2019

Learning in the 21st century: a phenomenological study of a blended learning program

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LEARNING IN THE 21st CENTURY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Leadership, Administration, and Policy

by

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May, 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Emma Katherine. I hope I serve as a role model that she can achieve any goal she sets for herself. She missed her momma on class and research weekends and became the cheerleader and drill sergeant in the final phase of the dissertation writing. Thank you Emma for being my shining star. I love her more than words can express!

My parents drove the love of education into my heart and being, which made me reach for the stars to tackle and accomplish this level of education. I lost my beloved father shortly before commencing graduate school, and my mom made it possible for me to attend classes by caring for my daughter on study weekends. Thank you to my parents for guiding me in life and instilling the desire to learn.

My educational journey started in Kindergarten when Stacey and I met. We pushed each other to achieve our best in grade school, just like we pushed ourselves through graduate school. I am honored that we are completing our educational journey together. I thank her for our lifelong friendship and her support through graduate school and writing the dissertation.

My dissertation committee is dear to my heart. Dr. Linda Purrington provided me guidance through the graduate program starting with my first class. She worked with me on weekends and holidays and late into the evenings, driving me toward excellence. She kept pushing me for more. Dr. Paul Sparks, a specialist in educational technology, suggested graduate school to me 20 years ago. Little did either of us know our paths would cross and he would serve on my dissertation committee. His questions drove me to look deeper into my topic. Dr. Molly McCabe balanced out my team with her gentle push to seek new ideas and constantly learn new

tools. I feel blessed to have worked with this dedicated team and thank them for their commitment and guidance.

The Perfect Ten; we shared long hours together, learning and laughing. Each one of them holds a special place in my heart. I thank them for their friendships and encouragement.

My amazing participants; I thank them for spending time with me to share their stories.

It takes a village to raise a child; it also takes a village to push a student through graduate school. My family made it possible for me to tackle this endeavor by encouraging me, supporting me psychologically and caring for Emma. My administrative team pushed me and supported me through the whole process. My special thanks are extended to Dr. Lisa Cooper, Dr. Lisa Michel, Dr. DuBois McMillan, Dr. Jon Chapman, and Mrs. Becky Stanis for their never-ending support and encouragement. A special friend unknowingly drove me to apply for the doctoral program. I thank him for his friendship and encouragement through the final phases of the dissertation.

Last, but not least, I dedicate this to my students. Your passion, inquisitiveness, and desire to learn inspires me to reach higher and dig deeper to fulfill your thoughts and questions. My research drives me to ensure that I, as an educator, am meeting your needs as students. That is my life's goal and I need to make sure I am achieving that goal!

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or graduates within the last 3 years from a unique blended learning program at Sunshine High School and Sunshine iAcademy, schools in California. This study also sought to describe how these schools address the needs of high school students in a 21st century learning environment. The two theoretical frameworks used to drive this study were social constructivism and personalized learning theory.

This qualitative study was conducted in a single school district that offers some students a blended learning program; part of their school schedule takes place at the comprehensive high school and the other part of their schedule is offered via the district's iAcademy. Seven current students and one graduate within the past 3 years participated in in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews. The interview instrument used researcher-developed questions aligning with four themes identified in the research as influencing high school graduation rates, including personalized schools, rigorous and relevant curriculum, assistance to students, and qualified instructional staff (Dianda, 2008).

The study resulted in six conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of the study findings: flexible learning schedule, alternative pathway for education, supportive, diverse learning styles, extended learning supports, and multiple motivations to enter a blended learning program. Participants shared that the blended learning program was a supportive one that offered them a flexible learning schedule so they could participate in their extracurricular activities. Each student had varying learning needs; participants shared that the blended learning program accommodated their diverse learning styles. Participants felt that extended learning supports would enhance the program.

Four practical recommendations to support blended learning resulted from analyzing the results of this study. First, school districts need to review their board policies to address online classes and or blended learning programs. Second, school districts need to examine the possibilities of offering online classes to students within a traditional high school setting. Third, school districts need to implement programs to monitor the social-emotional well-being of students enrolled in online classes, as some students may isolate themselves from social interaction. Fourth, school districts need to focus their Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) funding to prioritize programs to meet the needs of students which could include funding for online courses.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and perspectives of students who are currently enrolled in or recent graduates of a blended learning program at Sunshine High School (SHS, pseudonym) and Sunshine iAcademy (Si, pseudonym), schools in California, and described how these schools address the needs of high school students in a 21st-century learning environment. This chapter presents the background of the study, problem, purpose, importance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, and research questions. Afterwards, the delimitations, limitations, and assumptions are presented and followed by a description of the organization of the study.

Background of the Study

Individual and societal costs of not graduating from high school. Bowers, Sprott, and Taff (2013) argued that "students who do not graduate from high school will experience higher rates of unemployment and incarceration, lower overall lifetime earnings, and life expectancy than students who do graduate from high school" (p. 77). According to the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), the unemployment rate for people who earned less than a high school diploma was 7.7% in January 2017. Records indicate that the unemployment rate for people who had some college or earned an Associate of Arts degree was 3.8% at the same time. Hence, the data indicate an almost four percent increase in unemployment for those who did not complete high school. Higher unemployment among dropouts is only one societal cost of not graduating from high school.

Higher rates of incarceration exist for students who drop out of high school than those who do not drop out (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). Dropouts are more likely to engage in crime or become incarcerated (Rumberger, 2011). According to Heckman and

LaFontaine (2007), 78% of incarcerated people are high school dropouts or GED recipients. Incarceration prevents people from contributing to the general economy and gaining skills to contribute to society. Some become incarcerated while in high school and do not complete their diploma, whereas others enter into the prison system after dropping out of high school.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2017), the graduation rate for the Class of 2015 in the state of California was 82%. If California could increase its graduation rate by eight percent, one expects the creation of 3,300 new jobs by increased spending from graduates, home sales would increase by $2.2 billion at the midpoint of a graduate's career, and $40.7 million increased local and state tax revenues from increased salaries from graduates would positively influence the gross national product.

Crissy (2009) asserted that educational attainment contributes to economic success. Data indicate that whereas the annual median earnings for workers over the age of 25 with a high school diploma are $33,452, the median earnings for workers in the same age group without a high school diploma are $19,405. Dropouts are less competitive in the marketplace than people who have completed high school, as they are less likely to continue training or education to learn new skills. There is a higher percentage of dropouts working below the minimum wage (Rumberger, 2011). Hence, dropping out of high school has a lifelong economic impact.

Lower wages contribute to poorer overall health. As dropouts earn lower wages, they are less likely to seek medical services. Low-wage workers are more likely to lack access to medical and psychological services and tend not to seek them out. They do not practice preventative healthcare or partake in regular medical checkups (Rumberger, 2011). Additionally, dropouts tend to make unhealthy lifestyle choices, eating poorly and using alcohol, which creates and prolongs poor health conditions. High school graduates have a higher chance of being employed

than dropouts, and they tend to lead healthier lives (National Research Council & National Academy of Education, 2011).

Societal costs of a dropout include contributing lower amounts to taxes to fund public spending, as dropouts tend to earn less (Rumberger, 2011). Rumberger (2011) argued that dropouts "threaten the future economy" (p. 133) due to their low education and low skill levels. Their wages remain low, and they do not learn the necessary skills to improve their employment situation. Rather than contributing to tax revenues, dropouts rely on welfare, including food stamps and housing assistance. Societal costs endure when students drop out of high school, including reduced tax revenue and more people tapping into public services (Stout & Christenson, 2009). Hence, dropouts place an economic burden on society.

High school graduates gain cognitive and non-cognitive skills that contribute to success in post-secondary educational opportunities and employment (National Research Council & National Academy of Education, 2011). High school dropouts do not learn these skills in a formal educational setting, which may have an impact on their success in college and careers. The National Research Council and National Academy of Education (2011) stated that not only are dropouts disadvantaged by lacking the skills one would learn in high school, but that "society is also disadvantaged when students drop out, since studies show that dropouts are less likely than graduates to contribute to the social and economic well-being of a country" (p. 120).

According to the 2014 United States Census Bureau's Current Population Survey, the median income for all people between the ages of 18 through 67 was $26,000. In comparison, the median income for people in the same age bracket who completed high school was $45,000 (McFarland, Cui, & Stark, 2018). Rumberger (2011) noted that the difference in lifetime earnings between a dropout and someone who completed high school was $260,000 in 2004.

National and California high school graduation rates. A National Center for Education Statistics (2018) report indicated that the national adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for 2013-14 was 82% (McFarland et al., 2018). The ACGR follows high school freshmen throughout 4 years and records the number of students who complete a regular high school diploma within those 4 years. Some students need more than four years to complete high school, which does not negatively impact the reported data.

The ACGR rate for California was 81% in 2013-14. Within this ACGR, 68% of Black students, 77% of Hispanic students, and 88% of White students completed their high school diplomas within 4 years. The national ACGR for economically disadvantaged students for 2013-14 was 75% (McFarland et al., 2018). Overall, these statistics indicate that one out of five students does not graduate from high school in California.

Demographic factors associated with higher dropout rates. According to the American Community Survey (United States Census Bureau, 2017), 12.7% of individuals across the nation between the ages of 18-24 years old did not earn a diploma in 2017. Focusing on California, 10.4% of Blacks, 35.2% of Hispanics, and 10.7% members of two or more races did not earn a diploma.

Rumberger (2011) reported that retention of Hispanics and Blacks in ninth grade is higher than among other races. High poverty rates exist within these racial groups, contributing to their dropout rates. Rumberger claimed that Black students have higher suspension rates and higher grade level repetition than other ethnic groups, which contributes to lower student engagement.

Ream and Rumberger (2008) reported that Mexican-Americans have the highest dropout rate in the nation. Family composition and the low socioeconomic status of Hispanic families

contribute to their dropout rate. Ream and Rumberger claimed that Hispanics lack engagement at school, are not prepared academically for school, and lack participation in extracurricular activities, including athletics.

Mental health factors that may contribute to higher dropout rates. Depression and mental health issues may also contribute to the high school dropout rate (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002; Liem, Lustig, & Dillon, 2009; Stout & Christenson, 2009). Students who lack skills or had poor school performance in the past are at risk of dropping out of high school. Some students must take on adult responsibilities while in high school, such as contributing to their family income, raising a child, or caring for siblings (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). These obligations or obstacles prevent students from focusing on school, which leads them to drop out of high school. Student disengagement increases the dropout rate, as students do not connect to their school. Engagement involves multiple aspects of a student's schooling, including academics, behavior, cognition, and affect. The likelihood of a student dropping out of high school increases as students become disengaged in one or more of these areas (Stout & Christenson, 2009).

The California Healthy Kids Study Survey, administered once every 2 years, includes questions on learning engagement, supports, and barriers to education, including student safety and health obstacles. The 2015 CHKS randomly surveyed 14,987 high school juniors in the state of California and found that 32% of 11th graders experienced chronic sadness and 16% of 11th graders had contemplated suicide in the past 12 months (Austin, Hanson, Polik, & Zheng, 2018). Basch (2011) stated

> no matter how well teachers are prepared to teach, no matter what accountability measures are put in place, no matter what governing structures are established for schools, educational progress will be profoundly limited if students are not motivated and able to learn. Particular health problems play a major role in limiting the motivation and ability to learn of urban minority youth. (p. 593)

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2007) has recognized that the "focus on one-size-fits-all education has marginalized the uniqueness of our children and eroded their capacity to learn in whole, healthy, creative, and connected ways" (p. 2). Supporting all of a child's needs will positively influence his/her academic performance.

Transition to high school and freshman year experience impact on graduation rates. Middle school students transitioning to high school face new educational and social challenges. Many fear the unknown and others require time to adjust to high school (Ellerbrock, 2012). Students must face the reality that high school classes count toward graduation as they enter a new environment with new expectations and a new culture (Roybal, Thornton, & Usinger, 2014). As students transition to high school, schools need to provide support systems to meet freshman students' emotional, educational, and developmental needs to ensure that they have a successful first year of high school. Whereas some freshmen students suffer from low self-esteem and depression, others may feel isolated or disconnected from the school (Ellerbrock, 2012). Therefore, services must be available at the schools to meet the academic and socio-emotional needs of their students to ensure their success and remain on track for graduation.

The freshman year of high school is a pivotal year that influences whether or not a student will graduate from high school. Ellerbrock (2012) stated that "6% of all dropouts leave school by their 10th-grade year" (p. 35). Fritzer and Herbst (1996) argued that that students "have declining academic performance, increased absences, increased behavioral disturbances, and decreased participation in extracurricular programs" (p. 7) during the transition to a new school. Ninth graders have a 22% repeat rate due to these factors (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996). Struggling high school readers fall behind their peers and have difficulty understanding the grade-level texts (Lang et al., 2009).

Outdated school settings and curriculum no longer meet the expectations for and needs of today's learners. School design in the United States dates back to the 1800s; since that time, few concrete changes have been made to support the needs of learners, specifically working students. A standard school setting and curriculum no longer meet the needs of all students (Subban, 2006). Students' learning styles vary widely, hence the need for varied and personalized learning to meet students' needs. Personalized learning provides students with a flexible learning environment, which may include online components to learn the Common Core Standards and skills to be successful in college and careers (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014). Differentiation within the curriculum provides learners with resources for extending their learning (Subban, 2006). Although research shows that people have diverse learning needs (Bray & McClaskey, 2015), the public school system has made few adjustments over the years.

California launched the California School Dashboard in 2017 to display data-based performance levels on tests scores, graduation rates, college and career readiness rates, attendance rates, suspension rates, and more, while providing schools with valuable data for driving the goals set by schools and districts. Data indicate that some schools need assistance in meeting their goals to ensure students have the opportunity to perform well within a school and in postsecondary opportunities (California Department of Education, 2017).

Schools are focusing on student engagement to improve graduation rates (Stout & Christenson, 2009). Stout and Christenson (2009) argued that "interventions must also support students' cognitive and affective engagement" (p. 19) to have an impact upon a student choosing to stay in school. Students need to feel the curriculum is relevant, need to feel successful, and need assistance with personal problems (Stout & Christenson, 2009). Some schools are focusing on providing interventions in the ninth grade to ensure students do not drop out of high school

(Emmett & McGee, 2012; Frank, 2011; Fritzer & Herbst, 1996; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; Neild, 2009). Virtual schools are offering an alternative educational pathway to some students (DePaoli, Balfanz, & Bridgeland, 2016). The impact of a blended learning program has not been studied fully to determine its impact on high school graduation rates.

Rethinking high school design to meet the needs of working students better. Traditional high schools present a one-size-fits-all curriculum and seldom tailor their curriculum to fit the needs of the varied learning modalities of modern students (Wandera, 2017). Buscha, Maurel, Page, and Speckesser (2012) stated "that working complements educational attainments via the acquisition of a variety of skills such as improved work values, literacy and numeracy skills" (p. 381). High school students gain skills at school and the workplace to enhance future employment (Buscha et al., 2012). Hence, the successful completion of a high school diploma will benefit a student in his/her post-secondary life.

California's compulsory education laws require children between the ages of 6-18 to attend school (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2004). Personalized learning provides students with a flexible learning environment that may include online components to learn the Common Core Standards and skills needed to be successful in college and careers (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014). Jacobs (2016) defined a blended learning environment as one with "a mix of online and teacher-led instruction" (p. 45). According to Davis's (2012) study on school enrollment and work status, "28 percent of high school students aged 16 and over worked less than full-time, year-round, while 1 percent of them were full-time, year-round workers" (p. 1). Some students need personalized learning to complete their education while working. Davis noted that one percent of high school students work full-time. These work hours could interfere with students' school schedules, depending upon the type of student employment.

Blended learning provides a platform to adjust the educational experience to meet the needs of individual students (Wandera, 2017). Students can advance, slow down, or ask for additional assistance through a blended learning program. Hence, their learning and satisfaction levels should outweigh those learning in a traditional high school setting (Hui, Hu, Clark, Tam & Milton, 2008). Students participating in a blended environment can determine their interactions with the media embedded into the program, which offers them more control and the ability to repeat the media should they not understand the material (Angiello, 2010).

Research has been conducted on blended learning in a higher education setting, but there is a lack of research on blended learning and personalized learning in a blended school program in high schools. This problem is important to address because California's Compulsory Education Law states that students must stay in high school until the age of 18 or when the student completes their high school diploma (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2004). Working students must comply with the education law and advance toward their high school diploma while working.

Problem Statement

Education is important in a global society and economy. Graduating from high school is vital for a student to continue successfully to post-secondary opportunities such as college, university, and trade school. Yet, California's high school graduation rate for the class of 2016 was 83.2% (Gordon, 2017).

Sunshine High School (SHS) and Sunshine iAcademy (Si), schools in California, have created a blended learning program, allowing students to take some face-to-face classes at SHS and some online classes at Si. In doing so, the schools are providing an alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school. However, the results of this blended personalized program

have not been studied. Therefore, a need exists to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates within the past three years from the blended learning program and how it may be addressing students' needs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of the blended learning program at SHS and Si, schools in California. This study also sought to describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs.

To accomplish this purpose, a phenomenological study was used to describe students' lived experiences and perspectives. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with current students or graduates within the past 3 years. The data were triangulated to make sense of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of the blended learning program offered by SHS and Si yo understand how this program is meeting its students' needs.

Importance of the Study

Blended personalized learning programs may be a viable option to meet the needs of high school students and increase graduation rates. As California schools shift to ensuring their students are college and career ready upon high school graduation, blended learning programs may provide an alternative educational pathway to meet these goals. This study may provide school districts and high schools with information about how a non-traditional, blended, personalized learning program addresses their students' needs. Therefore, districts and high schools may be interested in this study.

This phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences and perspectives of students who are participating or have participated in a non-traditional blended and personalized school learning program that provides an alternative pathway to high school graduation. Few, if any, phenomenological studies exist that address this area of focus. Brick-and-mortar schools no longer meet the needs of all students; hence, districts and schools need to explore alternative educational programs to meet their students' needs.

This study is compelling at a time while schools face reduced budgets as well as the need for increased services to support students through graduation. Blended learning programs may be an option for school districts to engage students, work with their diverse learning styles, prepare them for college and career readiness, and address their socio-emotional needs. Studies exist on blended learning programs at the university level, but a lack of studies exist at the high school level.

Definition of Terms

21st Century Skills: When a student applies his/her knowledge and readiness through "collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity" (Griffith & Slade, 2018, p. 37)

A-G readiness: A-G readiness involves completing the minimum eligibility requirements for entrance into a public 4-year university within the state of California, including a University of California campus or a California State University campus. Although A-G readiness includes the minimum number of entrance requirements, most University of California campuses require additional coursework due to their impacted campuses with large enrollments. A-G readiness includes completing the following coursework during the high school years: 2 years of social science, 4 years of college preparatory English, 2 years of a foreign language in one language, 3 years of mathematics with a minimum of Algebra I, 2 years of a laboratory science (although 4

years are recommended), 1 year of a visual and performing arts elective, and a year of an approved college preparatory elective (California Department of Education, 2018).

Alternative education: Seeking a non-traditional pathway to complete a high school diploma. Also referred to as alternative pathway for education.

Blended learning: "A mix of online and teacher-led instruction" (Jacobs, 2016, p. 45).

Comprehensive public high school: A public, secondary school for students of all abilities.

Engagement: "The degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion learners show when they are learning or being taught" (Bray, 2016, p. 42).

Graduation: Completing the high school graduation requirements set forth by the state and the district (California Department of Education, 2018)

Personalized learning: Creating a learning environment where educators gain a deeper understanding of their students' needs by learning about their interests and motivations to individualize instruction for students and make it more meaningful (Yonezawa, McClure, & Jones, 2012). A flexible learning environment in which to learn the Common Core standards, which may include online learning (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).

Rigor: Setting high expectations for students. Creating experiences that are academically and intellectually challenging for students (The Art of Education, n.d.).

Self-Blend: A scenario in which students choose to take one or more classes online from a remote, non-school lab, setting. Through this model, students choose to take traditional classes and online classes to meet their educational goals (Tucker, 2012).

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL): A type of learning focusing on applying knowledge and skills to manage emotions so one can set goals and feel empathy. Through this learning, one

maintains positive relationships and makes effective decisions (Griffith & Slade, 2018). SEL can also be referred to as character strengths, interpersonal skills, non-cognitive skills, or soft skills (Thiers, 2018).

Traditional high schools: Schools that are not private or a charter school and require teachers to have a state teaching credential. Students complete courses on campus in a face-to-face setting.

Whole Child: An educational model that focuses on collaboration between educational leaders and health personnel to improve a student's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (ASCD, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

This study was conducted through a social constructivist lens. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified this as a paradigm where "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 24). The goal of the study was to understand the participants' views and to gain a better understanding of the educational program offered through SHS and Si's blended learning program. The researcher used broad and general questions to listen to the participants and construct meaning through their answers in this interpretive research. Research questions were developed to interpret how the participants construct the meaning of their participation in the program. Participants have different lived experiences and perspectives, which influences how they interpret and respond to situations. Hence, their realities and thoughts may differ from one another. The researcher also experienced different lived experiences, which influenced how she interpreted and made meaning of information.

The second theoretical lens used through this study was the personalized learning theory. Bray (2016) coined the phrase "making learning personal" (p. xxi). Bray believes that education

should focus on learners who learn in a variety of ways. When learning is centered on the learner and personalized, the learner becomes intrinsically motivated and focuses on driving his/her education. The culture of a school contributes to whether or not the school can offer a personalized learning program. The foundation of a personalized learning system includes a supportive group of teachers and stakeholders who share beliefs about the learners.

Bray (2016) argued that a learner can delve into deeper learning and develop learner agency through a personalized educational program. Students take ownership of their learning and connect with it in a personalized school. Personalization creates a more meaningful educational program for the learner where he/she can connect deeply and flourish as a learner.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences and perspectives of high school students who are currently participating in or recent graduates of a unique blended learning program in California?

Delimitations

To gain an understanding of this blended learning program, the researcher studied one district in California that offers a blended learning schedule composed of students taking some face-to-face classes at the public, comprehensive high school, and the remainder of their schedule through online classes at its iAcademy. The focus on public schools in this study did not allow the researcher to research private schools, charter schools, or public schools outside of this district.

Limitations

Few districts and high schools are set up to accommodate a blended learning program. Therefore, this phenomenological study's results may be limited to this school district in California and therefore may not be generalizable. Also, many variables outside the researcher's

control could have influenced students' program experiences and influenced their lived experiences and perspectives in high school.

Assumptions

The researcher made four assumptions in this study. These assumptions were as follows: (a) alternative pathways are a viable educational option to meet student needs, (b) the selected participants understood the educational offerings at both schools, (c) the study's participants answered the questions truthfully, and (d) the data were interpreted accurately in reflecting the participants' perceptions.

Organization of Study

This phenomenological study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 presented the background of the study, identified the problem statement and purpose, presented the importance of the study and definition of terms, identified the theoretical frameworks, and presented the research questions. Subsequently, the delimitations, limitations, and assumptions were presented, and followed by an organization of the remainder of the study. Chapter 2 includes an in-depth literature review on the needs of high school students to meet their academic goals including information on blended learning. Chapter 3 presents the methodology used in this phenomenological study. Chapter 4 includes a presentation of the findings made through this qualitative study. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings and conclusions of the study and makes recommendations for policy, practice, and further research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Organization of Chapter

This chapter presents the rationale for researching the needs of a 21st-century high school students and what schools are doing to increase graduation rates. Individual costs for dropping out of high school include lower salaries, reduced overall lifetime earnings, reduced lifetime job opportunities, and health risks due to the lack of insurance and unhealthy lifestyles, including eating poorly and consuming alcohol. Societal costs exist for high school dropouts, including reduced contributions to taxes and public services (Rumberger, 2011). Overall, dropouts place an economic burden on society.

The National Center for Education Statistics reported that the national adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) for 2013-2014 was 82%. In California, the ACGR was 81% for 2013-2014, with lower rates for Hispanic and Black students (McFarland et al., 2018). Overall, one out of five students did not graduate from high school in California.

The California Healthy Kids Survey for 2015 found that 32% of 11th graders experienced chronic sadness and 16% of 11th graders had contemplated suicide in the last month (Austin et al., 2018). Mental health factors contribute to whether or not a student graduates from high school. The ASCD (2007) recognizes that a one-size-fits-all educational approach does not work for students and that educators need to focus on supporting the whole child to ensure academic and overall success.

Transitioning from middle school to high school creates an unknown situation for a student, which contributes to a student falling behind at the beginning of his/her high school years (Ellerbrock, 2012). The freshman year of high school is a crucial year for students. Ellerbrock (2012) stated that six percent of dropouts leave high school by their sophomore year

of high school. Some students lack academic preparedness, especially in English and mathematics, which lead to a 22% repeat rate for ninth-graders due to the students not possessing the skills to pass the classes (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996).

Contemporary school design dates back to the 1800s, with little changes made to support learners since that time. Subban (2006) argued that students have diverse learning styles that are not addressed by the standard school system and curriculum. Personalized learning provides an alternative pathway for some students to graduate from high school (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Bray & McClaskey, 2015; Pane, Steiner, Baird, & Hamilton, 2015). Virtual schools are an alternative pathway to earning a high school diploma. Blended learning offers another educational alternative to raising high school graduation rates.

Compulsory education in California requires students to remain in school until they graduate from high school or reach 18 years old. However, some students must work at an earlier age to assist their families or have the opportunity to start on a career path at an early age. Blended learning may be an educational option for working high school students.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of current students and recent graduates from the blended personalized learning program at SHS and Si in California and describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs. This study was conducted through a social constructivist theoretical lens to understand the individuals' meaning of how they live and work. People have their own encounters, which contribute to how they interpret experiences. A second theoretical lens used in this study is personalized learning. Bray (2016) coined the phrase "making learning personal" (p. xxi) and differentiated among personalization, differentiation, and individualization. Personalization differs from differentiation and

individualization because it focuses on learners as they drive their learning and gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum. Differentiation focuses on the needs of a group of learners and adjusts to the needs of the group (Bray & McClaskey, 2015). Individualization "accommodates learning needs for the individual learner" (Bray & McClaskey, 2015, p. 9).

The research question for this phenomenological study was, "What are the lived experiences and perspectives of high students who are currently participating in or recent graduates of a unique blended learning program in California?" This literature review focuses on four themes: personalized schools, rigorous and relevant curriculum, assistance to students, and qualified instructional staff.

Although literature exists on the impact of blended learning in the university setting and specific courses, there is a lack of literature on a blended learning program that combines face-to-face classes and online classes at the high school level. Personalized and blended learning are educational options to address the diverse learning styles of high school students, meet their social-emotional needs, and increase graduation rates. As public high schools begin to offer more classes online, more literature specifically related to a blended learning program and support services will become available.

This literature review commences with the theoretical lenses used throughout the dissertation. This phenomenological study presents the blended learning program implemented by SHS and Si to address the needs of high school students and influence graduation rates. The literature review will present educational programs and support programs that some schools are implementing to meet their students' needs and increase the graduation rate.

Theoretical Framework

The two theoretical frameworks used to drive this dissertation are social constructivism and personalized learning theory. The first framework focuses on making meaning of experiences, whereas the latter focuses on personalizing education for student learning. Pairing the two frameworks as a lens for this study guided the researcher through interpreting the research and data presented in this dissertation.

The social constructivist theory addresses how individuals make meaning and understand the world in which they exist (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each experience in which one participates is interpreted differently based upon one's individual life experiences. One uses personal experiences to construct one's interpretation and make meaning of them. Learning occurs in a shared social activity, often within a classroom. A constructivist teacher provides students the opportunity to make meaning of their knowledge before sharing the answers with them. Dialogue is encouraged between students and with the teacher to gain a deeper understanding of the knowledge (Watson, 2001). Social constructivism relies on a participant's understanding and views of experiences, presenting participants' beliefs, feelings, and ideologies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Vygotsky (as cited in Bryceson, 2007) developed social constructivism, recognizing not only that learning is an internal process, but also that the social aspect of learning creates deep learning. Students learn more as they interact with other students and the teacher. Bryceson (2007) asserted that "learning is seen as the development of higher-level psychological processes occurring first on an interpersonal level through social interaction" (p. 191). Learners construct the meaning of their learning and process it, creating higher-level, deeper learning.

Communication with others about ideas, experiences, and objects changes how one perceives them. The social aspect of interacting provides people with the opportunity to discuss with one another and hear varying views on a topic or idea, which may lead to a new interpretation of the ideas discussed. Language plays a pivotal role in the construct of an idea (Keaton & Bodie, 2011), as people construct their beliefs through social interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researcher joins a study with his/her own experiences, which influences his/her interpretation of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This interpretive research provides the researcher with the opportunity to make meaning of what others feel about the topic. Hence, through social constructivism, the subjects construct their meaning of the experiences and knowledge, and the researcher constructs his/her interpretation of the data.

Bray (2016) coined the phrase "making learning personal" (p. xxi) and asserted that education should focus on learners who learn in a variety of ways. Bray's ideas drive the personalized learning theory. Bray and McClaskey (2015) differentiated personalization, differentiation, and individualization in education. Whereas differentiation starts with the needs of a group of learners, individualization and personalization focus on the individual learner. Personalization connects the individual learner to his/her interests, passions, and aspirations. Students make more meaning of their learning when it is personalized. Learning is personalized for each learner by the teacher or personalized curriculum through the personalized learning theory. The use of technology-based courses has the potential to help school systems achieve personalization.

As the field of education embraces technology, schools and teachers can personalize the way a student learns and focuses on his/her interests. A personalized education motivates the

learner to become accountable for his/her learning (Bray, 2016). Bray (2016) argued that "personalized learning helps learners become intrinsically motivated to learn, so they own and drive their learning" (p. 1). Through this process, students become self-directed and independent learners.

A solid foundation of shared beliefs among learners, teachers, and their educational community must exist for a personalized learning system to be sustainable. All educational members drive this learner-centered education, and the right school culture must exist to sustain this type of learning (Bray, 2016). Personalized learning shifts education from focusing on a group to focusing on an individual.

Historical Background/Context

Technology. In 1997, the state of California offered the Digital High School Grant to fund technology and staff development. The grant provided financial resources to embed technology into the schools, train teachers on the use of educational technology, and prepare students with 21st-century learning skills. These monies were used to push computers and printers into the classrooms, purchase software, wire schools and classrooms with internet access, and train teachers. The state provided additional funding to high schools under AB 1339's Education Technology Staff Development Program to increase teachers' educational technology skills with the intent of enhancing their skills and curriculum in the classroom. The School Technology and Readiness Report Forum (CEO Forum, 2001) stated that in addition to learning each subject's standards, students need to be technology and digitally literate to be productive in the digital age. According to CEO Forum (2001), "21st-century skills must include the technology and digital age literacy, inventive thinking, effective communication, and high

productivity skills that will be essential for citizens in the rapidly changing digital age" (p. 6). These skills are critical for students to compete in a digital age.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) released its first version of the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) for students in 1998 and teachers in 2000. These standards drove educational technology and set the expectations for technology learning and performance indicators for students. ISTE released its most recent update to NETS for students in 2016. Mastering technology helps students in high school and prepares them for post-secondary opportunities, including college and careers (International Society for Technology in Education, 2018).

Online learning. Colleges and universities began to offer virtual college through broadcast starting in 1976. Students watched courses on television and submitted their work to the university. By the 1980s, personal internet access increased, providing an avenue to offer online courses. The University of Phoenix established itself in 1989 as one of the most popular online schools in the United States by offering a non-traditional educational setting to college students. The increase in internet speeds by the year 2000, allowed most universities to add online courses and even offer some degrees entirely online. College students embraced online learning quickly, with research showing that 27.1% of college students had taken at least one distance learning course. By 2013, 2.6 million students enrolled in online courses at the college level (Online Schools Center, 2018).

Speak Up (2014) surveyed 9,005 high schools and 2,710 districts nationwide, finding that 40% of the schools were offering online courses in history, English/language arts, mathematics, and science. The offering of online courses meets students' needs for credit recovery, student engagement and keeping students in school, personalizing learning, and academic remediation.

Teachers report that they see a strong correlation between the skills a student learns while taking an online course and career readiness. As a result of online learning, students take ownership of their learning, develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills, and apply academic concepts to real-world scenarios. Concerns regarding online learning include equity in device access, student safety, and district liability. In spite of these concerns, some high schools embrace the online learning option and find it a meaningful educational experience for their students.

College and career readiness. The Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21), founded in 2002, created a coalition of business community members, educational leaders, and policymakers to discuss the skills students need to be career ready in the 21st century. They published the P21 Framework for 21st Century Learning, which includes the 21st Century Skills Map. In addition to learning the various curricular elements, students need to learn critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration skills. California is a P21 state and recognizes that students need to have a command of the curriculum and possess critical skills to compete in the 21st century. The P21 Framework suggests that students gain learning and innovation skills; information, media, and technology skills; and life and career skills alongside learning the curriculum (Magner, Soulé, & Wesolowski, 2011).

In 2011, Magner et al. (2011) released the P21 Common Core Toolkit, a guide to align the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) with technology. This guide aligned the P21 Framework with the CCSS and provided examples and provided resources to align P21 and CCSS. P21 recognized that the skills they identified as essential for students are implied and not stated explicitly within the CCSS . Embedding P21 skills within the CCSS will prepare students as 21st century learners, for college, and careers.

As seen in Figure 1, through the P21 framework, students learn lifelong applicable skills to assist them in post-secondary life. Standards and assessments, curriculum and instruction, teacher professional development, and the learning environment are intertwined under the umbrella of the subjects and skills students learn while in a high school implementing the P21 framework.

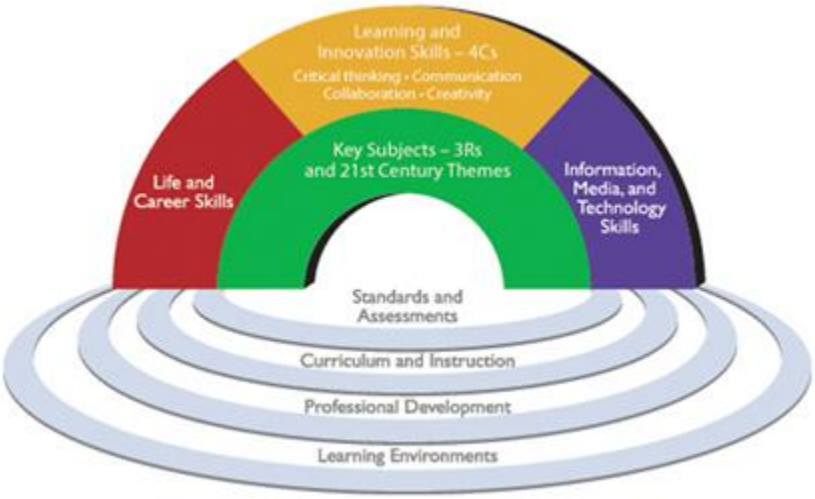

Figure 1. From P21 framework for 21st century learning by Battelle for Kids, n.d. (http://www.p21.org/our-work/p21-framework). Copyright 2019 by Battelle for Kids. Reprinted with permission.

Globalization. After visiting Bangalore, India, which is similar to America's Silicon Valley, Friedman (2005) proclaimed that the world is flat. Friedman recognized globalization, the changing relationships between government and businesses, was in full effect during his visit. American businesses outsourced[1] their business to Indian companies at a fraction of the cost of U.S.-based workers. India adapted easily to outsourcing, as they were an English-speaking country with a driven and technology-savvy population. Friedman stated that globalization was "shrinking the world from a size small to a size tiny and flattening the playing

[1] *Outsourcing* is taking a specific component of a job, such as research or call centers, and having that component of the work performed in another country. Moving an entire factory to another city or country is considered *offshoring*.

field" (p. 10). Fiber-optic networks were allowing Indian companies to file our tax returns, analyze our MRIs and CT scans, and write legal documents. Wages and rents in Bangalore cost one-fifth of those in western cities, so the services were provided at a fraction of the cost of those in America. Companies from New York, London, Boston, Bangalore, and other cities across the world conducted business simultaneously through the internet, rather than traveling to the various cities. The world was flat because we were interconnected and at times interdependent.

According to Friedman (2005), many factors have contributed to the flattening of the world. The Berlin Wall came down in 1989, opening up the east and creating a larger capitalist world to create and to consume products. Netscape became publicly traded in 1995 providing wider access to the internet to provide and access information. Google and other news sources entered the information market, providing search engines for accessing information. Open-sourcing created by collaborative communities provided cheaper software and provided tech-enthusiasts the opportunity to make advances in technology. Outsourcing work to India created jobs and reduced prices for American consumers. Many companies moved their factories to China once it joined the World Trade Organization, as they were able to produce items for lower prices. American companies could not produce items with the low cost and high quality that Chinese companies created, thus driving American companies to offshore many of their factories to China, Eastern Europe, or Central America, where production costs would be cheaper due to their lower costs of living (Friedman, 2005).

Insourcing maximizes a company's potential by providing services, outside of their normal services, to maximize a company's profit. For example, Friedman (2005) shared that if a Toshiba computer broke down, a consumer could take it to his/her local UPS store for repairs. UPS also synchronized supply chains in companies like Papa John's Pizza by coordinating the

routes of their suppliers and pizza deliveries. The world is flattened when workers can telecommute across the world, people have immediate access to information, and suppliers provide items quickly. Amazon delivers items within a few hours; the consumer never leaves his house. America needs an educational system to stay abreast of these technologies and educate and train workers to compete in this flattened world.

Policy and legislation. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) became law in 2002 under President George W. Bush. This law updated the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which provides federal guidelines for education. Although responsibility for education, in general, is the states' domain, the federal government passes basic laws or acts guiding education to which states must adhere. NCLB was a bipartisan move "to advance American competitiveness and close the achievement gap between poor and minority students and their more advantaged peers" (Klein, 2015). NCLB held schools accountable to the federal government for student outcomes and annual academic progress (Klein, 2015).

NCLB expected teachers to be *highly qualified*, requiring a bachelor's degree in the subject they taught along with holding a teaching credential in their subject area. Pathways existed for experienced teachers to certify as highly qualified if they did not hold a bachelor's degree in their subject matter, but many schools reassigned teachers to align with their areas of study. Paraprofessionals funded through Title I monies were required to have an associate's degree or higher or pass a test demonstrating knowledge and teaching skill working with students (Klein, 2015). NCLB creators believed that aligning teachers within their subject level expertise and ensuring support personnel possessed adequate skills would create a learning environment for students to achieve higher scores.

Under NCLB, schools administered tests in reading and math in grades three through eight and in grade 11. Results for the school and all subgroups were reported each year and had to meet the adequate yearly progress benchmarks set by the government. NCLB required students to achieve the proficient level on state tests by the 2013-2014 school year. States chose their tests and determined their proficient level. Schools who did not meet their adequate yearly progress benchmarks for over one year faced consequences, including allowing students to transfer to a better performing school, offering free tutoring, state intervention, or losing some of their Title I monies. By 2010, 38% of the nation's schools were not meeting adequate yearly progress, up nine percent since 2006 (Klein, 2015). Students were not becoming proficient under NCLB.

NCLB required these changes but provided little financial support for doing so. Title I was expected to be funded at $25 billion by 2007. However, by 2015, funding for Title I had only reached $14.5 billion (Klein, 2015). President Obama offered waivers to states that did not meet NCLB's requirements if they agreed to embrace educational redesign priorities of preparing students for the workforce and higher education. California chose to adopt the CCSS, which met Obama's requirements (Klein, 2015),

The CCSS for English and mathematics were released in 2010. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers lead the development of the standards to focus on students' achievement and mastery of skills. CCSS was adopted by 36 states by 2010 and embedded into state educational policy. Standards are grade specific and focused on what students need to learn to be college and career ready (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). The introduction of CCSS created a platform for the adoption of national standards. Porter et al. (2011) found that the CCSS moved education

"toward greater emphasis on higher-order cognitive demand" (p. 115), hence providing students the skills they need to be successful for college and career readiness. The new standards emphasize critical thinking and classroom discussions over passive learning through lectures. Students learn to use evidence throughout their learning to support their answers. Students also learn to use technology along with the content. The California State Board of Education adopted the K12 California CCSS in August 2010.

Under President Barack Obama, the U.S. Department of Education offered a $4.35 billion competitive grant to reform education in 2010. States applied for the Race to the Top grant and worked with their local education agencies to implement standards and assessments geared for student success in college and career readiness to meet the demands of a global economy. Monies from the 4-year grant funded teacher and administrator recruitment, development, and retention, focusing on areas with the most need. Race to the Top required the use of data systems to measure student growth and success, providing teachers and administrators simple access to information on areas that needed improvement (United States Department of Education, 2009). Comprehensive educational reform at the national level focused on college and career readiness as opposed to solely being focused on achieving proficiency on standardized tests.

California changed its educational funding plan to the Local Control and Accountability Plan (LCAP) in 2013-14 to focus on supporting student outcomes. Schools must describe how they will meet their annual goals within this plan, focusing on eight state and local priorities. Parents, educators, school employees, and the community work together to establish the goals based on school data. Funding for schools comes through the local control funding formula (LCFF) based upon goals cited in a school's LCAP. Previously, schools received restricted funds called categorical funds targeting specific programs and goals. Under the new LCAP, the

elimination of categorical funds provided increased monies to the schools and districts to focus on locally identified, data-based goals. Theoretically, the new funding formula for schools focuses monies on the area of need rather than adhering to the restricted disbursement under categorical funding.

The state of California focuses on preparing their students for college and career readiness. Schools are aligning their courses with the A-G coursework, which upon completion satisfies the minimum entrance requirements for a California State University or a University of California institution. The Career Technical Education Pathway provides a multiyear sequence of courses in identified fields that high school students study to gain academic and technical knowledge, preparing them for postsecondary college and careers. Some schools offer students a pathway to complete the courses at their high school; other schools have students complete a capstone course at a community college. The shift to courses aligned with the A-G requirements and providing career-technical pathways ensures the preparation of California students for postsecondary opportunities.

In 2017, California launched the California School Dashboard to display data-based performance levels on identified indicators for schools and districts. This user-friendly dashboard displays test scores, graduation rates, college and career readiness rates, attendance rates, suspension rates, and more, while providing schools with valuable data for driving the goals set by schools and districts. The Dashboard uses five colors—red, orange, yellow, green, and blue—to visually display a school or district's performance level from lowest to highest. The State monitors the Dashboard and provides state assistance through funding and or county personnel and programs if a student group falls into the lowest or red category. The Dashboard provides transparency on school and district performance (California Department of Education, 2017).

Testing. In 2015, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) collected data on mathematics and science achievement for students from more than 60 counties in grades four, eight, and 12. It compared the achievement of U.S. students to students in the same grade in other countries. The report indicates that American fourth and eighth graders ranked lower than seven other education systems when tested in science. The report indicated that American fourth graders ranked lower than fourth graders in 10 other education systems and American eighth graders ranked lower than eighth graders in eight other education systems in mathematics, which is higher than previous years (Provasnik et al., 2016). Hence, although U.S. students are making improvements in their performance in both mathematics and science, a gap still exists between U.S. student achievements and their counterparts in some other countries where students are achieving higher scores.

Influencing High School Graduation Rates

A plethora of evidence-based research exists on strategies to increase graduation rates, thus decreasing high school dropouts (ASCD, 2018; Dianda, 2008; National Dropout Prevention Center, 2018). The National Education Association (NEA) presents a comprehensive review including strategies identifying groups and locations identified with dropouts to support them, advocating for the dropouts, and implementing school practices and policies to increase graduation rates. The themes in this literature review fall broadly under the NEA's defined categories that lead to implementing school practices and policies to increase graduation rates– personalized schools, rigorous and relevant curriculum, assistance to students, and qualified instructional staff (Dianda, 2008).

Personalized schools. Personalizing the learning environment increases high school graduation rates (Bray, 2016; Dianda, 2008; Yonezawa et al., 2012). Smaller learning

environments create an educational setting where educators learn more about their students and students' needs, thus creating a caring, student-centered learning environment (Dianda, 2008). Addressing students' social-emotional needs within a school setting provides significant support, positively influencing their academic achievement (ASCD, 2013; Dianda, 2008). According to the ASCD (2014), "schools are one of the most efficient systems for reaching children and youth to provide health services and programs, as approximately 95 percent of all U.S. children and youth attend school" (p. 3). Learning and health are interrelated. Hence, meeting the mental and physical needs of students positively influencing their academic achievement (ASCD, 2014).

Social-emotional supports. Historically, schools focused primarily on students' academic success. However, some students face life barriers that prevent them from performing well in school. The ASCD recognized these barriers and sponsored the Commission on the Whole Child in 2006 where they launched the Whole Child Initiative (Trybus, 2015). The goal of the initiative was to improve children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Murray, Hurley, & Ahmed, 2015).

Additionally, the ASCD (2007) recognized that the "focus on one-size-fits-all education has marginalized the uniqueness of our children and eroded their capacity to learn in whole, healthy, creative, and connected ways" (p. 2). Supporting all the needs of the whole child will positively influence a child's academic performance. The whole child will be capable of learning if he/she is supported in all capacities. Ramirez (2018) stated that there is a growing concern with mental health statistics and that schools need to use this information to offer varied programs to address their students' needs.

Leading educational advocates, including John Goodlad, Stephanie Pace Marshall, Nel Noddings, Elliot Eisner, and Pedro Noguera served on the Whole Child Commission (Trybus,

2015). The commission's members discussed critical information to support the varied needs of the whole child at their meeting. In 2007 following the Commission's meeting, ASCD published a report entitled *The Learning Compact Redefined: A Call to Action*, which states:

> ASCD calls on educators, communities, and policymakers to work together to fulfill the new compact for the education of the whole child. Successful implementation of these policies results in successful learners who are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, civically active, artistically engaged, prepared for economic self-sufficiency and ready for the world beyond formal schooling. (ASCD, 2007, p. 20)

This call to action inspired schools, educators, and policymakers to start making decisions to benefit the whole child and acknowledge of the interdependence of health and learning. Academics were no longer the sole outcome people expected from the school. Instead, these educators demanded that schools support and challenge students while also meeting their socio-emotional needs.

The 2018 California Healthy Kids Survey indicated that 32% of 11th graders experienced sadness and 16% of 11th graders contemplated suicide in the previous 12 months (Austin et al., 2018). Creating wraparound programs at the school to support students' mental and physical health will place students at an advantage when preparing for long, fulfilling futures. "Individuals with more education are likely to live longer, experience better health outcomes; and practice health-promoting behaviors such as exercising regularly, refraining from smoking, and obtaining timely health care check-ups and screenings" (ASCD, 2014, p. 5). Carstarphen and Graff (2018) emphasized the value of embedding social-emotional support skills into the curriculum to support students through high school and in post-secondary opportunities. Therefore, embedding the services within one another benefits the children in more ways than one.

ASCD (2010) continues to advocate for the Whole Child Policy and provides resources for schools to use to meet the Whole Child Tenets. Engaging stakeholders is key; tying the Whole Child Tenets to the Common Core and State Standards is imperative in educating the whole child. ASCD states in its *A Whole Child Approach to Education* (n.d.) document, "standards, no matter how high, do not increase student achievement. Nor do they solve hunger. They cannot defeat bullying or boredom, ineffective teaching or leadership" (p. 2). Instead, many school districts imbed wraparound supports for students and their families within the school setting to meet students' needs. These include addressing socio-emotional wellness, instructional strategies, a positive school culture, and family engagement within the schools.

The WSCC model "emphasizes a schoolwide approach rather than one that is subject – or location-specific, and it acknowledges the position of learning, health, and the school as all being a part, and reflection, of the local community" (ASCD, 2014, p. 9). Limiting the approach to one subject or location would not adequately provide the wraparound services students need. Instead, the school is the central location for academic and socio-emotional support under the WSCC model.

ASCD (2013) published *Models for Conducting Whole Child Community Conversations* to inform the public about their approach and empower the schools and communities to embrace it and develop plans to implement it. Successful implementation of the WSCC policy involves the school, health organizations, and community members. Advocating for the policy in Washington D.C., at state capitols, and within their communities brought much-needed attention to this imperative matter.

Many districts support the whole child by aligning and integrating education and health services. One district that stands out in its implementation of the WSCC model is Denver Public

Schools in Denver, CO. This district serves a diverse population with 90,000 students, 72% of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch. The district imbedded WSCC into its strategic planning process and budgeted a significant amount of resources to support student health needs. New resources to meet the needs of the whole child included serving breakfast, adding Physical Education (PE) teachers, increasing the time spent in PE, and increasing the number of counselors working with students. Since implementing these changes, the district experienced a decrease in suspension and expulsion rates, thus exposing students to the maximum amount of educational minutes (Chiang, Meagher, & Slade, 2015). Students, parents, teachers, support staff, and community members provided the district with input regarding continued health and wellness supports they will make available to students.

Districts across the nation embraced the Whole Child Tenets and some adopted formal policies. In March 2015, the Culver City Unified School District (CCUSD) passed a Whole Child Board Resolution. After its passage, CCUSD created a Director of School and Family Support Services position. The district hired intervention counselors to work with students in need of mental support, created a Backpack for Kids program that provided students on the free lunch program with food for the weekend, and created the Culver Closet, which makes clothes, shoes and home necessities available to students and families in need. A community health center is located in between the middle and high school campuses and provides mental health and medical services to CCUSD students (D. Sotelo, personal communication, September 19, 2016). Providing these services support the Whole Child Tenets and positions previously unsupported children to increase their academic achievements.

A well-rounded 21st century education goes beyond learning reading and math. Instead, evaluating the success of today's students must rely on more than test scores. ASCD's (2013)

Whole Child Tenets include a school setting for a student that is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, challenged, and sustainable. Each tenet focuses on one of the essential components to support the whole child. ASCD created indicators for schools to use to assess their level of implementation of the Whole Child Tenets, which schools use to rate themselves on a scale of 1-10 and gain a clear understanding of how to advance to the next level.

Schools need to support all aspects of the whole child by implementing adequate services and supports, creating commissions to monitor their progress, and regularly reviewing them and publishing reports (ASCD, 2015c). To adequately address the mental and health needs of students, the student-to-counselor ratio must be reduced. ASCD found that the current ratio is 826:1 in California and 482:1 nationwide (ASCD, 2015a). According to the American School Counselor Association, there should be a 250:1 ratio of students to each school counselor (ASCD, 2015b). Schools implementing the Whole Child Tenets lower these rates and offer more comprehensive counseling services by hiring additional counselors targeting identified services.

The United States Whole Child Snapshot (ASCD, 2015b) stated that, "to be prepared for well-paying jobs and lifelong learning, the nation's children need personalized support, safe environments, good health, and challenging learning opportunities" (p. 1). Preparing a student for a successful future is a school's ultimate goal. Graduation statistics for high school graduation for the class of 2013 was 81% nationwide and 80% in California (ASCD, 2015a). Whereas only 59% of students report engagement at school (ASCD, 2015a), student engagement will increase as a result of a more active, engaging, and student-centered curriculum. Student engagement in schools will then have a positive impact on the state's graduation rates.

According to Morse and Allensworth (2015), "student participation enhances self-awareness, and social achievement improves mental health and academic performance, and

reduces the rate of dropping out of school, delinquency, and substance abuse" (p. 786). Peer mentoring, peer education, and students' voices empowered the students and their peers. Civic engagement also increased in some schools implementing WSCC because it provides opportunities for students to flourish in capacities not previously expected.

Tacoma Public Schools (TPS) created a Whole Child Accountability System and assessed their impact on providing a healthy, safe, engaged, challenged, and supported program for their students (Murray et al., 2015). Community input launched its accountability system. Results drive adjustments to programs to ensure growth. As a result, "TPS has increased graduation rates by approximately 90% in 4 years, over 90% of students participate in PSAT and SAT testing, and an increased number of TPS students receive scholarships to the community and four-year institutions" (Murray et al., 2015, p. 799).

Chiang et al. (2015) asserted that "the benefits of collaboration, alignment, and integration between health and education can best be viewed in 3 key areas: leveraging resources, utilizing resources efficiently, and improving both health and education outcomes" (p. 776). Through cross-collaboration, the sectors integrate and align services while improving health and educational student outcomes (Chiang et al., 2015). Before WSCC, comprehensive services were not offered in the school setting. The original Whole Child Commission did not envision the improved efficiencies; instead, they simply hoped to support the whole child.

Some communities created shared use agreements between the schools and city to increase physical activity opportunities for students. School-based community health centers were created to serve students' needs, increase primary medical care, and decrease visits to the emergency room. The installation of these health centers led to fewer hospitalizations, which in turn increased school attendance (Chiang et al., 2015).

Graduation rates increased by 18% in a school district in Atlanta that embedded social-emotional supports in its schools, and ACT scores increased in all subjects in the same school district over a 5-year period. Students come from different backgrounds and families, and many need social-emotional learning in their schools. School leaders need to reinforce social-emotional learning by embedding it into everything they do as a school. Students who learn social-emotional skills will be on a better path to success in college, career, and life than those that do not learn these skills (Carstarphen & Graff, 2018).

Noguera emphasized that some students come to school with greater needs than others. Some children come from a background in poverty and need additional supports and resources that other students do not have. Responding to student needs is essential to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn. Schools support students with greater needs by providing social-emotional learning. Noguera investigates schools to see how they teach prosocial values, advocating for equity for all students. He has argued that schools need to support each child and schools need to be supported so they can serve all students ("Turn & Talk/Q&A with Pedro Noguera," 2018).

Students need to learn how to make positive choices, manage their emotions through disappointments, build healthy relationships, and learn life skills (Carstarphen & Graff, 2018). Strong social-emotional skills contribute to academic access.

Basch (2011) stated,

> No matter how well teachers are prepared to teach, no matter what accountability measures are put in place, no matter what governing structures are established for schools, educational progress will be profoundly limited if students are not motivated and able to learn. Particular health problems play a major role in limiting the motivation and ability to learn of urban minority youth. (p. 593)

Providing health services at a school was only an idea when the Whole Child Commission first met; once some schools installed clinics, attendance increased, providing consistent educational access to the students at those schools. Schools provided mental health services to their students during the school day to meet their social-emotional needs, which aligns with the Whole Child tenets. In the past, schools placed mental health services on the back burner and provided reactive services as opposed to proactive services. Schools embedding social-emotional programs into their strategic plans, budgets, and hiring practices are more likely to have sustainable programs and services.

Extracurricular activities. Bryan et al. (2012) argued that strong bonds to a school correlate to academic success for high school students. Involvement in extracurricular activities and clubs creates strong bonds. The strongest correlation between academic achievement and school bonding occurred in the 10th grade (Bryan et al., 2012). Extra-curricular involvement as a student enters high school sets the foundation for academic success. Bryan et al. (2012) argued the "number of clubs students were involved in and the hours spent on extra-curricular activities were positively related to academic achievement" (p. 472).

Chase, Hilliard, Geldhof, Warren, and Lerner (2014) stated "school engagement positively predicts the GPA of high school students (p. 894). Engagement included involvement in extracurricular activities. Emotional and behavioral development positively correlate with higher GPAs (Chase et al., 2014). School bonding, through extracurricular involvement, has a positive impact on student academics (Bryan et al., 2012).

Bradley and Conway (2016) argued that school activities competitively practiced multiple times a week, including athletics, develops a student's non-cognitive skills which may enhance academic achievement. Student motivation and self-efficacy are enhanced through

extracurricular activities (Bradley & Conway, 2016). Pestana, De Carvalho, De Menezes Nunes, Almeida Junior, and Salvador (2018) argued that physically active students showed better academic performance than inactive students.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. A school's curriculum must meet the needs of 21st-century learners. Schools promote deeper learning by focusing on real-world, essential standards and skills to teach more thoroughly (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Students will connect to the curriculum if they understand its relevance to their life.

Personalized learning. Bray and McClaskey (2015) argued that students can analyze, conceptualize, and synthesize information through personalization of education, which supports Vygotsky's theory. Personalization differs from differentiation, and individualization as personalization enables the student to gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum. Personalization is provided through blended learning while mastering the CCSS (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Pane et al., 2015). Interventions provide students with the support systems (Ellerbrock, 2012) needed to be successful in high school and the opportunity to create relationships for their high school experience (Roybal et al., 2014).

Research indicated the advantages and disadvantages of personalized learning (Bingham, 2017; Borup, Graham, & Drysdale, 2014; Jacobs, 2016; Pane et al., 2015; Schober & Keller, 2012; Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2010). Personalized learning offers students the opportunity to determine individual educational goals (Pane et al., 2015), which alters the structure of traditional schools and encourages the use of technology. Personalized learning has the potential to serve all students, including those who are traditionally underserved (Bingham, 2017). Academic growth increases the longer a student is enrolled in a personalized learning environment (Pane et al., 2015).

Teacher buy-in and training are essential to implement an effective personalized learning program (Jacobs, 2016). As Jacobs (2016) noted, “If you don’t have the right culture in place and teachers haven’t bought in, it can go horribly wrong” (p. 46). Mentors and teachers work with students to identify and track learning goals. Teachers meet with their students at least once a week and with parents four times a year to review student progress (Jacobs, 2016). Teachers appreciate personalized learning as it allows them to create a closer connection with students as individual learners (Borup et al., 2014; Jacobs, 2016). Training for teachers implementing personalized learning is essential, as their roles and responsibilities differ within each grade span and from that of the traditional teacher (Borup et al., 2014). A challenge for personalized learning and blended learning is the technical skills of teachers, as this educational opportunity is technology heavy (Pane et al., 2015).

The 2010 National Technology Plan discussed personalization, differentiation, and individualization and student needs in reference to the use of technology. Bray is at the forefront of personalization in schools especially relating to technology and coined the phrase “making learning personal” (Bray, 2016, p. xxi). Personalized learning focuses on the individual learner and his skills, needs, and goals (Bray & McClaskey, 2015). Whereas individualization provides instruction at the individual level, the learner drives his learning in personalization (Bray, 2016). Instruction that is meaningful to the individual connects the learner to the curriculum providing a deeper understanding of the curriculum (Bray & McClaskey 2015). Learners become intrinsically motivated and accountable for their education in a personalized system (Bray, 2016). The differences between personalization, differentiation, and individualization are introduced in Table 1.

Table 1

Personalization versus Differentiation versus Individualization

Personalization	Differentiation	Individualization
The Learner...	The Teacher...	The Teacher...
drives their own learning.	provides instruction to groups of learners.	provides instruction to an individual learner.
connects learning with interests, talents, passions, and aspirations	adjusts learning needs for groups of learners.	accommodates learning needs for the individual learner.
actively participates in the design of their learning.	designs instruction based on the learning needs of different groups of learners.	customizes instruction based on the learning needs of the individual learner.
owns and is responsible for their learning that includes their voice and choice on how and what they learn.	is responsible for a variety of instruction for different groups of learners.	is responsible for modifying instruction based on the needs of the individual learner.
identifies goals for their learning plan and benchmarks as they progress along their learning path with guidance from teacher.	identifies the same objectives for different groups of learners as they do for the whole class.	identifies the same objectives for all learners with specific objectives for individuals who receive one-on-one support.
acquires the skills to select and use the appropriate technology and resources to support and enhance their learning.	selects technology and resources to support the learning needs of different groups of learners.	selects technology and resources to support the learning needs of the individual learner.
builds a network of peers, experts, and teachers to guide and support their learning	supports groups of learners who are reliant on them for their learning.	understands the individual learner is dependent on them to support their learning.
demonstrates mastery of content in a competency-based system.	monitors learning based on Carnegie unit (seat time) and grade level.	monitors learning based on Carnegie unit (seat time) and grade level.
becomes a self-directed, expert learner who monitors progress and reflects on learning based on mastery of content and skills.	Uses data and assessments to modify instruction	uses data and assessments to measure progress of what the individual learner learned and did not learn to decide next steps in their learning.
Assessment AS learning and FOR Learning with minimal OF Learning	Assessment OF and FOR Learning	Assessment OF Learning

From *Make Learning Personal* (p. 9-10), by B. Bray and K. McClaskey, 2015, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Learners realize their strengths, needs, and challenges through personalized learning. Student engagement increases through education personalization as students connect to the curriculum and make deeper meaning of the lessons (Bray, 2016). Schools implement individual education plans for students with special needs, focusing on the areas for student development. Personalization should exist for all learners. Bray and McClaskey (2015) argued that the fundamental difference between individualization and personalization is "encouraging learner voice" (p. 14). Learners immerse themselves in the content and drive themselves to continue learning. Learners demonstrate their mastery of the curriculum through lessons, tests, and projects rather than on the Carnegie unit, which focuses on the amount of seat time a student accomplishes. Differentiation and individualization base themselves on the Carnegie unit (Bray & McClaskey, 2015).

Vygotsky's theory supports personalization as students analyze, conceptualize, and synthesize their knowledge (Bray & McClaskey, 2015). Bray and McClaskey (2015) discussed the implementation of blended learning in the classroom, which meets the needs of personalization. These methods include four models. A flex model allows teachers to facilitate lessons within a computer lab. In contrast, the lab rotation model allows students to use a lab in another school location to work on lessons. The station rotation model provides students in subject-specific classes the opportunity to rotate amongst technology stations within the classroom to learn the material. The individual rotation model embeds classroom instruction and online lessons within the same course, hybridizing the traditional teaching model with blended learning while meeting the personalized needs of each student.

An alternative school schedule gives students the opportunity to have a late or early start in the day to open up their schedule for career-related or non-school related obligations such as

non-school competitive sports. A personalized program can be implemented through blended learning, both of which are considered alternative school settings.

Blended learning. A learning management system (LMS) such as Moodle or Canvas is used to present the blended learning curriculum (Jacobs, 2016; Pane et al., 2015; Schober & Keller, 2012; Wu et al., 2010). A district's curriculum aligned to CCSS is used to create a course that teachers can modify or supplement to meet student needs. Teachers spend more time tutoring and interacting with students in a blended setting as the LMS sets the curriculum (Borup et al., 2014). Teachers monitor the progress students make through the curriculum presented via the LMS.

Exposure to blended learning provides high school students the opportunity to gain the 21st-century skill sets they need to compete in the global marketplace (Tucker, 2012). Tucker (2012) identified several benefits of a blended learning model: saving time, saving money, increasing one-on-one interaction with students, more effective communication, and building community and relationships with students. Mastering these skills and learning to communicate in a variety of mediums prepares students for the workplace.

Technology provides students and teachers the opportunity to participate in a flexible learning environment through blended learning opportunities, which in turn provide school districts with an alternative program to meet budget cuts. Districts save money through this online or hybrid educational model, as the expenses supporting this type of program differ from those of a brick-and-mortar school. Students and teachers access the online platform from anywhere. Hence, they do not need a facility in which to meet. Classes are conducted in a synchronous or asynchronous model, providing students and teachers a flexible model to fit their learning and teaching needs (Tucker, 2012).

Online learning programs may physically isolate students from other students, but they provide an online space for students to communicate, collaborate, and connect. Class discussions are often dominated by a few students in a traditional classroom, whereas other students feel pressure in discussions because they are unsure of the information or how to phrase their answers. In a traditional classroom, students need time to process information quickly to participate in classroom discussions; in contrast, in a blended learning class, students have time to process the information before responding to digital communications (Tucker, 2012).

Students in a traditional classroom do not hear or write down all of the information that is presented in class as they are unable to follow rapid, real-time conversations. In an online class, however, students participate in online discussions with other students without worrying about taking notes as they know they will have access to the digital materials at a later time. A blended learning class provides students access to a digital footprint and the typed-out words in an online posting or the notes to refer back to should there be a need (Tucker, 2012).

Blended learning is used to include online and teacher-led instruction (Jacobs, 2016). Ng and Nicholas (2010) affirmed that online learning facilitates and extends learning experiences for students who participate in a face-to-face learning environment. A blended learning environment presents a learning approach that includes delivery methods via face-to-face instruction, asynchronous online learning, and synchronous online learning (Wu et al., 2010). Effective blended learning teachers need to be technology savvy and must stay abreast of current educational technologies.

Wu et al. (2010) suggested that e-learning is more flexible and eliminates the geographical barriers within a traditional school setting, hence creating a convenient learning environment stripped of potential social problems. Jacobs (2016) argued that “this flexible model

appeals to students with diverse goals" (p. 46). E-learning is an educational option that may benefit some students.

A CDW-G 21st Century Campus Report (CDW Government, 2011) reported data from their study of technology and learning. CDW Government shared the following student response; "we are learning to think more independently and learning better time-management skills by doing more classwork virtually" (p. 12). Students learn 21st-century skills through blended learning classes. In the study, a college student shared that his generation is accustomed to having access to up-to-date information through the use of the internet. Hence, online classes meet their needs as students stay informed with instant access to current information.

Some studies indicate there is no statistical difference in student satisfaction for students participating in distance learning as compared to those in a traditional educational setting (Allen, Bourhis, Burrel, & Mabry, 2002). However, other studies argue that students have a higher satisfaction rate and learn more in a blended learning environment (Angiello, 2010; Cejudo & Almenara, 2013). Students' needs vary from individual to individual.

Research exists on blended learning in higher education and personalized learning (Gallagher, 2014) in some high schools (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Pane et al., 2015). However, a gap in the literature exists in high schools implementing personalized learning embedding blended learning programs for high school students.

College and career readiness. Richard Riley (as cited in Trilling & Fadel, 2009), Secretary of Education under President Clinton, identified a critical problem with our nation's education system: "We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist…using technologies that haven't yet been invented…in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet" (p. 3). Education systems need to anticipate future technologies and train students

to compete in a global marketplace. According to Trilling and Fadel (2009), hiring executives of major corporations identified skills U.S. graduates lack upon graduation: oral and written communication, critical thinking and problem-solving, professionalism and work ethic, teamwork and collaboration, working in diverse teams, applying technology, and leadership and project management. The lack of work skills in these areas causes a financial burden for companies, preventing them from yielding increased revenue. American companies become less competitive as they are unable to meet the growing demands of their clients and compete in the marketplace.

Trilling and Fadel (2009) argued that the new ways of learning for the 21st century include knowledge work, digital tools, digital lifestyles, and learning research, all of which align with the P21 Framework. Collaborative skills and accessing new types of technologies is essential in 21st century learning. Trilling and Fadel (2009) argued that "a one size fits all factory model and one-way broadcast approach to learning does not work well" (p. 30), thereby identifying a need for change in education goals for 21st-century learners. Students need to learn innovation skills, digital literacy skills, and career and life skills to be competitive in the workforce (Magner et al., 2011; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Teachers need to possess adequate technological skills to teach 21st-century learning skills to students (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

The Race to the Top program, implemented under the Obama Presidency, shifted the country's educational emphasis from focusing solely on meeting proficiency requirements on standardized tests to acquiring the skills for college and career readiness. Along with the subject content, the P21 Framework teaches life and career skills; learning and innovation skills; and information, media, and technology skills to prepare students for postsecondary opportunities (Magner et al., 2011). Programs supporting the implementation of this framework meet the

qualifications for the Race to the Top program to prepare students for career and college readiness. Mastering the P21 skills is crucial for students to compete in a global marketplace. Tangible skills are not the only needs of American students to be successful in high school. The acquisition of social-emotional skills and supports will assist the students while earning their high school diplomas.

Assistance to students. High school is the first experience students have where they are expected to pass all courses to satisfy graduation requirements. Students lack engagement for various reasons. Some students lack academic skills, whereas other students lack study skills (Neild, 2009). Schools need to identify student needs, build relationships with them, and provide interventions to guide students to success.

Identify needs. High school administrators and educational teams need to identify at-risk students or potential dropouts early and provide them with interventions to help them complete their high school diplomas (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). Administrators, teachers, and counselors can identify some students who need intervention easily. However, there is often a quiet group of students who fall through the cracks. Therefore, school personnel need to regularly monitor students with low academic performance, poor attendance, and lower extracurricular involvement, as these students may potentially need intervention (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015).

Administrators support a program not only through planning and participation, but also by allocating monies to be used for field trips, incentives, supplies and parental outreach (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). Freeman and Simonsen (2015) argued that school policies and practices should be examined regularly to ensure they meet the needs of the students and school; adjustments should be made to policies and practices that do not benefit the students and school.

Administrators need to consistently re-examine programs and resources to ensure they meet student needs.

McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) stated that "increased graduation requirements and rocky transitions from middle school to high school seem to comprise a majority of the reasons for students struggling, failing, and dropping out" (p. 447). Students who do not pass all of their classes in ninth grades have an elevated risk of dropping out (Neild, 2009). Providing interventions to high school students, specifically as they transition from middle to high school, contributes to the success of students toward earning their high school diploma.

Roybal et al. (2014) argued that "educators cannot wait for the students to fail; proactive interventions at multiple levels are necessary. The educators must develop and implement effective programs to promote student success" (p. 480). Montgomery and Hirth (2011) suggested that "every student is unique and each high school different in providing specific options and programs for helping the student meet with success" (p. 248). High schools determine which programs will meet the needs of their specific students; hence, intervention programs will look different from school to school. Additionally, students need to understand the correlation between the curriculum they learn and its application to their future to make a deeper connection to the information.

Relationship building. Montgomery and Hirth (2011) highlighted that "teaching and learning are intertwined with the ability of teachers to develop relationships with students in order to effectively communicate and correlate knowledge" (p. 262). Student-teacher relationships are meaningful in life and have an impact on student success. Intervention programs need to build student-teacher relationships and relationships between students and other adults on school campuses to provide students with the support system they need.

Roybal et al. (2014) argued that students need to experience positive relationships while in school: with peers, adults, and teachers. Positive relationships affect student connectedness to school, work ethic, and achievement in school. Some students cite peer rejection as a reason why they dropped out of school. Students need to feel connected to the school through relationships, activities, and academics, otherwise their academic performance will suffer.

Students come from varied home experiences and sometimes lack the skills to operate in a social and school setting. The high school experience exposes all students to skills that will assist them in life. Educators teach students necessary skills to prepare them to be successful members of society. Learning these life skills in high school will overlap into the students' post-secondary-lives (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011).

Engagement in high school is crucial, especially during the transition from middle school to high school. Students need to be present, physically and emotionally, and have curiosity, interest, and passion for learning (Bray, 2016). Some students lack the academic basics in English and mathematics to prepare them for the rigorous pathway through high school (Emmett & McGee, 2012; Lewandowski, Berger, Lovett, & Gordon, 2016). Students need to feel connected to the school and have positive interpersonal relationships at school (Roybal et al., 2014). Administrators need to ease the transition to high school by providing adequate funding and interventions to support all students at their school focusing on ninth graders (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Neild, 2009). Administrators need to recognize that the one-size-fits-all program does not meet the needs of all students and that students have diverse learning needs.

Interventions. A student does not choose the family into which he/she is born. Some families are capable of preparing their students for school; others lack the knowledge or resources to do so. Hence, support services are essential for some students to thrive

educationally. Although such services are expensive, they create a more equitable school setting for students from various backgrounds and prepare them as they transition from one level of schooling to the next.

As students transition to high school, schools need to provide support systems to meet the emotional, educational, and developmental needs of their freshman students to ensure a successful freshman year. Whereas some freshmen students suffer from low self-esteem and depression, others may feel isolated or disconnected from the school (Ellerbrock, 2012). Therefore, services must be available at the schools to meet their students' needs. Ellerbrock (2012) stated "6% of all dropouts leave school by their 10th-grade year" (p. 35). It is essential to ensure that students receive the services and attention they need to stay in school.

Academic vocabulary development as an intervention would benefit students as reading comprehension is a key skill in secondary education and beyond (Lewandowski, Berger, Lovett, & Gordon, 2016). Many students enter high school unprepared for the demands of the curriculum and lack the English and mathematics skills to understand the curriculum and make adequate progression (Emmett & McGee, 2012). Students have a difficult time engaging in school when they lack adequate academic skills.

Montgomery and Hirth (2011) discussed a transition program called HEART, which stands for Helping Everyone Aim for the Right Target. A student identified for the HEART program "has a lack of academic performance, behavioral issues, truancy, social and emotional problems, or a combination of these factors" (p. 257). HEART addresses these obstacles and provides a sense of belonging to the students who participate in it by providing opportunities to be engaged in school. Teachers build strong relationships with the students, motivate them toward higher performance, and demonstrate their care that a student graduates from high school.

A school needs to identify the right teachers, counselors, and administrators to work in an at-risk freshman transition program. Montgomery and Hirth stated that "working with at-risk students require extra energy from teachers to maintain their consistent academic effort as this support is not always present at home" (p. 260). The selection of the right teachers for this program is crucial.

Schools implement multi-tiered systems of support to address students' needs. Schools need to address academics, attendance, behavior, and school dropout within their interventions to address their students' needs (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015). Freeman and Simonsen (2015) reviewed multiple interventions and determined that more research needs to be completed in each area of concern to recognize which strategies would help solve the problem. Programs exist targeting a specific concern (i.e., academics, attendance, behavior, and school dropout), but no program has successfully addressed all four problems.

Students have diverse learning styles that are not met by American high schools (Bray, 2016; Subban, 2006). Some students need personalized learning (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Bray & McClaskey, 2015; Pane et al., 2015) to thrive in high school. Blended learning could meet these educational needs, as it provides students the opportunity to learn the curriculum visually while gaining 21st-century skills (Bray, 2016; Tucker, 2011). Appropriate interventions support students as they transition to high school and embrace a new learning environment focused on passing classes to earn a high school diploma. Schools no longer focus on students demonstrating a certain level of proficiency on tests. Instead, they focus on preparing students for college and career readiness.

Qualified instructional staff. The educational shift in the United States has been from one of a teacher being a sage on the stage to one who can guide students through deeper,

problem-based learning. To meet these needs, 21st-century teacher education programs should include “practice in designing and implementing inquiry, design, and collaborative learning projects” (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 125). Teachers need to master the content and embed 21st-century skills to prepare students for college and careers (Magner et al., 2011; Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

The National Dropout Prevention Center (2018) stated that teachers need ongoing professional learning opportunities to meet students’ changing needs to prevent dropouts. Students’ needs change over time. Educators need to understand the youth they serve and grasp the pedagogical skills to support them. Professional development should focus on pedagogical goals aligned with the vision and focus of the school. Once trained, teachers need to be supported through the implementation of teaching strategies and the fidelity of their implementation. Sometimes educators pick and choose which parts of a strategy to implement, which may undermine the significance of the intended lesson.

Continual professional development for new and practicing teachers needs to be a top priority of schools to ensure that student needs are met. Educators in 21st-century classrooms possess ample technological skills to support students and empower them with college and career readiness skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Digital literacy skills and content are intertwined into meaningful 21st-century learning lessons. Teachers pose essential questions and allow students to investigate problems to instill deeper learning, preparing students for the future. New teaching methods and new frameworks provide powerful learning environments. The P21 framework offers strategies to interweave standards-based learning, assessments, and content to create effective learning environments for 21st-century students (Magner et al., 2011; Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Diverse learning styles. Subban (2006) argued that students do not fit a single mold: they have unique learning styles. Vygotsky recognized that learning is not just an internal process; rather, the social aspect of learning creates deep learning (Bryceson, 2007). Therefore, it is pertinent to have a qualified instructional staff to match students' diverse learning styles to ensure they receive quality and meaningful education. Pane et al. (2015) stated that it is difficult to find qualified staff for a personalized learning school.

Each brain is unique, constructed of varying experiences and environments (Gregory & Burkman, 2011). Educators need to understand brains vary and use different instructional methods to teach their curriculum to meet the varying needs of students. Gardner's Multiple Intelligences recognize that students learn in different ways which include verbal/linguistic, musical/rhythmic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, naturalistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Gregory & Burkman, 2011, p. 52).

For example, a visual/linguistic learner reads fluently and is articulate in their speech. This type of learner is attentive when listening and gains their knowledge through spoken and written words. A rhythmic learner gains knowledge through the rhythms of the language or music and better acquires knowledge when listening to background music. Visual/spatial learners discover through illustrations and color code while learning. Logical/mathematical learners prefer structure and logic within their learning environment. Bodily/kinesthetic learners prefer movement; naturalistic learners learn through nature and details. Whereas interpersonal learners prefer learning in groups, intrapersonal learners are reflective and learn better working independently (Gregory & Burkman, 2011).

Each intelligence uses a different part of the brain or more than one part to acquire and process information (Gregory & Burkman, 2011). Educators who present lessons requiring

students to use more than one intelligence serve different types of learners and provide students varying opportunities to access information. Gregory and Burkman (2011) discussed that English learners not only face language barriers but they also capture knowledge through different learning styles and multiple intelligences. Therefore, best teaching practices include embedding activities which use more than one instructional method.

Culturally relevant education. The change in society's demographics necessitates a change in the traditional curriculum to embed literature, history, and word problems that tap into the multiple cultures in today's schools (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Culturally relevant curriculum includes embedding lessons and literature recognizing the cultures, languages, and life experiences of students, validating students' backgrounds and enticing them to connect with the lesson and curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Connecting student experiences and interests to curriculum dates back to the philosophy of Dewey (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). Culturally relevant pedagogy provides students the avenue "to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476). This kind of pedagogy focuses on a student's academic success, ensures cultural competence, and embeds sociopolitical awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally relevant teachers provide students the platform to "critique current social inequities" (p. 476).

Educators need to regularly examine their educational practices and make changes as necessary to serve students and their learning styles (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). This includes connecting the curriculum to their culture and lives. Blankstein and Noguera (2015) stated, "It is time to design a pluralistic education that moves beyond skin color, native language, and zip code where everyone is a valued member and had capacity to learn" (p. 138). All students need to feel valued through the curriculum. Teachers who capitalize on their students' interests and

experiences create a strong, nurturing learning environment. Blankstein and Noguera stated, "culturally relevant pedagogy can significantly enhance the academic success of ethnically diverse students" (p. 176). Students tap into their cultural backgrounds and make meaning of the lessons if they connect personally to the lessons.

A teacher's beliefs and ideologies surface in his/her teaching. In a culturally relevant classroom, teachers understand not only their culture but also the culture of others. Students need to feel comfortable in classrooms where they learn lessons that embed topics reflecting their lives. Ladson-Billings (1995) observed equitable and reciprocal teacher-student relationships in culturally relevant classrooms. Building relationships with students has a positive impact on their learning.

Motivating students. Strong teacher-student relationships drive student performance and motivation in classrooms. Student motivation increases when a teacher shows she cares for a student and wants them to graduate (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). Additionally, student motivation increases when the curriculum is culturally relevant and a student identifies with the lessons (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Learners become intrinsically motivated and accountable for their education in a personalized system, as they recognize their choice in learning (Bray, 2016).

Siegle, Rubenstein, and Mitchell (2014) identified creativity and enthusiasm as characteristics of successful teachers who drive student performance in gifted classrooms. The same techniques may impact the non-gifted classroom as well. Teachers with positive social interactions with students have a favorable impact on motivating their students to learn (Siegle et al., 2014). These teachers exude confidence and, in some cases, learn alongside the students. It can be difficult for some teachers to acknowledge that they do not know something.

Motivation increases when a teacher drives a student to take ownership of his/her learning (Bray, 2016; Siegle et al., 2014). Personalizing a student's education provides the student the opportunity to take ownership of his/her learning; motivation increases as the student plays a role in determining his/her education (Bray, 2016). Bray (2016) argued, "personalized learning helps learners become intrinsically motivated to learn, so they own and drive their learning" (p. 1).

Summary

Graduates from high school have more opportunities available to them in post-secondary life than dropouts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2017; Bowers et al., 2013; Crissy, 2009; Rumberger, 2011). Hence, high schools need to provide support to ensure student engagement, support their diverse learning styles, and meet their social-emotional needs. Research indicates that students perform better when schools provide interventions (McCallumore & Sparapani; 2010; Neild, 2009; Roybal et al., 2014) and support (ASCD, 2015; Carstarphen & Graff, 2018; Thiers, 2018; "Turn & Talk/Q&A with Pedro Noguera," 2018) to meet student needs.

Student engagement contributes to academic success (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; Montgomery & Hirth, 2011; Neild, 2009). High school students face the reality that their grades count toward graduation, which creates pressure they have not experienced previously. Schools engage students by providing academic interventions to support students, including increased support in English and mathematical skills (Emmett & McGee, 2012). Understanding the curriculum creates an appealing environment in which students can thrive. Positive relationships provide the support for students to flourish; positive relationships between students and adults at school influence student connectedness to school, work ethic, and achievement (Roybal et al., 2014). Montgomery and Hirth (2011) emphasized

the importance of teachers developing relationships with their students to create a trusting environment in which to deliver the curriculum.

Bray (2016) coined the phrase “making learning personal” (p. xxi) and differentiated among personalization, differentiation, and individualization. Whereas differentiation considers the group of learners, personalization and individualization start with the individual learner in mind. In a personalized setting, “the learner identified goals for their learning plan and benchmarks as they progress along their learning path” (Bray & McClaskey, 2015, p. 9). Technology and or blended learning can create an avenue for personalization in schools (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Bray, 2016; Bray & McClaskey, 2015; Pane et al., 2015).

Students perform better in school when their social-emotional needs are met (ASCD, 2015c; Carstarphen & Graff, 2018; “Turn & Talk/Q&A with Pedro Noguera,” 2018). Student have varied familial backgrounds, some of which do not provide adequate support for success (Thiers, 2018). Schools need to provide wraparound services to support the whole child to have an impact upon academic achievement (ASCD, 2015c). Schools providing social-emotional supports demonstrated academic increases (Murray et al., 2015).

Subban (2006) argued that students do not fit a single mold and have unique learning styles. ASCD (2015c) affirmed the importance of providing wraparound services to increase student achievement by meeting student needs and ultimately increasing the high school graduation rate. Students have diverse backgrounds and diverse needs. Educational options exist through blended learning programs (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Bray, 2016; Pane et al., 2015) to meet the personalization and diverse needs of high school students to increase graduation rates.

Ladson-Billings (1995) argued that students thrive in a culturally relevant classroom that embeds lessons connecting to their lives and backgrounds. Students engage in lessons and demonstrate higher academic achievement when the curriculum connects to their lives. Through culturally relevant curriculum, students grow academically, develop cultural competence, and demonstrate a sociopolitical consciousness. Culturally proficient leadership guides an organization implementing culturally relevant curriculum (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Motivation in the classroom increases as teachers exude caring toward their students. Teachers who learn alongside their students are more likable and also spark motivation among their students (Siegle et al., 2014). When students recognize their own lives within the curriculum, they identify with the lessons and demonstrate increased motivation (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Personalizing learning focuses on student accountability (Bray, 2016). As students take more ownership of their education, motivation increases.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the study methodology. The chapter is organized into 11 sections: (a) introduction, (b) research methodology and rationale methodology, (c) validity/trustworthiness of study design, (d) setting, (e) population, sample, and sampling procedures, (f) human subject considerations, (g) instrumentation, (h) data collection procedures and data management, (i) data analysis, (j) positionality, and (k) conclusion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates within the last 3 years from the blended learning program at SHS and Si in California and describe how these schools address the needs of high school students in a 21st-century learning environment. To accomplish this purpose, a phenomenological study methodology was used. In-depth individual interviews were conducted with students currently enrolled in or who graduated within the last 3 years from the blended learning program at SHS and Si. The data were triangulated to make sense of the lived experiences and perspectives of students who have participated in the blended learning program offered by SHS and Si.

Research Question

The following central question guided this study: What are the lived experiences and perspectives of high school students who are currently participating in or recent graduates of a unique blended learning program in California?

Research Methodology and Rationale

This research study used a qualitative phenomenological study methodology to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of students who were currently

enrolled in or who recently graduated from a blended learning program at SHS and Si in California and describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs and influencing graduation rates. The researcher conducted in-depth individual interviews with current students or individuals who graduated from the blended learning program within the past 3 years.

A qualitative study "involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 7). Qualitative studies interpret the human meaning of programs or problems in their natural setting, establishing themes or patterns to report data. In this qualitative study, the researcher used in-depth individual interviews to interpret the meanings of participants who participate in or have participated in a blended-learning program to gain a better understanding of this alternative educational option. Creswell and Poth (2018) described a phenomenological study as one relating "the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p.75). This phenomenological study identified the common themes across the data to understand the essence of the shared experience.

Individual interviews are used commonly in phenomenological and qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Researcher created, open-ended questions guided the semi-structured interviews with current students and recent graduates to gather information about the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Guided questions led the semi-structured, open-ended conversations while the researcher gathered data (Yin, 2018). A researcher follows his/her path of inquiry, remaining unbiased while posing questions throughout a study (Yin, 2018). Data analysis identifies significant statements and themes to understand the essence of the data. The researcher reports significant statements through the research and describes the meaning of the central themes identified in the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Validity/Trustworthiness of Study Design

The researcher built rapport with the participants before the study to help obtain an accurate reflection of the phenomenon under investigation. Participant validation processes were implemented to ensure the validity of the data gathered. Participants were offered a copy of the interview transcripts to verify their accuracy, thereby ensuring the credibility of the data presented in the study. A peer reviewer reviewed the data from the study to provide feedback and ensured the validity and transparency of the information. The peer reviewer kept the researcher honest and ensured that information was interpreted correctly and presented accurately (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A delimitation of this study is that it was conducted in a unique setting in California offering some students a school schedule composed of some classes at the comprehensive high school while taking some classes online through the district's iAcademy.

Setting

California schools SHS and Si served as the research sites for this phenomenological study on the lived experiences and perspectives of students participating in their blended school program. Some students participate in a blended learning program for part of their schedule; they take face-to-face classes at the comprehensive high school, and the remainder of their schedule includes online classes offered through the iAcademy.

In 2014, the principal of SHS recognized that the comprehensive high school was not meeting the needs of all students and approached the principal of Si to create a blended learning program between the two schools. The challenges to graduation faced by students at the comprehensive high school included the master schedule not including the courses a student needed to graduate, the time of the day the courses were offered, students having professional career obligations that prevented them from being enrolled full-time in a comprehensive high

school, and students needing time in their day to receive social-emotional support. During the Spring 2019 semester, 21 students were enrolled in the blended learning program.

Throughout the school year, students meet with their counselors at the comprehensive high school to review their academic progress and progress toward post-secondary goals and graduation requirements. Challenges may arise in fulfilling graduation or A-G requirements depending upon the needs of each student. If a counselor is unable to schedule a student into classes at the comprehensive high school to meet graduation or A-G requirements, then the counselor may propose a blended learning program to the student. Students may also request to be referred to the blended learning program to fulfill their A-G and graduation requirements. The blended learning program is available to students on a case-by-case scenario due to limited staffing. Counselors recommend students to the blended learning program at the monthly Friday Student Success Team (FSST) meeting attended by the academic and intervention counselors from SHS, the administrators from SHS and Si, and the psychologist and nurse serving both schools. This team of educators understands students' needs from varying perspectives and determines which school resources will benefit students, including but not limited to participating in the blended learning program.

The principal of the iAcademy oversees the online component of the blended learning program. Once the FSST determines a student should be placed in the blended learning program, the Si principal meets with the student and his/her parent to review the program and its expectations. The Si principal reviews the student's transcript and, with input from the SHS counselor, determines which classes the student should take online and which classes the student should take at the comprehensive high school. The SHS counselor enrolls the student in the courses at the comprehensive high school. The Si principal assigns the student to one of the two

Si teachers who meet with the student weekly to review progress, answer questions, assign work, and administer assessments as needed. The Si teacher monitors student progress remotely throughout the week, maintains contact with the student and parent, and updates the SHS counselor on student progress as needed.

Si uses two online platforms for their online classes: K12 and APEX Learning. K12 is the original platform Si uses for its classes. K12 high school classes meet A-G requirements and offer various courses including languages and Advanced Placement classes. K12 classes include an online teacher, so the Si teacher serves as additional support working with the student. APEX, the second platform used for online classes, also meets A-G requirements. The program is more user friendly for the student and the teacher. There is no online teacher for courses offered through APEX, so the Si teacher serves as the teacher for the courses. K12 is used for Advanced Placement classes and world languages except Spanish, as they have a Spanish teacher onsite. APEX is used for the other courses.

Whereas some blended learning program students start later in the day and finish at 3:00 p.m., others start at 8:00 a.m. and finish their SHS classes earlier in the day. The remainder of the time is open for students to work on their Si classes. The schools are located in a school complex that includes SHS, Si, and other schools in the district. The SHS and Si administrators consult with one another as needed regarding student progress and needs. Courses completed at both schools are placed on the student's transcript at the end of each semester. Students from both schools are eligible to participate in SHS activities, including the graduation ceremony.

Population, Sample, and Sampling Procedures

This phenomenological study was conducted in a single district in California that offers some students a blended learning program comprising a part of their school schedule at the

comprehensive high school, with the other part of their schedule offered via the district's iAcademy. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that operational criteria for potential candidates should be determined in advance so it is easier to qualify candidates. Purposive, non-random sampling was conducted; the study sample included students currently enrolled in grades nine through 12 or individuals who had graduated from the program in the past 3 years. Purposive sampling in qualitative research ensures that the participants have an informed understanding of the research topic. Targeted letters or emails explaining the study were sent to the parents of students currently enrolled in the blended learning program and to students who graduated from the program within the last 3 years to recruit participants for this study. A letter from the principals of the schools accompanied the study recruitment letter sent to parents and graduates of the program.

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that phenomenological studies should include five to 25 participants. This study included the eight respondants to the invitation to participate in the study. Participants were chosen carefully, or purposively, as they needed to have experienced the same phenomenon to forge a common understanding of their lived experience. As a researcher develops a phenomenological study, he/she integrates the participants' lived experiences and perspectives and embeds them with his/her own perspectives. The researcher may bring assumptions into the interpretation of the data; hence, the researcher needs to determine if and how he/she will incorporate his/her personal understandings.

Human Subject Considerations

Institutional Research Board approval. Approval for the research study was sought through Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that no harm was caused to study participants. IRB approval covers "respect for person, concern for welfare, and justice"

(Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 54) and was completed before the commencement of the study. Ethical standards were in place to ensure the integrity of the study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher needs to maintain ethical standards throughout each phase of the study. The researcher passed the CITI Investigator Education course and learned about essential components of creating an ethical study focused on protecting the study participants and the institution. This course is a requirement for Pepperdine's IRB approval.

Study permission. Once IRB approval was granted, the researcher formally sought permission to conduct the study from the school district. The district required the submission of a formal application to the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services seeking permission to conduct the study. The school district accepts five research studies each school calendar year and also requires human subject protections.

Following district approval, the site principals for the research study signed a joint letter introducing the research study. This letter, along with the recruitment letter from the researcher, was sent to the parents of students participating in the blended learning program seeking permission for their students to participate in the study, as well as to recent graduates of the program to participate. Letters were sent via the United States mail and email.

Informed consent. Parents signed a consent form for voluntary, opt-in participation (see Appendix F) of their children before the researcher sought assent from the students through a signed paper form (see Appendix E). Once parents consented to their students' participation in the study, students opted in to the study through a signed paper assent form. Adult graduate participants in the study did not need to sign a paper consent form to participate in the study, as they provided informed consent when they attended interviews of their own free will. Parents of minors, minor students, and adult graduates signed a form consenting to have the interviews

recorded. Adult participants were provided with the informed consent form (see Appendix G) at the beginning of the interview and had the option to leave if they no longer wished to participate in the study.

Confidentiality. The researcher took precautions to ensure the safety and confidentiality of all research participants. To protect the participants from harm and disclosure, pseudonyms are used instead of the participants' names and the names of the schools were changed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A master list of pseudonyms was recorded and will be stored in a locked cabinet for 3 years, after which it will be destroyed.

Potential risks. Minimal harm was expected to come to study participants. Risks of participation included fatigue, boredom, possible psychological or social harm as participants may have started questioning their educational choice, breach of confidentiality, breach of identification, or loss of personal time for the duration of the interview. As students answered the questions, it was understood that they might have become interested in the possibility of participating in a different type of educational setting from which they participated. They may have determined they preferred a full-time face-to-face program or a full-time online program. Graduates may have questioned the choice they made in completing their educational path.

Interviews were maintained electronically and password-protected, with signed consent forms from parents and assent forms from students kept in a locked cabinet. Adult participants did not need to sign consent forms. The data will be destroyed after 3 years. These safeguards were put in place to protect the confidentiality of the research participants and the integrity of the study.

Once parents provided their signed consent for their student to participate, the students provided their signed assent, and graduates consented orally to participate in the study,

interviews were scheduled in a school-provided location at either the comprehensive high school or the iAcademy. The researcher requested an office or classroom with a desk or table and two chairs to conduct the interviews. The interviews were scheduled for a 60-90-minute time period. The researcher reviewed the IRB protections and presented the purpose of the phenomenological study to the interviewees. The researcher asked to audio-record the conversations and made it clear that the recording would be transcribed to compile the data. The researcher explained that she might take notes during the interview to assist with her understanding of the data. Potential benefits of the study to schools and districts were presented to participants to provide an understanding of the study. Participants had the option to opt out of the interview or choose not to answer certain questions even after they started the interview. Participants were told that if they became uncomfortable at any time during the interview, the recording would be paused and they could take a break until they were ready to resume the interview.

Instrumentation

A researcher must design an appropriate instrument to align with the research goals and ensure a valid research project. *What* and *how* questions are used in phenomenological studies. Interviews are an appropriate data collecting method for a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants in this study participated in in-depth, individual interviews and answered semi-structured, open-ended questions through a guided conversation.

The instrument for this study used researcher-developed questions addressing the four themes identified in the research that influence high school graduation rates: personalized schools, rigorous and relevant curriculum, assistance to students, and qualified instructional staff (Dianda, 2008). The questions were as follows:

- Student questions (see Appendix H):
    1. What grade were you in when you started the blended learning program? What grade are you in now? (to understand the time spent in the program)
    2. What were the circumstances that led you to a blended learning program?
        a. What were barriers or challenges, if any, you had with a traditional high school program?
        b. How has the blended learning program, if at all, assisted you with completing your high school diploma?
    3. Tell me about your classes in the blended learning program.
    4. How would you describe your learning environment?
    5. Tell me about your teachers and counselors and their relationships with students.
    6. Describe any advisement you may have received related to classes, staying in school and graduation requirements.
    7. What type of counseling do you receive about coping with the stress of school and life?
    8. What type of involvement do you have in your schools outside of classes?
    9. Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Are the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than your traditional classes? Explain.
    10. What are issues or challenges, if any, you have with a blended learning program?
    11. How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for college readiness?
    12. How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for career readiness?

13. What type of assistance do you receive as a blended learning student that differ from being a student in the traditional high school?
14. What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance do you receive as a student in the blended learning program?
15. How do your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program?
16. How do your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework?
17. How do teachers motivate you to learn?
18. What are some things you can think of that would improve the blended learning program?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share?

- Graduate questions (see Appendix I)
    1. What grade were you in when you started the blended learning program? What grade are you in now? (to understand the time spent in the program)
    2. What were the circumstances that led you to a blended learning program?
        a. What were barriers or challenges, if any, you had with a traditional high school program?
        b. How did the blended learning program, if at all, assist you with completing your high school diploma?
    3. Tell me about your classes in the blended learning program.
    4. How would you describe your learning environment?
    5. Tell me about your teachers and counselors and their relationships with students.

6. Describe any advisement you received related to classes, staying in school and graduation requirements.
7. What type of counseling did you receive about coping with the stress of school and life?
8. What type of involvement did you have in your schools outside of classes?
9. Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Were the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than your traditional classes? Explain.
10. What are issues or challenges, if any, you had with a blended learning program?
11. How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for college readiness?
12. How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for career readiness?
13. What type of assistance did you receive as a blended learning student that differed from being a student in the traditional high school?
14. What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance did you receive as a student in the blended learning program?
15. How did your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program?
16. How did your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework?
17. How did teachers motivate you to learn?
18. What are some things you can think of that would improve the blended learning program?

19. Is there anything else you would like to share?

The researcher conducted the individual interviews in a neutral setting, avoiding partiality to ensure bias-free responses as much as possible.

The researcher conducted a pilot interview of the questions with a high school student to ensure a high school student could understand the questions and the language used within the questions. The pilot interviewee suggested some vocabulary changes to ensure that students would understand the questions. The researcher adjusted the vocabulary in the questions prior to submitting them to review by experts.

The researcher submitted the interview questions via email (Appendix J) to two experts to review them to establish validity and determine if they were tools to use for this phenomenological study. Experts were asked if 60-90 minutes was an adequate time frame to conduct the in-depth individual interviews. Experts were asked the following questions:

1. In light of my study purpose, research questions and methodology, am I asking the right questions to get at my purpose?
2. Are the questions phrased understandably?
3. Are they organized correctly?
4. Does this methodology seem appropriate for this study?

Content Validity

Table 2 demonstrates the alignment of the interview questions with the literature to establish content validity. Additionally, the questions were reviewed by two content area experts to ensure the questions support the objectives of the phenomenological study.

Table 2

Relationship among the Research Questions, Interview Questions, and the Literature Source

Research Question/Theme	Interview Question	Literature Source
RQ1. What are the lived experiences and perspectives of high students who are currently participating in or recent graduates of a unique blended learning program in California?	1. What grade were you in when you started the blended learning program? What grade are you in now (S)? What grade were you in when you started the blended learning program? What year did you graduate (G)?	
Opening question	2. What were the circumstances that led you to a blended learning program? (S, G)	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) Bingham (2017) Bray (2016) Bray & McClaskey (2015) Griffith & Slade (2018) McCallumore & Sparapani (2010) Pane et al. (2015) Rumberger (2011) Subban (2006)
Opening question	2a. What were barriers or challenges, if any, you had with a traditional high school program? (S, G)	Angiello (2010) Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) Wandera (2017)
Opening question	2b. How has the blended learning program, if at all, assisted you with completing your high school diploma (S)? How did the blended learning program, if at all, assist you with completing your high school diploma (G)?	Angiello (2010) Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2015) Hui et al. (2008) Pane et al. (2015) Stout & Christensen (2009)
Opening question	3. Tell me about your classes in the blended learning program. (S, G)	Angiello (2010) Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2015) Hui et al. (2008) Pane et al. (2015)
Personalized Schools	4. How would you describe your learning environment? (S, G)	Angiello (2010) Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2015) Hui et al. (2008) Pane et al. (2015)
Personalized Schools	5. Tell me about your teachers and counselors and their relationships with students. (S, G)	ASCD (2014) Ellerbrock (2012) Griffith & Slade (2018) Morse & Allensworth (2015) Neild et al. (2008) Ramirez (2018) Roybal et al. (2014)

(continued)

Research Question/Theme	Interview Question	Literature Source
Personalized Schools	6. Describe any advisement you may have received related to classes, staying in school and graduation requirements (S); Describe any advisement you received related to classes, staying in school and graduation requirements. (G)	Ellerbrock (2012) McCallumore & Sparapani (2010)
Personalized Schools	7. What type of counseling do you receive about coping with the stress of school and life (S)? What type of counseling did you receive about coping with the stress of school and life (G)?	Basch (2011) Carstarphen & Graff (2018) Chiang et al. (2015) Griffith & Slade (2018) Pane et al. (2015) Ramirez (2018)
Personalized Schools	8. What type of involvement do you have in your schools outside of classes (S)? What type of involvement did you have in your schools outside of classes (G)?	Ellerbrock (2012) Frank (2011) Fritzer & Herbst (1996) Montgomery & Hirth (2011) Roybal et al. (2014)
Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum	9. Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Are the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than your traditional classes? Explain (S); Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Were the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than your traditional classes? Explain. (G)	Angiello (2010) Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) Bingham (2017) Cejudo & Almenara (2013) Hui et al. (2008) Jacobs (2016) Pane et al., 2015 Wandera (2017)
Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum	10. What are issues or challenges, if any, you have with a blended learning program (S)? What are issues or challenges, if any, you had with a blended learning program (G)?	Angiello (2010) Allen et al. (2002) Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) Bingham (2017) Cejudo & Almenara (2013) Hui et al. (2008) Jacobs (2016) Ng & Nicholas (2010) Pane et al. (2015) Wandera (2017)
Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum	11. How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for college readiness (S)? How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for college readiness (G)?	Angiello (2010) Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) Pane et al. (2015)

(continued)

Research Question/Theme	Interview Question	Literature Source
Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum	12. How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for career readiness (S)? How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for career readiness (G)?	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) Pane et al. (2015)
Assistance to Students	13. What type of assistance do you receive as a blended learning student that differ from being a student in the traditional high school (S)? What type of assistance did you receive as a blended learning student that differed from being a student in the traditional high school (G)?	Angiello (2010) Bingham, Pane, Steiner, & Hamilton (2018) Neild et al. (2008) Roybal et al. (2014) Schober & Keller (2012)
Assistance to Students	14. What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance do you receive as a student in the blended learning program (S)? What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance did you receive as a student in the blended learning program (G)?	Angiello (2010) Bingham et al. (2018) Schober & Keller (2012)
Qualified Instructional Staff	15. How do your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program (S)? How did your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program (G)?	Schober & Keller (2012) Subban (2006)
Qualified Instructional Staff	16. How do your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework (S)? How did your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework (G)?	Blankstein & Noguera (2016) Ladson-Billings, 1995 Terrell & Lindsey (2009)
Qualified Instructional Staff	17. How do teachers motivate you to learn (S)? How did teachers motivate you to learn (G)?	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) Blankstein & Noguera (2016) Pane et al. (2015) Siegle et al., 2014 Terrell & Lindsey (2009) Wu et al. (2010)

(continued)

Research Question/Theme	Interview Question	Literature Source
Recommendations for future of Blended Learning Program	18. What are some things you can think of that would improve the blended learning program? (S, G)	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) Pane et al. (2015) Wu et al. (2010)
Recommendations for future of Blended Learning Program	19. Is there anything else you would like to share? (S, G)	

The first expert serves as the Director of Secondary Curriculum in a small school district and has a Doctorate of Education in Educational Leadership. Her responsibilities include designing curriculum and guiding the secondary schools in her district toward achieving their curricular goals. Additionally, she oversees an online learning school from the district level. She formerly served as a high school teacher. The second expert is an assistant principal in a comprehensive high school, holds a Doctorate of Education degree in Curriculum and a Master's degree in Educational Technology, and taught blended learning courses in a medium-sized school district.

Suggestions from the experts included changing the order of the questions and additional questions to consider asking within the interviews. The researcher chose not to include the additional questions as they did not tie into the research conducted for this study. Vocabulary adjustments and order of questions were changed per the experts' suggestions.

Data Collection Procedures and Data Management

In-depth individual interviews were used to collect data for this phenomenological study. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), interview questions are used to entice participants to open up about their experiences. Participants in this study shared a lived experience through their participation in the blended-school personalized learning program at SHS and Si. Participants answered open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview setting. Follow up questions were asked when more information or clarification was needed. An incentive was offered to participants in this study in the form of either a $25 Starbucks or a $25 Target gift card.

Hard copies of notes and signed consent and assent forms will be stored for 3 years in a locked file cabinet to ensure confidentiality and security. After this point, they will be destroyed by the researcher. Results of the study will be archived via ProQuest and will be available for future studies.

The following procedures were used while conducting the study:

- Once IRB approved the study (See Appendix K), the researcher contacted the school district and schools where the research was conducted to establish rapport.
- The researcher submitted a research proposal to the district for approval and signed forms required by the district.
- Once the district granted approval for the study, the researcher contacted the principal of each school in the study to discuss the study informally.
- The schools queried the student information system to determine the students enrolled in the blended learning program and individuals who graduated from the blended program within the last 3 years.
- A cover letter explaining the study and its relevance was written and signed by the principal of SHS and the Si. This letter was sent along with the researcher's letter via mail and email to the parents of the students enrolled in the blended learning program and adult graduates of the program to recruit participants for the study.
- Ten days after the original mailing, An email was sent to parents and individuals who graduated from the blended program within the last 3 years to remind them of the request to participate in study in hopes of gaining consent from more participants.
- Students for whom parents provided initial consent were invited to meet with the researcher to learn about the study and sign assent forms.

- Interview data and times were established. Participants were contacted a minimum of 3 days in advance via email or phone with the date, time, and location of the interviews.
- Individual interviews were conducted based on a predetermined script. Participants were reminded that the interviews were being recorded.
- Analytic memos were written during and after the interviews.
- Participants were provided with the $25 gift card incentive.
- A transcription program, NVivo Transcription, was used to transcribe the interview recordings. Transcripts will be stored digitally for 3 years under password-protected format.
- Participants were offered copies of the interview transcripts to review for accuracy over the course of 1 week.
- Transcripts were uploaded to a NVivo, a coding program, for coding.
- Coding was reviewed by an expert coder to check themes for credibility and validity.
- Analytic memos were written while reading through the data to determine themes and codes.

Data Analysis

The researcher recorded the interviews via a password-protected cell phone and a password-protected iPad, in case one technology failed. The reason interviews were recorded was to ensure that transcripts were complete and accurate and to allow the researcher to better facilitate the process, observe, and take notes. A secure transcribing service, NVivo Transcription, was used to transcribe the interviews from the digital files. Recordings were destroyed once they were transcribed and the transcription was validated by the researcher. All

transcripts were stored digitally and password protected on the researcher's computer. Participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews to ensure they reflected their responses. The researcher wrote analytic memos during and after the interviews to record preliminary thoughts during the research. Methodologists recommend writing analytic memos during readings of the data to develop codes and themes within the data (Saldana, 2016).

Coding was used to lump actual language used within the interviews to determine the themes. In vivo coding is defined as literal coding, hence portraying the actual words of the participants in the study (Saldana, 2016). Transcripts of the interviews were uploaded to NVivo, a coding program, to assist in the coding and defining the prevalent themes. An expert reviewer helped with the coding to ensure the credibility and validity of the data and study findings. Triangulation across the data was used to determine patterns and comparisons across the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Positionality

The researcher is a secondary school administrator with a background in blended learning and familiar with the study site. The researcher holds a Master's degree in computer education and completed some graduate school coursework online over the past 15 years. These experiences could potentially pose a bias toward blended learning. The study involved an expert review of instrumentation and experienced coders to ensure authentic interpretation of the data and prevent bias within the study.

Summary

This chapter described the study methodology for this phenomenological study. The chapter presented detailed information on the study in 11 sections: (a) introduction, (b) research methodology and rationale methodology, (c) validity/trustworthiness of study design, (d) setting,

(e) population, sample, and sampling procedures, (f) human subject considerations, (g) instrumentation, (h) data collection procedures and data management, (i) data analysis, (j) positionality, and (k) conclusion.

This phenomenological study presents in-depth data on the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or individuals who graduated within the past 3 years from the blended learning program at SHS and Si and describes how these schools address the needs of high school students in a 21st-century learning environment. A qualitative phenomenological study methodology was used to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of students in and recent graduates from the blended learning program. Data were collected through in-depth individual student interviews. The use of guided-questions in semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with data about the student experiences in the high school blended learning program. Interviews are used commonly in phenomenological studies to understand participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The use of participation validation methods ensures the trustworthiness of data for the study. Participants had the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure the use of accurate language in the study. An external checkpoint person kept the researcher honest and ensured the accuracy of the data interpretations.

The use of purposive sampling ensured that the participants had an informed understanding of the research topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Study participants included students and graduates of SHS and Si. Targeted letters and emails were used to recruit study participants. Participants received a $25 gift card as an incentive for participating in the study.

Approval for the research study was sought through Pepperdine's IRB to ensure that no harm would come to the study participants. Ethical standards were in place to ensure the integrity

of the study. Safeguards were established to protect the confidentiality of the research participants and the integrity of the study.

Two experts validated the researcher-developed questions. Both experts have high school curriculum experience, have worked in comprehensive high schools, and oversaw a blended learning program or class in their tenure. The alignment of interview questions and the research goals ensured the reliability of the study research tools.

NVivo, a coding program, was used to code the data via in vivo coding to determine dominant themes. In vivo coding is literal coding, hence portraying the participants' actual words (Saldana, 2016). Triangulation across the data was used to determine patterns and comparisons (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The following chapter will contain a presentation and analysis of the data.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will present individual profiles of the seven current student participants in and one graduate (within the last 3 years) of the blended learning program at SHS and Si in California. This chapter also includes summary findings for each research question that emerged from collective analysis of the individual profiles.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of a blended learning program at SHS and Si, schools in California, and describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences and perspectives of high school students who are currently participating in or recent graduates of a unique blended learning program in California?

Research Design

A phenomenological study was used to describe students' lived experiences and perspectives. In-depth individual interviews of seven current students and one recent graduate of the blended learning program at SHS and Si were conducted. The face-to-face interviews were semi-structured and included open-ended questions. The data were triangulated to make sense of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of the blended learning program offered by SHS and Si to understand how it is meeting its students' needs.

Two experts validated the interview instrument. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed through NVivo Transcription, then coded through NVivo Coding Software. Codes were validated by an experienced coder.

Study Participants

Seven current students and one graduate of the blended learning program participated in the study. Participants included two students who started the program this school year, five students who have been in the program for the past 2 years, one student who participated in the program for the past 3 years, and a graduate of the program. Hence, study participants provided their lived experiences and perspectives from varying points of the program (see Table 3).

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Student/Graduate	Grade Entered Blended Learning Program	Years in Blended Learning Program
P1 - Roxy	Graduate	11	2
P2 - Lili	Student	11	2
P3 - Edward	Student	12	1
P4 - Corinne	Student	11	2
P5 - Stacey	Student	9	2
P6 - Timona	Student	10	2
P7 - Thierry	Student	9	1
P8 - Tommy	Student	10	3

Participant Profiles

The following profiles represent information gathered during the conversations between the study participants and the researcher. All participants were asked the same open-ended

questions, followed by additional questions as needed. Quotes from the conversations are used to share the emotions the participants expressed.

Subject 1 (Pseudonym: Roxy). Roxy participated in the blended learning program during her junior and senior years in high school. She graduated from SHS in 2018. Roxy is a professional photographer who had professional opportunities as a high school student and was often working. She realized she could return to school at any time but her job would not be available to her at any time, so she had to find a solution to complete her education. Additionally, she has a medical condition that makes it difficult for her to have enough energy to function properly in the morning, so she missed a lot of her morning classes. The schedule of a traditional high school did not benefit Roxy due to her medical condition and her career obligations.

The offer of interning as a photographer for a professional sports team presented itself to Roxy while in high school. As a student in a traditional high school setting, it was challenging for her to pursue this career opportunity and maintain her studies. She also interned as a photographer with a professional basketball team while in high school. After interning with the professional sports team, Roxy was hired as the team's photographer.

Roxy benefited from the blended learning program, as she has dyslexia and she was able to "go back and reference everything" to ensure she learned it. This program also benefited her career obligations as she was able to devote adequate time to her schoolwork and her career. Before changing to the blended learning program, Roxy used to sit in class thinking about the work she had to complete for her career and not focus on the classroom lessons.

Personalized schools. The classes Roxy took online were similar to the ones she had in the traditional setting. She did not take electives online. Roxy pointed out that the online classes provided a "reference point to go back to instead of hearing it and hoping I could find it in a

textbook later." Roxy never had a problem with her online teachers, whom she described as "very accommodating, very understanding." If she accidentally missed a deadline, they would extend the deadline for her. The online classes were "a lot more accommodating because it's more tailored to you versus being in a classroom that's tailored to 40 kids."

Roxy shared she had different teachers for each of her online classes, but did have one teacher twice. She indicated that she was not able to establish relationships with the teachers of her online classes like she does with her teachers in classes at SHS. Her teacher at Si helped her complete assignments but also served as the interface between Roxy and the online teacher. If the online teacher did not do something, the Si teacher advocated for Roxy with the online teacher. She enrolled in one or two classes at a time so she could focus on them and complete them faster. Focusing on one or two classes at a time prevented her from mixing up the assignments and readings due to her dyslexia. In reference to her Si classes, Roxy noted, "Being able to take them on your own schedule, take them one at a time, helps."

Roxy's Assistant Principal at SHS helped her enroll in the online school. She liked her counselor and teachers at SHS. Some teachers at SHS were very understanding when she missed school once she explained the career opportunity. They would allow her to come in when she returned to school to go over missed material. Regarding her online classes, she was advised to "get all her classes done" and not procrastinate. She completed her work, which was easy for her, and was able to establish a rhythm that worked for her.

Roxy was involved in the sports programs at SHS for 5 years, specifically the football program. She photographed the players, practices, and games. She was a teacher's assistant for the football coach and wrote up rules, playbooks, and schedules for the team. Roxy, her coach, and the football team considered Roxy part of the team.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Roxy felt the online classes were challenging if she did not keep up with the work. In her classes at SHS, she did not have to put in as much work, but was unable to "go back in reverse" if she missed something in a lecture and someone else didn't have the notes. In the Si classes, she was able to reread the material she was teaching herself.

Tests could be administered in the computer labs at Si, but Roxy took her tests at home so she had additional time to work on them due to her dyslexia. Taking them at home gave her the opportunity to take breaks as needed during the testing time. This type of testing structure benefited Roxy more than the testing structure at SHS, where students have 45 minutes to complete a test.

If she had an issue or challenge in the blended learning program, she was able to work with her teacher or counselors to address obstacles. She did have challenges completing her math class online. When discussing her math classes, she stated, "It is a little bit harder just because you don't have an immediate answer to your question." She ended up accessing a tutor outside of school to assist her with her math class.

As a college student, she realized that participating in the blended learning program in high school prepared her to take her general education classes online in college. She taps into the time management skills she learned while in the blended learning program. Once in college, she had difficulty managing her time while balancing her career and college classes, so she decided to take some classes online. Participating in the blended learning program gave Roxy the opportunity to pursue her career as a photographer for a professional sports team.

Assistance to students. Roxy recognized that the blended learning program is "more tailored to the student" than the traditional high school program. When she shared her reading

challenges due to her dyslexia with her online teacher, the teacher would answer questions or make adjustments to the assignments to accommodate her disability. In her classes at SHS, if she became confused, it was difficult for the teacher to make accommodations, as "there were 40 other kids to focus on at once."

The teacher at Si helped Roxy schedule her time to ensure "everything was going smoothly." When Roxy had difficulties in her online math class, Si referred her to a tutor to assist her with the subject matter. Teachers were "very accommodating" at Si. They would make adjustments for deadlines when Roxy requested an extension. This type of accommodation benefited Roxy, as sometimes the responsibilities of her professional career conflicted with assignment deadlines.

Qualified instructional staff. In her online classes, Roxy preferred having conversations with her teachers and establishing a relationship with them and the students. She was more motivated to work when her teacher was more understanding about her professional career. In the classes at Si she participated in online discussions with her classmates, which afforded her a better understanding of the material.

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program. Roxy met students who wanted to try the blended learning program. She suggested advertising the program and its deadlines to interested students. Although she recognized that many students do not have the time management skills to be successful in online courses, Roxy proposed allowing others to try the program on a trial basis. She suggested "not make it too easy for them," but to provide them an opportunity to find out about the blended learning program to determine if it would benefit them.

The blended learning program was “really helpful” for Roxy, as she recognized she would not have been able to obtain her photography position with the sports team without being in the blended learning program in high school. She enjoys being busy and managing different jobs at the same time. Participating in the blended learning program gave her an alternative learning environment in which to complete her high school diploma while pursuing her career as a professional photographer.

Subject 2 (Pseudonym: Lili). Lili entered the blended learning program in 11th grade when she transferred to the Sunshine School District after attending private schools all her life. Lili was on a cooking show during middle school and had several career opportunities while in high school. She did not have enough time to attend school full-time and maintain her professional responsibilities. She starred in cooking videos for YouTube, attended media events, and represented different cooking-related brands. Her exposure in the culinary field led to her being offered a position in a bakery, requiring her to be available each day at 1:30 pm. Her professional schedule conflicted with a traditional school schedule. She spoke about the possibility of a blended learning program with her private school; however, they were unable to accommodate the request. Fortunately, a friend in the blended learning program at SHS and Si told her about the blended learning program, and because she lived in the Sunshine School District, Lili was able to attend their schools. When she transferred to the public school, she and her parents met with administration and the counselor to discuss the possibility of a blended learning schedule. The school recommended her to the program.

A barrier Lili faced in the traditional school setting was the time needed to follow her passion. Even though she was enrolled in honors-level classes while trying to fulfill the obligations of her professional projects, it was difficult for Lili to manage a traditional school

schedule and her professional responsibilities. As a transfer student, she had to complete some additional coursework to be eligible to graduate from SHS, which she completed during her junior year.

Lili comes from a family that values education. Her grandfather was a university professor and her family members attended Notre Dame and University of California schools. Due to her exposure to her career at an early age, people asked her if she would pursue a degree in culinary arts. She was not sure if she needed the post-secondary education background as she already had the work experience. Lili realized she did not want to work 14-hour days until 3:00 a.m. and decided it would be a better path for her to pursue a degree. Ultimately, she hopes to complete a Hospitality, Food, and Beverage Management program and earn her Master's Degree.

Personalized schools. Lili discussed Si's two online formats: Apex and K12. Her courses were on K12. Lili felt her courses were "pretty straightforward" and the classes were not "very hard." She had an advisor teacher at Si who scheduled her into the courses and monitored her progress; she also had online teachers through K12 who taught the coursework.

Lili describer her learning environment as "fun." She interacted with students at SHS and completed some of the courses through Si. She completed her science, language, and math classes at SHS, all of which were scheduled during the first 3 hours of the traditional school day. Her counselor determined the courses she took at SHS and Si. As she had friends at school, she enjoyed spending the lunch period at SHS. Hence, she would spend part of the day in the school library using one of their Chromebooks working on her courses for Si and complete her coursework for the Si classes at home in her living room. Lili described the library s a quiet

venue to complete her coursework. Lili enjoyed the blended learning program because she "got a little bit more of the traditional structure," which helped her stay on track.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. When asked whether the online courses were more or less challenging than traditional classes, Lili responded that it depended upon the course and teacher. She felt she had a "bad" online history teacher. She felt her online course was straightforward in its setup, but she had to teach herself the subject. The course lessons referenced readings that she accessed online or at the library in order to learn the curriculum. After completing exercises and readings, she took chapter quizzes and a unit exam. Lili stated that the online component of the classes was more difficult than she expected, as she realized she preferred reading "real books" and completing worksheets to learn the material. It took her time to adapt to this new online learning format. Once in the program, she realized she needed to take more detailed notes and "write everything out" to learn the content She checked books out from the SHS library to use for some assignments.

Staying on track with the online classes was a challenge for Lili. Although the coursework was "straightforward" and "manageable," she became "stressed about finishing" weekly assignments. Lili shared that the online classes did not have the worksheets and lessons to help her learn the material; however, her SHS classes did offer these materials.

As a student in the blended learning program, Lili learned time management skills that she will use in college. She understands that college courses are more lecture-based, and with the experience of taking classes at Si, she understands the importance of taking notes, staying organized, and reviewing her material regularly. Having weekly assignments, she needed to complete also prepared Lili for career readiness. Lili considers school to be a job; she had a

weekly meeting with her teacher at Si and was given assignments to stay on track. Testing time was unlimited.

Lili shared that the task of completing projects in a traditional setting differs from completing projects in an online setting. She receives a lot of resources to complete a project in a traditional setting. However, in an online setting, Lili needs to find the resources on her own in order to complete the project.

Assistance to students. At Si, Lili met with her teacher weekly. Her teacher assigned her courses, monitored her progress in the classes, and kept her on track. This teacher, who served as the liaison between Lili and K12, was able to monitor her assignments and the amount of time she spent working on the K12 classes. The teacher sent Lili email reminders and answered Lili's questions. Lili could also email her online teachers if she had questions about the coursework. Lili recognizes that at Si she had a teacher emailing her and cheering her along the way, which she does not have in her classes at SHS. For this reason, Lili feels SHS is not as "individualized" as Si.

When Lili transferred to SHS and Si, she met with the counselor and assistant principal to review the graduation requirements. She formed a relationship with her counselor and met with him as needed over the next 2 years. He checked on her and followed her progress in the classes at Si. Although she had career opportunities at a young age, taking the California High School Proficiency Exam was not an option for Lili. Rather, her goal was to graduate from high school. Lili shared that the blended learning program provided a "solution that would work for the situation I was in." Lili had ample family support for her education and career possibilities.

As challenges arose in school, Lili spoke to her teachers and accessed resources provided by the school. She spoke with her school counselor when she was feeling stressed or had concerns with certain classes. Lili also had access to counseling services outside of the school.

Lili was involved in Student Council at her private school and was surprised how competitive it was to become involved in the Associated Student Body (ASB) at SHS. Lili applied for the ASB program during her Senior Year and gained acceptance into the program, for which planned school events and dances. She also became involved in clubs and formed a relationship with the career counselor at SHS who had seen Lili's television and internet shows. The career counselor asked her to teacher some cooking workshops to members of a school club.

Qualified instructional staff. In the classes at SHS, Lili had the "human connection" with the teacher and other students. Although she had teachers at Si, she did not have the same type of "human connection" because she did not have the opportunity to talk to them. Lili enjoyed "forming those connections with and relationships with the teacher and just other kids" in her classes at SHS.

When a teacher is "passionate and enthusiastic about what they're teaching and how they teach it," it motivates Lili to learn and pay attention to the subject matter. Lili enjoys learning. She feels motivated when completing interesting assignments and participating in interesting lessons. In an online setting, students have the opportunity to take breaks as needed while working on their coursework, which differs from her courses at SHS. When she transferred to SHS, it was challenging for Lili to adjust to larger class sizes. Lili shared that she struggles with teachers "just teaching the class in the sense that it's like we all learn the same." Lili shared, "It's hard when my teachers kind of just expect everyone to grasp onto their lesson and or grasp onto

the way that they teach." Adjusting to classes at Si was difficult at first, but she determined what type of learner she is and was able to teach herself the material.

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program. Lili stated, "the scheduling was weird for me" because she started her social studies class later in the semester, completing it in the summer. Due to the course not being completed during the traditional school year, the course did not count towards eligibility for California Scholarship Federation which recognizes high standards and achievements in academics. Lili suggested that honor status should be taken into consideration for students hoping to earn the scholar recognition.

The Si room was "always open" to students if they wanted to complete work in the lab. Lili recommended that the lab should remain accessible to the students during the school day. Although she had a Si teacher manage her schedule, Lili feels it would be beneficial to students if a teacher at Si was available one or two times a week if students needed assistance with their online work. Teachers are available online to answer questions, but as Lili pointed out, "sometimes it's hard communicating online."

Although people asked her about the blended learning program, Lili believes the program is not for everyone. She recalled,

> I think it was a good learning experience for me especially having a kind of non-traditional learning experience like that. It definitely helped me figure out what I've wanted in the sense career-wise, education-wise, school-wise. And I like the way that I was on my own time, but I think it definitely takes a certain person. I don't think it's right for everyone.

Even though Lili realized she is a "pretty independent person," she reported, it was "difficult for me at times to make sure I was staying on top of it all. But I think the school did a good job of like assisting me through that." She reemphasized that the program is not for everyone.

Subject 3 (Pseudonym: Edward). Edward started taking classes in the blended learning program during the second semester of his senior year in high school. He and one of his elective teachers were "not getting along," so he thought it would be better if he took a class online to satisfy his elective credits toward his high school diploma. Edward plans to graduate from high school in June, after which he will start college in another state where he will major in criminal justice and play football.

Although Edward strives to play professional football for a team in the National Football League, he plans on preparing for a career in law enforcement. His stepfather is a police officer, so Edward had the opportunity to spend time at the police station and was exposed to detective work through his stepfather's career.

Personalized schools. Edward attended SHS five periods each day. He took one elective class at Si and completed most of his coursework for the online class from home. He worked at his own pace to complete the required coursework for the online course while maintaining a traditional school schedule for the majority of his courses. Edward recognized that his counselors worked to put him "in the best situation that they [felt] for me" with regard to his classes. When Edward ran into a challenge with his elective course, his counselor and the assistant principal suggested a blended schedule as a path to complete his coursework. Edward felt he did not understand the information in the class at SHS, and the Si course provided an alternative pathway for him to stay on track to complete the requirements for his diploma. Edward's counselor advised him to earn only C grades or above to be eligible for college.

Outside of school, Edward volunteered in the community to complete his service-learning hours, which are a graduation requirement. He played varsity football and was on the varsity

track team. As a student-athlete, he learned to balance his coursework and his team practice schedule.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Edward read a lot for the Si course and had fewer distractions than he would have in a traditional classroom with 30 or more students. He took notes to prepare for the quizzes and tests. Edward was exposed to new vocabulary words through the online class and had the opportunity to look up the meaning of new words and expand his vocabulary. He was unable to look up words in his classes at SHS because cell phones are not allowed in the classroom. Having the opportunity to work at his own pace gave Edward the opportunity "to slow down" as needed to comprehend the material. However, sometimes the online coursework posed a challenge for Edward, as he was unable to ask questions and gain immediate feedback as he does in his classes at SHS.

Assistance to students. Students in the blended learning program access services at both schools. Edward met with his academic counselor at SHS for class scheduling and college entrance advisement. As a student-athlete, he also had access to the National Collegiate Athletic Association counselor and administrator at SHS to ensure he was on track for college entrance.

Qualified instructional staff. Teachers motivated Edward to come to school each day. He strived to attain A grades and attended school to earn good grades, as he recognized that "universities prefer students with good grades." Edward learned different lessons each day in his classes and they all tied together at the end of the unit in his classes at SHS and Si. Teachers determined what he could and could not do and built upon his performance level to strengthen his academic skills. If a teacher realized he did not understand the material, he or she would "try to go around it or something to try and make it so [he could] learn."

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program. Although Edward was only in the blended learning program for a brief period, he identified some benefits of his participation. Edward affirmed that the blended learning program is a good option because a student can learn the material on his/her own. He expressed that many students do not pay attention in the traditional classroom and Si offers students the opportunity to read the material and receive immediate feedback after taking quizzes.

Subject 4 (Pseudonym: Corinne). Corinne is a competitive equestrian who spends multiple hours training and participating in competitions as well as driving to and from her stables. She adopted a blended learning schedule during her junior year of high school and continued it during her senior year. This alternative school schedule gave her the opportunity to complete her equestrian training and compete. Before entering this educational program, Corinne had a difficult time balancing her riding obligations and her school work. She also participated in the YMCA's Youth and Government Program. As a student in the blended learning program, Corinne was able to complete her classes and stay on track for graduation.

Corinne took Advanced Placement classes at both SHS and Si. Although this was a challenge for her, it taught her "time management and kind of having a better work ethic." She stated,

> I'm really glad I've done this online school blended schedule. It's really helped kind of take down the stress of missing school because I remember in my freshman and sophomore year when I didn't have a blended schedule, I would be really worried to miss school and miss content.

Through the blended learning schedule, she took classes in the morning, trained with her horses, then completed the remainder of her academic classes assigned through Si from her home.

Corinne hopes to attend a University of California school with an equestrian team. She may be recruited or try out as a walk-on athlete. She hopes to study environmental science, or

perhaps political science. She could combine these two passions and pursue a job in environmental policy, all while continuing to ride her horse.

Personalized schools. Corinne completed her Si classes from home where it is calm and quiet. She focused on her work "to get it done efficiently and in a timely manner." Corinne's teachers were supportive when she needed to miss school for a competition. Counselors guided her "to make the right choices of classes" and made sure she wasn't "taking too many things onto my plate." Corinne's counselor shared with her that she had met all of the class requirements for graduation and met college entrance requirements.

The blended school schedule enabled Corinne to participate in the Associated Study Body at SHS where she planned events and dances. Most recently, she planned a TEDTalk style event for students to participate in and also a leadership conference for her fellow students focused on entrepreneurship. Corinne served as an upperclassman mentor for freshmen students in the school's Link Crew program and was involved in some clubs on campus.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Taking the Advanced Placement Language and Composition class online was "a bit more challenging…then being in class because I had to do a lot of the reading by myself without teacher input or commentary about it." Corinne's class schedule needs were specific, and the Advanced Placement Language and Composition offered at SHS did not fit into her school schedule. Si offered the course, which gave Corinne the opportunity to take it.

She took music appreciation through Si and found it to be interesting and "not as hard" as the Advanced Placement class because the notes and slides were organized and available to her online. Corinne took pre-calculus online, which proved to be "a bit tricky" as she did not know

the teacher. She reported, “I think that’s the one thing I like – the face-to-face discussion in class.”

According to Corinne, the biggest challenge with a blended learning program, specifically the online component, is keeping up with the work and submitting it time. With her busy school and athletic schedule, it was “sometimes trying to find time to work where I don’t just put it off to the weekend.” She also missed the face-to-face component of her classes at Si. “But other than that, it’s not terribly hard to manage.”

Learning time management skills as a student in the blended learning program prepared Corinne for college. She stated “I think the independence of finding time and setting aside time for me to study and then also balance extracurriculars and then my sport” taught her beneficial skills. She recognized that although she did not receive guidance on how to manage to complete the list of assignments provided to her, she still managed to complete them. Through the blended program, she learned to reach out and use the resources available to her. She emailed teachers and used the internet to find resources to help her succeed in her classes. These skills will overlap in her post-secondary and professional life in the future.

Assistance to students. Students at Si have a teacher who meets with them weekly to assign assignments and administer tests. The teacher acts as a mentor and keeps the workload manageable. When Corinne needed additional time to complete an assignment, she contacted the teacher to request additional time. A student at SHS is more than likely not able to receive this type of assistance.

Corinne accessed online resources such as Khan Academy to learn content. Additionally, she had a tutor outside of school for her pre-calculus class to help her learn the mathematical concepts. These types of resources are not accessible in her classes at SHS.

She relied on her friends and her close relationship with her horses to deal with stress. Riding her horse was "always a nice stress relief after a long hard day of school." Corinne did not seek additional counseling services at school, though she knew they were available to her.

Qualified instructional staff. Corinne noted that her teachers "are very understanding if I tell them I have a competition or if I'm away with Youth and Government." She felt her teachers were accepting of her schedule. Her teachers knew she is a competitive equestrian and involved in a lot of programs. They understood she had "a very diverse and accepting open mind." Corinne felt her teachers understood how these experiences influenced her views and learning. Corinne felt her teachers this year "really like what they're teaching." They assigned engaging projects, and their lectures were engaging. She stated, "My teachers have a lot of passion when they're talking about subject material or subject matter." She feels when a teacher exudes excitement while teaching, students are motivated and are inclined to learn.

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program. Corinne recommended that there should be better communication between SHS and Si to record completed classes in a student's records. Corinne also recommended that the program provide a resource for students if they need help with an online class. Although she had a teacher at Si, some courses may fall outside of the teacher's subject expertise. Students would benefit from a face-to-face conversation with a teacher who has subject matter expertise when they need assistance.

Subject 5 (Pseudonym: Stacey). Stacey started the blended learning program during her freshman year of high school and continued in the program during her sophomore year. She was overwhelmed with her work, which she felt took longer to complete than it did her classmates. Stacey felt it was easier "to work at my own pace," as it was hard for her "to focus and pay my full attention."

At one point, Stacey, a musician, was in an Arts program at SHS. However, she joined a rock/alternative band outside of school to which she needed to devote more time. Her band played in established clubs and spent time in the studio recording music. Due to her music commitments, she decided to leave the Arts program to spend time focusing on her music.

Stacey comes from a family that values education. Her mother is a teacher, and two of her siblings are in graduate school; one is completing a Doctorate, and the other is completing a Master's degree. Stacey plans on majoring in Ecology and studying the impact big companies have upon society. She plans on pursuing a Master's Degree at a University of California institution or a private school.

Personalized schools. Stacey completed her Si classes in a shorter period than her classes at SHS because she had fewer distractions in her online classes than in her face-to-face classes. She completed some Si classes after 2 months whereas a typical semester at SHS lasts five months. As a student in Si, Stacey broke up the work into 15-minute segments, which aligned better with her learning style. Stacey's overall grades improved when she started the blended learning program.

Stacey described her learning environment at SHS as more "communal" because she learned and interacted with other students. In contrast, she completed her Si classes on her own at home. Stacey felt she had the skills to learn and work in both educational settings.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Stacey worked with her counselor to schedule courses at SHS that were less challenging for her to complete, including included chemistry, music, and physical education. She took her world history, English, and geometry classes through Si. History classes were challenging for Stacey to take online as she was given slides to read through and annotate, which she felt was more work than she would have received in a

history class at SHS. However, taking the math class online seemed to be easier for Stacey, although she noted, “I’m not sure if they’re just easier online or if they are easier because I get to work on them by myself.”

Assistance to students. Stacey had a teacher at Si who met with her every week and assigned her work. Her counselor advised her to complete 60 credits each year. She was told she would have more opportunities in life if she stayed in school. When she became stressed, she sought guidance from her parents who recommended that she take an additional class at Si this year to alleviate the stress caused by a class at SHS. Although Stacey knew there were counseling services at the schools, she did not seek them out. A new counselor was assigned to her at SHS during the past school year and she did not spend much time with her.

Through the blended learning program, Stacey learned “to work on my own as well as work with my peers:” skills that helped prepare her for college, as did her experience working in different learning environments. As she hopes to pursue a research-based career, she felt that participating in the blended learning program would help her with her career because she learned to complete research on her own through the program.

Qualified instructional staff. Stacey felt she wanted to be successful and recognized that teachers “show me how to do that and how that will help me in my life.” These types of interactions inspired her “to work hard to go to college and get a good career.” She felt supported by her teachers.

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program. Stacey suggested providing more individualization in the Si classes. For example, she was required to take the tests at Si and preferred to take tests from home. Sometimes she was unable to advance in a unit over the weekend because she needed to take a test, which she could not do at home. Another

suggestion Stacey made is to change the cascading grading system in the classes at Si. She stated, “when I have an A in work, my grade will show up as a C” because it is averaged in with all the work she needs to complete for the course. Eventually, her grade in the class improved, but it initially confused her as a student.

Subject 6 (Pseudonym: Timona). Timona has been a professional disc jockey and a music producer for the past 6 years. Although she is a junior in high school, she regularly works professionally, which interferes with her schooling. Timona adopted a blended learning schedule as a sophomore when it became difficult to manage her school life, professional life, and social life. Timona’s school schedule started later in the day, as she had evening gigs and returned home late. Timona recognized that she is “more concentrated and focused on whatever I’m doing in general at night.” The blended scheduled gave her the option to have a late start.

Timona enjoyed being a disc jockey at school dances and participating in school activities. The blended program gave her the opportunity to “make friends and make nice connections with people and get to know people.” A full-time online high school program may have been more conducive to Timona’s academic needs, but the blended program met her professional needs and provided the academic and socialization needs she desired as a teen.

Timona plans on attending university and will most likely take some online classes. She will be able to access classes online in between professional obligations. Online classes will give her the flexibility to study from anywhere in the world.

Personalized schools. Timona felt she was not fully supported in a classroom of 30 to 40 students at SHS. She is inquisitive and asked many questions, which she felt frustrated by the teacher and slowed down other learners. Accessing some of her classes online gave her the forum to ask questions of her online teachers without disrupting the rest of her classmates.

A blended schedule gave Timona more flexibility, since she travels for her profession, or may be absent for a few days while working in the studio. Teachers in her online classes were "more flexible" and changed the due dates or assignments to work around her travel and work schedule. Timona does not like studying in the same setting each week; therefore, she accessed her classes from the library, a local coffee shop, or home.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Math was the hardest class for Timona to take online because she did not have someone to walk her through the steps of learning. She also shared that she did not have an online discussion in her classes, so she was unable to ask questions of her peers. However, she did have access to online resources like Khan Academy to help her understand the material. Timona felt the curriculum in the online courses was not as rigorous as her classes at SHS.

Assistance to students. Like other teenagers, Timona faced some challenges and regularly accessed a school therapist. Recently, a friend died by suicide, and her therapist offered her tools to learn how to understand and deal with his loss. Timona shared that her therapist was more understanding than her teachers because "teachers will listen, but they won't hear you." Timona shared that teachers had 150 students and were unable to modify the curriculum for an individual student, and that counselors contacted teachers to advocate for Timona's needs. Timona noted that a benefit of the blended program is that she received the emotional support she needed.

Qualified instructional staff. Timona attended classes at SHS for 3 hours of the day and asked questions of her teachers in order to understand the curriculum fully. In contrast, her online courses did not provide her that instant access to a content expert who could answer

questions on demand. Timona felt her teachers at SHS presented the content and answered questions to benefit her education.

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program. Timona suggested that teachers and counselors make themselves aware of the circumstances of leading a student to choose a blended learning program. The main teacher at Si was aware of her circumstances, but Timona felt the information should also have been shared with her teachers at SHS to support her fully. Because "teachers [at SHS] are focused on kids who come here every day from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. or in the class all day," they did not know how to modify the curriculum for students who had more than the normal number of absences, even though Timona's excused due to her entertainment work permit.

Timona appreciated the online discussions within her online courses because she felt they benefitted students by providing a better understanding of the content. Online interaction may give learners access to other students who can explain the material to students. Timona suggested that have a teacher available at all hours of the days would support nocturnal learners who access the curriculum at night and may have questions.

Subject 7 (Pseudonym: Thierry). Thierry became sick at the beginning of his freshman year of high school and fell behind at school due to all of his illness-related absences. Once he recovered from his illness, a blended learning program was proposed to help him to catch up with his classes so he would not fall behind during his first year of high school. Thierry's later start time in the blended program was advantageous because he preferred sleeping in each morning.

Thierry took three classes through Si and three classes at SHS. Initially, it was difficult for him to get into the rhythm of the blended program. However, he chose to begin working on

his Si courses each day at 9:00 a.m. before attending his classes at SHS. He completed the remainder of his assignments at home. Thierry was a student-athlete who competed on the swim team at SHS. This was his first-year swimming and participating in competitive sports.

Thierry would like to have a career in the sciences. At this point, he is unsure about whether or not he will attend college but is "keeping an open mind" about it. He also enjoys playing the guitar in his free time.

Personalized schools. Thierry shared that although he is a freshman, the blended program helped him catch up on the schooling he missed while sick. He stayed on top of his classes because of the structure of this program. He met with his teacher at Si for an hour each week and had access to the school's computer lab throughout the week to work on his coursework.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Courses at Si had a "larger workload" than his classes at SHS. Thierry felt he had more writing and assignments to complete in the Si classes in comparison to his courses at SHS. He stated, "It's pretty easy to learn from it and teach yourself the material, but it takes more time to get through all the assignments" in his classes at Si.

Participating in a blended program gave Thierry the opportunity "to deal with people in the world" rather than just attending classes each day. Because he had a mixture of online classes and face-to-face classes each day, he felt he had "a bigger experience than just coming to high school." Thierry benefited academically from the blended learning program.

Assistance to students. Thierry shared that his teachers are "good and they help when I'm behind with any assignment I struggle with." As a student-athlete, he returned home late some nights after competitions, noting that "It definitely takes up time out of school." He pointed out that he has two sets of teachers—teachers at both schools—which he perceived as a benefit; "I'd

say it's better to have two sets of eyes looking at my work and making sure I'm doing everything correctly."

His counselor at SHS supported him with guidance and scheduling. He saw her about twice a month as needed. He stated that "She definitely calms me down and just really look at what I need to do." Counselors presented graduation requirements in classes to ensure students understood what is needed to earn a high school diploma. Everyone—his parents, teachers, and friends—advised him to stay in school and finish it. They said, "take the hardest classes you can without too much pressure."

Teachers motivated him to learn by giving fun assignments instead of having students just take notes and tests. He preferred interactive lessons, "which I think help me learn a lot better when I'm involved in it instead of just assignments on paper." In these ways, teachers at SHS motivated him to learn.

Qualified instructional staff. Teachers supported Thierry, always making "sure I get all the content and memorize it." If he needed assistance, teachers were accessible via email at both schools. Thierry felt his teachers at Si were more flexible than his teachers at SHS because they were available online. Additionally, his classes at Si did not require work to be completed on a daily basis. He was able to complete it within the week when he had time to do so.

Teachers understood if Thierry needed additional time to complete assignments or if he was dealing with something outside of school. When discussing teachers at both schools, he shared, "they're pretty good about it if I talk to them and I can work something out." He felt supported by the instructional staff.

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program. Thierry suggested having students come in twice a week to Si to help them learn. He shared that seeing his teacher

more than once a week helped him greatly. He emphasized, “I think that iAcademy is a really good program and the blended schedule definitely is a good option for a lot of kids.”

Subject 8 (Pseudonym: Tommy). Tommy started swimming when he was 6 years old. He is an avid swimmer and enjoyed playing water polo for SHS. He entered the blended learning program in the 10th grade and is now a 12th grader in the program. Adapting to a traditional school schedule was a challenge for him as there were also activities he enjoyed doing outside of school: namely, water sports. He recognized he could be a lazy student who frustrates teachers in a traditional school setting.

Tommy plans to attend a California State University or a community college where he intends to pursue a degree in the technology field. He has not decided upon a career yet. He plans on continuing to practice his sports in college.

Personalized schools. The blended learning program gave Tommy the opportunity to retake classes he failed and to complete the credits he needed to earn his high school diploma. Through this program, he worked at his own pace. He took different numbers of classes at SHS each year depending upon his needs. During his senior year, he took an elective class and his team sport at SHS; he took the other classes through Si. Tommy shared that when he is in a large class in the traditional school setting, and there are “bad kids,” it is hard for him to learn.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Classes at Si were less challenging for Tommy than his classes at SHS. He understood the material and advanced through the lessons after taking quizzes rather than having to complete additional assignments. Participating in the blended learning program helped Tommy learn to keep to a schedule, which he recognized will help him in college. He set deadlines that he needed to meet. The repetitiveness of the lessons and learning will also help him prepare for his career in the future.

Assistance to students. Teachers and counselors advised Tommy to stay in school; dropping out was never an option for him. He was reminded to "just say in school and try to finish it even if you don't like it." Graduation requirements were posted on the walls of his classrooms; his counselor and his mother reminded him of them regularly.

Tommy shared that he received hands-on help with his classes at SHS. His teachers at Si recommended websites for him to access, and he could access assistance through his online courses 24 hours a day. He shared, "You can be working at any time of the day, and someone is always there to help you get through it." Participating in the blended program also gave him the opportunity to better acquaint himself with staff at both schools.

Qualified instructional staff. Teachers helped Tommy stay focused on his classes. They motivated him by reminding him of the work he needed to complete. Teachers gave him website suggestions to further his knowledge of the curriculum.

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program. Tommy suggested having more students join the blended learning program. For him, the social aspect was a challenge because there are few students in the program. He felt that if he, or other students, were struggling with something in the program, then he could get help from other students in the program if there were more participants.

Collective Experiences: Key Themes

This section presents the key themes that emerged from an analysis of participants' collective experiences. NVivo was used to identify key themes for each category of questions to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of the students in the blended learning program. The findings are presented by category. Findings for the opening questions 2, 2a, and 2b are presented individually because their results share different information. Findings within

the categories are listed collectively unless one question differed dramatically from the others and necessitated its own analysis. Interview questions are listed within each category. Questions identified with an (S) were asked of current students; questions identified with a (G) were asked of graduates of the program.

Circumstances leading to participation in a blended learning program. Interview question 2 addressed this topic, What were the circumstances that led you to a blended learning program (S, G)? Table 4 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 4

Circumstances Leading to Participation in the Blended Learning Program

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Alternative Education (5)	An alternative educational placement for students whose needs are not being met in a traditional educational setting
Career (4)	An occupation or profession
Multiple Absences from Traditional School (3)	Absent many times from school

An alternative educational path offers students who do not fit into a traditional setting a path toward earning their high school diploma. Corinne shared that a traditional schedule "was difficult completing classes and my equestrian training." Therefore, she sought a school schedule that would provide adequate time for both. Timona, a professional disc jockey who works in the music industry late at night, sought an alternative education because "if I don't get enough sleep and I'm not able to concentrate in class, or I'm not able to focus, or sometimes I end up coming late." Early morning classes are not conducive to her learning style. Tommy sought "a different route" for his education in order to balance learning, athletics, and his social life. Stacey was overwhelmed with her schooling because it took her longer to learn than her peers, so she sought

a different path. Edward and a teacher were “not getting along” at SHS, so he sought a different pathway to complete his elective to graduate and remain eligible for college entrance. Lili had friends who attended the iAcademy, so she pursued this alternative educational path to complete her education while working in the culinary field.

Roxy, Timona, and Lili had careers while in high school and their work schedules conflicted with a traditional school schedule. Corinne’s equestrian competitions and trainings are also considered a career pathway. Being a high school student with professional obligations led these participants to the blended program.

Roxy has a medical condition “that basically makes it hard for me to get up in the mornings because I need sleep in order to function.” She missed a lot of school due to her illness. Thierry was sick during his first month of the school year and fell behind in his studies. Timona, Roxy, and Corinne missed school due to their careers. Greater than normal absenteeism led these students to pursue the blended learning program between SHS and Si.

Two sub-questions in the category of circumstances that led to participation in the blended program were asked of participants. Sub-questions 2a asked, what were barriers or challenges, if any, you had with a traditional high school program (S, G)? Table 5 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 5

Barriers or Challenges with a Traditional High School Program

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Schedule (6)	A typical high school schedule is 8:00 am to 3:00 pm
Class size (3)	The size of a typical high school class is 30-40 students.

The participants shared some common ground when discussing barriers and challenges they had with a traditional high school program. Timona stated that it "benefited me with sleep because for me I'm kind of a nocturnal person." She preferred sleeping in each morning and starting school later. Thierry shared the same sentiment about school; "I'd say the time it starts, it's really early in the morning." He is an athlete who practices each afternoon, and the early school start was difficult for him. Roxy worked late some evenings, and her medical condition made it difficult for her to wake up early each day. Corinne had a difficult time accommodating a traditional school schedule while training as an equestrian. Lili's career working as a chef kept her from "having enough time" to complete school on a traditional schedule.

A typical high school class size is 30 to 40 students. Timona "felt like I wasn't being fully supported…. You know when you're in a room full of like 30 to 40 kids in the classroom." Stacey shared that it was hard "to focus and pay my full attention" in class. Tommy noted, "If you are in a class with a lot of bad kids then it's not going to work out the best for you." Timona, Stacey, and Tommy indicated that the large class sizes in their traditional classrooms posed a challenge to their education.

The second sub-question related to the category of circumstances that led to participation in the blended program was 2b; How has the blended learning program, if at all, assist you with completing your high school diploma (S)? How did the blended learning program, if at all, assist you with completing your high school diploma (G)? Table 6 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each theme.

Table 6

Assistance with Completing High School

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Flexibility (6)	The ability to complete classes at different times in different spaces.
Class Completion (4)	Finishing a class with a passing grade to earn credits toward graduation

Participation in a blended learning schedule gave students the opportunity to have a flexible learning environment. Roxy shared that taking some of her classes at Si,

> helped with my schedule so I was able to pay enough attention and give it all my time and effort that it deserved versus being in class and I have to get to work I have to do that, and I have a million things on my mind.

The flexibility to complete some classes at other times gave Roxy the opportunity to focus on her schoolwork. Lili shared that sometimes she stayed in the library at SHS to work on her classes for Si, and other times she worked on her Si classes from home. This flexibility gave her the opportunity to stay on the SHS campus for school activities. In contrast, Timona does not like learning in the same space or at the same time each day. The blended program gave her the flexibility to work on classes from home, in the library, at a coffee shop, or while on the road. As someone who functions better in the evening, Timona had the option to work on her Si classes whenever it worked best for her. Corinne shared that "the program is definitely giving me the opportunity to get all of my classes done and work whenever I am able to." Tommy and Stacey discussed class pacing as an incentive in the Si classes. Tommy stated that the classes "show me what I need to do because it's online I get to work at my own pace" while completing the SHS classes at the teacher's pace. Stacey shared that she has the flexibility to complete Si classes at a faster pace than if she were to take the classes at SHS.

Tommy shared that a blended learning schedule has “given me the ability to be able to retake classes that I failed and also take classes and get the credits needed to pass and get my high school diploma.” Thierry stated that after a month of absences, the blended program “helped me stay on top of my classes more. It would have been really hard to catch up.” Stacey completed courses at Si in a shorter period than if she were to take them at SHS. Corinne recognized that “the program is definitely giving me the opportunity to get all of my classes done and work whenever I am able to.” Corinne felt she could complete classes through the blended program while continuing to train and compete as an equestrian.

Personalized schools. Interview questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 addressed the personalization of school in the blended learning program. Question 4 asked, How would you describe your learning environment (S, G)? Question 5 stated, Tell me about your teachers and counselors and their relationships with students (S, G). Question 6 stated, Describe any advisement you may have received related to classes, staying in school and graduation requirements (S). Describe any advisement you received related to classes, staying in school and graduation requirements (G). Question 7 asked, What type of counseling do you receive about coping with the stress of school and life (S)? What type of counseling did you receive about coping with the stress of life (G)? Table 7 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 7

Personalized Schools Themes

+	Key Themes Definitions
Supportive (11)	Student received the support from teacher and counselors.
Learn on own (8)	Students learned the material on their own through the Si classes.)
Individualized (5)	The blended program individualized the program to the needs of the students.

The participants shared that their teachers and counselors are supportive in the blended learning program. Corinne stated,

> My teachers have been very supportive. They're very understanding when I have to miss school for a competition as well. The counselors are also very supportive. They've really guided me to make the right choices of classes I want to take. Making sure I'm not taking too many things onto my plate. Yeah, the environment is really good at the school. The teachers have been really supportive, and I really like them.

Stacey mentioned, "My teachers have good relationships with their students. Teachers that I have now are really like open and very helpful." Timona recognized that her teachers at Si

> are a lot more understanding because they don't use me being absent because of my work against me because they're more understanding and they understand that I have adult responsibilities because of the sacrifice I made to do my career, because of how much I love doing it.

She feels her online teachers are more supportive than her teachers at SHS because they realize there is a reason why she is taking the classes online. She also shared that the counselors are supportive at the schools. Timona described the difference of support between the teachers and the counselors:

> I think that's like a really, really big thing is that they listen. Because teachers will listen, but they won't hear you. And I think that's the difference between the teachers and the counselors and the support that I get.

Thierry noted that his teachers are really good and help him with assignments, and his counselor is always available to him. Thierry shared that when he is absent, "My teachers always make

sure I get all the content and memorize it all. They're really on top of that I'd say. They're pretty good." Tommy noted that "for the online part we have one teacher and she is pretty chill. She assists us on stuff if we can't understand. She helps to try to fix technical problems and keeps us on track." Overall, the participants recognized the supports given by the teachers and counselors.

Roxy described how learning assistance differed between her SHS and Si classes. Whereas she had guidance and assistance from her teachers in her SHS classes, "online [in the Si classes] it's just a matter of going through it all by yourself with no help." Edward discussed learning on his own. Stacey shared that she has more help from teachers in her SHS classes "and during iAcademy it's more doing stuff on my own." She also noted that learning on her own helped her in some classes. About her math classes, she said "I'm not sure if they're just easier online or if they are easier because I got to work on them by myself with more time on them. I think it's just an easier setting for me." Stacey noted that her social studies classes at Si seemed more challenging as she needed to read all the slides and annotate them on her own, which is more work than what she would have been asked to do in a social studies class at SHS. Timona discovered the type of learning supported her the best through the classes at Si, stating, "You have to rely on yourself to learn the material that you don't learn. You got to teach yourself the stuff is pretty much what I'm saying."

In a large school, it is difficult for teachers and staff to focus on an individual student. When discussing the blended program, Roxy shared, "I think it's just more tailored to the student." Her educational needs as a student with a career were met through the blended program. Lili shared the difference between the courses at SHS and Si, stating, "It's not very individualized [at SHS] as much as maybe an online schedule is." Blending the two programs met her needs as a student with a career. When discussing the support in the blended program

Edward shared that his counselors "put me in the best situation that they feel for me." As a professional in the music industry, Timona's needs changed throughout her high school years. She recalled, "I've made two to three changes within my schedule just being attending high school alone. So I've switched from me being here full time and the next year going blended." The blended program fulfilled Timona's individualized educational needs.

The fourth sub-question related to the category of personalized schools was question 8, which asked, What type of involvement do you have in your schools outside of classes (S)? What type of involvement did you have in your schools outside of classes (G)? Table 8 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 8

Involvement in School Outside of Classes

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Activities (7)	Student participated in school extracurricular activities including clubs, dances, or events.
Athletics (5)	Student participated in team sports at school.
Associated Student Body (3)	Student participated in the Associated Student Body program or Student Council.

All participants responded that they are currently involved in or were at one point involved in extracurricular activities at SHS while participating in the blended program with Si. Corinne and Lili participated in and planned activities for students at SHS. Corinne and Lili planned a TEDTalk type event where students and staff spoke at the event. Corinne served as an upperclassman mentor for the freshmen class at SHS. Lili planned a leadership conference for the school and attended school dances. Lili shared her talent as a chef with her peers by teaching cooking classes for a club at school. Timona attended school dances and enjoyed serving as a

guest disc jockey at school dances. Stacey was involved in the Arts Academy but chose to stop participating in this program due to activities outside of school.

Thierry and Tommy played water polo and participated on the swim team at SHS. Whereas Edward played football at SHS, Roxy photographed the football team and was the teacher's assistant for the football coach; she considered herself part of the team. Edward also competed on the track team at SHS. Lili competed as an equestrian and represented SHS at her competitions.

Corinne and Lili were in ASB, sometimes referred to as Student Council, and planned activities for students at SHS. They also participated in clubs at school, as did Tommy. Students in the blended learning program were able to participate in activities and athletics at SHS.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Interview question 9 addressed the online component of the blended learning program. It asked, Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Are the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than your traditional classes? Explain (S). Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Were the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than your traditional classes? Explain (G). Table 9 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 9

Rigor of Online Classes

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Rigor (6)	The level of difficulty of the class.
Teach myself (5)	Student teaching themselves the curriculum.

The rigor of SHS classes changed depending on the class and teacher. The same was true of classes at Si. When discussing the rigor of coursework, Roxy shared, "Online classes were

more challenging if you didn't keep up with it. But if you kept up with it, I think you'd be pretty solid on it versus like in class." Lili shared that the level of rigor in classes differed in her classes at SHS and Si. Edward also shared that his classes had varying levels of rigor; "I would say a mixture of both. Sometimes it can be challenging because of all the work and, you can't really ask the questions right then and there with the teacher." Corinne took an Advanced Placement class through Si. She recalled,

> I took AP Language and Composition in 11th grade and, that was a bit more challenging. I feel than being in class because I had to do a lot of the readings by myself without teacher input or commentary about it.

Students had the option to take any non-laboratory class through Si, even Advanced Placement classes. Timona stated, "the difference between the curriculum online, and the curriculum physically is like…that physical connection with the teacher, and if you need help on something, it's on demand." The immediate assistance helped her understand the material. Timona considered the difference in rigor between the classes at SHS and Si, stating, "I definitely say the online teachers are way more flexible then it is here" at SHS, which she indicated may reflect in the rigor at Si.

Lili, Timona, and Thierry mentioned that they teach themselves in the classes at Si as opposed to having the teacher assist them in their courses at SHS. Timona shared that she was still working on a math class from the previous school year because "I didn't finish because when you're online, and you don't have teachers you can email, or you don't have even online support in your academic courses." This posed some problems for her. Of his Si class, Edward shared, "You can't really ask the questions right then and there with the teacher." Not having an immediate, accessible teacher created a challenge for him.

The second sub-question related to the category of rigorous and relevant curriculum was question 10, What are issues or challenges, if any, you have with a blended learning program (S)? What are issues or challenges, if any, you had with a blended learning program (G)? Table 10 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 10

Issues or Challenges with the Blended Learning Program

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Delay in receiving answers (4)	Students do not receive an immediate answer to their questions.
Time Management (3)	Students learn to manage the own time to complete tasks.

Lili, Edward, and Timona noted that when they had questions in classes at SHS, their teachers answered them. However, they do not have the same resource in their classes at Si. Edward shared "you can't really ask the questions right then and there with the teacher."

Time management surfaced as a challenge in the Si classes. Corinne shared,

> the biggest challenge would be keeping the work on time. Sometimes I'll have a really busy week at school [SHS] and sometimes trying to find that time to work [on Si classes] where I don't just put it off to the weekend.

Lili mentioned "staying on track with finishing" the classes was a challenge. Thierry had trouble adjusting to the online classes at the beginning, including managing his time in this new educational format. He rectified this problem by going to the Si computer lab each morning to complete work for his classes at Si.

The third sub-question related to the category of rigorous and relevant curriculum was question 11, How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for college readiness (S)? How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for college readiness (G)? The fourth sub-question related to the category of rigorous and relevant

curriculum was question 12, How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for career readiness (S)? How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for career readiness (G)? Table 11 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 11

College and Career Readiness in the Blended Learning Program

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Time management (7)	Students learned to manage their time to complete tasks.
Skills (3)	Students learned to do tasks through training.

Lily shared that the blended program taught her "time management and just staying on top of to do lists," and realizes these skills prepare her for college and career readiness. Lili learned to complete all her work on her own through classes at Si. Tommy also recognized the balance of the SHS and Si classes helped him manage his time, which will overflow into his post-secondary life and career. Roxy learned time management through the blended program as she learned to balance her classes and career obligations. Tommy learned to manage his time so he would not fall behind. When asked what she learned, Corinne shared,

> I would say time management again. I think that independence of finding time and setting aside time for me to study and then also balance extracurriculars and then my sport. I think the time management aspect is preparing me for college because I don't have any guidance of you know like a set day when I have to do things other than just a sheet of requirements I have to make sure I get done by the end of the week.

She recognized the value of this skill and the impact it will have on her future.

Edward, Stacey, and Tommy discussed the skills they learned in the blended learning program that will apply to their college and career lives. Edward enhanced his vocabulary in his Si class, as he read more in these classes and looked up the meaning of unfamiliar words. He

noted that he did not read as much in his SHS classes as he did in his Si classes. Tommy shared that the skill of repeating things to learn them will help him in his life, college, and career. Stacey plans for a career in STEM research. She stated, "the career I want to focus on is going to be research-based. If I want to pursue something like STEM fields…I've learned how to research and work on my writing abilities" through the blended learning program. These skills will benefit her in the future.

Assistance to students. Interview questions 13 and 14 addressed assistance to students in the blended learning program. Interview question 13 asked, What type of assistance do you receive as a blended learning student that differ from being a student in the traditional high school (S)? What type of assistance did you receive as a blended learning student that differed from being a student in the traditional high school (G)? Interview question 14 asked, What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance do you receive as a student in the blended learning program (S)? What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance did you receive as a student in the blended learning program (G)? Table 12 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 12

Additional Assistance Received in the Blended Learning Program

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Teacher and counselor contact via email (11)	Students had contact from their teachers or counselors via email.
Access to counseling services (4)	Students had access to counseling services during the school day.

Participants affirmed that they received a lot of emails from their Si teachers. Thierry stated, "My teacher emails me back pretty quickly so whenever I have a problem like I'm just sending her an email." Lili stated that both her Si teacher and the online teachers of her classes

email her, so she feels she has extra support. Roxy shared her Si teacher communicated often with her about completing assignments. Corinne stated,

> I think the most assistance that I get is having the head assistant or the head teacher at the iAcademy. She's kind of a mentor of keeping my workload manageable and kind of staying in contact and giving me extra time if I need it which sometimes students don't always get in the traditional classroom.

Thierry's teachers at SHS and Si responded to his emails quickly. When asked whether or not he could email his teachers at SHS, he responded that he could email them. He shared that whereas the teachers at Si tend to initiate emails to him, he tends to initiate emails to his SHS teachers. Counselors emailed students and also advocated for their students through emails to their teachers.

Lili sees a therapist outside of the school system. An alternative school schedule provides her the time to do this during the day. Timona met with a counselor for therapy at school and shared, "I received more emotional support" than a student solely in SHS. She feels her flexible school schedule gave her the opportunity to meet with her counselor when needed. Recently, she had a friend die by suicide and was able to access her counselor frequently after the incident. Participants shared that they had access to their school counselor as needed to discuss their classes and progress toward graduation.

Qualified instructional staff. Question 15 addressed how teachers meet the diverse learning needs of students. Question 15 asked, How do your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program (S)? How did your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program (G)? The second sub-question related to the category of qualified instructional staff was question 16, which asked, How do your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework (S)? How did your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences

through your coursework (G)? The third sub-question related to the category of qualified instructional staff was question 17, which asked, How do teachers motivate you to learn (S)? How did teachers motivate you to learn (G)? Table 13 depicts the most identified themes, the number of times each theme was identified, and a definition for each key theme.

Table 13

Qualified Instructional Staff in the Blended Learning Program

Key Themes (Number of times identified)	Key Themes Definitions
Accommodating (7)	Teachers who are willing to accommodate or make changes to lessons and or assignments to match student needs.
Different Learning Styles (4)	Each student learns differently.
Engagement (3)	Teachers implementing lessons that keep students participating in and interested in the lesson.

Roxy, a professional photographer, stated that her teachers at Si are more accommodating than her teachers at SHS. She indicated, “They’re just good at accommodating and it wasn’t anything like noticeable which I guess is a good thing.” Timona shared that teachers who make accommodations for her “motivate me to learn because we work together instead of against each other.” Timona travels for work and her Si teachers accommodated her career needs by adjusting due dates or assignments. Both Roxy and Timona stated that they do not receive the same type of accommodations from their teachers at SHS. Timona changed her learning environment as needed by working on her Si classes from different locations, or by listening to music while learning. These changes can not be implemented in the classes at SHS. Edward stated that his teachers accommodated his needs because

> they basically go off what you can do and what you can not do. Like if you don’t know how to do a certain thing they will probably try to go around it or something to try and make it so you can learn.

Corinne shared, “My online teachers are very understanding if I tell them I have a competition or if I’m away with Youth and Government.” They adjusted due dates and accommodated her needs. Thierry recognized the flexibility in the courses at Si.

> I say they are a lot more flexible than at the high school because you can do your work whenever you need to because it’s online. So if you’re like really busy on Monday and Tuesday but Wednesday, Thursday, Friday you have a bunch of free time they let you just get it all done those days instead of having to come for like an hour each period every day like at the high school.

These accommodations helped Thierry manage his studies and athletics.

A challenge Lili had with her classes at SHS is that educators were “just teaching the class in the sense that it’s like we all learn the same.” Si gave Lili a different format for learning. She indicated that at first, it was difficult learning on her own though Si, but ultimately it gave her the avenue to discover how she learns best. Stacey recognizes that she learns more slowly than other students and is allowed to work at her own pace at Si. As a freshman in the blended program, Thierry had to learn what worked best for him. He figured out he learned best when he started attending lab time every day at Si.

When discussing motivation by teachers, Corinne shared, “I can tell if they really like what they’re teaching. And so they have fun projects that we do. Lectures are very engaging.” Corinne indicated that these are the type of teachers that motivate her to learn. She also stated,

> My teachers have a lot of passion when they’re talking about what subject material or subject matter we’re learning. And so I think there is some excitement for what the subject is kind of shows and it goes on to the students, and we get a better feeling in the classroom. And so I think that’s really motivating if the teacher likes it and we’re kind of more inclined to like what we’re learning to them.

Thierry stated that motivational teachers “make school fun and doing work fun, instead of just like - here’s the notes. You have a test tomorrow. Study it, and they give you like assignments that are interactive.” He asserted that teachers who make learning fun motivate him as a learner.

Recommendations for future of the blended learning program. Interview question 18 addressed recommendations for the future of the blended learning program. Question 18 asked, What are some things you can think of that would improve the blended learning program (S, G)? Responses are given in narrative format.

Roxy suggested providing the opportunity to other students to complete a trial time in the program to see if they want to continue in it. Timona suggested exploring another online learning program that embeds video chat with students and teachers to provide interaction and assistance with the coursework. Another option she suggested is online chat forums in the Si classes. Timona pointed out that information should be shared with the teacher at SHS about why the student is on a blended schedule so the teachers at SHS can have a better understanding of the student's needs.

Stacey suggested changing the cascading grading system in the online courses so she would know her current grade at all times. Thierry suggested having students come in to see the Si teacher two times a week to ensure they complete their coursework. Corinne suggested better communication between SHS and Si to ensure that all coursework reflects on the transcripts as a student completes it.

Corinne suggested having some teachers at SHS available to Si students should they need assistance with content specific lessons. Lili suggested having some content expert teachers available one to two times a week at Si for students to receive assistance if they need it. Although Lili had a teacher at Si, she is not a content expert in all areas. Lili suggested that there be better communication between SHS, Si, and counselors. Although she started a course during the spring semester, she finished it during the summer, which made it ineligible to be applied toward recognition for the honor society.

The second sub-question related to recommendations for the future of the blended learning program gave participants the opportunity to provide information they had not shared previously. Question 19 asked, Is there anything else you would like to share (S, G)? Responses are given in narrative format.

When asked if she had additional comments to share, Roxy stated that the blended learning program "was just really helpful for me to get into my job." She has a career as a photographer for a professional sports team and would not have been able to manage both a career and being a high school student in a traditional school setting. Lili recognizes that "it takes a certain person" to be in the blended program. She felt many students do not have the skills to complete the class requirements. She also mentioned that she liked the blended program because she "still got a little bit more of that traditional structure, which kind of helped me keep on track with a regular kind of schedule." Lili shared,

> I think it was a good learning experience for me especially having kind of a nontraditional learning experience that definitely helped me figure out what I want in a sense like career-wise, education-wise, like school-wise. And I like the way that I was on my own time, but I think it definitely just takes a certain person.

Edward shared, "I just think it's a good program." He stated that the blended learning program helped him develop vocabulary because he read more in his classes at Si than he did at SHS. Corinne recognized,

> I'm really glad I've done this online school blended schedule. It's really helped kind of take down the stress of missing school because I remember in my freshman and sophomore year when I didn't have a blended schedule I would be really worried to miss school and miss content. So with the blended schedule, I'm able to just keep working, or I can do my class in the morning, and then I can train and then come home and do my blended or my online work and not have to worry about missing a lesson or missing a test. So it's really helped with that flexibility.

Timona pointed out that the blended learning program is not perfect, but

> you know these are good like the first steps to ensuring that there's plenty of other options and alternative ways to complete high school because not everybody is able to work or has the capability to work and learn in the same environment as everybody else.

In reference to the blended learning program, Thierry shared, "It's a bigger life experience than just coming to the high school." He participated in traditional high school classes and had the opportunity to take some high school classes virtually. Tommy, a participant who spent 3 years as a student in the blended learning program, ended the interview by stating, "I'm happy you guys are doing this [the interviews] cause I mean taking input from us helps so, I know that people don't like to admit it, but it does mean a lot."

Summary

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and perspectives of seven students currently enrolled in and one recent graduate from a blended learning program at SHS and Si, schools in California. This research described how these schools address the needs of high school students in a 21st-century learning environment. The eight participants in the study spent between 1-3 years in the blended learning program. Data were collected via in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured individual interviews, which included 19 open-ended questions. The data were triangulated to make sense of the participants' lived experiences and perspectives.

Participants shared varied circumstances that led them to the blended learning program, including seeking an alternative education, having a career in high school and needing to balance school and professional needs, and having multiple absences at the traditional high school. Barriers and challenges for the participants in the traditional high school setting included the traditional school schedule and large class sizes. The blended learning program gave the participants a flexible school schedule as well as them the opportunity to complete classes

toward graduation. All eight participants shared that the blended learning program benefited them educationally.

Personalizing schools has a positive impact on graduation rates. Participants shared that the blended learning program offered a balanced learning environment between SHS and Si. The students shared that they were supported through the program, although felt like they were learning on their own in the classes at Si. Participants felt the blended program met their individualized needs as students, which varied from person to person.

As in any school, students have varying opinions about the rigor in their classes depending upon their strengths as scholars, as well as the teacher's style and their interest in the subject matter. The participants in this study experienced varying levels of rigor in their classes. Whereas students can receive immediate help from a teacher in a class at SHS, they often learned on their own in the Si classes. Participants in the blended learning program learned time management skills because they had to balance their coursework for both schools and their classes at Si. Participants were able to take non-laboratory courses including Advanced Placement classes at Si.

Participants accessed varying levels of assistance while in the blended learning program. They had more teacher- and counselor-initiated emails in the Si classes than their classes at SHS. The blended schedule provided a flexible schedule for students to access school-provided therapists or therapists outside of school. Students recognized that they had access to teachers and counselors at SHS and Si.

Participants shared that their teachers at Si seemed to accommodate students' needs more often than teachers at SHS. Assignments and their due dates were modified if a student needed additional time due to career obligations, health problems, or learning needs. Participants

discussed students have different learning styles and how the blended program provided an alternative pathway for students to complete their high school diploma. Student engagement had an impact on student success in a class, thus having an impact upon graduation rates. Participants expressed that they are engaged when teachers enjoy what they teach, provide interactive assignments, and make school fun for students.

Chapter 5 will discuss the relationship between these findings and the literature review. They will also be tied into the social constructivist theoretical lens and the personalized learning theoretical lens. Conclusions and recommendations to increase the student graduation rate through a blended learning program will be presented. Finally, recommendations for future research will be given.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Earning a high school diploma is critical for a successful future. In California, the high school graduation rate for the class of 2013 was only 80% (ASCD, 2015a). Taff (2013) argued, "Students who do not graduate from high school will experience higher rates of unemployment and incarceration, lower overall lifetime earnings, and life expectancy than students who do graduate from high school" (p. 77). Therefore, high schools need to explore an alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school. A plethora of evidence-based research exists on strategies to increase graduation rates, thus decreasing the number of high school dropouts (ASCD, 2018; Dianda, 2008; National Dropout Prevention Center, 2018).

The National Education Association (NEA) presented a comprehensive review of supports to increase graduation rates, including strategies identifying groups and locations identified with dropouts, advocating for the dropouts, and implementing school practices and policies to increase graduation rates. The themes in this study fall broadly under the NEA's defined categories that lead to implementing school practices and policies to increase graduation rates: personalized schools, rigorous and relevant curriculum, assistance to students, and qualified instructional staff (Dianda, 2008).

As stated by Peter Drucker (as cited in Trilling & Fadel, 2009), "Since we live in an age of innovation, a practical education must prepare a person for work that does not yet exist and cannot yet be clearly defined" (p. 151). Therefore, it is imperative that high schools prepare their students for the future by providing them with the knowledge and skills to be successful in college and careers. Blended learning programs may meet these needs, offering students vital content and skills for their post-secondary lives.

Studies exist on blended learning programs at the university level, but a lack of studies exists at the high school level. This phenomenological study focused on a unique learning opportunity allowing high school students to take some face-to-face classes at SHS and some online classes at Si. This study could help school districts learn about an alternative high school program to meet the needs of some students to increase the graduation rate. This study is important at this time due to funding challenges in the public education system.

Chapter 5 discusses the key findings that surfaced through individual interviews of seven current students and one recent graduate of the blended learning program offered by SHS and Si. This chapter compares the key findings to the literature review, drawing conclusions and implications from the results and offering recommendations for further study of blended learning programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates from a blended learning program at SHS and Si, schools in California, as well as to describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs.

Research Question

The research in this study focused on the question, What are the lived experiences and perspectives of high school students who are currently participating in or recent graduates of a unique blended learning program in California?

Research Design Overview

This study used a phenomenological research design. Semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews were conducted with seven current students and one graduate within the

past 3 years. Participants were asked 21 questions (see Appendices H & I) and follow-up questions as needed. Interview questions reflected the themes that emerged through the literature review, presented in Chapter 2. Data were coded using NVivo coding software, analyzed, and triangulated to make sense of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of the blended learning program offered by SHS and Si and understand how it is meeting the needs of its students. An experienced colleague reviewed the codes and themes to ensure the data were analyzed accurately.

Discussion of Key Findings

The discussion of key findings is organized according to the six categories of questions that made up the interviews. Within each category, the key themes are discussed. The categories include: (a) circumstances leading to participation in a blended learning program, (b) personalized schools, (c) rigorous and relevant curriculum, (d) assistance to students, (e) qualified instructional staff, and (f) recommendations for the future of the blended learning program. The key themes within each category are represented in Table 14.

Circumstances leading to participation in a blended learning program. Questions 2, 2a, and 2b related to the first category of circumstances that led to student participation in the blended learning program. Questions identified with an (S) were asked of current students; questions identified with a (G) were asked of the graduate of the program. Question 2 asked, What were the circumstances that led you to a blended learning program (S, G)? The three themes emerging from this question were seeking an alternative education, career obligations, and having multiple absences from school.

Table 14

Key Themes Emerging from Data within Category of Questions

Category of Questions	Key Themes
Circumstances leading to blended learning program	Alternative education
	Career obligations
	Multiple absences from school
Barriers and challenges with a traditional high school program	Schedule
	Class size
Assistance toward graduation	Flexibility
	Class completion
Personalized schools	Supportive
Rigorous and relevant curriculum	Rigor
	Teach myself
Challenges with blended learning program	Time management
College and career readiness	Time management
	Acquisition of skills
Assistance to students	Teacher and counselor contact via email
	Access to counseling services
Qualified instructional staff	Accommodating
	Diverse learning styles
Recommendations for the future of the blended learning program	Extended learning supports

Alternative education. A one-size-fits-all education does not meet the needs of all students (ASCD, 2007; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Some students need or want to work at an early age, but also need to fulfill the obligation of completing their compulsory education (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2004).

Roxy, Lili, and Timona recognized that they needed an alternative schooling environment to meet the demands of their careers. Tommy realized he needed an alternative schedule to balance his schooling, athletics, and social life. He shared, "I like going a different route." Edward and his elective teacher were not getting along, and the teacher was the only person teaching the course. Edward had to find an alternative route to complete the class in order to stay on track for graduation. Stacey sought an alternative educational choice because it was taking her

longer to complete classwork than her peers, which caused her to feel uncomfortable staying in the same educational setting.

Roxy, Lili, and Timona had careers while in high school. Balancing high school and a career drove them to the blended learning program. Sometimes, their careers prevented them from attending school, causing excessive absences. Stacey's musical career started to demand more of her time, which led to absences when she spent time in the studio. Tommy was sick for the first month of school, which prevented him from learning the content standards and skills needed to be successful in high school. Fritzer and Herbst (1996) recognized the negative impact excessive absences have upon a student's academic performance.

Question 2a asked, What were barriers or challenges, if any, you had with a traditional high school program (S, G)? Schedule and class size emerged as barriers or challenges the participants had with a traditional high school program. Participants in the study had careers, played athletics, or had out of school obligations preventing them from participating in a traditional school schedule. An alternative school schedule gives students the opportunity to have a late or early start in the day, open up their schedules for career-related or non-school-related obligations, such as non-school competitive sports. School schedule did not surface as a theme in the literature review.

Stacey shared, "It's hard for me to focus and pay my full attention for long spans of time." Timona shared it was hard for her to be in classes with 30 to 40 students because she occasionally needed individualized assistance due to her absences. The large classes made it difficult for her to get her needs met. Tommy shared that the large classes often included some "bad kids." Their behavior prevented him from making the most of his education. Dianda (2008)

argued that smaller learning environments create an opportunity for students to have their needs met as they tend to be more student-centered.

Questions 2b asked, How has the blended learning program, if at all, assisted you with completing your high school diploma (S)? How did the blended learning program, if at all, assist you with completing your high school diploma (G)? Question 3 asked, Tell me about your classes in the blended learning program (S, G). The two themes that emerged through the individual interviews were flexibility and class completion.

Roxy, Lili, Corinne, and Timona needed the flexibility to balance their careers and school. The blended learning program offered Roxy the flexibility she needed to focus on schoolwork while she was studying and on her career when she worked as a photographer. Lili, Corinne, and Timona enjoyed the flexibility of completing schoolwork at the library, at a coffee shop, at home, or while on the road. A flexible learning environment gives students the opportunity to learn the CCSS (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Pane at al., 2015)

Tommy worked at his own pace to make up classes he had not passed and to complete the classes he needed to graduate. Participating in the blended learning program enabled him to stay on track for graduation. Stacey worked slower than her peers and was able to work at her own pace in the blended classes. Corinne shared, “The program is definitely giving me the opportunity to get all of my classes done and work whenever I am able to.” The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) and Pane et al. (2015) found that a blended learning environment offers a flexible alternative for completing classes toward a high school diploma.

Technology offers students and teachers the opportunity to participate in a flexible learning environment through blended learning (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Ng & Nicholas, 2010; Pane et al., 2015; Tucker, 2012; Wu et al., 2010). Students can access the

curriculum from anywhere around the world (Tucker, 2012; Wu et al., 2010). Online classes provide access to a digital footprint for students to re-access if they did not understand the material the first time it was taught (Tucker, 2012). The flexibility of a blended school model appeals to students with diverse goals (Jacobs, 2016).

Personalized schools. Questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 related to the second category of personalized schools. Question 4 asked, How would you describe your learning environment (S, G)? Question 5 asked, Tell me about your teachers and counselors and their relationships with students (S, G). Question 6 asked, Describe any advisement you may have received related to classes, staying in school, and graduation requirements (S). Describe any advisement you received related to classes, staying in school, and graduation requirements (G). Question 7 asked, What type of counseling do you receive about coping with the stress of school and life (S)? What type of counseling did you receive about coping with the stress of school and life (G)? The questions were grouped together because their answers overlapped. The emerging theme for these questions was supportive.

***Supportive*.** Five of the eight participants mentioned that the learning environment in the blended learning program was supportive. When discussing her equestrian training and competitions contributing to her excessive absences, Corinne shared, “My teachers have been very supportive.” Timona shared, “The counselors are supportive” and “teachers are a lot more understanding” than when she was in a traditional schedule at SHS. Tommy shared, “For the online part we have one teacher, and she is pretty chill;” the researcher took this to mean that the teacher was supportive and easy to work with. Counselors supported students by being available to them and advising them of graduation requirements as well as the students’ progress toward attaining them.

Positive, supportive relationships provide the support students need to flourish. These relationships help students connect to school and positively influence their achievement (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011; Roybal et al., 2014). Freshman students need to identify with the right teachers, administrators, and counselors to feel supported and not drop out of school (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011).

Mental health issues are a concern in schools. The ASCD presented the Whole Child Tenets, which include wraparound services at school, ensuring students' academic success (ASCD, 2014, 2015c; " Turn & Talk/Q&A with Pedro Noguera," 2018). Schools have been successful in embedding mental health services and experiencing an increase in student achievement as a result (Chiang et al., 2015; Morse & Allensworth, 2015; Murray et al., 2015). The ASCD (2015b) found that personalized support helps prepare students for well-paying jobs and lifelong learning. Hence, the personalized support affects a student's post-secondary life.

Question 8 asked, What type of involvement do you have in your schools outside of classes (S)? What type of involvement did you have in your schools outside of classes (G)? The three themes that emerged for this question were involvement in school activities, athletics, and ASB.

Students in the blended learning program have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities at SHS. All participants in this study participated in activities, athletics, or the ASB at SHS, including school clubs, dances, or programs. Morse and Allensworth (2015) shared that social achievement and involvement in school increase mental health and academic performance, reducing the rate of dropping out of school. Roybal et al. (2014) reported that students need to feel connected to their school through school activities to improve the dropout rate. Ream and Rumberger (2008) reported an increase in dropout rates for Hispanics when they

are not involved in school activities or athletics. Bohnert, Aikins, and Arola (2013) recognized the importance of student involvement in activities during the transition to high school and once in high school.

Rigorous and relevant curriculum. Question 9 asked, Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Are the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than traditional classes? Explain (S). Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Were the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than traditional classes? Explain (G). The two themes that emerged were rigor and teach myself. The themes were found to be highly interconnected.

Rigor and teach myself. When asked about the rigor in the online classes, Lili shared, "It depends." Roxy and Lili shared that the online classes were challenging if they did not keep up with them. Edward replied that classes were a mixture of being challenging and not challenging. He noted in his Si classes there was a lot of work and no one from whom to gain an immediate answer, which was challenging for him. Corinne enrolled in an Advanced Placement class through Si because a face-to-face option did not fit into her schedule. She felt the class was challenging as she had to complete the readings and analysis "without teacher input or commentary." Students have access to up-to-date curriculum through the internet (CDW Government, 2011), which impacts the type of information students receive in an online course. Taking the class online may have benefitted Corinne because the curriculum may have been more up to date than what she would have received in a face-to-face class.

Students gain access to 21st-century learning skills in a blended learning model as they gain skills to prepare them for the global marketplace (Tucker, 2012). In a personalized learning environment, students gain a deeper understanding of the curriculum because they share a voice

in creating their learning environment and help to determine their individual educational goals (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Bray & McClaskey, 2015; Pane et al., 2015). Personalized learning focuses on the individual learner and his/her skills, needs, and goals. Learners immerse themselves into the curriculum and drive themselves to continue learning, hence increasing their level of knowledge (Bray & McClaskey, 2015). A blended learning environment is an alternative learning environment that could be considered an intervention for the student to ensure success in high school. Academic growth increases the longer a student participates in a personalized learning environment (Bray, 2016; Pane et al., 2015). In this study, teachers monitored student progress through the learning management system used by the online class provider.

Time management. Question 10 asked, What are issues or challenges, if any, you have with a blended learning program (S)? What were issues or challenges, if any, you had with a blended learning program (G)? The two themes that surfaced were a delay in receiving answers and challenges with time management. Interestingly enough, time management also appeared as a theme in the skills students learned that will impact their post-secondary lives.

Lili shared that she had to learn how to complete her papers “on her own” with no input from teachers. When Edward and Timona had questions, there was no teacher to provide immediate feedback. The theme of delays in receiving teacher feedback did not surface in the research.

Time management is a valuable skill students will use in their post-secondary lives. Participants were not given guidance on time management when they enrolled in the blended learning program, which presented some challenges. CDW Government (2011) indicated one learns better time management skills and thinking more independently through e-learning.

Acquisition of skills. Question 11 asked, How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for college readiness (S)? How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for college readiness (G)? Question 12 asked, How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for career readiness (S)? How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for career readiness (G)? The two primary themes that emerged were time management and the acquisition of skills. Learning time management skills in the blended learning program was a recurring theme throughout the participant interviews. These type of skills will help students thrive in a global marketplace (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Roxy, Lili, Corinne, and Tommy mentioned time management as a skill they learned through the blended program. Corinne mentioned time management more than once as a valuable skill she learned in the program. Corinne shared,

> I think the time management aspect is preparing me for college because I don't have any guidance of, you know, a set day when I have to do things other than just a sheet of requirements I have to make sure I get done by the end of the week.

When asked about the college and career readiness skills he learned, Tommy shared that he learned how to "be on a schedule because you don't want to be too far behind."

Students need to learn skills to compete in a global marketplace. Trilling and Fadel (2009) shared skills identified by hiring executives of major corporations that students are lacking when they graduate from high school, including communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and working collaboratively. The lack of workplace skills places a financial burden on companies (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Magner et al. (2011) argued that students learn life and career skills through the P21 Framework. Edward shared that he increased his vocabulary through the class at Si because he read more than in his traditional classes and looked up the meaning of the words. He shared, "I got to learn new words like big words, some words I

didn't know from before I can actually use in the big world." Stacey recognized that her research skills improved through the blended learning program. She shared, "I've learned how to research and work on my writing abilities." Tommy indicated that the opportunity to repeat things in the blended program helped him learn the information and skills.

The participants in this study recognized the correlation between the skills they learned in the blended learning program and their application to their post-secondary lives. Participants indicated they learned time management skills which will benefit them in college and their careers. As a participant in a blended learning program, they learned technology skills which will benefit them in their future.

Assistance to students. Question 13 asked, What type of assistance do you receive as a blended learning student that differ from being a student in the traditional high school (S)? What type of assistance did you receive as a blended learning student that differed from being a student in the traditional high school (G)? Question 14 asked, What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance do you receive as a student in the blended learning program (S)? What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance did you receive as a student in the blended learning program (G)? The two themes that emerged were teacher and counselor contact via email and access to counseling services.

Teacher and counselor contact via email. All participants shared that they received email support from their teachers at Si. Students taking the classes through K12 had additional teacher support form their online teacher. Thierry shared that he received multiple emails from the Si teachers. He indicated that whereas he initiated his emails to teachers at SHS, his Si teachers initiated the emails to him. Emails to students included reminders of the work they needed to complete, reminders about approaching deadlines, and answers to student questions.

Corinne shared that email communication from her teacher helped make the work manageable for her. Roxy, Corinne, and Timona explained that they felt supported by their teachers when they emailed them to ask for extensions on due dates. This type of flexibility supported the students through their learning. Tommy expressed that he felt supported by having "two sets of teachers" watching him and working with him. Tommy shared that he received "hands-on help" through email communication with his teachers.

The literature did not address the impact of teacher and counselor contact via email on student achievement, although it does address support of the student. In a smaller school setting, the student-teacher and the student-counselor relationships tend to be stronger, as the caseload is smaller for the teachers and counselors. Hence, staff has more opportunities to send emails to students. The support students received from teachers and counselors through the blended learning program adds to the literature.

Access to counseling services. The student-counselor ratio is reduced in some schools to provide more comprehensive counseling services (ASCD, 2015b). Roxy, Lili, and Thierry shared that they spoke to their school counselors at SHS when they became stressed. The school counselor provided counseling services beyond scheduling classes. Some students need more intensive counseling that falls outside the auspices of the school counselor. Two of the participants shared that they access mental health counseling services; whereas Timona accesses these services at school, Lili uses the flexible learning schedule to access a counselor outside of school. Timona shared that she struggled when her friend died by suicide. She was able to access her mental health counselor at school to discuss her concerns and gain skills to deal with the loss of her friend.

Meadows and Ramirez (2018) stated that there is a concern with the increasing number of mental health issues arising in schools. Providing health services at school reduces absenteeism because students can attend their appointments during the school day (ASCD, 2014; Chiang et al., 2015; Dianda, 2008). Students need to have obstacles, such as mental health concerns, removed so they can be motivated to learn at school (Basch, 2011). Counseling teaches students valuable skills and how to manage their emotions (Basch, 2011; Carstarphern & Graff, 2018; Thiers, 2018). Students suffer from self-esteem issues and depression in high school (Ellerbrock, 2012). Therefore, it is important to provide support so these issues do not negatively impact a student's academics.

Qualified instructional staff. This section included three questions. Question 15 asked, How do your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program (S)? How did your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program (G)? Question 16 asked, How do your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework (S)? How did your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework? (S) Question 17 asked, How do teachers motivate you to learn (S)? How did teachers motivate you to learn (G)? The prevailing themes included accommodating, diverse learning styles, and engagement.

***Accommodating*.** Participants in the study found the staff in the blended learning program to be accommodating. Roxy shared that the staff was accommodating with coursework, noting, "It wasn't anything like noticeable which I guess is a good thing." Edward shared,

> They basically go off what you can do and what you can not do. If you don't know how to do a certain thing they will probably try to go around it or something to try and make it so you can learn.

Corinne shared that her teachers accommodated her when she was training and competing as an equestrian or involved with extracurricular activities. Stacey indicated that her teacher was accommodating by giving her time to work at her own pace. Thierry contended, "I say they're a lot more flexible than at the high school because of—you can do your work whenever you need to because it's online." These accommodations gave him time to balance his academics, activities, and athletics. The classes at Si allowed Timona to work in varying learning spaces and listen to music while learning, which could not happen in a traditional educational setting.

Diverse learning styles. Lili recognized that she learns differently from others, but teachers in a traditional classroom do not vary their teaching styles to meet the needs of all students. Roxy, who has dyslexia, appreciated the classes at Si because she was able to review the material as often as she needed in order to understand it. She asked teachers questions if she did not understand the content. Stacey and Tommy preferred working at their own pace on Si classes. Lili and Thierry used the lab hours to work on classes at Si, and had access to Si teachers if they needed assistance. Lili indicated, "I was my own teacher which was hard at first, but then it helped me kind of figure out how I learned in ways that I can teach myself or be more sufficient in that way." Si gave Lili the opportunity to determine how she learned best.

Students have diverse learning styles that American high schools are not working to address (Bray, 2016; Subban, 2006). Although research shows that people have diverse learning needs and styles (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Bray & McClaskey, 2015), public schools have made few adjustments over the years in an attempt to meet students' need for varied and personalized learning. Learning happens through student-teacher and student-student interactions (Bryceson, 2007). A blended learning program provides students with both face-to-face classes and online classes, meeting the needs of diverse learners.

Engagement. Engagement in lessons occurs in different ways. Corinne contended,

> My teachers have a lot of passion when they're talking about what subject material or subject matter we're learning. And so I think there is some excitement for what the subject is kind of shows and it goes on to the students, and we get a better feeling in the classroom. And so I think that's really motivating if the teacher likes it and we're kind of more inclined to like what we're learning to them.

Corinne is engaged when the teacher is passionate and motivates her to learn. She asserted that her teachers during the past school year were "great teachers." Additionally, she indicated, "I can tell they really like what they're teaching. And so they have fun projects that we do. Lectures are very engaging." Thierry affirmed, "They make school fun and doing work fun, instead of just like, 'Here's the notes. You have a test tomorrow. Study it.' And they give you assignments that are interactive."

Strong teacher-student relationships drive student performance and motivation in classrooms. Student motivation increases when a teacher is likable and shows he/she cares for students and wants them to graduate (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). Creativity and enthusiasm exude from successful teachers in gifted classrooms (Siegle et al., 2014). Corinne indicated that she was motivated to learn because her teachers were passionate and enjoyed teaching.

Educators need to examine their educational practices regularly and make changes as necessary to serve students and their learning styles (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Curriculum, lessons, and readings need to show cultural relevance to students and relate to their lives to be meaningful to the student. This concept is not new; connecting student experiences and interests to curriculum dates back to Dewey (Blankstein & Noguera, 2015). Engagement increases as teachers create a connection between school and student experiences. It is easier to update materials within an online class than one that relies on a textbook for its classroom materials.

Recommendations for the future of blended learning program: Extended learning support. This section included two questions. Question 18 asked, What are some things you can think of that would improve the blended learning program (S, G)? Question 19 asked, Is there anything else you would like to share (S, G)? The theme that emerged is the need for extended learning support.

Corinne suggested adding an extended learning component to the blended learning program for students to access if they have questions. She stated,

> If there was a resource to have a teacher from the high school if you needed help with an online class if that's their subject. A teacher to come to you would have that face to face conversation with you.

Lili shared her sentiments, and suggested,

> It might have been beneficial maybe once or twice a week there was a teacher at iAcademy who if you needed to go in and needed help with your work they would be there to help you with your online work.

Timona suggested having a teacher to access either face-to-face or online for additional support. Thierry suggested having Si students meet with their teacher twice a week because he felt he benefited from seeing his teacher more often than the required weekly meeting. Timona also shared that it would benefit the student if teachers at both schools were given information about why the student was in the blended learning program. Once the information is provided, everyone will have a better understanding of the needs of the student and how to support him/her. Extended learning supports, including tutors, assisted freshmen through their transition to high school (Ellerbrock, 2012). Wu et al. (2010) recognized the lack of tutorial support for students participating in e-learning. Providing additional tutorial supports for students in the blended learning program would benefit students academically.

Discussion of Key Findings as Related to Theoretical Framework

This section aligns the lived experiences and perspectives of students in a unique blended learning program to social constructivist theory and personalized learning theory. As shared in the literature review in Chapter 2, social constructivist theory acknowledges that "individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 24). Constructivist teachers give their students opportunities to make meaning of their knowledge before giving them answers. Social constructivism provides the learners the opportunity to make meaning of information and experiences in shared social activities. Dialogue among the learners and between students and the teacher give learners a deeper understanding of their knowledge (Watson, 2001).

Bryceson (2005) argued that the learner interprets the world and constructs meaning based upon his/her lived experiences: past and present. The eight participants indicated that whereas they had teachers to guide their learning in their classes at SHS, they learned on their own in the Si classes. This was difficult for Lili at first, but through the blended learning program, she discovered how she learned best. She shared, "Basically I teach myself."

Students make individual meanings of each experience, including school. Social constructivist theory contends that different meanings surface when one faces a lesson on one's own versus interacting with others while learning. Students share their feelings and understanding with others, which may impact the knowledge of others. Through the blended learning program, students participated in classes and activities at SHS, which gave them opportunities for socialization. All eight participants engaged in activities or athletics at SHS. Edward, Corinne, Tommy, and Thierry competed on athletic teams at SHS. Although not an athlete herself, Roxy was the football team's photographer and attended practices and games.

She also served as a teacher's assistant for the football coach, fulfilling the athletes' needs. She considered herself part of the football team. Lily and Corinne are part of SHS's ASB and planned school activities and dances. All participants were members of clubs at SHS. Their classes and activities at SHS enabled participants to socialize and develop as human beings.

Corinne mentored underclassmen through the Link Crew program. Lili taught cooking seminars for a school club. Stacey participated in the Arts Academy. Timona served as a guest disc jockey at school dances. Corinne and Lili planned a TEDTalk type event for their school where students and a teacher shared their lived experiences on certain topics. The social interaction provided students the opportunity to hear different viewpoints to establish their own meanings on topics.

Timona shared that she asks a lot of questions in her classes at SHS to understand the material fully. She makes meaning of the information through her dialogue with other students and the teachers. Stacey shared that her classes at SHS are more "communal in learning." Whereas she works individually to make meaning of the material in her classes at Si, she learns through interactions in her classes at SHS.

The second theoretical framework driving this dissertation was the personalized learning theory introduced by Bray (2016). Personalization connects the individual learner to his/her interests, passions, and aspirations (Bray & McClaskey, 2015), thus increasing their motivation to learn (Bray, 2016). In a personalized learning program, "the learner drives their own learning" (Bray & McClaskey, 2015, p. 9) and students have a voice and choice to acquire deeper knowledge (Bray & McClaskey, 2015). Education shifts from focusing on a group to focusing on an individual in a personalized learning environment.

Participants in the blended learning program chose to participate in this unique learning experience. All eight participants engaged in career obligations and or extracurricular activities that clashed with a traditional high school program. The blended learning program personalized the education of each participant by providing an alternative learning program to meet the students' needs. Students met with the Si administrator to determine which courses they would take at Si and which courses they would take at SHS. At the same time, students chose to have an early or late start for their face-to-face classes at SHS. Roxy, Lili, Corinne, and Timona had career commitments to balance with their school obligations. Whereas Timona preferred a late start at SHS due to her numerous evening gigs as a disc jockey, Corinne and Lili chose an early start so they could attend to their career commitments in the afternoon. Roxy also chose a late start to accommodate her photography sessions.

Motivation increased for the eight participants in the study as they had a choice in their educational path. Teachers in the Si courses demonstrated flexibility and would adjust due dates or assignment to meet the students' needs. Roxy shared, "They're always very accommodating, very understanding. If I accidentally missed a deadline on something you could just email them and say hey I read this wrong. I did that." Timona's career schedule changed often; she indicated that her Si teachers were "more understanding and also … [I could] ask them to reduce any workload temporarily so that way when I come back, I can be on track. They were willing to do that." Personalizing the assignments to meet the students' needs benefits learners in a personalized learning environment. About the blended learning program, Timona mentioned that it was difficult to receive personalization in her classes at SHS. Roxy shared, "I think it's just more tailored to the student" in reference to the blended learning program.

Subban (2006) argued that students have diverse learning styles that the standard school system and curriculum do not embrace. The blended learning program gave Roxy, a student with dyslexia who needed more time on assessments, the opportunity to take tests at home. In doing so, she took breaks as needed and was able to reread the questions to ensure she understood them. Personalizing the testing environment had a positive impact on her education. Stacey and Tommy thrived in an educational setting where they could "work at their own pace." Students can work slower as needed, or push through a course to finish faster. This choice is not feasible in a traditional high school class setting. The blended learning program provided a balance of classes where Stacey and Tommy can work at their own pace in the Si classes and learn to work at the pace of their teacher and classmates at SHS. Mastery of content is not sacrificed in a personalized system, as students demonstrate can their mastery in unique ways (Bray & McClaskey, 2015). Content and essential standards are presented within classes at Si and SHS; students demonstrate their understanding of these standards through the assignments and assessments in both learning environments.

Lili shared, "I liked that I had the blended schedule because I still got a little bit more of the traditional like structure which kind of helped me keep me on track with a regular kind of schedule." The blended schedule offered her a balanced, personalized path to complete her studies and her career commitments. Edward benefited from reading the coursework in his class at Si and the immediate feedback he received after he took assessments. He felt he was not learning comparable skills and gaining immediate feedback in his classes at SHS. When discussing the blended program, Thierry indicated, "It's a bigger life experience than just coming to the high school." The personalization of the blended school schedule helped him complete his classes.

Bray's (2016) personalized learning theory is evident in the blended learning program offered by SHS and Si. Participants shared the words "individualized" and "accommodating" throughout their interviews. Students share their voice and have choices in varying aspects of their schooling, including the type of schedule they want and which classes they take at each school. Timona shared that her assignments are individualized and could be changed if needed, such as when she was on the road or in the studio. The blended learning program at SHS and Si does not implement Bray's personalized learning theory completely because students cannot enroll in any class they want to take because they must adhere to the district's graduation policies. Social constructivist theory also applies to the blended learning program, but not solely by constructing meaning of knowledge in the classrooms. Whereas participants work on the Si classes alone, they interact with students in their classes at SHS. Although participants did not describe constructing meaning of the content within their classes at SHS, all participants discussed their involvement and socialization in activities and athletics at SHS. Students in the blended learning program had the opportunity to make meaning of their lives and experiences through their interactions in the extracurricular program at SHS. Social constructivism theory and the personalized learning theory apply to the learning structure of the blended learning program at SHS and Si.

Implications for Practice

Four practical recommendations to support blended learning programs resulted from analyzing the results of this study. First, school districts need to review their board policies to address online classes and or blended learning programs. Although blended programs exist at the university level, school districts are adopting an alternative learning environment that may include online classes. School districts need to either ensure that the offering of online or blended

learning programs falls within school board policies or rewrite policies to include online learning.

Second, school districts need to examine the possibilities of offering online classes to students within a traditional high school setting. The Master Schedule drives course offerings in a traditional high school, sometimes limiting the courses available to students. If a student would like to learn German, he/she should not be excluded from learning the language because the school does not have enough interested students to fill a few sections within the school day. Districts should consider online course offerings as a practice to fulfill students' educational needs and desires.

Third, school districts need to implement programs to monitor the social-emotional well-being of students enrolled in online classes, as some students may isolate themselves from social interactions. Online classes may be a viable option for some schools and students to complete their high school diplomas. However, this option should not be a detriment to a student's social-emotional status.

Fourth, school districts need to focus their LCFF funding to prioritize programs to meet the needs of students. Districts need to speak to their students to determine the programs they need to be successful. In 2015-16, California ranked 41st of 50 states in spending per K12 student after adjustments for the cost of living (California Budget & Policy Center, 2017). Districts determine the allocation of funding which could include funding blended learning programs for students. Student voice and choice must be considered when creating educational programs.

Conclusions

This study resulted in five conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of the study findings: flexible learning schedule, alternative education, supportive, diverse learning styles, and extended learning supports.

Flexible learning schedule. The first conclusion is that student access to a flexible learning schedule in this blended program provides a more personalized education and enables participation in extracurricular activities**.** All eight participants were involved in extracurricular activities at SHS, including the ASB and athletics. Students in the blended learning environment chose an early or late start to accommodate their needs. Morse and Allensworth (2015) stated that "student participation enhances self-awareness, and social achievement improves mental health and academic performance" (p. 786). Corinne is an equestrian who sought the flexible learning environment to give her the time to attend school, train with her horse, and compete. Edward, Thierry, and Tommy played team sports at SHS; Roxy immersed herself within the football team and felt she was part of the team. Students in this study participated in extracurricular activities at SHS, which correlates to social achievement, hence impacting their overall mental health and academic performance. The flexible learning schedule provided through Si afforded participants in this study access to extracurricular activities while personalizing their education. Each participant had input into his/her learning path designed by the Si administrator and his/her SHS counselor.

Means, Toyama, Murphy, and Baki (2013) argued that online and blended learning are flexible and that blended learning will emerge as the predominant model of education in the future. This finding correlated to the personalized learning paths funded through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014). Personalized learning is flexible and gives students the

opportunity to determine individual education goals (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Bingham, 2017; Jacobs, 2016: Pane et al., 2015). The United States Department of Education (2010) recognized the importance of extended learning time offered through online learning because students can access the learning "on demand anytime and anywhere, dramatically expanding educational opportunities" (p. 71).

The freshman year of high school is a pivotal year that profoundly influences whether or not a student will graduate from high school. Whereas ninth-graders have a 22% repeat rate Fritzer & Herbst, 1996), "6% of all dropouts leave school by their 10th-grade year" (Ellerbrock, 2012, p. 35). Two of the participants, Thierry and Stacey, started the blended program during their freshman year of high school. Thierry had numerous absences due to illness and Stacey learned at a different pace than other students in her class. This flexible learning schedule provided them the interventions or supports to remain on track for graduation.

Alternative pathway for education. The second conclusion is that this blended learning program provides an alternative pathway for education for students to successfully meet their career, athletic, and extracurricular obligations while in high school. Roxy shared, "It was just really helpful for me to get into my job" and recognized that she would not have been able to have access to her career as a professional sports team's photographer had she not been in the blended program. Lili left a private school seeking a blended school schedule to accommodate her work schedule in the culinary field. Timona needed an alternative pathway for education so she could meet the demands of being a disc jockey. Corinne, also an athlete, is able to compete in her sport and receive sponsorships as a blended learning student. Tommy sought an alternative pathway for education so he could manage his academics, athletics, and social life. Edward and Allen dedicated a large amount of time to their sports and sought an alternative schedule to

complete their graduation requirements. Stacey learned at her own pace and her band demanded a great deal of her time. She, too, sought an alternative pathway for education. CDW Government (2011) shared that virtual learning provides adults the opportunity to learn while working full-time. Personalized learning is an alternative pathway for education (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014; Bingham, 2017; Jacobs, 2016: Pane et al., 2015).

Supportive. The third conclusion is that teachers and counselors in this blended, personalized learning program provide a supportive learning environment for students' academic and personal needs. Students in this study felt they established stronger relationships with their teachers and counselors as a student in the blended learning program. When discussing the blending learning program, Roxy expressed, " I think it's just more tailored to the student." Stacey shared, "My teachers have good relationships with their students," which created a supportive learning environment for her. Students had access to mental health counselors and academic counselors within the school day, which maximized the learning time for students seeking services. ASCD (2014) shared the importance of providing health services at school to ensure the availability of services. Timona expressed the importance of accessing a counselor at school when her friend died by suicide. The counselor offered her tools to deal with the loss so she could focus on schoolwork. Emmett and McGee (2012) shared the importance of meeting students' social and emotional needs. Despite her absences due to equestrian training and competitions, Corinne shared, "My teachers have been very supportive. They're very understanding when I have to miss school for a competition as well. The counselors are also very supportive." Thierry shared that his teachers in the blended learning program are supportive; "My teachers are good and they help when I'm behind with any assignments I struggle with."

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) found students felt the personalized learning programs were supportive because the program focused on the needs of each student.

Diverse learning styles. The fourth conclusion is that this blended learning program meets the diverse learning style needs of its student participants. Subban (2016) argued that students do not fit a single mold; rather, they have unique learning styles. Timona shared that she learns best in the evening and can work on her classes from the library, at a coffee shop, at home, or on the road. Stacey and Tommy prefer working at their own pace. Roxy expressed that having access to online course material via the learning management system gave her the opportunity to review the course material as often as needed to support her learning. The classes at Si supported Roxy due to her dyslexia. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2014) and Pane et al. (2015) presented the positive impact personalized, blended learning had on students while preparing them for careers and colleges and meeting their diverse learning needs. Jacobs (2016) argued that a personalized learning program taps into students' diverse learning goals because they set up their own learning goals and can work on the curriculum at their own pace.

Extended learning supports. The fifth conclusion is that students in this study recommended extended learning support from content teachers as the most important means for improving their blended learning program experience. Five participants expressed their desire to be able to access extended learning supports beyond the online classes. Lili and Corinne suggested having content area teachers from SHS available to Si students each week in case they have content specific questions. Thierry suggested having students meet with their teachers at Si twice a week because he felt accessing his teacher multiple times a week helped him with his coursework. Edward felt supported by his access to instant results after he takes tests in his Si class. Ellerbrock (2012) stated that extended learning supports supported freshmen through their

transition to high school. Some students lack adequate preparation for courses, especially in ninth grade, and need assistance in order to understand the material (Neild, 2009). Wu et al. (2010) recognized the lack of tutorial supports in e-learning. The United States Department of Education (2010) recognized the importance of providing extra support for students as needed. Students need to be able to identify the skills and knowledge they lack and have access to extra support in order to learn them.

Multiple motivations. A one-size-fits-all education does not meet the needs of every student (ASCD, 2007; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Wandera, 2017). Five participants stated they sought an alternative pathway for education. Tommy shared, "I like going a different route to balance my studies, athletics, and social life." Edward wanted to stay on track for graduation and took a class at Si to satisfy graduation requirements. Stacey relized she needed an alternative pathway for education when she recognized she completed classes at a different pace than her peers. Four students stated they had careers while in high school and became a blended learning student to balance their education and career obligations. Three students stated they had multiple absences from the comprehensive high school which impacted their education. They joined the blended learning program to ensure their absences did not impact their education. Fritzer and Herbst (1996) discussed the impact excessive absences have upon a student's academic performance.

Recommendations for Further Study

Study blended learning as an option for high school students with careers. Four of the study participants had careers while in high school. More research should be done to explore the lived experiences of high school students with careers. Conducting a study focusing on high

school students with a career participating in a blended learning program will reveal the lived experiences and perspectives of another specific group.

Study the difference in the rigor of classes at a traditional high school in comparison to the rigor of online classes. Although this study included a question about rigor in classes, it would add to the literature to conduct a study focused on comparing the level of rigor in the two educational settings. Are face-to-face classes and online classes embedding a comparable amount of rigor into their courses?

Study blended learning as an option for high school students with dyslexia. One participant in the study shared that she has dyslexia and benefited from the Si classes as she could review the online content as many times as she needed to understand the content fully. It would add to the literature to share the impact of a blended learning program for high school students with dyslexia, focusing on supports received through online classes. Conducting a study on the lived experiences of students with dyslexia could answer the question, Does access to online material that students can review on demand benefit their learning experiences?

Study the impact of teacher-student electronic communication on student achievement. Participants in this study shared that they received more electronic communication from their Si teachers than from their SHS teachers. Si teachers reminded students of deadlines, shared information about future assignments and assessments, and answered student questions. Students may have received more email communication from their Si teachers, as Si is a smaller educational setting. It would add to the literature to study the impact of teacher-student electronic communication on student achievement. Would students in a face-to-face setting achieve higher grades and complete assignments on a more regular basis if they received more electronic communication from their teachers in a traditional high school setting?

Study the impact of a blended learning program on students who do not participate in extracurricular activities at the traditional high school. In this study, all participants participated in extracurricular activities or athletics at the high school. Hence, they maintain their social interaction with other students through extracurricular activities. It would add to the literature to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of students participating in a blended learning program that do not have such an outlet for social interaction. Are they satisfied with the blended learning program, or do they feel isolated as a result of having no school-related social interaction**?**

Summary

Chapter 5 discussed the key findings that surfaced through individual interviews of seven current students of and one graduate within the past 3 years from the unique blended learning program offered by SHS and Si. Findings were compared to the literature review presented in Chapter 2. The researcher drew conclusions and implications from the results and made recommendations for further studies of blended learning programs.

The key findings were organized into six categories that guided the interviews based on the literature review. The categories are (a) circumstances leading students to participate in a blended learning program, (b) personalized schools, (c) rigorous and relevant curriculum, (d) assistance to students, (e) qualified instructional staff, and (f) recommendations for the future of the blended learning program. The three themes that emerged related to the circumstances leading students to participate in the program were an alternative pathway for education, career obligations, and multiple absences from school. Barriers participants experienced in a traditional high school included the schedule and class size. The blended learning program provided flexibility and the opportunity for class completion. The key theme that emerged related to

personalized schools is supportive. The key theme that emerged related to a rigorous and relevant curriculum were rigor and teach myself. A challenge for participants with the blended learning program was time management. Participants recognized that the blended learning program prepared them for college and career readiness with time management and the acquisition of technology skills. The two themes that emerged related to assistance to students were teacher and counselor contact via email and access to counseling services. The two themes that emerged related to qualified instructional staff were accommodating and diverse learning styles. The theme that emerged related to a recommendation for the future of the blended learning program was extended learning supports.

The researcher presented a discussion of the key findings as they relate to the theoretical frameworks, social constructivist theory and personalized learning theory. Through the blended learning program at SHS and Si, students made individual meanings of each experience, including school. All participants were involved in activities, athletics, or ASB at SHS. Their classes and activities at SHS provided participants the opportunity to socialize and develop as people. Personalized learning theory connects the learner to his/her interests, passions, and aspirations (Bray & McClaskey, 2015). Students had a voice in their personalized learning schedule and chose an early or late start depending upon their needs. Students had input on the classes they took at both schools. Their choice of courses was personalized but remained within the categories needed to satisfy graduation requirements. Students constructed their own meanings of content, interactions and activities through the blended learning program which aligns with the social constructivism theory. The education was focused on the learner in the blended learning program. Students implemented their choice and used their voice which derives from the personalized learning theory.

Four practical recommendations to support blended learning resulted from analyzing the results of this study. First, school districts need to review their board policies to address online classes and or blended learning programs. Second, school districts need to examine the possibilities of offering online classes to students within a traditional high school setting. Third, school districts need to implement programs to monitor the social-emotional well-being of students enrolled in online classes, as some students may isolate themselves from social interaction. Fourth, school districts need to focus their LCFF funding to prioritize programs to meet the needs of students which could include funding for online courses.

The study yielded six conclusions based on the analysis and interpretation of the study findings: flexible learning schedule, alternative education, supportive, diverse learning styles, extended learning supports, and multiple motivations to enter a blended learning program. Participants shared that the blended learning program was a supportive program whose flexible learning schedule enabled them to participate in extracurricular activities. Each student had varying learning needs; participants shared that the blended learning program aligned with their diverse learning styles. The reasons varied for students to enter the blended learning program. However, extended learning supports would enhance the program.

Five recommendations for further study resulted from the research. They include: (a) study blended learning as an option for high school students with careers, (b) study the difference in the rigor of classes at a traditional high school in comparison to the rigor of online classes, (c) study blended learning as an option for high school students with dyslexia, (d) study the impact of teacher-student electronic communication on student achievement, and (e) study the impact of a blended learning program on students who do not participate in extracurricular

activities at the traditional high school. The researcher recommends further study in these areas to gain a comprehensive analysis of blended learning programs.

In closing, I believe that digital learning provides students the opportunity to learn outside of the traditional brick and mortar classrooms. Students can learn any subject from anywhere in the world. This study on the lived experiences and perspectives of these students demonstrated to me the strength of the blended learning program at SHS and Si. I believe that more schools should adopt this program as an option for students, especially to study courses that do not fit into the master schedule of a school. One should not be restricted from learning German just because the school can not fill a couple of sections to fit into the master schedule. A blended learning program opens the doors to possibilitiles for students.

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APPENDIX A

Parent Recruitment Letter and/or E-Mail

Date of preparation

My name is Katherine Tarvyd, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study on the lived experiences and perspectives of students participating in the blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy. I am contacting you as your student is enrolled in the blended learning program offered by the high school and iAcademy. If you agree for your student to participate in this study, s/he will be invited to participate in an individual semi-structured interview.

The interview is expected to take 60-90 minutes and it will be audio-recorded. Participation in this study is voluntary; however, a complimentary $25 Starbucks or Target gift card will be given to thank participants for their time. The identities of participants will remain confidential during and after the completion of the study. Your student's identity will be protected by assignment of a pseudonym.

By assisting me with this project, your child may not find out information that will directly benefit him/her but the information may assist educators to support high school students in the future. The results of the study may be shared with other districts about an alternative path towards high school graduation.

Please let me know if you consent to having your child participate in this graduate school study so I may provide you with more details and the consent form. You may reach me via email at [redacted] or via phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you for considering having your student participate in this graduate school study.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Katherine Tarvyd, Doctoral Student
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

APPENDIX B

Recent Graduate Recruitment Letter and/or E-Mail

Date of preparation

My name is Katherine Tarvyd, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a research study on the lived experiences and perspectives of students participating in the blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy. I am contacting you as you are a recent graduate who participated in the blended learning program offered by the high school and iAcademy. If you agree to participate in this study, you will be invited to participate in an individual semi-structured interview.

The interview is expected to take 60-90 minutes and it will be audio-recorded. Participation in this study is voluntary; however, a complimentary $25 Starbucks or Target gift card will be given to thank participants for their time. The identities of participants will remain confidential during and after the completion of the study. Your identity will be protected by assignment of a pseudonym.

By assisting me with this project, you may not find out information that will directly benefit you but the information may assist educators to support high school students in the future. The results of the study may be shared with other districts about an alternative path towards high school graduation.

Please let me know if you would like participate in this graduate school study so I may provide you with more details and the consent form. You may reach me via email at [redacted] or via phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you for considering your participation in this graduate school study.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Katherine Tarvyd, Doctoral Student
Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

APPENDIX C

Follow-Up Email - Parents of Present Students

Date of preparation

Dear_____,

This is a follow-up email to see if you are interested in having your student participate in my graduate school research study on the lived experiences and perspectives of students participating in the blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy.

Your student's input will be valued for this research study as your student is in the blended learning program and will be able to share their experience in the program. Participants will receive a $25 gift card for participating in the study and their identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym. If your student is available for this study, please contact me as soon as it is convenient so we can schedule the interview. You may reach me via email at [redacted] or via phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Katherine Tarvyd, Doctoral Student
Pepperdine University
[redacted]

APPENDIX D

Follow-Up Email - Adult Graduates of Program

Date of preparation

Dear_____,

This is a follow-up email to see if you are interested in participating in my graduate school research study on the lived experiences and perspectives of students who participated in the blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy.

Your input will be valued for this research study as you were a student in the blended learning program and will be able to share your experience in the program. Participants will receive a $25 gift card for participating in the study and their identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym. If you are available for this study, please contact me as soon as it is convenient so we can schedule the interview. You may reach me via email at [redacted] or via phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Katherine Tarvyd, Doctoral Student
Pepperdine University
[redacted]

APPENDIX E

Youth Assent to Participate in Research

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

YOUTH ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

"LEARNING IN THE 21st CENTURY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM"

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Katherine Tarvyd, Doctoral Student of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy with Dr. Linda Purrington, Committee Chair, at Pepperdine University. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate.
Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You can decline to participate, even if your parent/legal guardian agrees to allow your participation. You may also decide to discuss it with your family or friends. If you decide to participate, you will both be asked to sign this form. You will be given a copy of this form.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in this study because you are a student in the blended learning program. The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of a blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy and describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs.

In order to accomplish this purpose, interviews of students and recent graduates will be conducted. The data will be compiled to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of the students participating in this blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy and understand how the program may be meeting its students' needs.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minutes individual interview with Katherine Tarvyd. During your interview will be asked questions that relate to your experience in the blended learning program. For example, you will be asked what the circumstances were that led you to a blended learning program. Examples of

other questions are the issues or challenges, if any, your have with a blended learning program; how participating in a blended learning program prepares you for college or career readiness; or types of assistance you receive as a blended learning student that differ from being a student in the traditional high school.

The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed by an external transcriber.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

You do not have to answer any question you don't want to answer.

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in the study are minimal. Risks of participation include fatigue, boredom, possible psychological or social harm as participants may start questioning their educational choice, breach of confidentiality and breach of identification or loss of personal time for the length of the interview.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include: This study could provide the high school and iAcademy feedback on their program and inform other educators on the potential impact of this blended learning program. This study may provide information about an alternative blended learning program to other educational institutions.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a $25 Target gift card or a $25 Starbucks gift card for your time. You do not have to answer all of the questions in order to receive the card. The card will be given to you at the end of your interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. The members of the research team and Pepperdine University Protection Program (HSPP) may access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored for a minimum of three years on a password protected computer in Katherine Tarvyd's place of residence. The data collected will be de-identified, transcribed by an external transcriber, and coded. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. The audio-recordings of the interviews will be uploaded to a third-party website for transcription. All identifiable information will be removed from the recording before it is uploaded for transcription. You will be assigned a pseudonym and

responses will be coded. Transcript data will be maintained separately. The audio recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you or your child are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies due to your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to full participation in the study is not participating or only answering the items for which you feel comfortable. Participation in this study will not in any way, shape or form infringe upon the relationship between you and your education institution.

EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures your student will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

The investigator is willing to answer any inquiries you may have concerning the research herein described. If you have questions or concerns about the research, please contact Katherine Tarvyd (Researcher) at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email at [redacted]; or Dr. Linda Purrington (Committee Chair) at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email at [redacted]

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT- IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or this research, please contact: Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University, 6100 Center Drive Suite 500, Los Angeles, CA 90045, XXX-XXX-XXXX or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT (IF PARTICIPANT IS 14 yrs. or OLDER)

I have read the information provided above. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

AUDIO RECORDING

☐ I agree to be audio-recorded.

☐ I do not want to be audio-recorded.

_____ _____

Name of Participant Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment the participants are knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. They have the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. They also have been informed participation is voluntary and that they may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

_____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX F

Parent/Legal Guardian Consent to Participate in Research

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

PARENT/LEGAL GUARDIAN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

"LEARNING IN THE 21st CENTURY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM"

Your student is invited to participate in a research study conducted by Katherine Tarvyd, Doctoral Student of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy with Dr. Linda Purrington, Committee Chair, at Pepperdine University, because your student is in the blended learning program at the high school and iAcademy. Your student's participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deceiving whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also discuss participation with family and friends. If you decide to allow your son/daughter to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of a blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy and describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs.

In order to accomplish this purpose, interviews of students and recent graduates will be conducted. The data will be compiled to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of the students participating in this blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy and understand how the program may be meeting its students' needs.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If your son/daughter agrees to voluntarily participate in this study, he/she will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute individual interview with Katherine Tarvyd. During your student's participation in the study the participant will be asked interview questions that relate to his/her experience in the blended learning program. For example, your son/daughter will be asked what the circumstances were that led them to a blended learning program. Examples of other questions

are the issues or challenges, if any, your student has with a blended learning program; how participating in a blended learning program prepared you for college or career readiness; or types of assistance a student do you receives as a blended learning student that differ from being a student in the traditional high school.

The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed by an external transcriber. The transcriber will be asked to maintain confidentiality and the audio recording will be de-identified before being provided to the transcriber. If you choose not to be recorded, the researcher will ask to take written notes.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in the study are minimal. Risks of participation include fatigue, boredom, possible psychological or social harm as participants may start questioning their educational choice, breach of confidentiality and breach of identification or loss of personal time for the length of the interview.

GREATER THAN MINIMAL RISK

Participating in the study means that there is a potential risk as well as a probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research which may be greater that what one would ordinarily encounter in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations as well as tests. More specifically, there may be a breach of confidentiality and a breach of identification.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include: This study could provide the high school and iAcademy feedback on their program and inform other educators on the potential impact of this blended learning program. This study may provide information about an alternative blended learning program to other educational institutions.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

Your son/daughter will receive a $25 Target gift card or a $25 Starbucks gift card for their time. Your son/daughter do not have to answer all of the questions in order to receive the card. The card will be given to your son/daughter at the end of their interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your son/daughter's records for this study will be kept confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about your son/daughter. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if the participant discloses any instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data

collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored for a minimum of three years on a password protected computer in the researcher's place of residence. The data collected will be de-identified, transcribed by an external transcriber, and coded. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. The audio-recordings of the interviews will be uploaded to a third-party website. All identifiable information will be removed from the recording before it is uploaded for transcription. The participant will be assigned a pseudonym and their responses will be coded. Transcript data will be maintained separately. The audio recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your son/daughter's participation is voluntary. His/her refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you or your child are otherwise entitled. He/she and/or you may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies due to your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to full participation in the study is not participating or your student only completing the items for which your student feels comfortable. Participation in this study will not in any way, shape or form infringe upon the relationship between you and your education institution.

EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

If your student is injured as a direct result of research procedures your student will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

The investigator is willing to answer any inquiries you may have concerning the research herein described. If you have questions or concerns about the research, please contact Katherine Tarvyd (Researcher) at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email at [redacted] or Dr. Linda Purrington (Committee Chair) at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email at [redacted]

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT- IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or this research, please contact: Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools

Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University, 6100 Center Drive Suite 500, Los Angeles, CA 90045, XXX-XXX-XXXX or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN FOR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

I understand the procedures described above, and all of the benefits and risks to me and my child. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____ _____

Name of Parent of Legal Guardian Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian Date

AUDIO RECORDING

☐ I agree to have my son/daughter audio-recorded.

☐ I do not want my son/daughter to be audio-recorded.

_____

Name of Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment the parental/legal guardian is knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to allow his/her son/daughter to participate in this study. This person has the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. This person also has been informed that (if application) participation is voluntary and that his/her son/daughter may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason. Finally, I have also verified that the person signing this consent form is the parental/legal guardian of the minor who is participating in the study.

_____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX G

Adult Participant Consent to Participate in Research

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

ADULT PARTICIPANT CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

"LEARNING IN THE 21st CENTURY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM"

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Katherine Tarvyd, Doctoral Student of Education in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy with Dr. Linda Purrington, Committee Chair, at Pepperdine University, because you were in the blended learning program at the high school and iAcademy. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deceiving whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also discuss participation with family and friends. As an adult, showing up and willingly participating in the interview demonstrates your consent. You will also be given a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of a blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy and describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs.

In order to accomplish this purpose, interviews of students and recent graduates will be conducted. The data will be compiled to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of the students participating in this blended learning program offered by the high school and the iAcademy and understand how the program may be meeting its students' needs.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you agrees to voluntarily participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 60-90 minute individual interview with Katherine Tarvyd. During your participation in the study the participant will be asked interview questions that relate to his/her experience in the blended learning program. For example, you will be asked what the circumstances were that led them to a blended learning program. Examples of other questions are the issues or challenges, if any, you

had with a blended learning program; how participating in a blended learning program prepared you for college or career readiness; or types of assistance a student did you receive as a blended learning student that differ from being a student in the traditional high school.

The interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed by an external transcriber. The transcriber will be asked to maintain confidentiality and the audio recording will be de-identified before being provided to the transcriber. If you choose not to be recorded, the researcher will ask to take written notes.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

The potential and foreseeable risks associated with participation in the study are minimal. Risks of participation include fatigue, boredom, possible psychological or social harm as participants may start questioning their educational choice, breach of confidentiality and breach of identification or loss of personal time for the length of the interview.

GREATER THAN MINIMAL RISK

Participating in the study means that there is a potential risk as well as a probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research which may be greater that what one would ordinarily encounter in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations as well as tests. More specifically, there may be a breach of confidentiality and a breach of identification.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, there are several anticipated benefits to society which include: This study could provide the high school and iAcademy feedback on their program and inform other educators on the potential impact of this blended learning program. This study may provide information about an alternative blended learning program to other educational institutions.

PAYMENT/COMPENSATION FOR PARTICIPATION

You will receive a $25 Target gift card or a $25 Starbucks gift card for your time. You do not have to answer all of the questions in order to receive the card. The card will be given to you at the end of their interview.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. However, if required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if the participant discloses any instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The data will be stored for a minimum of three years on a password protected computer in the researcher's place of residence. The data collected will be de-identified, transcribed by an external transcriber, and coded. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. The audio-recordings of the interviews will be uploaded to a third-party website. All identifiable information will be removed from the recording before it is uploaded for transcription. The participant will be assigned a pseudonym and their responses will be coded. Transcript data will be maintained separately. The audio recordings will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies due to your participation in this research study.

ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION

The alternative to full participation in the study is not participating or only completing the items for which you feel comfortable. Participation in this study will not in any way, shape or form infringe upon the relationship between you and your education institution.

EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION

The investigator is willing to answer any inquiries you may have concerning the research herein described. If you have questions or concerns about the research, please contact Katherine Tarvyd (Researcher) at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email at [redacted]; or Dr. Linda Purrington (Committee Chair) at XXX-XXX-XXXX or via email at [redacted]

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT- IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or this research, please contact: Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University, 6100 Center Drive Suite 500, Los Angeles, CA 90045, XXX-XXX-5XXXX or gpsirb@pepperdine.edu.

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN FOR CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

I understand the procedures described above, and all of the benefits and risks to me and my child. I have been given a chance to ask questions. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

AUDIO RECORDING

☐ I agree to be audio-recorded.

☐ I do not want to be audio-recorded.

_____

Name of Participant

_____

Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

I have explained the research to the participants and answered all of his/her questions. In my judgment the participant is knowingly, willingly and intelligently agreeing to participate in this study. This person has the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study and all of the various components. This person also has been informed that (if applicable) participation is voluntary and that he/she may discontinue their participation in the study at any time, for any reason.

_____

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

_____ _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent Date

APPENDIX H

Student Interview Questions

Interview Protocol:

Pseudonym of interviewee: _____

Role of the interviewee: **student** Location of Interview: _____

Date of interview: _____ Time of interview: _____

- Thank the participants for their time.
- Review IRB protections.
- Review the purpose of the phenomenological study.
- Remind participant that the interview will be recorded and the researcher may also take notes.
- Remind the participant(s) they can stop at any time.

1. What grade were you in when you started the blended learning program? What grade are you in now? (to understand the time spent in the program)
2. What were the circumstances that led you to a blended learning program?
    a. What were barriers or challenges, if any, you had with a traditional high school program?
    b. How has the blended learning program, if at all, assisted you with completing your high school diploma?
3. Tell me about your classes in the blended learning program. (ice breaker)
4. How would you describe your learning environment?
5. Tell me about your teachers and counselors and their relationships with students.
6. Describe any advisement you may have received related to classes, staying in school and graduation requirements.
7. What type of counseling do you receive about coping with the stress of school and life?
8. What type of involvement do you have in your schools outside of classes?

9. Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Are the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than your traditional classes? Explain.
10. What are issues or challenges, if any, you have with a blended learning program?
11. How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for college readiness?
12. How has participating in a blended learning program prepared you for career readiness?
13. What type of assistance do you receive as a blended learning student that differ from being a student in the traditional high school?
14. What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance do you receive as a student in the blended learning program?
15. How do your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program?
16. How do your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework?
17. How do teachers motivate you to learn?
18. What are some things you can think of that would improve the blended learning program?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share?

- Thank participant again for their time and participation.
- Provide participant with the gift card.

APPENDIX I

Graduate Interview Questions

Interview Protocol:

Pseudonym of interviewee: _____

Role of the interviewee: **graduate** Location of Interview: _____

Date of interview: _____ Time of interview: _____

- Thank the participant for their time.
- Review IRB protections.
- Review the purpose of the phenomenological study.
- Remind participant that the interview will be recorded and the researcher may also take notes.
- Remind the participant he/she can stop at any time.

1. What grade were you in when you started the blended learning program? What year did you graduate? (to understand the time spent in the program)
2. What were the circumstances that led you to a blended learning program?
    a. What were barriers or challenges, if any, you had with a traditional high school program?
    b. How did the blended learning program, if at all, assist you with completing your high school diploma?
3. Tell me about your classes in the blended learning program. (ice breaker)
4. How would you describe your learning environment?
5. Tell me about your teachers and counselors and their relationships with students.
6. Describe any advisement you received related to classes, staying in school and graduation requirements.
7. What type of counseling did you receive about coping with the stress of school and life?
8. What type of involvement did you have in your schools outside of classes?

9. Describe the online component of the blended learning program. Were the online classes more challenging, or less challenging, than your traditional classes? Explain.
10. What are issues or challenges, if any, you had with a blended learning program?
11. How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for college readiness?
12. How did participating in a blended learning program prepare you for career readiness?
13. What type of assistance did you receive as a blended learning student that differed from being a student in the traditional high school?
14. What type of additional help or out-of-classroom assistance did you receive as a student in the blended learning program?
15. How did your teachers meet your diverse learning needs in the blended learning program?
16. How did your teachers demonstrate an understanding of your culture, language, and life experiences through your coursework?
17. How did teachers motivate you to learn?
18. What are some things you can think of that would improve the blended learning program?
19. Is there anything else you would like to share?

- Thank participant again for their time and participation.
- Provide participant with the gift card.

APPENDIX J

Expert Review Email

Thank you for serving as an expert reviewer of my study tools. Here is some information on my study to provide you some background.

Problem Statement

Education is important in a global society and economy. Graduating from high school is vital for a student to successfully continue to post-secondary opportunities such as college, university, and trade school. Yet, California's high school graduation rate for the class of 2016 was 83.2% (Gordon, 2017).

Sunshine High School (SHS) and Sunshine iAcademy (Si), schools in California, created a blended learning program allowing students to take some face-to-face classes at Sunshine High School and some online classes at Sunshine iAcademy. In doing so, the schools are providing an alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school. However, the results of this blended personalized program have not been studied. Therefore, a need exists to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or individuals who graduated from the blended learning program and how it is meeting their students' needs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of a blended learning program at Sunshine High School (SHS) and Sunshine iAcademy (Si), schools in California, and describe how this alternative pathway for students to graduate from high school may be addressing students' needs.

To accomplish this purpose, a phenomenological study will be used to describe the lived experiences and perspectives of students. In-depth individual interviews of current students or graduates within the past three years will be conducted. The data will be triangulated to make sense of the lived experiences and perspectives of students currently enrolled in or recent graduates of the blended learning program offered by SHS and Si and understand how it is meeting its students' needs.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences and perspectives of high students who are currently participating in or recent graduates of a unique blended learning program in California?

As you go through the three questionnaires and two observation tools, please answer the following questions:

1. In light of my study purpose, research questions and methodology, am I asking the right questions to get at my purpose?;
2. Are the questions phrased understandably?;
3. Are they organized correctly?; and,
4. Does this methodology seem appropriate for this study?

Once again, thank you for guiding me through this process. You are welcome to answer directly on the document or within an email.

APPENDIX K

Notice of Approval for Human Research

PEPPERDINE

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: February 14, 2019

Protocol Investigator Name: Katherine Tarvyd

Protocol #: 19-01-958

Project Title: LEARNING IN THE 21st CENTURY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF A BLENDED LEARNING PROGRAM

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Katherine Tarvyd:

Thank you for submitting your application for expedited review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. As the nature of the research met the requirements for expedited review under provision Title 45 CFR 46.110 of the federal Protection of Human Subjects Act, the IRB conducted a formal, but expedited, review of your application materials.

Based upon review, your IRB application has been approved. The IRB approval begins today February 14, 2019, and expires on February 13, 2020.

Your final consent form has been stamped by the IRB to indicate the expiration date of study approval. You can only use copies of the consent that have been stamped with the IRB expiration date to obtain consent from your participants.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for expedited review and will require a submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB. If contact with subjects will extend beyond February 13, 2020, a continuing review must be submitted at least one month prior to the expiration date of study approval to avoid a lapse in approval.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

PEPPERDINE

Pepperdine University
24255 Pacific Coast Highway
Malibu, CA 90263
TEL: 310-506-4000

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research