ comments about

relationships. It is important to note that the only significant difference between the first category—stated beliefs—and the second category—deliberate actions—was the manner in which teachers discussed them. In the first category the teachers talked about the importance of the actions and in the second category they described the actions they took. It is possible that the teachers acted on the ideas in category one, but they did not state as much. Regardless, teachers’ comments highlighted many important concepts related to supportive teacher-student relationships.

### **Research Question 3 – Students’ Perspectives**

The data for this study included focus group interviews with students from 19 early college high schools. The focus groups appeared to include between four and eight students, but I did not have clear information about the students in the focus groups. The de-identified data set I employed had all participant information removed. The site protocol for the original study (Appendix A) suggested schools identify four to six students in grades 10–12, but some of the transcripts appeared to represent more student voices. The students answered the following questions about personalization from the interview protocol: “[6] Tell us about the relationships you have with the adults in your school;” and “[suggested probe questions for question 6] Do you think all the teachers know your names? How are they helping you to prepare for college career *sic*? Do college professors know your names?” (Appendix E). Because this study focused on the high school teachers in the ECHS model, I limited my analysis to descriptions of the students’ relationships with their high school teachers and avoided the comments they made during the interviews about their college professors. I organized the information from the students into three similar codes to those of the principals and the teachers with

a slight change of focus on the second code. The codes appeared in Table 4.1 and they read as follows: (1) Awareness of the importance of relationships; (2) Behaviors of teachers that students identified as supportive; and (3) school programs that provide space for relationships to develop.

I had difficulty distinguishing between students' awareness of the importance of relationships and their comments about the actions teachers took that supported teacher-student relationships. While some students were far more articulate about their relationships with teachers than others, many students demonstrated considerable thoughtfulness about the importance of relationships. A student at Albemarle ECHS summarized it succinctly, "I think the biggest reason you don't like somebody is because you don't know them." When asked about their schools, the students sometimes had difficulty attributing how they felt to anything in particular as in the case of this student from Albemarle ECHS:

It's the atmosphere around it. It's the welcoming—nothing's repressing about it. If a teacher assigns you something you feel comfortable talking to them about it. It's—the projects and the hands-on—I'm not sure in an essence what specifically does it to make me comfortable. It's just the whole atmosphere of the school.

In this next comment from Kenyon ECHS, the student recognized the importance of a teacher caring about the students and the impact it had:

Adults, kids, the whole school as a whole. Having all the people around you who genuinely care and know who you are, and are backing you 100% on your road to success, and graduation eventually. It's really motivating. It's just an experience that I'm sure that if everyone had the opportunity to take and realize, the world would be a different place.

However, this student still did not make a connection to how the school or the teacher helped achieved a supportive relationship, so this comment along with those in the next

two paragraphs exemplify the general comments students made regarding their beliefs about relationships with teachers.

The students were able to articulate how teachers, or the relationship they had with teachers, made them feel. In the comments that follow, students described certain outcomes of their relationships with teachers. One benefit students attributed to supportive relationships with their teachers is that they helped students gain greater confidence. This student from Albemarle ECHS explained the following:

All of this helps out academically too, because then you don't have to worry about your relationship with somebody. You don't have to—and then it will also bring you together in class too to where you're not afraid to ask other people what they think about a subject, or how to do a certain problem.

Another student from Albemarle ECHS claimed, “You find out who you are and you find out what you need and what you don't need. It helps you be more personable and helps you with people.” Other students described the role respect played in their relationships with teachers such as in this quote from a student at Irving ECHS:

But it's a respect thing. They'll let you joke, but so far, but then you have to realize that this person is authority and you still have to show them the same respect you would if you went to a regular high school. They'll respect you as long as you respect them.

This student, also from Irving ECHS, compared the experience with that from middle school:

I think a lot of teachers that I've been around—not in this school, but in middle school and in elementary school, even, have this sort of God complex, like they're above you. It's kind of like a dictatorship, and I would say being here, it's more like a democracy.

While, another theme that emerged along with the idea of respect was that students viewed their teachers as friends as this student from Albemarle ECHS described, “Well,

it was mentioned earlier that we know the adults and they know us. We're not—there's no tension in between us. We can talk freely. We respect them and they respect us, but they're also our friends." A student from Calvert ECHS claimed, "They're there when we need them, and we have them as friends but we still respect them as teachers." This student from Ellicott ECHS may not have claimed to be friends, but implied it in this statement, "I have a pretty good relationship; I stay in the office *a lot*. You've probably seen me there...I should be on payroll but I'm not [laughs]."

One interesting theme that emerged addressed how, at times, teachers were a little too intrusive for their students' comfort. This student from Albemarle ECHS indicated, "They're almost too much in our business." A similar comment came from a student at Brandywine ECHS who said, "I don't necessarily like it when the teacher knows my business because these teachers like to talk to other teachers and it's like once one knows, all of them know." This student from Davenport ECHS felt there should have been less connection with the teachers as well:

The teachers were too attached, I guess you'd say. I really didn't like that whole in your face type thing about what you're doing, looking over your shoulder. I was kind of used to that whole teachers who were detached from you. You turn in your assignments, you get your grade, you're done.

Yet, this statement from a student at Rodman ECHS acknowledged how much the teachers knew, but the student appeared more impressed than concerned, "Oh Lord, yes. It's kind of scary how much they know about you. They know more about me than I know about myself. Dang."

However, in contrast to students' perspectives that relationships with teachers sometimes became too intrusive, some students noted that teachers maintained

appropriate boundaries. One student from Stephenson ECHS stated, “They don’t infringe upon the students’ personal lives or anything, but if you have a problem, yeah, they’ll help you out with it,” and another Stephenson student said, “If you’re not doing what you’re supposed to be doing, then he’ll tell you. So it’s—they know when to be your friend and they know when to be your teacher.” A student from Albemarle ECHS also stated, “There is a fine line between going too far, pushing their buttons too far. So yes, we have that friendship kind of relationship, but there’s a line there that ... They’re still your teacher and you still need to respect them.”

In the upcoming paragraphs, I include comments the students shared that described the deliberate actions of teachers which contributed to students’ feelings of supportive relationships. In this comment, a student from Calvert ECHS described how teachers provided flexible time to allow students to make connections with teachers and with other students:

They allowed us time to meet with everybody and to meet with our mentees and stuff, and to actually talk to them and get to know them, because it’s sort of hectic here with us running back and forth to college and the high school, and we had different schedules from them, so they actually allow us time for us to mingle, I guess you could say, and get to know everybody.

The concept of the students having easy access to teachers for both personal and academic support appeared frequently in students’ focus group interviews. This student from Albemarle ECHS, described how teachers provided students access to them, “Everybody has everybody’s cell phone number and stuff, and you can call them or text them and be like, ‘I really need help.’ They won’t come to your house, because that’s a little creepy, but you can meet them.” A student from Calvert ECHS stated, “Our

teachers, they also provide us with their personal phone numbers, so if we ever have to call them for anything they'll answer our calls or texts almost any time of the day." A student from Jennifer ECHS said, "If I have a question, I just call my teacher or send her a message. Other students talked about how teachers were open to discuss any topic. A student from Fessenden ECHS explained:

That was the thing. She'd be sitting there doing things, like he said, coding a paper or something, filing things, writing those, whatever she would need to do and you could actually come in there and sit down and talk to her about fishing.

The student from Fessenden ECHS expanded on the topics they might have discussed, "No matter what we have to talk about, they'll talk about it—family, friends, whatever—they're there to talk. They'll sit down and talk. Stop whatever they're doing and sit down and talk with you." And, a student from Newark ECHS described how teachers opened themselves up to students, "I think they're comfortable with us, though. They let down their boundaries in being school teachers and just having fun with us but teaching us at the same time."

The students found a number of ways to express that teachers were helpful to students. A student from Brandywine ECHS stated, "You can randomly come to one of the teachers here, and if they can't help you, they'll find somebody that can," and a student from Calvert ECHS claimed, "They're not going to judge you for what you do. They're just going to try to make the situation better." A student from Newark ECHS stated, "Yes. I love these teachers. They help us a lot," and finally, a student from Davenport ECHS said, "We have—actually we have the relationship with our teachers, so if you do need the help they're always there to be like, 'Okay, I don't understand,' and



they will take the time.” Thus, while being helpful may appear as an obvious statement, students noted the importance of teachers being available to students and providing them with the time to access the support they needed. This highlights the fact that students seek teachers who help them progress as learners.

However, one way students articulated teachers’ helpfulness was by describing how teachers would provide clarity when they required it in a lesson. A student from Albemarle ECHS, stated the following:

We would all go through that, but then to clarify anything our teachers would go back over it, just to make sure everyone knew what was going on. So they would let us do these hands-on activities and projects, but they would also make sure we all knew the information.

This student from Ellicott ECHS described how teachers provided clarity, “So if you don’t understand how to do an equation or math, he’ll try to explain it to us in simple terms that we can relate to.”

Students also recognized when teachers personalized their approaches with them by differentiating between learning styles. A student from Davenport ECHS explained:

Well, the project-based, I notice that they try to base projects differently off how different people learn. So one may be based more on kinesthetic learning, doing things hands-on, and others may be based on visual or auditory learning. So they try to mix it up a bit, and they also try to give you different options as to what you do with the project so it works better for different learning styles.

This student from Albemarle ECHS, described how teachers organized groups to personalize:

Yeah, we really do appreciate that and they know to put us in groups according to that. They know that each person has a different learning style, so they try so many different ways to help us learn so no one is left behind. It really is helpful.

The two previous comments also included references to approaches to teaching—project-based learning and collaborative grouping—that appeared frequently as teachers and principals discussed instruction at early colleges during their interviews.

One important theme emerged as students talked about how teachers provided proactive support to students by reaching out to them when teachers discerned that students needed help. This student from Irving ECHS, shared the following:

When my teachers see me not talking, they know something's wrong. I don't care if I'm just ticked. They're going to find out what it is. So I think it's a very good connection because, like [student] said, they don't look as if they're above you. They want to know your opinion because they're there to teach you. It might be their job, but their job is to teach you.

A student from Harrison ECHS made a similar comment, “Oh yeah, they do notice during class. If you’re just looking at your paper [teacher] will just come up behind you and she goes, ‘You need help, don’t you?’ and you’re like, ‘Yes, I do.’” And, from a student at Irving ECHS, “If you start failing or getting below a C, they're going to say, ‘You know what? You're coming in here this time and this time.’”

Students took notice of teachers who appeared to care about them both academically and personally. A student compared teachers at Calvert ECHS to teachers from non-ECHS experiences as follows, “Because there’s been teachers that I’ve had in the past that were lazy and I didn’t learn anything. I didn’t feel like they cared. Now I feel better about this.” Students took note when teachers communicated their care through high expectations for them to succeed as in this comment from a Porter ECHS student, “They care if you fail or not. If you want to drop a class, they want to know why. If it’s too hard, how they can help you.” This student from Calvert ECHS explained:

They really do care. If they didn't care they wouldn't hound us about our work, and if we're failing they wouldn't really come up to you and be like, 'Hey, why are you failing this class? What are you doing wrong? What do I need to help you with? Do I need to stay after school?'

Students also found other ways to describe teachers with high expectations. This student from Morrison ECHS explained, "The teachers push you, and they don't just give you answers. They help you to think for yourself," and another student from Morrison ECHS stated, "It's no longer about the end of course test. It's about understanding the idea of what we have to learn. It's about taking the steps to get—to know what they're teaching." In the next two comments, students made the connection that being on a college campus may have influenced teachers expectations. A student from Calvert ECHS noted, "I like that they don't treat you like little children all the time. You have to put on more responsibility than if you went to a regular school," and a student from Newark ECHS said, "Like here you're expected to do everything that you're told and you're expected to act like a college student. So we all make up to that and do it. Well, most of us."

Students also commented on teachers who frequently reached out to parents. The student from Harrison ECHS said, "Ms. K, she sends my parents emails every week, 'This is what she needs to do. This is – ' It's for everybody in her class. 'They have a test here. They have a project here. The note cards are due then.'" A student from Rodman ECHS also commented on a teachers' communication with parents:

One day I came to school and the math teacher, [teacher], she was like, 'Yeah. So your dog's going to have puppies, right?' I was like, 'Huh? How do you know that?' She was like, 'Yeah, I seen your mom.' I was like, 'Oh.' 'Yeah, I talked to your mom.' It was kind of weird. It was like they know stuff better.

These comments about communication with parents indicated another way teachers demonstrated their connection to students.

The third code category that appeared in the student interviews related to the comments about programs at schools. Similar to the comments by the principals and the teachers, students also referenced some of the programs in place at the schools that contributed to their relationships with teachers. Interestingly, the comments about programs were sparser in the student interviews than in the two other groups, but they did generally follow similar themes. The interview questions for the students did not specifically ask students about activities or practices in their schools that supported relationships as in the teacher and principal interview protocols.

Students mentioned activities outside of the school day or the school boundaries such as this statement by an Albemarle ECHS student, “In tenth grade, you take the most trips because they’re in this county. We’re learning about our county.” A student at Harrison ECHS described a different type of non-academic social event, “Yeah, we have a social thing every—the last day of every month. The whole school gets together and we eat pizza or something like that and just kind of interact with each other. It’s fun.” A student at Irving ECHS described a more personal event, “[Teacher], our first year here, she actually threw a party for us at her house because we didn’t have any money for dances, couldn’t go anywhere. She just invited the whole school. No teacher, I can imagine, would do that.” And, a student from Stephenson ECHS mentioned an activity that principals and teachers also mentioned:

We also vote on where we want to go as far as a field trip. The big thing is visiting colleges. We visit a lot of colleges in—mainly—like he said,

mainly North Carolina and Virginia. We went to the University of Virginia and Virginia Tech last semester.

In the principal and teacher interviews, the advisories at various schools emerged as among the most important programs for building relationships. Students mentioned advisories in their comments such as the Focus Groups at Albemarle ECHS and the Campfire at Davenport ECHS, but they did not necessarily describe them as an important setting for growing relationships. A student at Morrison ECHS did link their advisory period to relationships as follows:

So basically if you ever have a problem you could ask your House teacher, which is the same thing—she’s—your House teacher is going to be your regular high school teacher too, so you already know them on top of that. So it’s really easy to talk about anything in House.

At Morrison ECHS older students have a modified version of House due to scheduling challenges as another student described, “Sort of a one-on-one version of House basically except for you have to be there, yes, but it may not last as long as the traditional House would.” Additionally, a student from Newark ECHS described an experience in her school’s advisory, “And we have House and we get to know everybody’s situational problems, like one session it was all girls and we was in there and everyone’s talking and they had to go get tissues, two boxes of tissues, because every girl in there was crying.”

Some of the programs principals and teachers mentioned received very few comments from students. One program that a number of principals mentioned was assemblies. Students only mentioned large group assemblies in passing a couple of times. One student from Stephenson ECHS recognized it as an important element in the school, “I would like to say how—what has made our school better, and helped out with getting people here is where we go. We have a Town Hall, and that’s where you can

express your voice,” but this was an outlier among student statements. Another program that received much attention from principals and teachers was clubs. Other than the quote below from the student at Albemarle ECHS, students listed their clubs, but did not talk about them in the context of how they contributed to relationships in the schools. The student said, “We have many, many clubs, everything from Beta to planning the talent show. We have a robotics club where they’re doing—sending off a robot. They sent that off yesterday. Just so many ways you can get to know people.” Principals and teachers also frequently described how Seminar classes supported teacher-student relationships. While students mentioned the Seminar classes a number of times, those comments were more about finding a time to complete their work. This student from Calvert ECHS explained, “The ninth graders have an hour a day where we have seminar, and in seminar, if you don’t understand something that’s supposed to be your time when you go ask any teacher anything you need to.” Students from Ordway ECHS made the following two comments about seminar at that school. “And if we didn’t have sophomore seminar and freshman seminar people’s stress levels would be crazy” and “I feel like as far as emotional support, like she said, the sophomore and freshman seminar teachers, to me I feel like they’re the only teacher that you can really trust.” These comments hinted at underlying frustrations students experienced at that school which I will address in an upcoming section of this chapter.

One type of activity a number of students mentioned that was unique to the students’ interviews was teambuilding exercises that took place in a variety of venues. A student at Albemarle ECHS explained, “I think that all the extra activities we do are really meant to set us up for interaction with other people, because we have to learn how

to interact with each other.” An Albemarle ECHS student described one activity, “Here, you’re with them, and presenting projects, and then we do—we had speed dating in classes and stuff where we could get to know each other. A student at Davenport described activities that occurred in the summer prior to entering ECHS designed to get students to know each other, “Camp, like he said, they did a lot of team builders, so they made sure to mix you up with people that you didn’t know.” And, students at Irving ECHS experienced a different activity to learn about each other:

But now, the first—was it the first or second day of school? We went to a Ropes course to get to know each other, and we were talking to each other like we were the best of friends for years. And when we came back to school, we were ready to work with each other.

While the interviews did not reveal the teambuilding activities as organized programs at the schools, I included it in this section as a practice or activity similar to practices like the student-led conferences included in the sections on principals and teachers. Students did not mention the student-led conferences as an activity that enhanced relationships with their teachers, so it is not included here.

The final program in this section on students also appeared in the principal and teacher sections. Students frequently mentioned the tutoring that was available to them in most of their schools. While they did not correlate tutoring with relationships, they recognized it as personalized support. A student from Ellicott ECHS describe the availability of tutoring which also connected to students comments about having open access to teachers in the school, “There is always a tutor available, all students can... from 10:30 in the morning till 5 in the afternoon there’s a tutor available.” A student from Calvert ECHS explained how tutoring occurred in place of clubs for some students:

During—going back to clubs—on Fridays during club time if you haven't turned in an assignment, or you need to do something to bring your grade up, or you need to finish a test or something then you go to what we call procrastinators' guild during club time.

And, at Stephenson ECHS, students in need had access to tutoring support also:

We could stay after school usually—I believe it's on Tuesdays and Thursdays—as arranged by the teachers. They have remediation or reviews for the classes, which they will get extra one-on-one help in even smaller environments. So if they're struggling in their classes we can have extra help outside of school.

Thus, while students were less likely to connect programs in their schools to supportive teacher-student relationships, they provided a great deal of information to imply that the relationships between teachers and students were generally very positive.

Many of the relationship-supporting programs appeared in interviews with the teachers and principals from many of the schools. Students tended to connect those programs to relationships less frequently than the adults. That could have been a function of the format of the question in the interview protocol for students or it could have been that the students did not recognize how those classes provided opportunities for them to grow their relationships. It appeared that students provided more general statements to describe their relationships with each other and with teachers such as this student from Legation ECHS, "I'm friends with all my teachers because all of them are nice," rather than consider the setting in which those relationships grew.

In Table 4.4, I provided a summary of the themes that emerged in the three categories from the student interviews. These themes demonstrated that in many cases teachers' and principals' intentions for supportive teacher-student relationships were similar to the students' responses.



### Student Relationship Code Details

<p>Awareness of the importance of relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caring environment motivates</li> <li>• Relationships build confidence</li> <li>• Gain respect with respect</li> <li>• Relationships require appropriate boundaries</li> </ul>
<p>Behaviors of teachers that students identified as supportive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided open access</li> <li>• Helped</li> <li>• Provided clarity with work</li> <li>• Recognized different learning styles</li> <li>• Initiated support for students in need</li> <li>• Communicated care</li> <li>• Maintained high expectations</li> <li>• Involved parents</li> </ul>
<p>School programs that provide space for relationships to develop</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities outside school</li> <li>• Advisories</li> <li>• Seminar classes</li> <li>• Tutoring</li> </ul>

Table 4.4

#### **Research Question 4 – Comparison of Perspectives**

In this section I will compare the principals’ and teachers’ statements about their impressions of teacher-student relationships in their schools to the students’ descriptions of their relationships with their teachers. I have included a closer analysis of three particular schools, Legation ECHS, Albemarle ECHS and Ordway ECHS.

Demonstrating alignment between the principals’ and teachers’ statements about relationships and the students’ described experiences was easier to illustrate by employing a within-school analysis. Legation ECHS served to demonstrate the challenge I had discerning the truth of what was actually occurring in a school where the interviews were not necessarily consistent in their energy or enthusiasm related to the topic of teacher-student relationships. Then, Albemarle ECHS and Ordway ECHS exemplified

two extremes in the data. Albemarle ECHS represented the strongest example of alignment between the beliefs and actions of the principal, teachers, and students with regard to supportive teacher-student relationships. On the other hand, the interviews from Ordway ECHS revealed a lack of alignment between the principal's claims of positive relationships and the students' experiences.

The purpose of this section is to reveal if the claims the principals and teachers made about the importance of supportive teacher-student relationships were genuine or merely a façade they projected for the sake of attempting to demonstrate compliance with the ECHS design principles. In talking about how the entire staff came to care deeply about the students, the principal of Ellicott ECHS alluded to this idea in the following quote:

The cafeteria person, she knew all the kids by name and called them by name. Just everybody had a genuine concern for them, and I think the kids absolutely understood it, and felt it, and sensed it, and knew that it was genuine and not just, 'Oh, we're just going to act like we care about you because they told us we should because they said relationships were a good idea.'

My challenge in conducting this study is in determining the role school leaders played in the establishment of supportive teacher-student relationships. Evidence appeared throughout the data that principals and teachers in most of the schools contributed to supportive relationships. Later in this chapter I will discuss how Albemarle ECHS appeared to be the school where the focus on relationships was most deliberate, the most enthusiastic, and the most creative across all three groups of participants. To some degree, I used that school as a benchmark for comparing all others. From a researcher perspective, it was difficult to know if the evidence appeared that way because the

participants happened to be the most articulate about what was happening in their school or if the conditions were truly the most supportive of teacher-student relationships among the participating schools.

From the research perspective it was difficult to determine the circumstances for supportive relationships from the gestalt of an interview transcript. Legation ECHS provided an example of a circumstance where the essence of the interview transcripts did not appear to align with what appeared to be happening in the school. The Legation ECHS principal interview included many thoughtful and deliberate comments about relationships in the school such as, “I tell every kid in the school, I want each one of them to have a special person here on campus that they will go to if they have a problem or need advice, and for some kids, that’s me and that’s real neat,” or the following statement about a vision for how to treat people:

I think they respect me. I try always to respect them and in terms of my relationship, I tell them, and everybody laughs, but they get the point, a part of their job is to make sure I have a pleasant day, just like a part of my job is to make sure they have a pleasant day.

The teachers of Legation ECHS were mixed in their ability to describe supportive relationships at the school. One teacher stated:

I think the first thing you have to do is develop an atmosphere of trust, and sometimes letting them see that you’re human, that you care. I think that comes through by talking to them, having small conversations about different things.

That teacher’s interview was rich with comments about school programs including some unique ideas about a three-day summer Bridge program they held to help build relationships with incoming freshmen. The other teacher was not nearly as detailed about relationships and made comments such as, “We know our students. We run into our

students walking around campus a lot more.” This was a positive statement but it did not provide a particularly detailed description of the relationships. Following the principal and teacher interviews, the student interview was very sparse. It appeared the student participants just did not speak in a particularly descriptive way. Many of their statements were limited to short phrases or single sentences. They made no comments to indicate anything was wrong with the relationships at their school and even made a limited number of positive statements to imply relationships were strong:

Well, you can kind of go to all the teachers. It’s kind of like a family. I think of it. All the teachers—you’re friendly with all the teachers. You can joke around with them. There’s nobody that if you’d go to with your problems and they’d be like, ‘No. Don’t talk to me.’

Thus, while two of the interviews from Legation ECHS were quite descriptive about supportive teacher-student relationships, the other two were not. There was no evidence from the less descriptive interviews that relationships were not positive, there just were not enough details in the comments to be certain. In this case, the lack of description appeared to be due more to the communicative style of the participants more than an absence of details worth reporting. Essentially, there is evidence in almost every transcript except in the extreme case of Ordway ECHS which I will describe later in this section to point to supportive relationships between teachers and students in the schools, but some participants were more descriptive than others.

Of the nineteen schools in the data set, Albemarle ECHS appeared to be the most positive example of all three groups being aligned in support of strong teacher-student relationships. One theme that was somewhat unique in the Albemarle ECHS principal interview appeared in the principal’s references to deliberately training the teachers about

teacher-student relationships such as this comment about helping the teachers better understand the students, “So just constant training about things like that to help people have a better understanding of poverty, I think that helps with relationships.” To continue with the same theme, the principal explained about taking the teachers on a short trip to help them understand why the school’s poorer students did not behave the same way as middle class students:

...their friends were middle-class folks, and they did their work and they turned it in. To help provide an understanding of why all kids don’t do that, we’ve taken a couple bus rides around the community so that they see some of the homes that [Albemarle] students live in. It helps, and it helps to understand their story, and we talk about it often, because folks forget.

Another strategy the principal of Albemarle ECHS employed with teachers was to give them concrete instructions about how to make the students feel welcome in certain situations such as their cook out to meet newly accepted students:

What I’ve discovered, building those relationships doesn’t come naturally to everybody, so you have to tell adults what to do. You can’t assume that they know what to do at a cook-out. So you have to assign a couple people to be there greeting, and they’re to be there greeting; and X number of people are supposed to just be mingling, making sure that folks feel comfortable and folks feel welcome.

This principal recognized that helping teachers develop relationships with students required deliberate approaches, and thus the principal was deliberate in training the teachers. In the other principal interview transcripts, very few of the principals made any reference to providing such specific training to staff.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, this principal described a vision for relationships at the school by stating, “I believe, for me and for every adult in this building and for college instructors, building relationships with students and with staff,

that's the foundation of what we do." The teachers from Albemarle ECHS made many clear statements about the importance of relationships, such as one teacher who stated, "Most importantly, we put a huge emphasis on relationships, because to us, if you don't have that relationship in place, none of the other stuff is going to fall in line, or it's not going to go well." Then, the other teacher from the school responded to a question about the school's goals with the following:

I think, though, that the big one is that relationships come first, and that sort of major goal is to create relationships. And from that, we believe that success comes, but the relationships have to come first. And that's probably our goal, is to first develop a solid relationship with each of these students, and then be able to meet them where they are and get them where they need to be.

While the teachers identified relationship-building as a priority for Albemarle ECHS, students described their experience with deliberate efforts to increase their ability to form relationships with others as in this quote from a student:

I'd have to say that the relationships that I would build, and the ability to build new relationships, because this school has really taught me how to get out and talk to people and make relationships, because in middle school I was a little hermit and never did anything, and now it don't bother me to go up to anybody and talk to them.

What was unique about this comment and others like it from Albemarle ECHS students, was that they describe the school as teaching them skills for getting to know others and working on building relationships. In most of the other schools students spoke less or not at all about teachers teaching them to develop relationships. This does not mean other schools were not taking deliberate action, but the students from Albemarle ECHS articulated those efforts in their interview. This may have been merely a function of the students the school selected to participate in the interviews, or it may have been that

students in this school truly experienced a more deliberate focus on establishing relationships than students at other schools.

In contrast to Albemarle ECHS, the students' descriptions of their relationships with adults at Ordway ECHS did not align with the descriptions of those relationships in the principal or teacher interviews. The principal commented on teachers' relationships with students as follows:

But the teachers understand that whole personalization piece, too, and so they have very good relationships with the students. They're very quick to notice that there's something the least bit different about each one of the kids, or if there's something going on between two kids that has come on their radar and they're very proactive about that.

The principal then followed that statement, "So we try to be really, really proactive with that whole relationship piece and building those relationships with them." Yet, while these claims about relationships suggest teacher-student relationships were positive, the principal provided very little support for the claims and some of the principals' other comments or lack of comments about relationships suggested the relationships were not so positive. The principal made no comments about deliberate efforts to train the teachers about relationships. Also, when asked about how the school promoted relationships between teachers and students, the principals began the response with the following:

Well, I think it's very different from a traditional school because, number one, we're on top of each other here and we just tell parents, we're real up front with it, if you don't want somebody all up in your business, don't send your child to this school because we're all up in your business. And they understand that.

This comment projected the principal's view of the closeness of the staff and students in the school in a slightly less positive manner, and beyond the two quotes included above

there was very little additional evidence in the remainder of the interview that the principal promoted supportive teacher-student relationships. Another notable absence from the principal's interview was any reference to school programs that supported relationships. Nearly every other principal referenced programs such as advisories, tutoring, and clubs, but this principal mentioned none of those in connection with promoting relationships. Evidence from the teachers' and students' interviews revealed that all of those existed in the school, but the principal did not connect them to relationship building.

The teachers at Ordway ECHS provided more positive comments about teacher-student relationships in the school. One teacher described a close but professional relationship with students, "I have a very kind of professional yet friendly relationship with them. We joke around, but they know where my lines are and they're very respectful in the classroom." The other teacher at the school described one approach they employed to develop relationships with their students, "I think that you can see—we do a lot of team building kinds of activities at the beginning of the year with the students," and also stated the following:

I think though it's more on a personal level, that relationships in our school are probably the most important thing for us. We really want to make sure that our students feel connected here and feel like they have a place and that they have a home because I think that once they feel that way, once they feel that security and that safety, that really helps them to take off academically.

In their interviews, the teachers remained positive about the teacher-student relationships at Ordway ECHS and they mentioned a number of the programmatic structures found in most of the other ECHS, including advisories, tutoring and mentoring, seminar classes,



and parent led conferences. The teachers appeared to genuinely care about their students and the relationships they shared.

The real disconnect appeared in the student transcripts. A student offered the following description of the principal's treatment of students:

I was just going to say when you walk into this school, it's like walking on eggshells every day because you don't know who's going to be yelled at next. And you're almost scared to breath because, I'm gonna be honest. [Principal] has a temper and she takes it out on the students a lot. And she will get up in your face and yell. And there have been times when she's said things that I've thought have been so unprofessional but I just keep my mouth shut because I don't want to be the next one that's yelled at. And that, it just puts out a negative environment here at this school. And everyone just kind of is scared to say anything against it.

Following this comment in the transcript, other students contributed many similar statements which they mostly focused on the principal of the school. At a different point in the interview, students were discussing how they accessed academic support in the school and a student made the following statement about teachers, "I feel like as far as emotional support, like she said, the sophomore and freshman seminar teachers, to me I feel like they're the only teacher that you can really trust." And, at yet another place in the interview, a student commented on being frustrated with other students in the school as well:

And the thing is, a lot of those students that are here and are still failing classes and doing things to get in trouble and all this stuff, you know, not only are they hurting themselves but they're hurting the people around them because they put out a negative environment for everyone. Because when they get in trouble, all of us get in trouble because there's usually a lot of group punishment.

Thus, the students who participated in this focus group made negative comments about other students, the teachers—and most pointedly—the principal. During the student

interview, the researchers never asked the specific question from the protocol about the students' relationships with the adults in their school. Possibly, the researcher did not feel it would be necessary or appropriate after the many negative comments from the students which they volunteered without being asked. This was the only instance I noted in the study in which the researchers did not ask the relationship question. This most likely contributed to the absence of other information from the students about programs. Ordway ECHS students did mention clubs, peer mentoring, and the seminar classes as programs that existed in the school.

Despite the particularly negative nature of many of the comments from this student interview transcript, I must note that this was the only one of 19 in which students characterized their relationships in their school in a negative manner. In a general sense, while the comments from Albemarle ECHS were the most articulate and enthusiastically positive about teacher-student relationships, the remaining 17 student transcript were much more like Albemarle ECHS than Ordway ECHS. I would suggest that Ordway should serve as evidence that even a well-designed school model and a variety of programs or structures designed to promote positive relationships could not overcome the non-productive behaviors of such a school leader. It is also important to note that the focus group interview only represented the perspective of a limited number of students from Ordway ECHS, but the comments of all students within that group appeared to agree with the negative statements.

## **Closure**

In this chapter, I described the data from the 75 interview transcripts as it pertained to the four research questions for this study. The early college high school

model focuses on personalization as an important element in its design. This study looked at supportive relationships between teachers and students as one important component of personalization. In addition to the information above, the data revealed additional themes that contributed to the overall concept of personalization and added depth to the discussion about supportive relationships but did not fit neatly with the research questions. In particular, there were three themes I noted that are worth mentioning here: (1) the sense of family; (2) emphasis on group work and student to student support; and (3) reduced barriers to friendships.

Throughout the data, many participants indicated their experiences in the ECHS setting resembled a family as in these two comments from students at Calvert ECHS, “We’re more like a family here than you would be at a normal high school” and “So we started with 50, and we’ve kind of just started as a big family. We all know everybody’s business, and so we’re just—and we all get into arguments...” This student from Irving ECHS described the relationship with teachers as follows:

You're not scared of your parents. You're worried that you're going to disappoint them. You're going to let them down. And it's the same with our teachers. We feel like they're our second parents so we don't want to let them down.

A teacher from Quebec ECHS compared the students’ relationships to those of a family with the following statement, “They’ve been in all classes together, so they have that sense of family, which I love. Do they get along every day? No. Do they like each other every day? No.” The principal of Albemarle ECHS described deliberate efforts they made in their school to promote family-like behaviors such as a dinner with students, “So we had—for about 45 minutes or whatever we ate like a family, and we sat around—

because you're in your focus family, and you've got your grade family, and your school family, so it's all kind of extended family." And finally, one of the most insightful comments emerged from a student at Albemarle ECHS who stated, "I think that teenagers are teenagers and you're always going to have drama, but I guess here instead of being more like wanting to kill each other drama it's more like sisters and brothers kind of drama."

The second additional theme I noted was the emphasis teachers and principals placed on group work. While group work may not promote teacher-student relationships, it provided a venue for improving student-to-student relationships. Teachers and principals described their efforts regarding collaborative student work in many ways. A teacher from Harrison ECHS stated, "But this boy who was very disengaged at first, he got engaged when the group work started." A teacher from Calvert ECHS described, "The more hands on, the problem solving, or whether you saw in my room today, students working in groups. We try to get them in groups, thinking, problem solving, arguing but constructively, and trying to come to the right answer." The principal from Harrison ECHS describe the importance of group work as follows, "Working in groups—even though we have smaller classes than a traditional school, nobody knows anything as well as if they have to explain it to somebody else." There were many comments from students about group work being a regular practice which also appeared to lead to a culture where students supported each other both personally and academically. This comment from a student at Calvert ECHS captured it well:

It's kind of back to our whole motto. We're the crew, not passengers. There are no singled out students that are going to do their own thing.

We're going to function as a whole and we're going to make it happen as a whole. That's just the way it's going to be.

Thus, student group work may not be directly related to teacher-student relationships, but positive relationships may be a by-product of group work. The teachers' and principals' emphasis on the importance of collaboration created an environment for supportive personal relationships among all groups.

And finally, the third additional theme that emerged from the data came from student comments about the friendships they made at their ECHS. Many students commented that there appeared to be fewer barriers to developing relationships with different types of students and more notably, students they did not believe they would have befriended if they had attended a traditional high school. A student from Fessenden ECHS commented, "People that you don't think you would ever hang out with or ever talk to, you want to become like the closest friends." A student from Rodman ECHS described, "And people you never thought you'd be friends with in a regular high school. It's just like you sit back and think about it, 'If I went to [high school] I wouldn't even know you existed.' You'd have been just another face in the crowd." This student from Albemarle ECHS described the positive effect of this phenomenon as follows:

I don't think if I—if I wouldn't have come here I think I would have fallen into a bad crowd because my middle school friends were kind of known as the bad crowd. Honestly. So now that I moved here they didn't follow me here because they obviously didn't know the value of this school.

Overall, the data revealed that students in the early college high schools experienced supportive relationships with their teachers which reflected the intentions of their teachers and the principals of their schools who believed in the importance of such relationships. In chapter five, I will analyze the data through the lens of the theoretical

filters I discussed in earlier chapters to consider how the ideas generated by the participants might contribute to the work of educators and education leaders.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Introduction**

For this analysis of supportive teacher-student relationships in the early college high school setting, my goal was to deliver a rich description of students' relationship experiences along with observations about how principals and teachers contribute to those experiences. In chapter two I reviewed existing education and leadership theories to serve as a framework for analyzing supportive teacher-student relationships, and in chapter four I presented my description of what the data revealed. In this chapter I will merge the data with the theories to present how the data aligns with and hopefully contributes to a deeper understanding of the various theories I introduced earlier. Figure 1.1 provided a visual summary of the research topics I included in the conceptual framework for this study. The existing research I considered in chapter two included work in six distinct areas including: (1) ECHS Design Principles; (2) ECHS Performance Data; (3) Leadership Literature; (4) Relationships Literature; (5) Resilience Literature; (6) and finally, Giddens' Theory of Structuration. I will revisit these topics through the lens of the data I considered for this study.

### **Early College High School**

I did not design this study as an analysis of the ECHS model so much as I used ECHS data deliberately because of the model's focus on personalization as one of its important design principles. My goal was not to further establish the efficacy of the ECHS model, but to recognize it as effective and then analyze the one specific element of its design about personalization. The design principle of personalization suggests that teachers must know their students to be able to teach them effectively ([ncnewschools.org](http://ncnewschools.org),

2015). The existing quantitative data about the early college model suggests that students in early colleges outperform their peers in other settings (Berger, et al., 2009; Berger, et al., 2013; Edmunds, et al., 2011; Edmunds, 2012; Edmunds et al., 2012; Edmunds, 2013; Fischetti, McKain & Smith, 2011; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Kaniuka, 2012; Oliver, et al., 2010). This current study did not attempt to contribute to the quantitative understanding of student performance in ECHS, but the data did reveal that the student participants mostly reported positive teacher-student relationships as described in chapter four. Also, while this study did not include any basis for comparison with student experiences in non-ECHS settings, some students claimed their relationships in the ECHS setting were better when comparing them to previous experiences in comprehensive middle schools as in this comment from a student at Quebec ECHS describing ECHS teachers, “They, if you ask them, could probably tell you everybody’s name and something unique about them. And back in the regular middle school or going to the regular high school, I doubt a teacher could do that for everybody.”

The data also suggested that the other design principles may have influenced the positive relationships students reported having with their teachers. The six ECHS design principles (included at the end of chapter one) emphasize the importance of focusing on success for every student. The students often reported on the personalized support they received from teachers such as this comment from a student at Calvert ECHS talking about a teacher, “She has the winning mindset. There are no failures at this school. They help you. They will make you win. They won’t let you fail anything. It’s just not an option.” While this study focused specifically on the teacher-student relationship within



the design principle of personalization, it would be hard to separate the impact of the other design principles on the success of the students.

From a leadership perspective, the design principles provide guidance for principals and teachers in the ECHS setting. The fifth design principle is about purposeful design, and reads as follows, “Working from a purposeful design where the use of time, space and resources ensures that best practices become common practice” (ncnewschools.org, 2015). In chapter four, I highlighted a number of programs and practices within schools that appear to create opportunities for teacher-student relationships to develop. While the data I considered for this study does not include references to the origins of those programs in most of the schools, the fact that such commonalities exist—such as the number of schools that call their advisories “House”—suggested that some of the programs reflect the purposeful design of the ECHS model. Thus, the existence and continued operation of those programs within each ECHS reflects either a deliberate decision on the part of the principal to install such a program or at least the passive acceptance which also implies a degree of leadership agency.

Additionally, the fourth and sixth design principles each include language to suggest the importance of all students. Design principle four reads, “Redefining professionalism, creating a shared vision so that all school staff take responsibility for the success of every student” and design principle six reads, “Empowering shared leadership embedded in a culture of high expectations and a collaborative work environment to ensure the success of each student” (ncnewschools.org, 2015). This quote from a teacher at Brandywine ECHS captures both design principles in one simple observation, “Some of them don’t even have to search it out. We’ll go find them and say, ‘You need help.

You need to come see me. You need to come do this.” Under the umbrella of personalization the details that emerged around teacher-student relationship building included comments which made it difficult to separate social support from academic support because all three groups of participants included examples of both as important for supporting students. Such statements reflect both professionalism—principle four—and shared leadership on behalf of students—principle six.

### **Structuration**

I chose Giddens’ Theory of Structuration as a foundation for this article because of the way Giddens described the interplay of the agents with the existing yet changing structures in a social environment. Giddens captured the essence of that interplay in the following quote:

Analysing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction (Giddens, 1984, p. 25).

Figure 5.1 represents the convergence of this passage from Giddens and the findings from this study. For this study, the “social system” I analyzed was the web of relationships that exists in the early college high school setting. The relationships between the various agents in a school take on a structure of their own, while other programmatic structures in the schools influence those relationships as well. The relationships between the teachers and the students are the focus of this study. In addition to relationships between teachers and students, there are a number of other relationship structures that would exist within the ECHS social system including: principal-teacher relationships, principal-student relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, and student-student relationships. If I were to

### Social System of the ECHS Setting

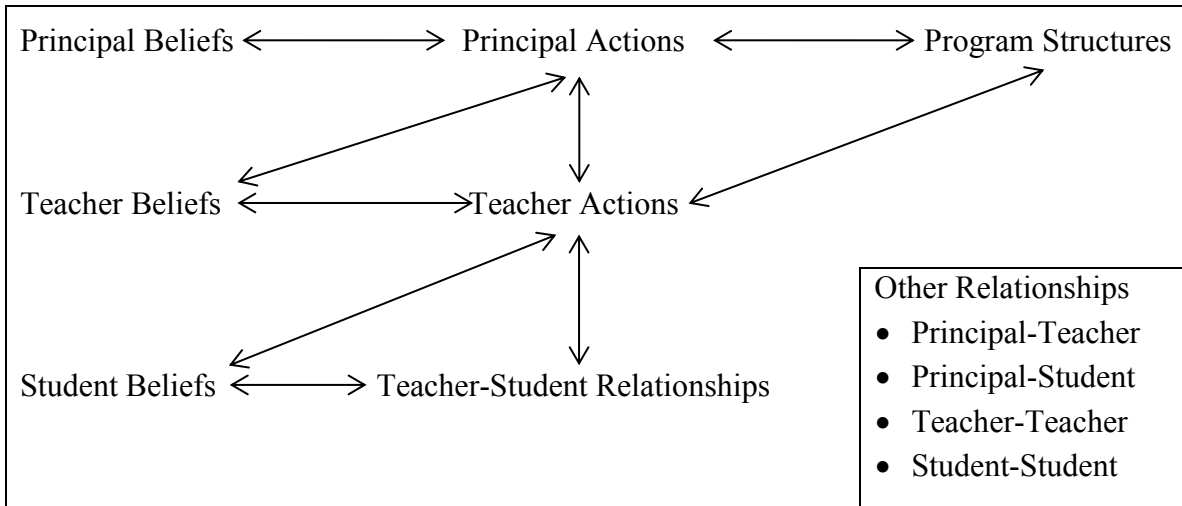


Figure 5.1

expand this line of thinking further, I might include parents and college faculty as well which would further multiply the combinations of relationship structures that could affect a students' experiences.

When Giddens said, "Analysing the structuration of social systems," he implied that he was describing the process by which daily interactions begin to take on describable patterns of behavior and thus become structures. The term structuration represents the process of agency creating structure or—in simpler terms—daily behaviors creating patterns of relationships between people. As I stated, the structures of interest in this study are the relationships between teachers and students. However, the programs in the schools which I view as more formalized social structures may also serve as the "action contexts" from the quote above. Since structures are the result of repeated actions or behaviors they are the product of both unconscious and conscious actions. In terms related to this study, the principals, teachers, or students may be behaving in a manner deliberately designed to promote supportive relationships. However, other

actions they engage in may also contribute to developing supportive relationships regardless of their awareness of that effect. Thus, both conscious and unconscious actions contribute to the production and reproduction of their relationship structures. Through the interview process, the participants in this study identified behaviors and school programs they believed contributed to supportive relationships, but it would be impossible to determine the degree to which the study participants were conscious of their actions as relationship supporting when they committed them. Giddens suggested that agents could influence structures by acting deliberately and thus the role of the leader in making teachers aware of relationship-creating behaviors should contribute to teachers' ability to act deliberately either by influencing the teachers' beliefs about relationships or changing their behaviors. This study revealed some of the actions ECHS principal and teacher participants in this study engaged in to create those supportive relationships in their schools.

The "knowledgeable activities of situated actors" from Giddens' quote above are the deliberate actions taken by principals and teachers to support relationships that I identified in chapter four. I interpreted the concept of knowledgeable activities of situated actors to mean the deliberate actions taken by those in a position to have an impact. In this case, the principals and the teachers are those situated actors, and I focused most of my attention in this study on their deliberate actions. The students themselves are situated actors as well with the agency to influence their teacher-student relationships, but they are not the intended audience for this study. Thus, I was not as interested in how they interacted with each other or how their actions influenced teachers, but it was important to capture how the teachers' actions affected them.

In chapter four I organized the data for research questions one, two, and three into three categories of codes which included the following: (1) stated beliefs, (2) deliberate actions, and (3) programs that provide space for relationships to develop. To clarify the third category, I use the term “space” to signify temporal, physical, and emotional space for students and teachers to interact.

The precursor to knowledgeable actions is knowledge itself. I chose to capture the first category of relationship codes—participants stated beliefs about teacher-student relationships—as a way of recognizing the teachers’ and principals’ awareness of them. I wanted to know how closely the principals’ and teachers’ thoughts about the importance of teacher-student relationships aligned with the existing research on the topic. I suspected that in some cases teachers’ and principals’ stated beliefs were either a precursor to deliberate action or possibly just another way of describing actions they engaged in. My later comparison between the adults’ stated beliefs and the students’ descriptions of their relationships with teachers would reveal how well the adults’ beliefs matched their actions.

Many of the principals’ and teachers’ comments about their relationship beliefs and actions corresponded to themes that emerged in my earlier review of the existing research on teacher-student relationships. Existing research on teacher-student relationships supports many of the themes that emerged during the data analysis. All three groups commented on the importance of teachers communicating to their students that they care about them personally and academically which is a well-supported concept in the existing research (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003; Calabrese, Goodvin & Niles, 2005; Foster, 2008; Knesting & Waldron, 2006; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; McHugh, et

al., 2013; Ongaga, 2010; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). Two additional concepts that emerged in all of the groups were the importance of developing trust between teachers and students (Cornelius-White, 2007; Corrigan, Klein & Isaacs, 2010; Gregory and Ripski, 2008; Phillippo, 2012; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011), and the importance of getting respect by giving respect (Handford & Leithwood, 2013; and Ongaga, 2010). Another of the relationship themes that emerged from just the teacher interviews included the importance of listening (Certo, Cauley & Chafin, 2003; Hallinan, 2008; and Johnson, 2008; and Ongaga, 2010). And, two important themes that emerged specifically from the students' perspective were the importance of having and maintaining appropriate boundaries in a teacher-student relationship (McHugh, et al., 2013; Morales 2010; Phillippo, 2012), and the concept that supportive relationships help students build academic confidence (Ongaga, 2010).

The evidence from the teachers' and principals' comments during the interviews revealed they possessed knowledge of the elements necessary to help establish supportive teacher-student relationships. So, the next test against Giddens' theory was to identify knowledgeable actions. The second category of relationship codes I gathered for each group described their deliberate actions. Table 5.1 provides a summary of the deliberate actions each group described in their interviews. The leadership research I reviewed in chapter two provides some support for the actions taken by the principals. Leithwood's dimensions of transformational leadership presented elements such as (1) providing appropriate models, which aligns with modelling supportive relationships for the teachers; (2) fostering acceptance of group goals, which aligns with seeking feedback; (3) providing individualized support, which aligns with providing open access and

### Summary of Deliberate Actions by Group

Deliberate Actions Taken by Principals to Promote Relationships	Deliberate Actions Taken by Teachers to Promote Relationships	Behaviors of Teachers that Students Identified as Supportive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modelled supportive relationships</li> <li>• Maintained visibility in the school</li> <li>• Provided open access to teachers and students</li> <li>• Sought feedback</li> <li>• Trained teachers about relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learned about students' lives</li> <li>• Provided students access to teachers</li> <li>• Initiated support for students in need</li> <li>• Conducted individual conferences with students</li> <li>• Communicated with parents</li> <li>• Collaborated with other teachers to monitor students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provided open access</li> <li>• Helped</li> <li>• Provided clarity with work</li> <li>• Recognized different learning styles</li> <li>• Initiated support for students in need</li> <li>• Communicated care</li> <li>• Maintained high expectations</li> <li>• Involved parents</li> </ul>

Table 5.1

maintaining visibility in the school; and (4) providing intellectual stimulation, which aligns with training the teachers (Leithwood, 1994, p. 507). The qualities of openness and teacher empowerment which aligned with the principal actions from Table 5.1 had support in the leadership literature related to trust (Chughtai & Buckley, 2009; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Moye, Henkin & Egley, 2005). It is important to note that the research about trust in principals relates to the relationships between principals and teachers and does not involve student perceptions of trust.

The deliberate actions teachers identified for themselves appeared to be best aligned with Avolio and Bass' elements of transformational leadership. While none of the actions capture the element of charismatic leadership, all six actions included in the

center column of Table 5.1 align with either individualized consideration or intellectual stimulation which are Avolio and Bass' other two transformational elements (1989). A discussion of teacher leadership is beyond the scope of this study, but many commonalities emerged between the review of leadership literature, the ECHS design principles related to shared leadership, and the practices around supportive teacher behaviors to suggest similarities between teaching and leadership. It is also relevant to note that transformational leadership focuses on the relationship between the leader and the follower which also parallels the focus of this study (Northouse, 2010). The teacher behaviors the students described—which appear in column three of Table 5.1—mostly appeared in my analysis above of the relationship behaviors I reviewed in the section on the students' beliefs about relationships.

One pattern that emerged in the principal transcripts led to an interesting question about the degree to which principals' relationships with individual students may interfere with teachers' efforts to build supportive relationships with their students. In chapter two, I discussed how the quantitative research thus far has not produced results that clearly tie principal leadership behaviors to student achievement. The work of Chin (2007), Griffith (2003), and Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) found results affecting teacher outcomes such as positive working conditions and job satisfaction, but did not find much evidence that those leadership behaviors improved student performance. These conclusions in the data do not necessarily mean that principals' behaviors do not influence student outcomes, but that it is difficult to establish such a link through research. However, these results may also suggest that the principals should focus more deliberately on working with teachers. While reviewing the principal interview



transcripts a pattern began to emerge where some principals spoke far more about their individual relationships with students than about the deliberate efforts they made to promote supportive relationships between teachers and students. I was most struck by the principal of Kenyon ECHS who stated, “We have that relationship piece down with our students. We have it down so much that I feel like that it impedes on my time as a prin—doing the other principal things because it’s like open door policy.” Later in the interview the same principal was describing the amount of time spent addressing individual student interactions and stated, “And that’s another shift too that other principals have told me. They’ve reflected upon that that’s actually a teacher’s job, not my job. I constantly call parents about kids not having their homework and things.” In this case, the principal was coming to a realization about the role of the leader in sustaining supportive relationships between teachers and students. In the rest of the interview the principal did not include many details about deliberate relationship strategies or programs in the school that worked to promote relationship building between the teachers and students. I could not tell from the other interviews from Kenyon ECHS if structures were lacking or if the participants just failed to describe them. Even the interview with the students described generally positive relationships among staff and students, but did not provide much detail about structures that supported relationships in the school. This pattern of principals focusing more on their own relationships with the students rather than those between teachers and students may have been a function of the wording in the interview protocol question. The second half of the first question about relationships for principals read, “Please describe the relationships you have with students.” The follow-up question read, “What is your school doing to build positive

relationships between teachers and students?” (Appendix C). The explanation may be simply that principals focused on the first question and did not take the time to address the second part as thoroughly. I already noted that one of the positive actions principals took to support teacher-student relationships was to model those relationships themselves. However, if—as the leadership literature suggests—principals have greater influence over their teachers than they do over their students, perhaps they should be focusing more on their capacity-building efforts for their staff and leave the actual relationships to the teachers.

In addition to the relationship structures described above, there are others in the school environment that supported teacher-student relationships, including: (1) supportive relationships between teachers and the principal; (2) supportive relationships between students and the principal; (3) collaborative relationships among the teachers; and then, (4) supportive relationships among the students. While these structures were not the main focus of this study, they did appear to contribute to the conditions that made supportive teacher-student relationships possible. The interview data revealed evidence of all four additional structures in the ECHS setting. The principal from Quebec ECHS described welcoming teachers and students, “A lot of your little quick writes as you walked around the first week of school were, ‘Tell me about yourself’. If it’s a returning teacher and returning students, ‘Well, what did you do over the summer?’ to try to catch up.” And, the principal of Calvert ECHS described supporting teachers, “My role as a leader is to make sure they have what they need in their classroom, whether it’s making contact with anybody on the community college side—so I’m just mainly their support piece here.” And then, the principal of Legation ECHS explained, “I think that if you

don't connect with all people emotionally, then you don't get but limited success." There were also many examples from the principals about how they supported the relationships among their teachers such as providing common planning time, requiring teachers to engage in instructional rounds, or conducting book studies. This comment by a teacher at Albemarle ECHS illustrated how collaboration among teachers led to support for students, "What I do like about my team are the students that I don't mesh with the best, there's somebody on my team that does get that student." And finally, student comments provided evidence of the social system of supportive relationships among students such as this comment from a student at Ellicott ECHS who explained, "Because you might be sitting next to somebody who don't get it, you just teach them so the teacher doesn't even know that they didn't get it at that point in time." Or, as in this comment from a student at Albemarle ECHS, "I feel like the other students help us out too, because we all realize that everyone learns different and that we need to help each other out to be successful."

Giddens referenced a "diversity of action contexts" which I interpreted as the places where social systems have an opportunity to develop (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). One semantic challenge I encountered during this analysis was how the word structure relates to the programs in the schools such as advisories and mentoring. In the tables, figures, and chapter text, I describe them as programs that provide a space for relationships to develop. I suggest that the programs serve as both structures and action contexts as described above by Giddens. They are structures in that the interactions that occur in these programs follow both spoken and understood patterns of behavior as in other social structures, so space can mean temporal or emotional space. However, they are also something more because they may also represent a physical location, hence a space for

the relationships to evolve. The teacher-student relationship structures also follow both spoken and understood patterns of behavior, but they are less bound by a designated space. This distinction may only be one of degree, because location appears to influence all relationship structures. Teachers and students may interact differently in different settings. Throughout this study I have differentiated between relationship structures and program structures. This distinction is my own rather than Giddens’.

The ECHS leadership established a variety of programs to bolster the relationships between the teachers and students in their schools. The programs that emerged from the data as supporting teacher-student relationships included activities outside school, clubs, advisories, seminar classes, tutoring, and student-led conferences. These programs all create space for the students and the teachers to interact either regularly or sporadically in settings that are less formal than a regular course. All of these programs provided teachers with opportunities to gain insight into the lives, interests, and abilities of the students. A teacher from Kenyon ECHS stated, “We do the field trips and things like that allow you to see the kids outside of school, get a different take on them.” A student from Davenport ECHS described the relationships that developed in the advisory, “The Campfire teacher is a great support. A lot of kids share stuff with the teachers, too much with teachers.” Students and teachers offered many comments about the seminar classes as personalized supports for academics, but this teacher from Porter ECHS also recognized it as a time to enhance relationships, “So in Seminar, I learned everybody. I learned about them, what they like.”

Where the programs existed, the evidence suggested they positively contributed to the development of supportive teacher-student relationships. However, the question of

the programs' existence related to a function of the leadership intentions to prioritize the creation of environments supportive of teacher-student relationships. In some cases the principals inherited the programs as they replaced an outgoing principal who may have put them in place so the presence of such programs may not have been a product of deliberate actions, but in all cases there was a decision to initiate the programs at some point. At Rodman ECHS the school experienced a principal change in the summer prior to the year of the interviews. One teacher described how the new principal's lack of focus on relationships along with some program changes damaged the conditions for teacher-student relationships. In response to the question, "What do you see the school as doing to help build those relationships as well?" the teacher responded as follows:

Honestly, it's left up to each individual teacher, from my impression for this year. Last year, we had a built-in seminar time. It was an hour to 90-minute class in the middle of the day, and we worked with that specific group. We don't have that luxury, unfortunately, this year, and I can see the difference between the sophomores and the freshmen.

At another point in this interview, the teacher described how parent participation had diminished due to changes in the activities in the school as well. The student participants at Rodman ECHS were all sophomores, so they had developed stronger connections with their teachers in the previous year which may have carried over into their comments. They made multiple comments about how they established friendships at the school they may not have had in a different environment:

And people you never thought you'd be friends with in a regular high school. It's just like you sit back and think about it, 'If I went to [high school] I wouldn't even know you existed.' You'd have been just another face in the crowd.

But, later when asked about their relationship with the new freshman class, they stated, “The school dance that we just had not too long ago—I think that’s the first time we’ve ever gotten together.” The students conveyed a sense that there had been no effort to provide opportunities for the groups of students to interact to develop the types of relationships they had come to expect when they were freshmen. In the principal interview, the evidence that relationships might have been slipping took another form. The principal’s interview revealed a lack of deliberate focus on the part of the principal. The principal professed the importance of relationships, but made no comments about deliberate actions or structures to support them. Comments such as this one which was a response from the principal following a question about structures to support relationships in the school demonstrated a lack of deliberate focus, “So now we have teachers who kind of adopt certain kids, and not all the good kids, but not all kids have been adopted, and that’s the problem.” In this next statement the principal recognized something should have been in place, but still had not established something, “I don’t think any kid here feels like he doesn’t have someone he can go to, but they still need that thing that happens on a regular occurrence.” Thus, the interviews from Rodman ECHS demonstrated that the principal allowed the program that had been in place to end without creating a replacement that would provide opportunities for the relationships to grow. The example of Rodman ECHS appeared to be an outlier among the ECHS data, but the change in principals which led to a lack of focus on relationships served as a clear example of the influence a leader may have through either deliberate actions or a lack thereof.

Detailed Version of the ECHS Social System

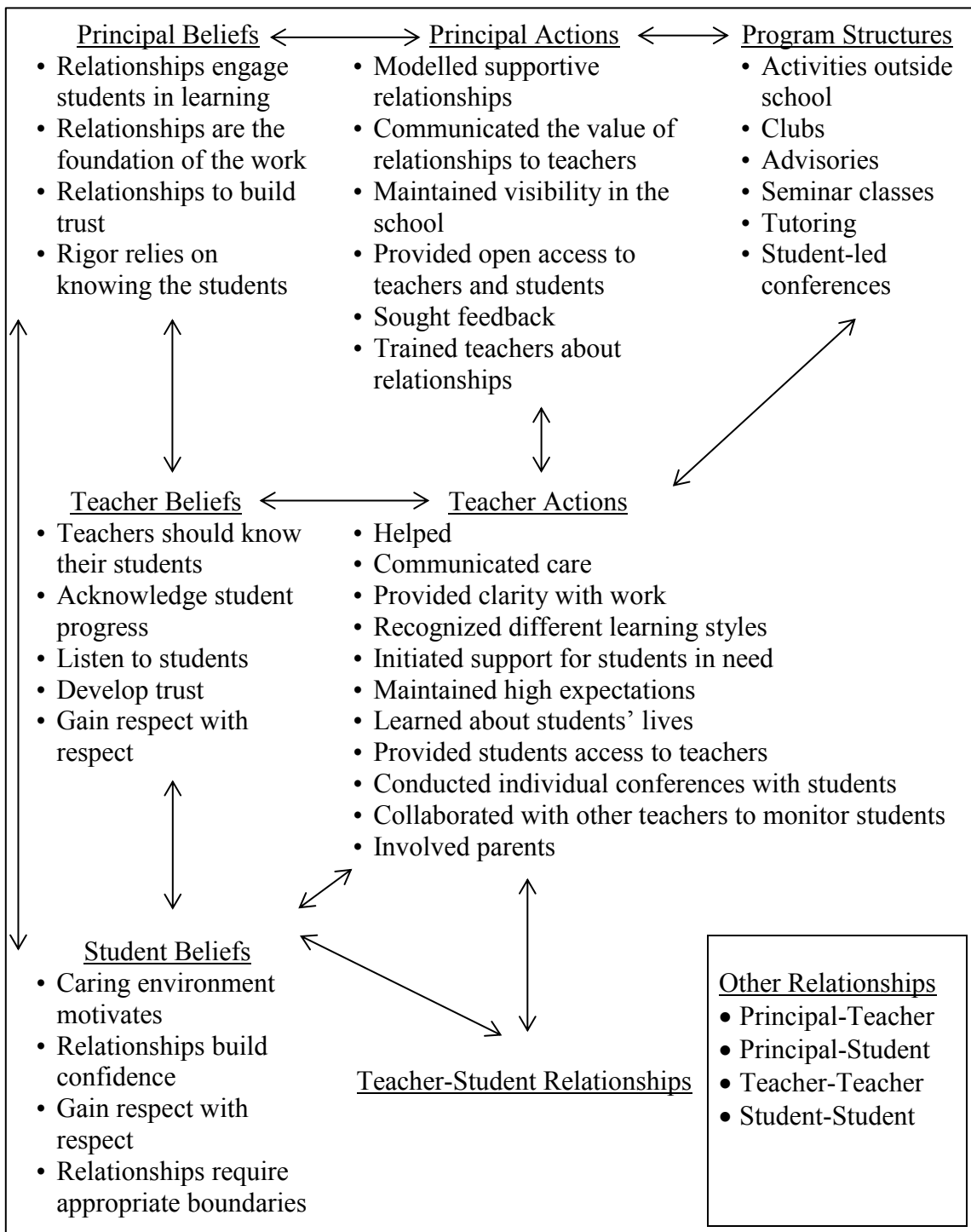


Figure 5.2

The detailed version of the ECHS social system I presented in Figure 5.2 repeats the same framework I presented in Figure 5.1 and includes the details that emerged from the participant interviews. To be clear, I did not present these findings as an exhaustive or exclusive list of the beliefs, actions, and programs that support teacher-student relationships, but only as the details that emerged from the data I reviewed for this study. Existing research suggested there are many other beliefs, behaviors, and programs that could also apply here, but the relationship among the elements of the ECHS social system I captured may be informative for school leaders.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study**

Of course, one important limitation of this study rests in the fact that I was not able to customize the questions to the participants because I employed pre-collected data. I would have asked fewer questions on other topics and focused more on the relationship questions with particular probing on the deliberate actions principals and teachers engaged in. However, in retrospect, if I had designed the interview protocols myself, my questions may have been too focused. I might not have gained the insight into some of the other important elements that revealed structures related to teacher-student relationships. Many of the participants did not connect structures such as advisories or clubs to relationships, so if it were not for the other non-relationship questions in the protocols, I might not have seen the same patterns. That being said, there would still be room for a more focused study of relationships in the ECHS setting. If I were to design it, I would focus more closely on questions about behaviors and traits of teachers who develop supportive relationships.



There were many times throughout this study when I began developing theories about which schools would outperform others based on the apparent success they revealed in their interview commentary. This study had no quantitative element to make performance claims about schools despite how the interview data may make them sound. For example, I have no quantitative support to suggest that Albemarle ECHS would outperform Ordway ECHS on any student performance or school performance measure. A mixed-methods comparative case study of those two schools might reveal an interesting relationship between supportive relationships in schools and student performance outcomes.

Another question I pondered throughout the study related to how much the size of the school impacted the relationship outcomes. I noted many references in which participants mentioned the small school size as important to creating an environment for supportive relationships. Many studies have analyzed the impact of school size such as Van Maele and Van Houtte's 2011 study in which they found that school size influences the relationships between teachers and students. It would be interesting to design a study to determine if the practices that emerged from this study as supportive of relationships could be beneficial in larger school settings.

Another area for further study would be to attempt to measure the effect sizes of the many other relationships that appear in a school's social system. While this study focused primarily on the teacher-student relationship, it would be interesting to learn how that structure's impact would compare to the other relationship structures I identified in Figure 5.2. In the ECHS setting the relationships between the students and the professors and the relationships between the teachers and the professors appear to be evolving as

schools grapple with how much they should be supporting students and how much they should be requiring students to assume more personal responsibility. The data I used for this study included many interesting thoughts on this topic, but that would require an entirely different study.

And finally, a question that may serve as a topic for further study or a question to influence policy relates to the role supportive relationships play in student outcomes. A question that occurred to me during the study is whether we seek to build strong teacher-student relationships merely as a means to improved student achievement as reflected in grades or test scores, or whether the relationships are an end in themselves. Should ensuring our students learn to develop positive relationships be a part of a larger goal or a means to an end? School districts' mission or vision statements often include terms such as citizenship and character but those are difficult domains to measure. In the opening quote on page one, Brooks stated that "we've had disappointing results year after year." It is not clear if he meant schools do not get adequate achievement scores or if he meant something bigger about schools not developing the type of adults our society desires. For the purposes of this study, I chose to view supportive teacher-student relationships as a means to greater student achievement, but relationships may need to be central to a bigger discussion about what success looks like when measuring student outcomes.

### **Considerations/conclusions**

In this analysis I have attempted to provide a rich description of the supportive teacher student relationships found in the ECHS setting along with descriptions of many of the factors that help create them. Giddens suggested the following, "There is no mechanism of social organization or social reproduction identified by social analysts

which lay actors cannot also get to know about and actively incorporate into what they do” (Giddens, 1984, p. 284). Giddens indicated the actions which create structures are a product of both conscious and unconscious decisions. By closely analyzing the behaviors of principals, teachers, and students, I hoped to make some of their unconscious actions more evident so those actions could be captured and made more deliberate. The data from this study suggested that there are deliberate actions school leaders can take to contribute to a supportive environment for students. In their policy implications section, McClure, Yonezawa, and Jones (2010) suggested, “The cultural or social component of schooling must be explicitly addressed and woven throughout the school-community, rather than isolated within a single course or area of the school” (p. 13). This appears to be sound advice as the establishment of programs to help develop supportive relationships between teachers and students is only one element in a comprehensive approach to personalizing an educational program. Leaders must consider how they provide training opportunities for teachers to learn about creating supportive relationships with students and they must work daily to ensure they model supportive behaviors and expect such behaviors of their staff.

If I were to distill my recommendations for school leaders hoping to replicate such supportive relationships down to a manageable list I would suggest focusing on a few key areas. My first recommendation for this study is for leaders to reflect on the role they play in helping teachers develop more supportive relationships with their students. As school leaders, principals must model the behaviors they expect of their teachers with regard to establishing supportive relationships with students. Yet, while modeling appropriate behavior is essential for leaders, it is not adequate to ensure such

relationships develop in their schools. In the data it appeared that those principals who spent the most time discussing their own relationships with students had the least to contribute with regard to deliberate actions they took to foster supportive relationships between their teachers and students. My review of the leadership literature suggested that leaders have a greater impact when working to develop the capacity of their staff to increase student outcomes. So, modeling supportive relationships is important, but I contend school leaders will have a greater impact by considering the next three recommendations.

Second, be thoughtful about the programs in place in a school to ensure there are ample opportunities for teachers and students to share both structured and less-structured time to provide a context for relationships to grow. The idea of providing physical, temporal, or emotional space for teachers and students to have opportunities to interact and develop supportive relationships is important. All three participant groups in this study discussed their informal interactions as times that strengthened their relationships. Yet, while providing space for interpersonal interactions is important, principals and teachers should remember that what students appear to desire more than friendly relationships is for their teachers to know them as learners.

My third recommendation is to provide teachers the space and time to collaborate on behalf of students to allow for both academic and personal support. The teachers in this study noted that certain teachers made better connections with some students more than others. The time teachers have to share with each other about the needs of individual students provides them with opportunities to ensure there is support for every student. This is also an area where the small environment of a school may have an

impact. The schools in this study are small by design and the small school size appears to contribute to their ability to personalize the experience for all students. While all school leaders may not have the ability to make their schools smaller, they take deliberate steps to ensure all students have staff members looking out for them. This is an example of where more deliberate action would be necessary to overcome or influence a structural challenge. A principal in a larger school would need to be more deliberate to ensure all students have teachers collaborating on their behalf.

My final recommendation for this study is to provide capacity-building opportunities for teachers to learn and reflect on the elements that contribute to supportive teacher-student relationships. A goal of this study is to expose actions some educators employ unconsciously and teach others to engage in them more consciously. In chapter four, I included a quote from the principal of Albermarle ECHS who described coaching her teachers on how to interact with families and students at a school picnic. That principal took actions that many people may engage in unconsciously in similar situations and made them more conscious for the staff members. The findings in this study provide a ready-made framework for designing training for teachers. First, increase their discursive awareness of the importance of teacher-student relationships by introducing them to research that supports the importance of such relationships. Second, engage in discussion with teachers about deliberate actions they take to promote supportive teacher-student relationships. And, third, consider the programs or structures in a school or a school schedule that provide space for relationships to develop.

I posit that fostering supportive relationships within a school setting requires deliberate thought and action on the part of principals and teachers, and the framework I

have presented during this analysis might assist educators in grasping the complexity of such a task. The early college high school model provided a useful lens for studying teacher-student relationships because personalization is a deliberate element of the ECHS design. A broader policy implication for this study might be to consider personalization more deliberately in other school models as well.

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## Appendix A: Site Visit Protocol

### *Learn and Earn* Early College High School Research Study

#### Site Visit Protocol for Schools

Thank you again for participating in the *Learn and Earn* Early College High School Research Study. As you may remember, part of the study participation requirements is a two-day site visit to your school. Researchers from the *Learn and Earn* Early College High School Research Study will be visiting your school this year at a time convenient for you and your staff. Two researchers will conduct the two-day site visit. The researchers will need to meet with different members of your school community. Each interview and observation will take approximately one hour and the interview will be audio-taped. While some of the interviews can take place simultaneously (with the exception of the student focus group, which must have two researchers), we have found that it works best to have two researchers present. As a result, please try to schedule things in such a way that the researchers can participate together. Below are the specifics for the different components.

**Campus Tour**—We would like to begin the visit with a tour of your campus, to help us orient ourselves, to look at the placement of the ECHS campus on the college campus, and learn about school resources. You may choose whomever you like to conduct the tour.

**Two Teachers**—We would like to both interview these teachers and observe their classrooms. The observations will take place prior to the interview and will be of their core subject class. We would like one of the teachers to be a mathematics teacher if possible. The second teacher should be someone who has been identified by school administration as using innovative strategies and curriculum in his/her classroom. As stated before, these interviews will take approximately one hour. As with all the staff interviews, these interviews can take place simultaneously if needed, although we would prefer if both researchers could be participate together in all interviews and observations.

**Two College Instructors**—We would like both of these instructors to teach either mathematics or English and be teaching a college credit course for the Early College



students. We would like one of the instructors to be someone who has been identified as having a close relationship with the ECHS and the other instructor to be someone who has had ECHS students but is not actively involved with the ECHS.

**Principal**—We would like to interview the Principal of the school. Again this interview will take approximately one hour and can be arranged at the convenience of the Principal.

**School/College Liaison**—This interview will also take approximately an hour.

**Student Focus Group**—We would like to interview 4-6 students who are upper classmen (Sophomores, Juniors and Seniors) who have taken College courses. This focus group will take approximately 70-90 minutes. This interview must be scheduled at a time when other interviews are not taking place so that both researchers can attend and take notes and tape the conversations. If the juniors and seniors in your school did not complete consent forms to participate in the study, you will need to send home consent forms (attached) with any of those students. Only students with completed consent forms will be able to participate in the interview. We recommend that you send consent forms home with 10 students to ensure that you have the appropriate number of students to participate in the focus group.

If you have any questions about the site visit, please contact Julie Edmunds at SERVE Center at 336-574-8727.

Thank you so much for your participation in the study. We look forward to learning from everything you are doing.

## **Appendix B: Data Sharing Agreement**

### **MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN SEAN BULSON AND SERVE CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO**

Whereas, SERVE Center has substantial data from the Study of the Efficacy of North Carolina's Early College High School Model that would benefit from additional analyses

And Mr. Sean Bulson is completing his dissertation on the topic of early colleges,

Now, therefore, the parties mutually agree as follows:

#### **I. SERVE Center agrees:**

They will provide Sean Bulson with de-identified transcript and observation data from the Study of the Efficacy of Early College High Schools and the Follow-up Study.

#### **II. Mr. Bulson agrees:**

- A. He will follow the UNCG Policy and Procedure for Ethics in Research and the UNCG Policy on the Protection of Human Subjects in Research, as required by the Institutional Review Board overseeing this research project. He will also obtain IRB approval from the institution at which he is enrolled in his graduate program.
- B. All data will be stored on a password-protected computer.
- C. There will be no attempt to identify the schools or individuals who provided the data. If Mr. Bulson inadvertently discovers the identity of any of the schools, he will keep this information confidential.
- D. No information that would identify a district, school, or individual will be mentioned in any report.
- E. He will use these data only for the completion of his dissertation and any publications arising directly from the dissertation.

- F. Prior to publication, he will provide a copy of the dissertation or any publications resulting from the dissertation to Dr. Julie Edmunds at SERVE Center. Dr. Edmunds will review the publications for the sole purpose of ensuring that schools or staff cannot be identified; all analyses and conclusions will not be subject to her review and approval.
- G. All datasets will not be shared with anyone other than SERVE Center staff.
- H. All data files will be destroyed upon completion of the dissertation.
- I. All publications will include the following statement (in the main text or a footnote) relative to the source of the data: This publication uses data collected by the SERVE Center at UNCG as supported by the Institute of Education Sciences under grants numbered #R305R060022 and #R305A110064. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the SERVE Center or the Institute of Education Sciences.

### **III. The Parties Agree**

*A. This MOU will be in effect from August 1, 2013 through August 1, 2015 unless amended in writing and signed by all parties hereto.*

FOR SERVE Center :

Terri Shelton

Acting Executive Director, SERVE Center at UNCG

Gateway University Research Park, Dixon Bldg.

5900 Summit Avenue

Browns Summit, NC 27214

Phone: 336-574-8727

Fax: 919-402-1617

FOR SEAN BULSON:

OFFICIAL CONTACT INFO.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties state and affirm that they are duly authorized to bind the respected entities designated below as of the day and year indicated.

---

Sean Bulson

---

Date

**SERVE CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT  
GREENSBORO**

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Terri Shelton

Acting Executive Director

---

Date

## Appendix C: Principal Interview Protocol

### *Learn and Earn* Early College High School Research Study

#### **Principal Interview Protocol: Academic Year 2009–2010**

**Principal's Name:**

**ECHS Name:**

**Date of Interview:**

**Start Time:**

**End Time:**

**Interviewer's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Please tell me a little about your background and experience.

*[Probe for former content area, former principalships, length of time as principal]*

#### **Role of the Principal**

2. From the perspective of an administrator, what do you believe the goals of this school are?

*[Probe: Keep in mind design principles. Probes can include questions on College/HS Integration, the Curriculum (rigor and relevance), student support, professional enhancement, and site management]*

3. In addition to the Leadership Institute for High School Redesign workshops, have you attended any other professional development provided by the New Schools Project in the last year or two? What impact have these workshops had on the implementation of the Core Principles of the ECHS?

4. Have you attended any other professional development that was not provided by the New Schools Project?

5. Describe your relationship with your College/University partner. Do you meet regularly with College Administration? *[Probe: Who do you meet with at the administration level at the college/university? What kind of resources are provided to you (monetarily, space, etc.)? How does the IHE view the ECHS as part of the College/University]*

***The next series of questions will focus on your perceptions of the implementation of the ECHS Design Principles.***

## **Purposeful Design/Professionalism**

6. Please describe for me your role in the ECHS.

*[Probes: How are you an instructional leader? What are your other roles as leader of the school? Do you model lessons in the classroom? Do you work with teachers on curriculum? How did your role evolve during the life of ECHS? Make sure the Principal provides specifics.]*

7. Describe for me how your faculty and staff collaborate with each other and the larger community to provide relevant and rigorous instruction to the students at the ECHS. What have you incorporated into the design of the school to encourage these collaborations? What have been the barriers?

8. Describe for me the collaboration that your teachers have with the college instructors. What strategies/activities have you integrated into the school to encourage these collaborations? What have been the barriers? *[Probe: What could have been done to ease or remove these barriers?]*

9. Describe for me the professional development provided to your teachers. How are your teachers involved in the decision process in selecting and implementing the professional development?

## **Powerful Teaching and Learning**

### **Classroom Instruction**

***Rigor has been a strong focus of the work in the ECHS.***

10. How do you define rigor?

11. How do you incorporate rigorous instructional practices into your school? What do you do as the instructional leader of the ECHS to encourage rigorous instructional practices?

***The next questions are to provide information on the use of assessment and assessment data in your school.***

12. Describe how you encourage teachers to use assessment to guide instruction in the ECHS. How do you use the assessment data in collaborating with teachers and staff to improve/enhance curriculum?

*[Probe: When discussing assessment this includes both teacher created assessments and statewide assessment.]*

## **Personalization**

*The next questions will talk about Student Support. As you know, a key component is to provide personalization so that the school can meet the needs of the students. The next questions will focus on this personalized learning experience for students.*

13. Developing strong relationships with students is an expectation of this model. Please describe the relationships you have with students.

- a. What is your school doing to build positive relationships between teachers and students?

14. Now we want to think about personalization relative to supporting students. I want you to think about a student who is struggling in your school. This student may be struggling because of both academic and social/emotional issues.

- a. How would you as a principal help this student?
- b. What kinds of supports are in place at the school level to help these students?

18. What challenges still remain for your school in effectively supporting students in their high school and college experiences? What additional supports would you like to put in place that will improve the students' high school and college experiences?

*The next questions will focus on the culture of your ECHS. Because of the unique setting and requirements of the school, the researchers are interested in finding out about the culture of the school.*

## **Ready for College**

19. Do you feel that this ECHS promotes a college-going culture for the students who attend? If so, how?

Follow up: Many of your students are first generation college goers. Do you have a sense of how many of them would not go to college if they had not have this option?

[Probe: *Make sure the Principal discusses guidance for after graduation options (application process, SAT/ACT requirements, etc. Is there economic or other reasons for why so many of your students would not consider college option if they were not here?)*]

20. How would you describe those students who are served well by the ECHS model?

Follow Up: How would you describe any students who aren't served well?

21. Please describe how the parents of your students are integrated into the school culture. What kind of information and activities are provided to support the parents in helping their children be prepared for college?

22. Are there other activities and information for parents that you would like to see implemented/provided?

23. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your school?

Thank you so much for your participation in this interview.



**Appendix D: Teacher Interview Protocol**

*Learn and Earn* Early College High School Research Study

**Teacher Interview Protocol: Academic Year 2009–2010**

**Teacher's Name:**

**Grades and Subjects Taught:**

**ECHS Name:**

**ECHS Principal Name:**

**Date of Interview:**

**Start Time:**

**End Time:**

**Interviewer's Name:**

The first set of questions concern your background. We will move through these fairly quickly so that we can spend the bulk of the time on your perceptions of this school.

1. Please tell me a little about your teaching background and experience.

*[Probe for subjects certified in, eligibility to teach college courses, high school and/or college subjects teaching. How long have you been teaching?].*

2. Are you currently or have you been a member of the School Reflection Team that completed the High School Innovation Project Self Assessment? If so, please describe your role?

3. What, if any, professional development provided by the New Schools Project have you attended over the past year or two?

4. Outside of the New Schools Professional Development, please describe any other professional development in which you have participated. How did you decide to participate in this professional development?

(Probes: types; content; when were the professional development sessions offered? Were they school-wide focused? Number of hours of PD have you attended both ECHS and other? ) \_\_\_\_\_

4. From your perspective, what are the goals of this school?

***The next series of questions will focus on your perceptions of the implementation of the ECHS Design Principles.***

### **Purposeful Design/Professionalism**

5. To what extent are you involved in decision-making about the ECHS? (e.g., College/HS Integration curriculum, teaching methods, resource/management, and other decisions)?

*[If they feel they are involved in the decision-making] What effect has your participation had (Probe if positive e.g., sense of ownership or negative e.g., overworked)?*

6. In the structure of the school day, how much time do you spend collaborating with other teachers in the ECHS?

*[Probes: Are there times set aside for collaboration with teachers in your content area? With other outside your teachers?]*

7. Have you collaborated with instructors from the College in your content area or other content areas?

*[If they have collaborated] Please describe the nature of your collaboration (what do you collaborate on and how)?*

*[If they have not collaborated] What do you think the barriers to collaborating with the college faculty have been?*

*[Probe: Make sure they provide specifics—ask for specifics]*

### **Powerful Teaching and Learning**

#### **Classroom Instruction**

8. If I were to ask you to describe a typical class, how would you describe your instructional style?

*[Probes: Do your students take notes from your lectures? Do you use small group work? Do you use outside materials? (manipulatives if mathematics) Do you work individually with students?]*

***Rigor has been a strong focus of the work in the ECHS and other school.***

9. How do you define rigor?

How do you incorporate rigorous instructional practices into your classroom?

***The next questions are to provide information on the ways that you assess the students in your classroom.***

10. Describe how you use assessments in your classroom.

*[Probe: What type of assessments do you use (selected responses, extended response performance/portfolio assessments). Are there formative assessments?]*

### **Personalization**

***The next questions will talk about your experiences and perceptions of Student Support. As you know, a key component is to provide personalization so that the school can meet the needs of the students. The next questions will focus on this personalized learning experience for students.***

11. Developing strong relationships with students is an expectation of this model. Please describe the relationships you have with students.

a. What is your school doing to build positive relationships between teachers and students?

12. Now we want to think about personalization relative to supporting students. I want you to think about a student who is struggling in your classroom. This student may be struggling because of academic or social/emotional issues or both.

a. How would you as a teacher help this student?

*[Probe: How do you identify that this student is struggling (what criteria does the teacher use)? How often would you meet with the student? Do you offer these supports to all of your students?]*

b. What kind of supports are in place at the school level to help this student?

*[Probe: How often would the student receive these services? Who provides them? Are these supports provided to all of your students?]*

c. Describe for me the impact that these supports have had on your students.

*[Probe: Do you think that the student has been more engaged? Has the student learned skills to use in other classes from these supports? Has the student stayed at the ECHS because these supports were in place?]*

13. What other supports do you think struggling students need?

**The next questions will focus on the culture of your ECHS. Because of the unique setting and requirements of the school, the researchers are interested in finding out about the culture of the school.**

**Ready for College**

14. Do you feel that this ECHS promotes a college-going culture for the students who attend?

*[Probe: Probe for specific strategies the faculty and staff use to promote the self-perception of being a pre-college/college student? Are there strategies in place to provide post-graduation guidance (application process, SAT/ACT requirements, etc.) to assist the student?]*

15. How would you describe those students who are served well by the ECHS model?

Follow Up: How would you describe any students who aren't served well?

**Parent Support**

16. Please describe how the parents of your students are integrated into the school culture. What kind of information and activities are provided to support the parents in helping their children be prepared for college?

17. Are there other activities and information that you would like to see implemented/provided?

18. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your school?

Thank you so much for your participation in this interview.

## Appendix E: Student Focus Group Protocol

### *Learn and Earn* Early College High School Research Study

#### **Student Focus Group Protocol: Academic Year 2009–2010**

**ECHS Name:**

**Date Focus Group:**

**Start Time:**

**End Time:**

**Focus Group Facilitator Name:**

I am going to be asking you some questions about your experiences at the ECHS, specifically programs and resources that are available to you. We will be taping the focus group so if you want to make a comment, please wait until the other person has completed their comment (don't talk over each other). Please respond to the question, don't just shake your head (the tape recorder can't see you nod).

1. I'd like to start with is just go around the room, and if you will tell me your name, and what grade you are in, what level you are in.

2. How did you decide to choose the ECHS as for your high school experience? What things attracted you to this school?

[Probes: *What about career choices: has anyone decided what to major in college?*]

3. Describe what happens in a typical high school class.

[Probes: *Does your teacher lecture, do you do group work, etc.*]

3. Are all of you taking college classes? Can you describe what happens in your college classes?

[Probes: *How many college classes do you take? Does your college instructor know that you are an ECHS student? How do you feel about being in the class (do you talk with other non ECHS students? Do you feel prepared to take the course? Are there students in this school who are not yet prepared to take college classes and why? How do the teaching styles differ in your college classes versus high school classes?]*

4. If you have trouble in any of your classes, how do people here help you?

[Probe ECHS supports: *Make sure that they discuss both the affective and academic supports. Do they feel that the teachers in their school interact with them? Do they feel that they are a part of the ECHS? Do they have tutors available?*]

[Probe College supports: *Are college instructors willing to work with you? Are there tutors available?*]

5. What resources do you have available on college campus and on high school campus that help you with both your college courses and high school courses? [Probe: *How accessible are those resources? Probe: Do any of you take online college or high school courses?*]

6. Tell us about the relationships you have with the adults in your school.

[Probe: *Do you think all the teachers know your names? How are they helping you to prepare for college career? Probe: Do college professors know your names?*]

7. What do you like best about being in Early College High School?

8. Do you know any students who left the Early College High School? If so, why did they leave?

9. Do you know any students who considered coming to the Early College High School but decided against it? Why did they make this decision?

10. Is there anything else you want to tell me about your ECHS and your experiences here?

Thank you all for participating.