Analysis of One Secondary School's Support Systems for Aspiring First-Generation Latinx College Students: A Case Study

Tiffany Cunningham
University of San Diego

Follow this and additional works at: https://digital.sandiego.edu/dissertations

Part of the Academic Advising Commons, Bilingual, Multilingual, and Multicultural Education Commons, and the Secondary Education Commons

Digital USD Citation

This Dissertation: Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital USD. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital USD. For more information, please contact digital@sandiego.edu.
ANALYSIS OF ONE SECONDARY SCHOOL’S SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR ASPIRING FIRST-GENERATIONLATINX COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

by

Tiffany Cunningham

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2023

Dissertation Committee
Sarina C. Molina, Ed.D., Chair
C. Bobbi Hansen, Ed.D., Member
David Preston, Ph.D., Member

University of San Diego
CANDIDATE’S NAME: Tiffany Cunningham

TITLE OF DISSERTATION: ANALYSIS OF ONE SECONDARY SCHOOL’S SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR ASPIRING FIRST-GENERATION LATINX COLLEGE STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY

APPROVAL:

_____________________________________, Chair
Sarina C. Molina, Ed.D.

_____________________________________, Member
C. Bobbi Hansen, Ed.D.

_____________________________________, Member
David Preston, Ph.D.
ABSTRACT

U.S. Census Bureau Report (2020c) showed Hispanic students constituted 18.5% of the U.S. population, 36% attended higher education and only 14% completed postsecondary education. Research has shown Hispanic, specifically Latinx, students faced barriers in accessing higher education’s hidden curriculum, compounded by deficit beliefs about their language, culture, and lack of family involvement (Kiyama, 2018; C. Martinez & Mendoza, 2020). Additionally, first-generation college students require college readiness skills, including knowledge about college and measurable and immeasurable skills shown to support student success (Chlup et al., 2018; Duncheon, 2021; Morley et al., 2021). Despite secondary school supports like college and career centers and summer transition programs, gate-keeping barriers have continued to inhibit Latinx students from obtaining capital needed to navigate higher education (Cunha et al., 2018; Howard & Sharpe, 2019; C. Martinez & Mendoza, 2020; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016; Yasuike, 2019). This qualitative case study, conducted in a secondary school on the central coast of California, examined support systems for aspiring first-generation Latinx college students (Bhattacharya, 2017; Fusch et al., 2017). Guided by Latine critical theory (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017) and community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), this study analyzed students, staff, and faculty experiences as they reflected on support systems aimed at facilitating transition of Latinx students to higher education. Data analysis revealed valuable insights into support systems for aspiring first-generation Latinx college students and highlights the need for further research and implementation of targeted interventions to ensure students have equitable access to higher education.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my students in the graduating class of 2022 for inspiring me to start this research study. and to my children, Maya, Marlie, Mikey, and Mark, for motivating me to finish it.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank my amazing dissertation committee. My remarkable
chair, Dr. Sarina C. Molina, thank you doesn’t quite seem enough for your mentorship
and encouragement. I have loved working with you and learning from you. Your
confidence in me and my work was incredibly reassuring and I am so grateful. Dr. Bobbi
Hansen, thank you for writing that letter of recommendation four years ago. I would not
be here without you. Thank you for your support, your positivity, and your guidance
through all of graduate school. Dr. David Preston, thank you for taking a chance on a
fellow teacher you only met through Zoom. Our conversations about education,
academia, entrepreneurship—and everything in between!—have been incredibly helpful
as I work through this last stage of my own formal education and embark on to the next
step.

My remarkable cohort, you all are inspiring! Hannah, you are an amazing person
and your light and sense of humor was so appreciated. Tommy, your kindness and
compassion stood out and apart and I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to get
to know you. Karla, you are absolutely amazing and a force to be reckoned with! I want
to be more like you when I grow up. Zulema, I love that you did YPAR—I’m coming to
you when I finally do that kind of research, too! Norma, I loved our talks about bilingual
education and CCW. Thank you so much for your time. Abel, thank you for reminding
me of just how important languages are and for your help with CCW. Adan, we had so
many classes together, I appreciate your input and feedback each step of the way.
Dianne, you are remarkable and your kindness is indescribable. I loved working with
you! Kelly, it was a pleasure to work with you and your work in ethnic studies is going to
change lives! Sobeida and Juan Carlos, I wish we had taken more classes together after
our history class. I loved conversations with you both! Jennifer, I learned so much from
you and I am grateful for your experiences. Cohort 1, we’re doing it!!
I would like to thank my absolutely amazing colleagues. Mrs. Kaytie Cowans who has become one of my closest friends through the ups and downs of teaching high school science, raising small humans, and trying to enjoy the one life we are given. I have loved spending every day at work—and several days outside of work!—with you. Thank you so much. Mrs. Courtney Zimmerman who battled with me in the delicate balance of teaching classes while taking classes. Thank you for being my teammate—I promise to always send you my slides before presentations! Mr. Joshua Tenhet, thank you for letting me ask you thousands of questions and always reminding me to focus on the mentorships with students, along with a very dry sense of humor. Ms. Robin Schneider, thank you for sparking the inspiration to focus on our students. I appreciate all you’ve done and continue to do.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. Thank you to my fiancé, my best friend, my biggest supporter, Jacob Cooper, I could not have done this without you. Thank you so much for the never-ending stream of encouragement, for listening to my rambles as I read and reread pages of this dissertation over and over again, for stepping up and helping me to raise the three most important people in my world, and for partnering with me to add a fourth to the chaos. Words will never be able to express how much I appreciate you. I love you, darling.

And to my children: Maya, Marlie, Mikey, and Mark. You four are the most important people in my life. I hope you remember the last few years of Zoom meetings and Sunday studying fondly. But always know, you are my dreams come true, my greatest adventure, my number one reason, and motivation for pursuing my goals. You are not, and never were, a distraction from my work—you are my most important work and being your mom is the best job ever. Thank you so much for joining me on this adventure. I love you to the moon and back.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aspiring First-Generation Latinx College Students</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Navigational Capital Is Inaccessible</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Familial Capital Is Undervalued</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Linguistic Capital Is Ignored</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Barriers Are Covert</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial Barriers Are Systemic</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Current Support Systems Have Had Limited Effects</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Holistic Perspective Is Needed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CRT</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social Capital Theory</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statement of Purpose</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance of Study</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assumptions and Delimitations</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Familial Capital 101
Linguistic Capital 106
Navigational Capital 111
Resistant Capital 119
Social Capital 121
Themes Across Stakeholder Groups 124
Familial and Linguistic Capital Created a Pathway for Students to Stay Connected With Their Families Through Home Languages. 125
Building Social Capital Strengthens Students’ Familial Capital and Creates a Venue to Share Navigational Capital 131
Aspirational, Navigational, and Resistant Capital Are so Intertwined That Building up one Capital Will Build up all Capitals 136
Conclusion 144
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION 147
Students Felt Supported Through Mentorship 149
Mentors Are key Entry Points 150
Formal Mentors Were Provided to all Students 152
Students Sought Informal Mentors on Their Own 153
Students Felt Supported by Their Families 155
Invisible Support 155
Struggles of Being First 156
Responsibilities and Recompensa 157
Students Felt Supported in Their Language Development 160
Students’ Full Linguistic Repertoire 160
The Jaulas of ELD Classes 161
General English Writing Classes 162
APPENDIX A Demographic Survey

APPENDIX B Codebook

APPENDIX C Interview Protocol: Students

APPENDIX D Interview Protocol: Staff and Faculty
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Descriptions of the Term “College Readiness” .......................................................... 32
Table 2. Dichos, as seen in Marrun (2020) ............................................................................. 43
Table 3. Average Number of Years of Education by Race ....................................................... 49
Table 4. Participants in Studies Reporting on Development of Support Systems for
Aspiring and Current College Students ..................................................................................... 63
Table 5. Demographics of Faculty and Staff at Nina High School .......................................... 74
Table 6. List of Stakeholders and Participant Criteria ............................................................. 77
Table 7. Data Collection Method and Corresponding Rationale ............................................ 81
Table 8. Types of Capital in Community Cultural Wealth Framework ................................... 89
Table 9. Parents’ Education Level ............................................................................................ 92
Table 10. Background Information for Student Participants .................................................. 95
Table 11. Students’ Accounts of Teachers Building Aspirational Capital ................................. 99
Table 12. Teachers’ Accounts of Building Connections With Students ................................. 123
Table 13. Comparison of Language Fluency Labels, as Provided by Administration and
Students ........................................................................................................................................ 167
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. College Enrollment Rates of 18- to 24-year-olds, by Sex and Race/Ethnicity ...19
Figure 2. Comparison of First-Generation and Continuing-Generation Students’ College Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity ................................................................. 20
Figure 3. Current and Projected Enrollment of Latinx Students in the United States .... 29
Figure 4. Race/Ethnicity of College Faculty .................................................................. 30
Figure 5. Percentage of Public School Students who Were English Language Learners by State ..................................................................................................................31
Figure 6. SAT Scores by Race/Ethnicity .................................................................. 40
Figure 7. ACT Scores by Race/Ethnicity .................................................................. 41
Figure 8. Percentage of Students in Special Education by Race/Ethnicity ............. 48
Figure 9. Percentage of English Language Learner Students by Race/Ethnicity .... 52
Figure 10. Percentage Distribution of English Language Learner Students by the 10 Most Commonly Reported Home Languages .............................................................................. 53
Figure 11. Household Income by Race/Ethnicity ......................................................... 54
Figure 12. Income Brackets of College Students by Race .......................................... 55
Figure 13. Languages Spoken in Students’ Homes ...................................................... 73
Figure 14. Classification of Students Based on Their English Abilities and Fluency ...... 73
Figure 15. Percentage Distribution of Public School Teachers in the United States, Differentiated by Various School Descriptions .................................................................................... 75
Figure 16. The Microsystem of Interpersonal Relations as Pertaining to Students’ Secondary School .................................................................................................................. 76
Figure 17. Political Map of Power and Influence in the Development of a “College-Going” Culture at a Large High School on the Central Coast of California ........................................ 78
Figure 18. Example From Trustworthiness Check on Types of Capital ......................... 86
Figure 19. Example From Trustworthiness Check on Code Definitions ....................... 87
Figure 20. Students’ Self-Identification Language Fluency Label ................................. 91
Figure 21. First-Generation College Students’ Plans After High School ...................... 93
Figure 22. Community Cultural Wealth Framework ..................................................... 98
Figure 23. Overlap Between Familial and Linguistic Capital ....................................... 126
Figure 24. Overlap Between Familial, Navigational, and Social Capital ...................... 133
Figure 25. Overlap Between Aspirational, Navigational, and Resistant Capital ............ 138
Figure 26. Community Cultural Wealth Framework, Seen as Overlapping Lenses ...... 188
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“I feel proud, really proud, to be a first-generation college student. It’s a huge accomplishment in my family and for me. And I’m grateful that I have been blessed with parents who support me with all of my goals for college” (Luis, Student–Participant)

“It was a declarative statement, ‘Nuestros hijos van a la universidad’ [Our children are going to college]” (Chlup et al., 2018, p. 22)

“Simply stated, Latina/o students have agency.” (Kiyama, 2018, p. 425)

First-generation college students have been widely accepted as students whose parents have little to no college experience and have not earned a bachelor’s degree (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2017). I am a first-generation college graduate and many of the high school students I teach everyday are working toward becoming first-generation college students as well. I have experienced and am currently witnessing firsthand that first-generation college students face increased barriers, as documented in repeated studies over the past 20 years (Boden, 2011; Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Espino, 2016; Gibbons et al., 2019; Sims & Ferrare, 2021; Vega, 2018). Although these studies have identified the barriers these particular students face, they have refused to call attention to the fact the educational system was not built for students who do not fit a particular mold: instead, the educational system was built to replicate the power structures present in current society (Covarrubias, 2021; Entwistle, 1978). As demonstrated in the previous quotes, Latinx students in particular have pride, determination, and focus to resist societal barriers in their pursuit of higher education.

Latinx students, like many students from racially and ethnically underrepresented communities, face additional barriers that prevent them from reaching their postsecondary educational goals. Currently, 27% of first-generation
college students identify as Hispanic (Campbell & Wescott, 2019) and enrollment of Latinx students has continued to grow at a steady pace. It is projected Latinx students will make up 30% of K–12 public school student populations by 2027 (UnidosUS, 2020).

As the demographic of student populations shift and Latinx students make up a larger and larger proportion, it becomes even more critical to recognize the traditional educational system was not built for these students. This begs the question: how can educational systems best serve and support Latinx students, particularly those who are aspiring first-generation college students?

This research study focused on Latinx students who speak a language other than English (LOTE) at home and are interested in being the first members of their families to attend college. Qualitative data were collected from students and staff and faculty of the secondary school these students attend to better understand the support systems currently in place for these students. In doing so, this study identified specific barriers students who speak a LOTE at home face and named the support systems most helpful to these students as they pursue their postsecondary educational goals.

Aspiring First-Generation Latinx College Students

Although first-generation college students as a whole face incredible difficulties in assimilating to higher education and navigating their ways through this very complex social institution (Espino, 2016; Storlie et al., 2016), Latinx students are faced with additional barriers associated with a mismatch between cultural values. These students are often barred from learning about the implicit norms and practices of higher education due to underresourced secondary schools (Vega, 2018). Additionally, their strong familial and community ties are often undervalued and ignored because they do not align with what most of society has deemed as normal. Furthermore, Latinx students make up 78% of English language learner (ELL) students in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021b) and the linguistic challenges associated with
slowly becoming academically fluent in a new language can be incredibly challenging. Latinx students’ capital, as defined by Yosso (2005) and explained later in this chapter, has been overlooked, neglected, and ignored. In doing so, academic and financial barriers have become more pronounced. In this section, I also describe the support systems that have been put in place to assist these students and explain the need for greater, additional systems that will truly help students pursue their postsecondary educational goals.

**Navigational Capital Is Inaccessible**

Yosso (2005) explained navigational capital as the knowledge needed to navigate social institutions, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers. In this instance, navigational capital refers to the awareness and knowledge of implicit norms, procedures, and policies present in institutions of higher education. But without explicit teaching by secondary schools (Chlup et al., 2018; Hansen-Thomas & Sourdot, 2015), through outreach programs from postsecondary schools (Cuevas, 2020; Gonzalez Quiroz & Garza, 2018) and connections between students and institutions at large (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Crawley et al., 2019), this form of capital has remained inaccessible to first-generation students, especially Latinx students who speak a LOTE at home.

Collaboration between families and schools is crucial to make navigational capital accessible for all students. This accessibility and collaboration can be achieved through events and workshops to provide information about financial aid or enrollment in college classes (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014), to assist in the development of social networks and matching with mentors (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Crawley et al., 2019), and to integrate everyone into the school system together for the betterment of the students (Covarrubias, 2021). With definitive and dedicated work focused on building navigational capital in underserved students, systems can be changed and barriers can be removed.
Familial Capital Is Undervalued

Latinx students are often faced with deficit ideology that implies their families are uninterested, disengaged, and place little value in their children’s educational journeys (Chlup et al., 2018; Marrun, 2020; Michel & Durdella, 2019; Rocha, 2021). In doing so, this ideology neglects students’ familial capital, which Yosso (2005) described as the pride and traditions associated with close family ties and relationships. Because Latinx families do not behave the way White, middle-class, native English-speaking families behave, people often assumed they also have different values and priorities (Yasuike, 2019). But this is far from the truth as “students benefit from collective support provided by families” (Luedke, 2020, p. 1031).

Therefore, as Romo et al. (2020) noted, it is surprising there have been relatively few educational programs designed to build a collaborative team between families and school systems. Schools, including colleges and universities, often expect families to approach them with questions rather than simply offering this information and creating a space for discussion. Due to cultural differences in who may approach whom, Latinx families are often dissuaded from approaching school officials or representatives with questions (Yasuike, 2019). This disconnect impacts Latinx students’ abilities to achieve their postsecondary educational goals and understanding of the cultural connections on campuses.

Linguistic Capital Is Ignored

In classrooms throughout the United States, monolingual policies have continued to be enforced (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021; English Language Education, 2014), pushing English to the forefront, and making language a priority over curricular content (Mitchell, 2013; Saavedra et al., 2009). Speaking English, taking part in English classes, and becoming fluent in English, are all ways to hold linguistic capital and social power (Malsbary, 2014; Molina, 2020; Shapiro, 2014). Yosso (2005) explained linguistic capital
is the skills developed through communication and it can be built up through the use of multiple languages, multiple dialects, and multiple forms of communication. Therefore, dismissing students’ home languages and any languages besides English that are used at home, dismisses their capabilities as a whole. The refusal to recognize students’ home languages causes an erasure of these languages and a disconnect between students and their families.

The insistence on using English—and only English—in classrooms puts multilingual speakers at a distinct academic disadvantage as they are not allowed to use their full linguistic repertoire (Flores & Rosa, 2015). These disadvantages impact Latinx students more than any other racial or ethnic group because, as mentioned previously, Latinx students make up 78% of ELL students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021b). These students suffer from ethnic bias that delays the reclassification process, forcing them to stay in language development programs longer than needed (Umansky et al., 2020). Therefore, language barriers for ELL students more directly impact Latinx students and deficit ideology abounds for these students: they are seen as less interested in education as a whole, particularly in postsecondary education, and therefore seen as less motivated to pursue postsecondary educational goals (Liou et al., 2021).

Academic Barriers Are Covert

The deficit beliefs about Latinx students’ capabilities in the classroom discussed in the previous section are not new; with the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848, when the United States took the land area that would become the Southwest, students who were unable or unwilling to assimilate within the U.S. public education system were seen as different and deficit (Ortiz, 2018; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). Due to differences in speech, behaviors, and cultural practices, Latinx students were segregated into separate classrooms and entire schools until the decision of *Mendez v. Westminster School*
District (1947) declared such segregation unconstitutional (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). But the damage had been done, precedent had been set, and Latinx students have continued to face discriminatory practices in the classroom, but it is more covert.

Although segregation and tracking are illegal practices in the U.S. education system, placing students in additional support classes, like language classes discussed previously, has continued. Reid and Moore (2008) and Wahleithner (2020) both found students who were able to take Advanced Placement (AP) English courses felt very prepared for university-level tasks and coursework, but students who took general English courses, English as a second language (ESL) courses, or English language development (ELD) courses felt underprepared. But Latinx students do not have the same access to AP courses as other students; of all students across the United States who take AP exams, only 34% are Hispanic. This number is even lower for AP math exams, including calculus and statistics, at 12% of students and lower still for AP science courses, including biology and chemistry, at 10% of students (de Brey et al., 2019). Additionally, Hispanic students are still disproportionately represented in special education classes, at 1.3 Hispanic students for every White student (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). Therefore, the discriminatory and exclusionary practices that were put in place years and years ago when the Southwest was originally created have continued today because they were built into the system of public education.

Financial Barriers Are Systemic

In addition to barriers built into the U.S. public education system, systemic barriers prevented access to property and employment from 1848 well into the 20th century and greatly hindered an entire marginalized community from developing generational wealth and growth (Ortiz, 2018). In 2020, 54.3% of Hispanic households earned less than $75,000 per year, and 66.5% of Hispanic households earned less than $100,000 per year. Additionally, the Hispanic poverty rate in 2020 was 17%, while the
White poverty rate was 8.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b). These rates are the inverse of college graduate rates, in which 20% of Hispanic people hold a bachelor’s degree or higher while 38% of White people hold the same (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). This demonstrates a correlation between household income and college degrees. These disparities are discussed further in Chapter 2.

**Current Support Systems Have Had Limited Effects**

The previous discussion on systemic and institutional barriers is not to say that schools, and the staff and faculty within them, have not tried to mitigate the effects of these barriers, but that the small support systems currently in place have only had small effects on the Latinx student population at large. Many secondary schools have begun integrating college and career centers: entire offices dedicated solely to assisting students in developing their postsecondary educational and career goals (Cunha et al., 2018; Stillisano et al., 2014). Although these centers promote college access, as seen by increased numbers of college applications and acceptances, they have no effect on college completion rates (Cunha et al., 2018).

Another support system developed by a select few secondary schools and partnering universities are summer transition, or bridge, programs. These programs are offered by colleges and universities on their campuses during the summer between high school graduation and students’ first year on campus, and bridge programs “vary in content, program size, and timeframe” (Gonzalez Quiroz & Garza, 2018, p. 2). But these programs are often limited to students of color, who are low-income, first-generation, or specifically majoring in science, technology, engineering, or math (Davis & Laster, 2019; Turner et al., 2021); therefore, these programs are not offered to all students.

An additional source of support are federal TRIO programs: a cohort of eight different programs designed to assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities progress through educational institutions from
middle school through graduate school by connecting middle and high schools with local universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Together, these programs provide assistance to low-income, aspiring first-generation college students by bringing them to college campuses for tours and mentorship. These programs do not focus specifically on any particular racial or ethnic group, rather focusing on low-income students overall (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). However, with their small capacities and required annual applications, they are limited in their reach and attempts at systemic change. Again, each of these support systems is working to combat issues that extend beyond their geographical reach. Therefore, the effects of these support systems are limited to only those students who live close enough to universities to benefit from these programs.

**A Holistic Perspective Is Needed**

With an awareness that most support systems focus on student outcomes, previous researchers have focused on students’ voices. Although this is necessary and beneficial for students, these studies have not created a broad view of the issues at large. Additional studies are needed to include the experiences and perceptions of not only students, but also those who interact with students. Other individuals within students’ Microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1981), including staff and faculty, may be instrumental in identifying and developing the support systems in place. Therefore, this research study not only amplified students’ experiences, but also the experiences of staff and faculty to provide a deeper understanding of support systems available at one particular secondary school in California through the use of counternarratives and identification of community cultural wealth.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

This research study used both critical race theory (CRT) and social capital theory as frameworks to better understand the experiences of aspiring first-generation Latinx
college students. These frameworks together brought focus to the lived realities and experiences of marginalized communities while also validating the community cultural wealth (CCW) these communities hold. In the following section, I give a very brief overview of each of these frameworks and their applications to this research study.

**CRT**

Originally developed by legal scholars in the 1970s, CRT puts forth the idea that the United States has embedded racist practices into institutional systems; this idea has spread as more and more scholars have recognized racist practices in educational systems (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). There are five generally accepted tenets of CRT: (a) race and racism are permanent features of society in the United States; (b) equality and social justice will not occur until interests converge between those with social power and those without; (c) challenges to racism must also include challenges to colorblindness and meritocracy; (d) oppression and prejudice are not based only on race; and (e) the narratives of People of Color are central to understanding the role race plays in underrepresented groups (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Rosa, 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006).

Since CRT began to gain traction 50 years ago, it has grown and developed, moving away from the Black/White binary to also include other marginalized groups. Today, theoretical frameworks also apply the critical theory approach to different groups: QueerCrit for the LGBT+ community, FemCrit for women, TribalCrit for Native Americans, and many, many others. Each of these frameworks calls attention to intersectional forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Rosa, 2020; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

**Latine Critical Theory.** One branch of CRT is Latine critical theory, or LatCrit, which focuses on the experiences of Latinx peoples. Disregarding the diversity seen by
those who identify as Latinx, including 20 countries with 560 different languages (Freire et al., 2015), Latinx people are often pushed aside and “othered” due to differences in language, race, immigration status, family make-up, and socioeconomic status (Arzubiaga et al., 2009; García et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2013). LatCrit focuses heavily on the lived experiences of those directly impacted by these forms of oppression, with strong support for oral histories and storytelling (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). These narratives are used to build community, challenge society’s accepted version of knowledge, open minds to new realities and experiences, and develop a deeper, richer world. However, these narratives are often ignored in higher education (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001), further cementing the need for systemic change to address social inequities. This research study used LatCrit as a framework to magnify the voices of Latinx students and to maintain an open mind to these students’ experiences and narratives.

**Social Capital Theory**

Additionally, social capital theory was used as a framework for this research study to better understand the CCW Latinx students hold, especially in the face of society’s omission of this capital. Although CRT amplifies the experiences and realities of marginalized communities, social capital theory highlights and affirms the CCW these communities hold; although these communities may have different cultural practices and traditions, these differences are not deficit-based and instead should be celebrated and recognized as social capital.

Social capital theory and its ensuing framework is based on the principle that society is made up of power imbalances (Entwistle, 1978) such that specific groups in society may hold greater power due to social class, gender, sexual orientation, race, or ableism (Crenshaw, 1991). These various forms of power can be identified as different types of capital: social capital, racial capital, and so on. Those who identify with the
“norm” of society—White, middle class, heterosexual, fully-abled, native English speakers—hold power and capital within society.

**CCW Framework**

With the rise of CRT and increased focus on disrupting deficit ideology surrounding underrepresented groups, additional forms of capital have been identified as part of CCW (Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) identified six additional forms of capital typically held by disenfranchised groups and, therefore, often overlooked: (a) aspiration capital, or the motivation to pursue goals; (b) familial capital, or pride and support due to close family ties; (c) linguistic capital, or the skills developed through communication in more than one language or dialect; (d) navigational capital, or the knowledge needed to navigate social institutions; (e) resistant capital, or the skills developed when faced with systemic oppression; and (f) social capital, or the support systems created through communities. Each of these different types of capital create CCW and a lens through which to identify strengths in marginalized communities. As such, these forms of capital were used to analyze responses from participants. This research study recognized and called attention to the CCW Latinx students hold and how to include this capital when developing systems of support.

**Statement of Purpose**

This exploratory case study aimed to understand how one predominantly Latinx secondary school provided supports for students interested in attending higher education, particularly those students who speak a LOTE at home. To understand the supports and resources in place, various stakeholders within the school were interviewed, including students, staff, and faculty from the school to better understand the practices, policies, and traditions in place for students interested in attending higher education.
Research Question

To better understand the supports available to students at this particular high school, this study was guided by the following research question: How are aspiring first-generation Latinx college students supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived and experienced by students, staff, and faculty in one high school in California?

Methodology

This research study followed a case study research design. This type of research answers only a few questions with in-depth inquiries, studying a particular unit of analysis to better understand new relationships and concepts (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The particular unit of analysis in this case study was a small group of Latinx students who speak a LOTE at home, who were going to be the first in their families to attend college, and who were part of the high school graduating class of 2022. This case study was exploratory (Fusch et al., 2017; Yin, 2018) as the purpose was to learn more about the support systems available to these students as they pursued their postsecondary educational goals.

Setting

This study took place in an agrarian community with a population of roughly 110,000 people on the central coast of California. The high school itself was a large, comprehensive high school made up of over 3,200 students, of which 95% identified as Hispanic or Latinx. Seventy-one percent of students were reclassified as English-speaking, implying they were multilingual, with an additional 17% classified as ELLs. Seventy-eight percent of students spoke Spanish at home, 11% spoke English at home, and 8% spoke Mixteco at home (Indigenous dialect of Mexico). The school employed 165 credentialed teachers, of whom 36% identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 455 support staff members, of whom 57% identified as Hispanic or Latino. Additionally, the school
had four counselors in the College and Career Center, three of whom identified as Hispanic or Latino, and 10 counselors, of whom eight identified as Hispanic or Latino. Finally, the school had four administrators, three of whom identified as Hispanic or Latino as well.

**Participants**

Participants were selected based on Bronfenbrenner’s (1981) theory on the ecology of human development, with students, particularly graduates of 2022 who speak a LOTE at home, as the focus. Then, individuals located in the students’ microsystem, or the space in which “interpersonal relations [are] experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 22) were also invited to participate in this study. Participants included students, teachers, guidance counselors, counselors from the College and Career Center, and administrators. Including a wide variety of stakeholders provided a broader, more holistic view of the support systems available to students who have faced, or are currently facing, linguistic barriers while they pursued postsecondary educational goals. Further rationale for each of these stakeholders and the sampling strategies that were used to select specific participants is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

**Significance of Study**

This research study aimed to learn more about how one high school provided supports for students interested in attending college after graduation with a particular focus on students who have been “reclassified” as fluent in English. This label implies students are multilingual and speak a LOTE at home. Previous studies have focused on students who speak a LOTE at home and the challenges they face in their pursuit of postsecondary education, including exclusion from 4-year universities due to enrollment in English support or development classes (Kanno & Varghese, 2010); lack of flow of information from schools to families due to language barriers (Hansen-Thomas &
Sourdot, 2015); these same language barriers forcing Latinx students to remain in the margins of society (Aragon, 2018); and assimilation with English often leading to the pursuit of higher education (Varghese & Fuentes, 2020). But this assimilation “leads to thinking that ‘having’ language means speaking English” (Saavedra et al., 2009, p. 331) and the educational system in place further promotes the hegemony of English (García et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2013), ignoring multilingual students’ linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005).

This study took a broad and holistic view of this culture by conducting qualitative interviews with students, staff, and faculty members. These different perspectives cultivated a clear picture of specific practices and implicit norms present on this secondary school’s campus, focusing on multilingual students and their experiences of preparing and applying for postsecondary education.

**Assumptions and Delimitations**

The key assumption made for this study was all participants were open and honest during the surveys (see Appendix A) and follow-up interviews. It was assumed that all of the participants were creating a more inclusive and supportive school culture on their secondary school campus.

There were also several delimitations while conducting this research study. Although using a multiple cases approach to the research methodology would provide increased validity and reliability in codes, categories, and themes (Quintao et al., 2020), it was not feasible to complete in the limited time available for this research study. Therefore, the research was limited to a single case study of the graduating class of 2022. With such a narrow focus of study, it was incredibly difficult to make generalizations from the studies, although these studies may serve as foundational work for future theories and generalizations (Schwandt & Gates, 2017). This aligns with most qualitative research studies as the focus is not to draw generalizations about a particular population.
group as a whole, but rather to identify key elements that can be transferred into new environments or applied to new groups of participants. Therefore, although this was a single case study, elements from this case study may be transferable to other case studies and populations.

Additionally, this research study was limited to the graduating class of 2022 because I developed a rapport with a significant number of students in that graduating class as their science teacher. Therefore, there was a possibility of skewing the data to be catered to my own students, as they were more likely to participate in this study, rather than provide a more unbiased view of all students’ viewpoints. However, given their established rapport with me, their participation could likely have been more detailed, thorough, and full of rich descriptions as they might have been more comfortable speaking with me about their experiences in school.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms were used extensively throughout this study:

*Chicana, Chicano, Chicanx:* this term specifically referred to those who traced their ancestral or familial roots to Mexico.*First-generation college student:* students attending postsecondary educational institutions whose parents have little to no experience with higher education and have not earned a bachelor's degree.

*Hispanic, Latino:* The U.S. Census Bureau does not differentiate between Hispanic and Latino, but this study focused on Latinx, meaning those who trace their ancestral roots to Latin America and intentionally separated from the colonization by Spain (Noe-Bustamante et al., 2020).

*Latinx:* This term was used frequently throughout this dissertation in lieu of Latino or Latine because the participants of this study identified themselves most frequently as Latinx and preferred this term over alternative terms.
Speakers of Other Languages: students who speak a LOTE at home; may be referred to as emergent bilingual students or ELLs. In the pilot study, these students shared they did not feel comfortable with the labels bilingual or multilingual because they felt they were not sufficiently fluent in neither their home language nor English.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of a research study focused on learning more about the supports available to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students, particularly those who speak a LOTE at home. Historically, students who speak a LOTE, particularly Latinx students, are marginalized: navigational capital is inaccessible and they struggle to move through social institutions, including public education; their familial capital is undervalued and their families are seen as uninterested and uninvolved; and their linguistic capital is ignored entirely as they are seen as “failed native speakers” (Cook, 1999, p. 195). These are not new phenomena as systemic barriers were overtly put in place starting in 1848 (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998), but these barriers have become significantly more covert as Latinx students, particularly those who speak a LOTE, are “provides instruction that falls short of preparing these students for the rigor of college” (Wahleithner, 2020, p. 24). Although secondary schools, and some partnering colleges and universities, have made attempts to combat these barriers, they are few and far between, primarily focused on particular populations of students. These programs are not available and do not directly address the unique intersectionality aspiring first-generation Latinx college students who speak a LOTE at home face.

This research study addressed the supports available to this very unique student population. Through interviews with students, staff, and faculty who interact with students on a regular basis, this study gained a holistic view of how students are supported in their journey toward their postsecondary educational goals. Although this was a single case study, the descriptions, experiences, and lived realities of this myriad of
participants provided information and narratives that assist other students in similar positions, and staff and faculty at similar secondary schools who simply want to help. This research study built on the discussion regarding support systems for aspiring first-generation Latinx college students, but also drew needed attention to students who speak a LOTE at home.

In the following chapter, I review the literature on the barriers, challenges, and current support systems affecting aspiring first-generation Latinx college students, expanding on some of the overarching themes discussed previously. I provide further exploration of CRT and social capital theory as lenses through which to understand this phenomenon and give a very brief historical overview of systemic barriers that specifically prohibit Latinx students from pursuing their postsecondary educational goals.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

“My mom and dad had worked so hard going through multiple jobs just to put me and my three other siblings through school. I am the first one to actually go to a university [out] of four [kids] so it’s really on my shoulders. I can prove that all their work is not in vain.” - Participant (Gibbons et al., 2019, p. 500).

“Intergenerational support for education is sewn into the fabric of Latina/o culture; it sustains young people through difficult times and it must be recognized by educational institutions” (Marrun, 2020, p. 178).

“The collaboration of educators, schools, colleges, counselors, parents, and students all working together can help Latino first generation college students to increase academic achievement, and intrinsic motivation which will also have a positive influence on higher graduation rates” (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014, p. 305).

“Emergent research and practice suggests that transforming high school learning environments into ones that are purposefully organized around smaller, personalized units for adults and students, and include rigorous academic coursework, career-technical education infused with language developed supports, and experiences that show students the relevance of education to their future, can make a significant difference in the outcomes for students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds” (C. Martínez & Mendoza, 2020, p. 42).

These quotes demonstrate when an aspiring first-generation Latinx college student enrolls in higher education, it is not a singular act. Rather, it is a combination of familial support and encouragement, teams of staff and faculty, and personal
connections between the school and home that come together in balance, creating the perfect opportunity for students to pursue their postsecondary educational goals.

**Introduction**

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020c), Hispanics make up 18.5% of the entire population. In California, they make up 39.4% of the population and within Santa Barbara County, 46% of the population. With this in mind, Hispanics had the largest growth in educational attainment from 2015–2020, specifically with 4-year college graduates growing from 3.6 million to 5.5 million. However, Hispanics continue to have the lowest enrollment rates among racial and ethnic groups, as seen in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*College Enrollment Rates of 18- to 24-year-olds, by Sex and Race/Ethnicity*


In the United States, 36% of Hispanic people attend college. This number has increased slightly in California as 43% of Hispanic people attended college (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020c). However, only 21% of Hispanic people in the United States earned a
bachelor’s degree, compared to 42% of White students, 28% of Black students, and 61% of Asian students (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Although the U.S. Census Bureau did not differentiate between Hispanic and Latinx, this study focused on Latinx, meaning those who trace their ancestral roots to Latin America.

Additionally, this study focused on first-generation college students. First-generation college students are widely accepted as those students whose parents have little to no college experience and have not earned a bachelor’s degree (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2017). Conversely, continuing-generation college students are those whose parents have earned a minimum of a bachelor’s degree. Hispanic or Latino students make up 27% of first-generation college students, but only 9% of continuing-generation college students, as seen in Figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Comparison of First-Generation and Continuing-Generation Students’ College Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity*

[Graph showing percentage distribution of enrollment by race/ethnicity for first-generation and continuing-generation students.]

Researchers have shown first-generation Latinx college students face significant academic, linguistic, and financial barriers. Recent studies have focused on these struggles and on how this subset of the student population has endured against these barriers. Researchers have identified how educational and social systems have created barriers for these students (e.g., Chlup et al., 2018; Covarrubias, 2021; de Brey et al., 2019; Ortiz, 2018; Wahleithner, 2020). Of over 80 peer-reviewed and published studies collected on this topic, 75 were qualitative or mixed-methods in methodological approach, focusing on the narratives and experiences of these students and their families. This review focused primarily on the last 20 years, with particular emphasis on the last 5 years, as the availability of studies focused on the Latinx population has grown during this time.

In this chapter, I review the theoretical frameworks guiding this literature review: critical race theory (CRT) and social capital theory. These two theories provide an emphasis on the historical and contemporary narratives and lived realities of marginalized communities and the cultural wealth these communities hold that is often overlooked by society at large. I then discuss what empirical literature has suggested constitutes knowledge required for success in college, focusing on the development of college knowledge, measurable skills these students may have, and the immeasurable skills they may have developed. Finally, I provide an analysis from the literature of the academic and financial barriers that first-generation Latinx college students face and the programs that secondary schools promote in an attempt to assist students in overcoming these barriers. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of what constitutes successful support systems for aspiring first-generation college students and the potential significance this study will have specifically for Latinx students.
Theoretical Frameworks

This literature review and subsequent research study used CRT and social capital theory as the theoretical frameworks through which to identify barriers first-generation Latinx college students face and highlight the solutions reported in previous studies, discussed in later sections. CRT and social capital theory work together to focus on lived realities and experiences of marginalized communities while also validating and affirming the cultural wealth these communities hold. Together, the theories create a lens to view more critically access and equity in the progression toward higher education. The following is a brief discussion of these frameworks and the rationale for their use in this study.

CRT

CRT was initially developed in the 1970s by legal scholars to call long-overdue attention to racist practices embedded in society, particularly those in the United States against People of Color and has since expanded into additional fields of study (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). This framework recognizes those who are White, middle-class, native English speakers hold power within society and are at an intangible advantage, inaccessible to those who do not fit this mold. There are five generally accepted tenets of CRT:

(a) Race and racism are endemic and permanent in the United States, built on socially constructed ideas and beliefs;

(b) Advancement toward equality and social justice, despite being a top priority, typically does not occur until interests converge between those with and without social power;

(c) Challenges to racism often include challenges to colorblindness and meritocracy, which are actually forms of continued oppression and purposeful ignorance;
(d) Oppression and prejudice are not based solely on race, but also include discrimination at the intersections between language, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class; and

(e) The narratives, stories, and experiences from People of Color are crucial in understanding how race affects marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1989; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rosa, 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006).

CRT and its five tenets focus on challenging dominant ideology, with a strong emphasis on the Black/White binary. Over the last 30 years, this theory has grown to include additional marginalized groups, including women in FemCrit, Asian Americans in AsianCrit, the LGBT+ community in QueerCrit, Native Americans in TribalCrit, individuals who are disabled in DisCrit, and Latinx Americans in LatCrit. Each of these specialized frameworks focuses on the intersectionality of different characteristics, recognizing people are not one dimensional and are affected by multiple forms of oppression at the same time (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rosa, 2020; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Because this study focused on Latinx students, it also used Latino critical theory as an arm of CRT.

Latine Critical Theory

Many studies have taken a pan-ethnic approach to Latinx peoples (Arzubiaga et al., 2009), sweeping together 20 Latin American countries and 560 different languages (Freire et al., 2015). There are a variety of terms used to describe this very diverse population, including Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Hispanic. Latino critical theory, or LatCrit, is used to shed light on the deficit ideology that moves these peoples into the margins of society.

As Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) wrote, “Chicana and Chicano students lie between and within layers of subordination based on race, class, gender, language,
immigration status, accent, and phenotype” (p. 335). As a result of these intersecting forms of oppression, Latinx people have faced a different form of injustice not clearly addressed by CRT, thus calling for the more specific branch of LatCrit. This framework is used “to examine how race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses that affect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 479).

Ultimately Latinx people are continuously pushed to the margins because they do not fit the Eurocentric norm; thus, they are pushed aside, and their cultural wealth ignored (Delgado Bernal, 2002). This diminishment is achieved by focusing on differences in language, race, immigration status, family make-up, and socioeconomic status—and insisting that difference is deficit, and difference must be pushed to the side and marginalized (Arzubiaga et al., 2009; García et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2013). But, as hooks (1989) said, “I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between the marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as the site of Resistance” (p. 23). LatCrit concentrates on highlighting these differences and giving them cultural and societal value.

LatCrit leans heavily on counternarratives to call attention to the lived realities of Latinx people directly affected by various forms of oppression. This framework “recognizes that oral histories and counter-storytelling are legitimate and appropriate methodologies” (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 335). Solórzano and Yosso (2001) explained these oral histories are collected through data gathering, current literature, and one’s own professional and personal experiences. Additionally, counternarratives build community, challenge society’s accepted version of knowledge, open minds to new realities and experiences, and develop a deeper, richer world.

This research study used LatCrit to call further attention to the lived experiences and perceptions of Latinx students and their families. This attention can be forged by
joining together LatCrit with social capital theory, specifically community cultural wealth (CCW). LatCrit provides the basis for oral histories to be shared and CCW provides the lens that draws attention to the cultural wealth present within this oral history.

**Social Capital Theory**

Social capital theories are based on the underlying principle that society is unequal due to an imbalance of power (Entwistle, 1978). If power is seen as a commodity, then it can be transferred, traded, and treated like part of the economy. In doing so, those with higher economic status also have more power. As Foucault (1980) explained, “knowledge is always an exercise of power and power is always a function of knowledge” (p. 93). That power is held by specific groups, depending on the situation and can be far-reaching, from social classes to gender to sexual orientation, to race to ableism. Varying forms of power can be classified as different types of capital: social capital, racial capital, and so on. Various types of capital exist because there are a variety of power imbalances throughout society and those with power and greater capital set the norm for all others to be compared. For example, language is a form of capital and those who are fluent in the dominant language hold that capital. English learners are consistently compared against native English speakers and granted capital on how well they can assimilate (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Cook, 1999).

**Community Cultural Wealth**

Although scholars have noted that typically those in power hold the most capital, others have studied the cultural wealth of underrepresented groups that hold less power. Using CRT, Yosso (2005) developed a typology of cultural capital to empower those who, she asserted, “do not have access to White, middle or upper class resources” (p. 82). She named six distinct types of capital, all of which fell under the umbrella of community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005). These six types of capital are:
• Aspirational capital: hope and motivation to pursue goals and dreams, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers;
• Familial capital: pride and cultural traditions associated with close family ties and relationships;
• Linguistic capital: skills developed through communication in more than one language, dialect, or style;
• Navigational capital: knowledge necessary to navigate social institutions and systems, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers;
• Resistant capital: skills developed specifically in the face of systemic oppression and inequality;
• Social capital: the networks and support systems developed through friends, peers, and communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

Together, CCW serves “a larger purpose of struggling toward social and racial justice” (Yosso, 2005, p. 82). In doing so, this framework moves away from a deficit viewpoint and instead celebrates the cultural wealth marginalized communities have and continue to build. This study followed this mindset of celebrating the cultural wealth marginalized communities hold by focusing on how the types of capital described by Yosso (2005) are used. These forms of capital were used as a lens through which to analyze the qualitative data collected in this research study.

**First-Generation College Students**

This study focused on the experiences of first-generation college students and the staff and faculty who worked closely with these students. The widely accepted description of a first-generation college student is one whose parents have little to no college experience and have not earned a bachelor’s degree (Center for First-Generation Student Success, 2017). Data collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics
reported first-generation college students were more likely to attend public colleges and universities that were closer to home, to take remedial classes, to enroll in 2-year programs rather than 4-year programs, and to be older than students whose parents attended college (Campbell & Wescott, 2019). Researchers have developed a clear picture of these students as they:

- Lack the family support and understanding that students whose parents graduated from college have (Boden, 2011);
- Are more likely to be placed in remedial, technical, or vocational classes (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016);
- Do not have access to the knowledge of the norms associated with college (Espino, 2016);
- Are less likely to achieve their original educational goals (Gibbons et al., 2019);
- Are seen as more likely to struggle both with classes and college culture (Sims & Ferrare, 2021);
- Have a lack of firsthand knowledge of college culture (Torres, 2019); and
- Are disproportionately made of People of Color, are of low socioeconomic status, and previously attended under-resourced secondary schools (Vega, 2018).

Each of these studies has emphasized the struggles first-generation college students face in their journey through higher education. However, these researchers do not take the critical step back to see the bigger picture: the educational system was not created for first-generation college students, for students who are breaking the mold, or for students who dare to rise above their parents’ social station. Rather, the education system was built to replicate society and maintain the current status quo (Covarrubias, 2021; Entwistle, 1978). Therefore, those students who do dare to rise above and pursue
educational and career goals beyond what their parents achieved are faced with greater obstacles, intentionally placed there through systemic oppression. Storlie et al. (2016) explained, “Even when controlling for race, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, first-generation college students are more likely to drop off after their first year of study” (p. 306).

**Latinx Students**

According to researchers, 27% of first-generation college students identify as Hispanic (Campbell & Wescott, 2019; Clayton et al., 2019; Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). This research study focused on these students because “first-generation Latinos face unique cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic challenges on campus” (Flink, 2018, p. 402). However, as indicated in Figure 3, the population of Latinx students is increasing; therefore, the needs of these students are becoming more and more pressing. Culturally, Latinx students value extremely close familial ties. These students are more likely to live at home with their parents (Campbell & Wescott, 2019) and play a significant role in family dynamics. But these families typically do not have access to information about the college admissions and transition processes due barriers in communication and expectations. As Chlup et al. (2018) reported, “information flow is not reciprocal when it comes to the schools communicating with parents” (p. 35). This lack of communication has continued from secondary schools to colleges and universities as there are very few bridge or transition programs that extend beyond the first year of study (Covarrubias, 2021). Schools, including colleges and universities, often expect families to approach them with questions rather than offering this information and creating a space for discussion. Due to cultural differences, Latinx families are often dissuaded from approaching school officials or representatives with questions (Yasuike, 2019). This disconnect impacts Latinx students’ abilities to achieve their postsecondary educational goals.
Additionally, Latinx students have been faced with the internal struggle of attending higher education institutions that do not reflect their identities. As seen in Figure 4, faculty in higher education are over 70% White, and only 3 to 9% Hispanic (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020). White and Ali-Khan (2013) found “[c]ollegiate academic success [is] predicated on understanding the rules or ‘codes of power’” (p. 28), but these codes are not freely shared with those students who do not match the assumed “norm” of the White, middle-class, native English-speaking student (Covarrubias, 2021). As a result, these institutions maintain the social status quo by holding onto implicit norms and practices that many first-generation students, especially Latinx students, struggle to understand without explicit directions (Pyne & Means, 2013).
Linguistically, Latinx students are the most likely, of any race, to be an English language learner (ELL) during their K–12 education. This is likely because Hispanic students make up the vast majority of ELL student populations at about 78% of all ELL students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021b). Also, although the national average of ELL students in public education is about 10%, this rate is highest in California at nearly twice the national average, as seen in Figure 5. Largely due to the language barriers for ELL students, Latinx students are more directly impacted by negative beliefs, such that “deficit-oriented lenses falsely characterize Latinas/os as culturally disinterested in education and, due to their economic circumstances, less motivated to attend college” (Liou et al., 2021, p. 1). These negative viewpoints are used as justification for inadequate access to college admissions and transition information.
and assistance (Marrun, 2020). These negative viewpoints further perpetuate attitudes about Latinx students’ abilities and builds on the insecurity they already face as first-generation college students (Duncheon, 2018).

**Figure 5**

*Percentage of Public School Students who Were English Language Learners by State*

*Note.* From English Language Learners in Public Schools, by National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021b, U.S. Department of Education (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf#:~:text=The%20percentage%20of%20public%20school,%2C%20or%204.5%20million%20students)

Finally, socioeconomically, first-generation college students are more likely to come from low-income families, particularly first-generation Latinx college students who are more likely to come from families at or below the line of poverty (Campbell & Wescott, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b). In the most recent census, the poverty rate for Hispanic families was reported to be 17%, while the rate for White families was 8.2%
(U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b). Underrepresented families, including Black and Hispanic families, are more likely to be at the low end of income distribution data tables and figures, which is discussed later in this chapter.

The following section focuses on the skills and abilities of first-generation Latinx college students as they apply and transition to university campuses, with particular focus on college readiness. College readiness includes the skills and qualities that higher education has deemed necessary for success. However, these skills and qualities are critiqued with an awareness of the social inequities that are further perpetuated by terms like college readiness.

**College Readiness**

Researchers have reported a set of skills first-generation Latinx college students need to be successful in college. As shown in Table 1, each study has created their own specific meaning to describe college readiness skills. These definitions may range from solely academic preparation with an emphasis on college preparatory curriculum to including the intangible skills associated with navigating college culture.

**Table 1**

*Descriptions of the Term “College Readiness”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amaro-Jimenez &amp; Hungerford - Kresser, 2013</td>
<td>“Four key college readiness dimensions include being able to explicitly use strategies for doing college-level work, mastering the academic content needed in their coursework, exhibiting appropriate academic behaviors, and understanding the college’s culture” (p. 2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chlup et al., 2018</td>
<td>“In this study, college readiness was defined as the combination of skills, knowledge, and habits of thought necessary to be successful in college-level courses. College knowledge was defined as learning what colleges look for in a student, along with obtaining the knowledge about the different types of colleges and how and when students should apply to college. Finally, college access was defined as a way of encouraging and preparing students for higher education that focuses on a range of college-related skills” (p. 23).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convertino &amp; Scholars</td>
<td>“define college readiness as the sum of three requisite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
components: college awareness (parent and student knowledge of the procedural and planning aspects of college attendance), college eligibility (completing the coursework necessary for college admission), and college preparation (students’ ability to put their college awareness skills into action). Other sources also define college readiness in terms of high school GPA and/or performance on college admission, placement, or state-required exams” (p. 313).

Duncheon, 2021
College readiness (CR) “comprises three categories of skills and knowledge: (a) cognitive competencies, (b) noncognitive competencies, and (c) college knowledge. Cognitive factors include the content knowledge and cognitive skills required to complete an entry-level college course. The second CR category refers to noncognitive mind-sets, behaviors, and skills that support college achievement. Third, college knowledge refers to familiarity with the procedural and cultural expectations of postsecondary education” (p. 1363).

Huerta et al., 2013
“Getting students into college and having them succeed once enrolled requires that high schools prepare students by providing them with rigorous curriculum” (p. 87). “Success also depends on factors within the student, such as resilience and persistence” (p. 88).

C. Martinez & Mendoza, 2020
“For Latinx students to achieve academic success and successfully apply to college, they need to do more than take the appropriate courses and get good grades. They must also learn to navigate the college application process” (p. 32).

Morley et al., 2021
“Historically, college readiness has been defined as being academically prepared for postsecondary education, usually evidenced through standardized test scores, advanced academics, grade point average, and other measures” (p. 146).

Ramirez, 2021
Primarily, rigorous coursework, including AP courses, readies students for collegiate work.

Each of the studies in Table 1 identified characteristics deemed necessary for success in higher education, but in doing so, refused to acknowledge systemic barriers. Amaro-Jimenez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013) referred to “academic behaviors” (p. 2), but never expanded on its meaning. What behaviors are appropriate and who made the decision to classify them as such? Chlup et al. (2018) discussed a “combination of skills, knowledge, and habits of thought necessary to be successful in college-level classes” (p. 23), but their analysis stopped short of identifying which systems decided which skills and what knowledge was necessary, which ones had value, and who decided this. Convertino and Mein (2020) reviewed college awareness, eligibility, and preparation, but did not discuss the lack of resources, supports, and networks that are necessary to
make these available to all students. Duncheon (2021) insisted on “(a) cognitive competences, (b) noncognitive competences, and (c) college knowledge” (p. 1363) but refused to acknowledge the implications of referring to these skills as “cognitive.” This is a continuation of the labeling of students’ intelligence by using factors completely unrelated to cognitive abilities and further echoes the racism and biases associated with IQ tests (Fass, 1980; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). Huerta et al. (2013), Morley et al. (2021), and Ramirez (2021) placed the onus of success or failure completely on the student, insisting it is the student’s responsibility to develop the skills necessary. Finally, C. Martinez and Mendoza (2020) began to approach the social inequities but did not go far enough to address the social barriers and inequities that are perpetuated by systems of education. They merely mentioned these barriers, but made no attempts to address removing that barrier. Altogether these researchers put the responsibility of adhering to college readiness definitions on the student, rather than recognizing this institution of education, including the system that defined college readiness, was not designed with these students in mind.

Based on the previously mentioned studies and the imbalance of society in the United States, college readiness can be summarized in three tenets: (a) college knowledge, (b) measurable skills, and (c) immeasurable skills. College knowledge refers to the awareness of college admissions processes, the transition to college, and the culture of college. Measurable skills include academic capabilities, secondary coursework, grade point averages, and test scores. Finally, immeasurable skills involve motivation, optimism, and perseverance of students. Each of these components of college readiness are impacted by the intersectional identities of first-generation Latinx students and the institutional barriers these students face, as discussed in the following section.
College Knowledge

College knowledge focuses on the abstract details and procedures that are implicit in college culture. Unfortunately, this knowledge is often inaccessible for first-generation college students, even when demographic characteristics are controlled for in the study (Sims & Ferrare, 2021). Those students who identify as Latinx often have fewer opportunities to accumulate this knowledge because their parents are often barred from accessing that knowledge as well. Deficit ideology implies Latinx parents are uninterested, disengaged, and place little value on their children’s educational progress and journey (Chlup et al., 2018; Hansen-Thomas & Sourdot, 2015; Marrun, 2020; Rocha, 2021).

However, parents do not have firsthand knowledge of college culture because, in general, they did not attend college and do not hold a college degree (Clayton et al., 2019). Additionally, Latinx families often feel uncomfortable expressing disagreement with teachers and school officials due to their respect for the social class that educators hold (Yasuike, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative schools reach out to families to welcome them to campus and encourage families to ask questions and learn more about the education system. There are significant language and communication barriers that often lead to students’ and families’ misperceptions of postsecondary education and the admissions and transition processes to succeed there (Rutter et al., 2020).

It is well-documented families play an influential role in their children’s educational journeys (Boden, 2011; Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Leyva, 2011; Marrun, 2020; Rocha, 2021; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2006). Luedke (2020) explained very clearly “students benefit from collective support provided by families” and “actively maintaining these connections is important to Latina/o/x students’ persistence in higher education” (p. 1031). Therefore, as Romo et al. (2020) noted, it is surprising there are relatively few educational programs designed to build a collaborative team between
families and school systems, particularly during the rather tumultuous time period of college admissions and transitions as will be discussed further in this study. Again, it is imperative schools find ways to build relationships with families, to create a support team alongside families to best support these students and assist them in their educational journeys.

Cuevas (2020) and Hansen-Thomas and Sourdot (2015) both reported students and their families strongly benefitted from targeted workshops. Hansen-Thomas and Sourdot focused on secondary schools, noting ELL students and their families need specific guidance to learn how to navigate the educational system. Cuevas, on the other hand, focused on the support available in universities and said first-generation Latinx students and their families need workshops that are culturally relevant, linguistically appropriate, and consider the particular needs of these particular students. This study aimed to identify how one secondary school provides supports that may be similar to what was identified by Cuevas (2020) and learn more about how current support systems may be modified to best assist these families and build a team between educators and family members.

Duncheon and Relles (2019) asserted, “[c]ollaboration involves joint investments on the part of the school and its partners to bring social capital opportunities to its student body” (p. 164). Although Duncheon and Relles discussed social capital, the opportunities they described actually referred to navigational capital. Yosso (2005) defined navigational capital as the knowledge necessary to navigate social institutions. These scholars discussed the successes students experienced when teachers explicitly taught them the implicit norms and practices associated with college admissions processes and higher education institutions (Duncheon & Relles, 2019). Therefore, this navigational capital is the equivalent to college knowledge. Collaboration between families to aid in the explicit teaching of these implicit norms and practices could be
offering events to families to provide information about financial aid or enrollment in college classes (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014), to assist in the development of social networks and matching with mentors (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Crawley et al., 2019), and to integrate everyone into the school system together for the betterment of the students (Covarrubias, 2021). This navigational capital is the knowledge that first-generation Latinx college students are lacking and collaboration with families is one way to secure it.

Additionally, researchers have shown navigational capital can be shared through mentors in the form of counselors and teachers on school campuses. Brazil-Cruz and Martinez (2016) called these mentors entry persons and explained they “served as an institutional broker for the family and became a go-to person for which families relied upon and needed information from” (p. 149). More researchers have expanded on this key entry person, demonstrating the need for one-on-one assistance from someone who has insider knowledge of the educational systems and can provide emotional support and guidance through the exploratory phase of college admissions and the admissions process itself (Amaro-Jimenez & Hungerford-Kresser, 2013; Brookover et al., 2021; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Ilic & Rosenbaum, 2019; G. Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015; M. Martinez et al., 2019; Rutter et al., 2020).

Finally, college knowledge and its specific navigational capital can also be developed through community organizations and families’ social networks. As Luedke (2019) and Ramirez (2021) reported, Latinx students felt most comfortable seeking help and guidance from community organizations that were reflective of their own cultures and languages; identifying themselves with members of the organization allowed for greater growth in mentor-like relationships and those members were then able to effectively support and advocate for these students. When students struggled to build these relationships themselves, their families supported this growth by promoting these
connections and encouraging their children to seek answers and help from others (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Crawley et al., 2019).

College knowledge is the navigational capital students need to achieve their postsecondary educational goals and it includes very implicit, unspoken rules and protocols that are incredibly difficult to learn. First-generation college students, especially Latinx students, face barriers to obtaining this knowledge and struggle to know what they do not know because they do not have immediate access to someone who has experienced college and can share these practices and procedures. But with the assistance of school counselors, teachers, mentors, and networking, these students can develop navigational capital and build up their confidence and skills in preparation for college.

**Measurable Skills**

Measurable skills include all the quantitative data that may indicate a student is prepared to attend postsecondary schools, including grade point average, test scores, number of advanced classes, and so on. Research has shown that those students who do take Advanced Placement (AP) classes or dual-enrollment (in which students earn both secondary school and collegiate credits) courses feel better prepared for coursework at the university level (Duncheon, 2018; G. Martinez & Deil-Amen, 2015; M. Martinez et al., 2019; Morley et al., 2021; Reid & Moore, 2008; van der Zanden et al., 2021). van der Zanden et al. (2021) succinctly surmised these data when they said, “The average grade of students in secondary education indeed is strongly correlated with their academic achievement in the first year at university” (p. 21).

Notably, students’ secondary English classes are most important in preparing them for collegiate reading and writing tasks (Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Reid & Moore, 2008; Varghese & Fuentes, 2020; Wahleithner, 2020; White & Ali-Khan, 2013). Reid and Moore (2008) and Wahleithner (2020) both found students who were able to take
AP English courses felt very prepared for university-level tasks and coursework, but students who took general English courses, English as a second language (ESL) courses, or English language development (ELD) courses felt extremely underprepared. White and Ali-Khan (2013) reported students had a “poor understanding of academic literacy and discursive practices” and they “lacked familiarity with strategies of academic reading and fluency” (p. 27). Wahleithner (2020) expanded on this research by stating, “when reading was assigned to students in high school, it usually came with the expectation that they would simply comprehend the text. This expectation did little to prepare them for the disciplinary literacy tasks required in college” (p. 24).

Kanno and Varghese (2010) published a qualitative study that showed students who took ESL classes in secondary school and found these students were barred from immediately enrolling in 4-year universities because ESL classes were not eligible to be counted toward the 4 requisite years of English classes. This exclusion negatively impacted students’ postsecondary educational pursuits and caused a decline in their confidence in the use of English. Later, Varghese and Fuentes (2020) performed a similar qualitative study focusing on emergent bilingual students who took either ESL or ELD classes in secondary school. They found those students who were able to quickly grasp the English language felt more confident in their linguistic abilities and were more assured in their pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals. Both studies demonstrated the power of English as the lingua franca in the United States. However, Saavedra et al. (2009) explained very clearly “this logic leads to thinking that ‘having’ language means speaking English” (p. 331).

Additionally, students identifying as Hispanic have historically and consistently scored below the average, particularly below White and Asian students, on standardized tests. For example, on the most currently available SAT scores shown in Figure 6, possible scores ranged from 400–1600 and the overall average score for all students was
1059 while the average score for Hispanic students was 978, as seen in Figure 6 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021b). On the most currently available ACT scores shown in Figure 7, possible scores range from 1–36 and the overall average for all students was 20.8 while the average score for Hispanic students was 18.8, as seen previously (U.S. Department of Education, 2021a). This disparity is also seen in AP classes and scores. Of all students across the United States who take AP exams, only 34% are Hispanic. This number is even lower for AP math exams, including calculus and statistics, at 12% of students and lower still for AP science courses, including biology and chemistry, at 10% of students (de Brey et al., 2019). Standardized tests, including AP exams, are another indication of students who identify as Hispanic falling short in the categories used to assess college readiness.

Figure 6

SAT Scores by Race/Ethnicity
Figure 7

ACT Scores by Race/Ethnicity

Historically, these measurable skills are used by admissions committees to determine which students are accepted to which colleges and universities. However, times are changing as admissions offices accept standardized tests, the number of AP or dual enrollment courses a student takes, or GPA are methods of gatekeeping: “they serve merely as minor obstacles to the wealthy, and impenetrable impediments to those without the social, financial, and cultural capital to overcome them” (Boeckenstedt, 2021, p. 21).

Immeasurable Skills

Immeasurable skills include intangible qualities that all students need to succeed, like motivation, optimism, and perseverance—in short, aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005). Over the last 10 years, researchers have focused on students’ personal impetus (Boden, 2011), academic ethic and determination to succeed (Pino et al., 2012), positive effects of persistence (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014), conviction to change the trajectory for their families’ economic capabilities (Storlie et al., 2016), vision and agency in their pursuit of higher education (Kiyama, 2018), and optimism and confidence in their own
potential (Romo et al., 2020). These are all qualities that cannot be measured through grades or test scores, but they are crucial to students’ success and their progress toward achieving their goals.

However, these skills can be taught and researchers have shown that Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) classes are a successful pathway to do so (Huerta et al., 2013; Huerta & Watts, 2015; Morley et al., 2021). AVID is coursework specifically developed to assist aspiring first-generation, low-income college students as they progress through both primary and secondary school (AVID, 2021). At the secondary level, these classes “place a focus on writing, collaboration, organization, reading, and effective note-taking, utilizing the Cornell Note Taking system” (Morley et al., 2021, p. 149), all of which are skills that assist students in building their confidence and academic capabilities. Additionally, AVID teachers serve as easily accessible mentors for these students as they develop the confidence and capabilities to set and pursue postsecondary educational goals (Huerta et al., 2013; Huerta & Watt, 2015).

As Nunn (2014) explained, students know academic success is a combination of qualities and effort. Romo et al. (2020) found determination to be a positive feedback loop; those Latinx students who were dedicated to their studies performed well academically, which built up their confidence and motivated them to study more and pursue challenging courses. Success in those classes led to increased confidence and motivation, and the cycle continues. Rocha (2021) described this confidence and motivation as resilience and reported that it was built up initially from familial support and capital.

Unfortunately, familial involvement and support is typically seen through a deficit lens. Rocha (2021) reported, “deficit beliefs about Latinx parents suggest they place little value in the education of their children” (p. 187). This belief is because “involvement of Latinx families in the educational trajectories of youth often go
unrecognized because of the perceived lack of visibility in their involvement” (Luedke, 2020, p. 1029). However, this could not be further from the truth as reported in several studies. Amaro-Jimenez et al. (2020) reported family involvement has been positively linked to several outcomes, including higher academic achievement, sense of well-being, school attendance, student and family perceptions of school climate, student willingness to undertake academic work, and aspirations for higher education. Brazil-Cruz and Martinez (2016) found families, in full awareness of their lack of firsthand knowledge of college culture, built social networks to better help their children develop the capital needed to succeed. Chlup et al. (2018) found despite financial barriers, parents and families felt positive their students would succeed in higher education. Clayton et al. (2019) found even without firsthand knowledge of college culture, students felt extremely supported by their families. Cuellar (2021) found students drew strength from the cultural capital developed by their families. Marrun (2020) reported families used their own experiences of facing adversity to encourage students to pursue their goals.

Interestingly, some scholars have focused on the practice of families sharing dichos, consejos, and cuentos with their children to further encourage them in their pursuits (Chlup et al., 2018; Luedke, 2020; Marrun, 2020). Dichos are whimsical sayings, consejos are small pieces of advice, and cuentos are short stories about one’s life. In each of these studies (Chlup et al., 2018; Luedke, 2020; Marrun, 2020), students shared that when they sought help from family members, they were often comforted and encouraged by these small pieces of home. Table 2 lists examples of the dichos Marrun (2020) mentioned in her research study.

**Table 2**

*Dichos, as seen in Marrun (2020)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish original</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Algo es algo, peor es nada, y se casó con uno que tenía vacas.</td>
<td>Something is something, nothing is worse, and she married someone who had</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*El camarón que se duerme se lo lleva la corriente.*
The shrimp that falls asleep is carried away by the current.

*Él que con lobos anda, a aullar se enseña.* He who walks with wolves is taught to howl.

Dichos, consejos, and cuentos are microaffirmations critical to students’ success; they are pieces of home, familial strength, and cultural capital. This cultural capital builds the foundation for students’ growth in aspirational capital, or the hope and motivation to pursue goals in the face of adversity, and resistant capital, or the skills developed to fight against oppression (Yosso, 2005). These microaffirmations develop these types of capital, through familial and cultural capital, to encourage students to change the trajectories of their families’ futures.

Luedke (2020) reported first-generation Latinx college students also created their own dichos and consejos to pass on to their younger siblings, cousins, and other family members. She explained students took pride in the ability to serve as role models, to help pave the way for the next generation, and to change the trajectory for their families. As Storlie et al. (2016) noted:

Participants described themselves as cultural trailblazers who break family and cultural traditions by attaining a college education and moving forward with a career uncommon to their family and cultural history. Furthermore, participants identified a sense of pride in broadening the stereotypical roles available to Latinx [people]. (p. 313)

These studies have shown students draw strength from the cultural capital they develop within their families. An awareness of this cultural wealth and strong familial background is essential to better understanding students’ determination and motivation and in the work of building relationships with families.
Areas of Blocked Access

With the awareness that institutions require all students to meet the requirements previously noted, it is incredibly important to address the systemic barriers blocking aspiring first-generation Latinx college students’ access to meet the requirements. The next section highlights a very brief history of the education for Latinx students, which directly impacts the limited access students have today, and the financial reality these students live in and the repercussions of a society that refuses to address income disparities.

Academic Access

Historically, institutions of education were built to intentionally bar students from marginalized populations—to hide the cultures and histories of these communities. But as Anzaldúa (1987) asserted “each of us must know our Indian lineage, our afro-mestizaje, our history of resistance” (p. 108). The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 allowed the United States to take ownership of the area that would become Arizona, California, parts of Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, and Utah (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). The treaty:

was supposed to protect the status of the approximately 115,000 former Mexicans who lived within the newly conquered territories of the West. Instead, existing anti-Indian and anti-Black laws were amplified to undermine the human rights of Mexicans who could not prove they were definitively White. (Ortiz, 2018, p. 56) Legally, Mexican Americans were classified as White, but socially, they were seen and treated as People of Color (Donato & Hanson, 2012).

During the first 30 years of joining the United States, three types of schools dominated the Southwestern region: Catholic, Protestant, and public schools. All three were built up from the local communities and, therefore, reflected the culture and language present in those communities, the “cultura mestiza” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 44).
However, with an increase in financial abilities and acceptance of common schooling, states began to formalize public education. In doing so, by the end of the 19th century, public education had shifted from promoting “Americanization” in addition to Mexican culture to focus only on “Americanization” and English-only language policies (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998).

With child labor and school attendance laws, there was a surge in public school enrollment in the early 1900s (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). More than ever before, public schools became sites of assimilation, creating a common and accepted citizen for the general public (Brayboy et al., 2007; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998; Wollenberg, 1975). Segregated schools became significantly more commonplace as White community members insisted Mexican American students needed a separate education to better assimilate them to the community (Donato & Hanson, 2012; Wollenberg, 1975). This separate curriculum “shifted from the 3Rs to focus on the 3Cs, common cultural norms, civics instruction, and command of the English tongue” (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998, p. 366). Additionally, intelligence tests grew in popularity and underrepresented students, including Mexican American students, were placed in special education classes in hugely disproportionate numbers as deficit ideology took hold (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998), providing a greater push for continued segregation in schools (Wollenberg, 1975).

However, Mexican American families began using the legal system to fight against these injustices. *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District* (1931) was the first case to challenge segregation and it rose to the California Supreme Court. Because Mexican American students were legally White, the practiced segregation was not legal under state law (Donato & Hanson, 2012). *Mendez v. Westminster School District* (1947) put forth a similar argument at the federal level and eventually ended *de jure* segregation for these students (Donato & Hanson, 2012; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). Over the next 40 years, families and communities used the legal system to fight for equality in education
for their children, ending de jure segregation. Unfortunately, de facto segregation remains in effect; due to demographic shifts, rezoning school boundaries, charter schools and private schools, Mexican American students—and Latinx students in general—are in greater isolation than ever before (Donato & Hanson, 2012; San Miguel & Valencia, 1998).

This de facto segregation has caused significant barriers to the education of Latinx students—with gaps in opportunity and achievement documented over the past nearly 100 years. A study sponsored by the Office of Education of the U.S. Department of the Interior reported that teachers were not prepared or trained to teach Mexican American students, especially Spanish speakers, that Mexican American teachers only made up 1.1% of the teaching workforce, and that Mexican American students were significantly overrepresented in special education classes (Reynolds, 1933 as cited in San Miguel & Valencia, 1998). These issues still stand today; teachers continue to report feeling underprepared to teach students who are now classified as ELLs (Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Lemmi et al., 2019; Lew, 2016). The last census showed only 9% of all teachers across the nation identify as Hispanic (Schaeffer, 2021), and Hispanic students are still disproportionally represented in special education classes (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). In reference to California, and Santa Barbara County specifically, Figure 8 is used to show that in 2020, Hispanic/Latino students made up 58.1% and 73.4% of the population of special education students, respectively. This is 2 to 3 times the number of White students enrolled in special education and further shows the disproportional representation.
Figure 8

Percentage of Students in Special Education by Race/Ethnicity

Note. Adapted from Special Education Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, by KidsData, 2020, Population Reference Bureau (https://www.kidsdata.org/topic/97/special-education-race/table#fmt=248&loc=2,273&tf=110&ch=7,11,70,85,10,72,9,73&sortColumnId=0&sortType=asc)

In addition to disproportional representation in special education, the rates of high school completion based on race or ethnicity also continue to differ. According to San Miguel and Valencia (1998), “[a]lthough educational discrimination against Latinos is widespread, there is an ongoing persistent lack of attention to these matters” (p. 395). This is seen in the continued achievement gap, documented in Table 3. Although the achievement gap is gradually shrinking, over 80 years later it still has not closed entirely, indicating more work must be done to create equitable opportunities for all students to reach their achievements. This is not to say that schools, faculty, and staff have given up on attempting to close the opportunity and achievement gaps. The use of AVID elective classes is an evidence-based approach to assist students academically by building up
study skills and having an easily accessible mentor in the AVID teacher (Huerta et al., 2013; Morley et al., 2021). This individual serves as an initial guide and counselor to students as they plan out their educational goals and as a key support person that is needed to encourage students to pursue postsecondary education. Students in these small cohorts created by AVID classes are more likely to set and achieve postsecondary educational goals as seen by the steady progress these students are making through their postsecondary education (Huerta et al., 2013) and college graduation rates 6 years after high school graduation (Morley et al., 2021).

**Table 3**

Average Number of Years of Education by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>Difference in years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mexican American</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>13.83</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>12.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Ultimately, these students need more academic assistance than a single class to continue their work in overcoming the barriers that have been built into the system. Unfortunately, many Latinx students attend under-resourced secondary schools that cannot provide these scaffolds and support (Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; G. Martinez &
Deil-Amen, 2015; Saenz et al., 2018). C. Martinez and Mendoza (2020) explained quite clearly:

Emergent research and practice suggests that transforming high school learning environments into ones that are purposefully organized around smaller, personalized units of adults and students, and include rigorous academic coursework, . . . can make a significant difference in the outcomes for students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. (p. 42)

**Linguistic Access**

As discussed in the previous section, early public schools focused on “the 3Cs, common cultural norms, civics instruction, and command of the English tongue” (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998, p. 366). In doing so, these public schools became sites of assimilation, creating a common and accepted citizen for the general public and this action has resulted in a clear erasure of cultures, lived experiences, and entire languages (Brayboy et al., 2007; Charamba & Zano, 2019; Liddicoat & Taylor-Leech, 2015). This process helped to position English as the *lingua franca* and since then, English has developed a strict hegemony over all other languages (Bourdieu, 1991; Canagarajah, 2013).

In classrooms throughout the United States, monolingual policies continue to be enforced (English Language Education, 2014), pushing English to the forefront and making language a priority over curricular content (Mitchell, 2013; Saavedra et al., 2009). Speaking English, taking part in English classes, and becoming fluent in English is seen as developing and having power (Malsbary, 2014; Molina, 2020; Shapiro, 2014). In doing so, the power dichotomy created causes division between native English speakers and everyone else. Those who are not yet fluent are seen as “failed native speakers” (Cook, 1999, p. 194) and are clearly at the bottom of the language hierarchy
(Flores & Rosa, 2015). This thought process and the actions that support these policies clearly disregard the linguistic capital that multilingual speakers hold (Yosso, 2005).

The insistence on using English—and only English—in classrooms puts multilingual speakers at a distinct academic disadvantage as they are not allowed to use their full linguistic repertoire (Flores & Rosa, 2015). This stress on monolingual instruction cuts away at students’ identities and severs them from their home languages and cultures; identity and culture are intimately linked, thereby celebrating and encouraging multilingualism also celebrates and encourages cultural diversity (S. Harper, 2011; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Palmer & Martinez, 2013; Paris, 2012; Reyes, 2009). The refusal to recognize students’ home languages causes an erasure of these languages, a disconnect between students and their families, and a rift that cannot be fixed quickly or easily.

Additionally, monolingual instruction and the sink-or-swim mentality surrounding English instruction shrinks students’ ability to learn English as they are unable to use their own home languages to make sense of English (Cummins, 2009; Daniel & Pacheco, 2016; DiNapoli & Morales, 2021; Lee & Handsfield, 2018; Malsbary, 2014). It is widely accepted that it takes 7–10 years to attain academic fluency in a new language (Green, 2003); and yet, students are often expected to transition into classes that use only academic English after only 2–3 years through transitional bilingual programs (S. Harper, 2011). But researchers have shown most programs for ELL students are not aligned with current research on language acquisition, best practices for multilingual students, or culturally sustaining pedagogies (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; Canagarajah, 2013; Cho & McDonnough, 2009; Paris, 2012). Although teachers desperately want to provide equitable and accessible language accommodations, but with improper and inadequate training, they are unable to do so (Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Lemmi et al., 2019).
Furthermore, with the growing number of ELL students, this erasure of languages and the insufficient and inequitable programs are also growing, creating linguistic barriers for more and more students throughout the United States. The number of ELL students has grown from 3.7 million, or 9.2% of public school students, in 2000 to over 5 million, or 10.2% of public school students in 2018 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021b). Of those students, 78% identify as Hispanic, as seen in Figure 9, and Spanish is the most common home language, as shown in Figure 10. Latinx students often suffer from ethnic bias that delays the reclassification process, forcing these students to remain in language development programs longer than is needed (Umansky et al., 2020). This indicates Latinx students are the most affected by these unjust language policies—and they have been since the original Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1898 (San Miguel & Valencia, 1998).

**Figure 9**

*Percentage of English Language Learner Students by Race/Ethnicity*

![Pie chart showing percentage of ELL students by race/ethnicity]

*Note.* Adapted from English Language Learners in Public Schools, by National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021b, U.S. Department of Education
Figure 10

*Percentage Distribution of English Language Learner Students by the 10 Most Commonly Reported Home Languages*

![Bar chart showing the distribution of English Language Learner students by the 10 most commonly reported home languages. Spanish has the highest percentage at 75.2%, followed by Arabic at 2.7%. Other languages such as Chinese, English, Vietnamese, Somali, Russian, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, and Hmong have much lower percentages.]

*Note.* Adapted from *English Language Learners in Public Schools*, by National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021b, U.S. Department of Education

Financial Access

The Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo was intended to protect the Mexican citizens who lived on the land that became the Southwest. However, just as states immediately put laws into effect that disallowed Mexicans to define themselves as White, they “created laws that defined Mexicans overall as an inferior people with minimal claims on
citizenship and land tenure” (Ortiz, 2018, p. 56). Systemic barriers preventing access to property and employment continued from 1848 well into the 20th century and has greatly hindered an entire marginalized community from developing generational wealth and growth (Ortiz, 2018).

The U.S. Census Bureau’s (2020b) data reported the median Hispanic income was $55,321 and the mean income was $75,193, indicating the data are positively skewed and unimodal. This was further supported by reports that 54.3% of Hispanic households earned less than $75,000 per year, and 66.5% of Hispanic households earned less than $100,000 per year. Figure 11 shows household income by race and further demonstrates the disparity; Black and Hispanic households are predominantly at the lower end of the spectrum compared to White and Asian households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b). The U.S. Census Bureau (2020b) also reported the Hispanic poverty rate in 2020 was 17%, while the White poverty rate was 8.2%. Regardless of collegiate status, Hispanic families in the United States are more likely to be economically disadvantaged.

**Figure 11**

*Household Income by Race/Ethnicity*
Additionally, reports published by the National Center for Educational Statistics stated Hispanic students made up 26.2% of the lowest 25% income bracket, while only 12.3% made up the highest 25% income bracket (Campbell & Wescott, 2019). These data also reported the income of dependent Hispanic students was less than $20,000 annually for 27.7% and was $20,000 to $39,999 annually for 24.3% of students. As seen in Figure 12, the percentage of Hispanic students, and all underrepresented students, shrinks as income increases. The U.S. Census Bureau (2020b) reported the poverty rate for a family of four was $26,200, which means over 28% of Hispanic college students live below the poverty level while attending college.

**Figure 12**

*Income Brackets of College Students by Race*

![Income Brackets of College Students by Race](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221)

*Note.* Adapted from Income & Poverty [Data set], by U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b (https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221)

Unfortunately, first-generation students, especially Latinx students as seen in the data previously noted, are more likely to come from low-income families who are straddling the poverty line (Campbell & Wescott, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). These students are more likely to work while taking classes to pay for college-related expenses and more likely to have a harder time integrating on college campuses due to their commuter status (Núñez & Sansone, 2016; Wilbur & Roscigno,
Thirty nine percent of Latinx students continue to live at home while taking college courses, a number nearly 10% higher than any other race or ethnicity (Campbell & Wescott, 2019). This living situation limits students as they attempt to balance familial responsibilities and their own postsecondary educational goals (Kiyama, 2018; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016).

Teachers and staff members in secondary schools are well aware of the financial barriers in place and the information gaps that prevent Latinx families from seeking help for their students (Hansen-Thomas & Sourdot, 2015). Yasuike (2019) noted programs and nonprofit organizations that partnered with high schools were particularly helpful in assisting students as they built relationships with the families and, because they were not directly associated with the high schools, they were able to offer assistance beyond high school. Ramirez (2021) found comparable results in her study on community-based organizations; members of these organizations were from similar backgrounds as the students and they were able to advocate and negotiate on behalf of these students and their families, again, providing assistance beyond high school. However, because nonprofit organizations use soft-money, or donations and such, they are not particularly sustainable and more likely to be affected by economic changes in the community. Latinx families are well aware of the financial difficulties they and their children face, but as Chlup et al. (2018) stated, “many see it as an opportunity to show how they can overcome difficulties to ensure a better future for their children: ‘Que ellos no pasen las dificultades que yo he pasado’ [‘That they don’t go through the difficulties that I have been going through’]” (p. 36).

Support Programs

With the needs of aspiring first-generation Latinx college students in mind, the following section discusses programs designed to address students’ needs and assist these students in the development of college preparation and transition. The focus is on
the assistance available to students prior to starting their collegiate studies: College and Career Centers located in secondary schools and the transition programs available to students during the summer before their first year of college.

**College and Career Centers**

College and career centers are physical offices located on secondary school campuses that serve to assist students in their college preparatory and admissions processes by offering extended office times, internet access, and easily accessible guidance counselors and specialists. They go by many names, including college access centers, college readiness offices, GO centers, and so on, all with the ultimate goal of helping students prepare themselves for their postsecondary education (Cunha et al., 2018; Heimerman, 2012; Stillisano et al., 2014).

Stillisano et al. (2014) studied college access centers and found they served as a crucially important connecting piece between families and the schools, effectively serving as a market team for the college admissions and informational events put on by the school. They concluded the main focus of these centers was to build collaboration with all parties on school campuses to build the “college-going” culture. Cunha et al. (2018) reported similar findings on GO centers as these also focused on calling attention to college choices, the application process, financial aid, and required standardized tests through family events and student publications. However, they also found although the GO centers promoted college access, as seen by increased numbers of college applications and acceptances, they had no effect on college completion rates. This detail highlighted one of the difficulties that secondary schools face in assisting students in the transition from secondary schools to postsecondary education.

**Transition Programs**

One way secondary schools attempt to guide students toward acclimation on college campuses is by encouraging them to attend summer bridge programs. These
programs are offered by colleges and universities on those campuses during the summer between high school graduation and students’ first year on campus, and they “vary in content, program size, and timeframe” (Gonzalez Quiroz & Garza, 2018, p. 2). Each college and university has varying objectives for their summer bridge programs, but these generally focus on increasing students’ awareness and engagement with various support programs in the colleges, including academic advising, academic support and tutoring, social support groups, and mentorship opportunities (Davis & Laster, 2019; Gonzalez Quiroz & Garza, 2018; Howard & Sharpe, 2019; O’Hara, 2022). Additionally, many summer bridge programs focus on recruiting students who are of color, low-income, or first-generation and those who are in science, technology, engineering, or math majors (Davis & Laster, 2019; Turner et al., 2021).

Scholars have shown these programs are successful in assisting students to acclimating to college culture; students use these programs to expand their social support systems, make more connections with faculty and mentors, and learn time management skills in a relatively low-risk environment (Murillo & Worrell, 2022; Tichavakunda & Galan, 2020; Turner et al., 2021). Summer bridge programs are increasingly applauded for rising retention rates as students who attend these programs are more likely than those who did not to enroll in their second year of study and graduate in 6 years or less (Howard & Sharpe, 2019; Turner et al., 2021). With continuous research into the effectiveness of these programs, more colleges and universities are expanding to include more than only students studying science, technology, engineering, or math majors and promoting parental and family involvement in various summer programs (Davis & Laster, 2019; Howard & Sharpe, 2019).
Federal TRIO Programs

Put into effect with the Higher Education Act of 1965, the federal TRIO programs are a cohort of eight different programs all designed to help low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities progress through educational institutions from middle school through graduate school. There were originally only three programs, and together were called TRIO, but these programs now include Educational Opportunity Centers, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs Staff, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, and Veterans Upward Bound (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Because this study was focused on high school students aspiring to be first-generation college students, this review will focus on Talent Search, Student Support Services, Upward Bound, and Upward Bound Math-Science.

Talent Search

First, Talent Search is a program focused on junior high and high school students who may benefit from intervention strategies to assist these students in their pursuit of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). This program includes workshops and academic counseling to assist students in preparing for college applications and field trips to various college campuses. Finally, this program helps students build their own networks with participants of the over 475 Talent Search programs across the United States (California Polytechnic State University, 2022a).

Student Support Services

Second, the resources under the Student Support Services group are available on college and university campuses; they provide opportunities for academic development, assisting students with identifying and meeting college requirements, and motivating students to complete their postsecondary education. The goal of this program is to
increase college retention and graduation rates, especially among low-income and first-generation college students (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

**Upward Bound**

Finally, Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math-Science are programs that focus on assisting high school students in preparing and applying for college, with the Math-Science program specifically dedicated to students interested in science, technology, engineering, or math majors (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Typically, these programs are limited annually to about 95 high school students who must meet low-income requirements and be aspiring first-generation college students. Upward Bound bridges colleges and secondary schools together, with representatives from the colleges visiting the high school campus weekly to provide students with college preparatory workshops. Additionally, through the colleges, this program provides Saturday workshops every month and a 6-week summer academy (California Polytechnic State University, 2022b).

Together, these programs work together to attempt to help low-income, aspiring first-generation college students. These programs do not focus specifically on any particular racial or ethnic group, rather focusing on low-income students overall (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). However, with their small capacities and required annual applications, they are limited in their reach and attempts at systemic change.

**University of California Early Academic Outreach Program**

In 1976, the University of California founded the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) to assist students in preparing for college by offering academic and financial guidance and tools. Since then, each University of California campus has partnered with middle and high schools to provide workshops for students and their families, sharing information about college preparation and financial aid. Depending on
the resources available to the campuses, they may also offer research internships, summer academies, Saturday workshops, concurrent enrollment opportunities, and classroom instruction and tutoring (Early Academic Outreach Program, n.d.). Similar to the Federal TRIO programs, EAOP is limited in how many students and schools each campus can connect with each year and in the resources they are able to provide: not every middle or high school is located close enough to a University of California campus to receive services and each program is limited in the number of students they are able to assist each year.

**Development of Supports for Students**

Ultimately, responding to students' academic and financial needs, addressing the barriers that prevent students from accessing the capital they need, and collaborating with families for the betterment of the students are several of the supports aspiring first-generation Latinx students need. M. Martinez et al. (2019) explicitly explained creating a culture of support for students interested in attending postsecondary schools is achieved through normalizing the college admissions and transitions processes by consistently and openly sharing information, taking students on tours of college campuses, providing opportunities for students to meet and talk with college students and faculty, promoting enrollment in postsecondary schools, and participating in summer enrichment programs. Several studies have discussed the influence that teachers and counselors have on developing this culture: (a) distributing information about the college admissions process (Michel & Durdella, 2019), (b) encouraging students to take college preparatory courses and providing college readiness workshops (C. Martinez & Mendoza, 2020), (c) developing readiness skills through one-on-one and group meetings (Brookover et al., 2021), (d) sharing navigational capital surrounding college access and readiness (Crawley et al., 2019), and (e) working together as a team to support students (M. Martinez et al., 2019).
Additionally, researchers have found families are the primary influences on students’ interest and pursuit of higher education (Luedke, 2020; Marrun, 2020). But to effectively build the navigational and social capital required by educational institutions that essentially serve as replicas of society, families without the knowledge of implicit college “norms” and practices need to develop community social networks. These networks are especially important for Latinx youth who attend low-income schools (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Duncheon, 2018) and as a pathway to establish relationships between schools and families (Crawley et al., 2019; Duncheon & Relles, 2019). Therefore, the research is clear: to successfully develop the support systems necessary to guide students through the transition to postsecondary education, a team of support for these students must be built between teachers, counselors, and families.

**Gap in the Literature**

Currently, there have been limited studies showing successful support systems in place for first-generation Latinx college students (e.g., M. Martinez et al., 2019). Additionally, as seen in Table 4, researchers have focused solely on students’ voices rather than taking a step back to get a more complete view of the attitudes, behaviors, and overall support systems available in schools by including the voices of families, faculty, staff, and administrators. Although it is admirable and aligns very well with the theoretical framework of LatCrit to focus on the voices of the students directly impacted by the development of support systems for first-generation Latinx college students on secondary school campuses, there is a clear need for a broader perspective. This research study aimed to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of one high school and the support systems currently in place. This research study also included the perspectives of administrators, counselors, and teachers to triangulate data with students’ experiences and present a holistic picture of how to best support Latinx students’ postsecondary educational aspirations.
Table 4

Participants in Studies Reporting on Development of Support Systems for Aspiring and Current College Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amaro-Jimenez and Hungerford-Kresser (2013)</td>
<td>34 first-generation bilingual Latinx college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clayton et al. (2019)</td>
<td>4 first-generation Mexican college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncheon (2018)</td>
<td>25 aspiring first-generation Latinx college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duncheon and Relles (2019)</td>
<td>25 Latinx high school seniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luedke (2020)</td>
<td>17 Latina college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marrun (2020)</td>
<td>10 first-generation Latinx or Chicanx college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Martinez et al. (2019)</td>
<td>14 aspiring Latinx college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Martinez and Mendoza (2020)</td>
<td>21 aspiring first-generation Latinx college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michel and Durdella (2019)</td>
<td>5 prospective first-generation Latinx college students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suwinyattichaiporn and Johnson (2022)</td>
<td>907 first-generation Latina/o college students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

First-generation college students are at distinct disadvantages in terms of supports provided by schools to be successful in higher education when compared to their continuing-generation peers—and these disadvantages are even more apparent for Latinx students. These students are more likely to lack the knowledge of implicit norms associated with college culture (Espino, 2016; Torres, 2019) and they are disproportionately made of students from marginalized communities, are of low socioeconomic status, and previously attended under-resourced secondary schools (Vega, 2018). Latinx students especially are more likely to face deficit ideology that firmly plants them in a position geared toward less success and fewer opportunities than their continuing-generation or White peers (Marrun, 2020). These students need greater assistance in secondary schools to prepare themselves for postsecondary education.
As a result, studies have shown that systemic support for aspiring first-generation Latinx students is hugely important in developing their college knowledge, measurable skills, and immeasurable skills. College knowledge refers to an awareness of the processes involved with applying to, accepting offers of admission, and transitioning to college campuses. Measurable skills are all the quantitative details that students include on their college applications: grade point average, AP courses, dual-enrollment courses, SAT and ACT scores, and the like. Finally, immeasurable skills are the intangible qualities that, unfortunately, are often overlooked, including aspirational capital (Yosso, 2005), motivation and optimism (Rocha, 2021; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014), and familial support, often seen through dichos, consejos, and cuentos (Chlup et al., 2018; Luedke, 2020; Marrun, 2020). Together, each of these components builds a better understanding of what is needed to achieve postsecondary success, but schools and systems have not been successful in providing and nurturing these skills in their aspiring first-generation Latinx college students.

Although Latinx students struggle upon entering higher education, studies have reported that secondary schools are attempting to help students. This is seen through offering AVID courses that focus on teaching students study habits, time management skills, and how to develop persistence and determination (Huerta et al., 2013; Morley et al., 2021). Additionally, schools attempt to offer guidance regarding how to apply for financial aid in college, with the clear understanding families that identify as Hispanic are more likely to earn less money annually than families of other ethnicities (Campbell & Wescott, 2019). Finally, some secondary schools have offered assistance through college and career centers, which are offices specifically dedicated to helping students work toward their postsecondary plans (Cunha et al., 2018; Stillisano et al., 2014), and through various federally funded programs associated with local colleges and universities.
Ultimately, there is a gap in the literature focusing on developing successful support structures for students interested in attending college. As discussed previously, previous studies have been aligned with LatCrit theoretical frameworks by magnifying students’ voices and perspectives on their experiences of preparing for higher education and pursuing their postsecondary educational goals. But there is a significant lack of studies that include the perspectives of all stakeholders within their microsystems and extending outwards: teachers, counselors, and administrators. This research study focused on bringing all these voices together to provide a clearer picture of what supports are available to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students. The next chapter articulates the methodology and data analysis protocol used in this research study.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

“If research is to be a driver of social change, then it also carries with it significant responsibility” (Bethune & Gilbert, 2019, p. 17).

“Through knowing differently we come to be differently. Through being differently we come to newly productive knowledges” (Kuntz, 2016, p. 65).

“How one understands truth and reality has a direct bearing on the kind of research one conducts” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 1).

First-generation college students are those students whose parents have little to no experience in higher education. Latinx students make up 27% of first-generation college students in the United States (Campbell & Wescott, 2019; Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017); and unfortunately, these students are more likely to face increased challenges socially, linguistically, and financially. Socially, these students do not have the tools to develop the navigational capital to successfully integrate into institutions of higher education (Sims & Ferrare, 2021) and these tools are intentionally kept from marginalized students through systematic and bureaucratic barriers as a result of deficit ideology, especially concerning familial involvement and participation (Chlup et al., 2018; Hansen-Thomas & Sourdut, 2015; Marrun, 2020; Michel & Durdella, 2019; Rocha, 2021). However, studies have demonstrated that due to different communication practices and often language barriers, families have often been barred from necessary information surrounding college admissions and transition processes, thereby further creating additional hurdles for these students in the pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals (Chlup et al., 2018; Crawley et al., 2019; Romo et al., 2020; Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Yasuike, 2019).

Linguistically, first-generation Latinx college students have been faced with additional barriers due to strict monolingual policies (English Language Education,
The emphasis on monolingual instruction has cut away at students’ identities and severed them from their home languages and cultures: identity and culture are intimately linked, thereby celebrating and encouraging multilingualism also celebrates and encourages cultural diversity (S. Harper, 2011; Kubota & Lin, 2006; Palmer & Martínez, 2013; Paris, 2012; Reyes, 2009). Additionally, monolingual instruction and the sink-or-swim mentality surrounding English instruction has shrunk students’ ability to learn English as they were unable to use their own home languages to make sense of English (Cummins, 2009; Daniel & Pacheco, 2016; DiNapoli & Morales, 2021; Lee & Handsfield, 2018; Malsbary, 2014). Researchers have noted English courses are crucial in determining how confident students feel in the pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals. Reid and Moore (2008) and Wahleithner (2020) both found students who were able to take AP English courses felt very prepared for university-level tasks and coursework, but students who took general English courses, English as a second language (ESL) courses, or English language development (ELD) courses felt extremely underprepared. Latinx students face these academic barriers more often than students of other races as they make up 78% of English language learner (ELL) students in the United States (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021b); therefore, they are more likely to be barred from success in higher education as a result of their linguistic differences.

Latinx students are more likely to struggle financially as their families are often straddling the poverty line and they are forced to juggle working to support themselves, and possibly assisting their families, and coursework during both secondary school and postsecondary school (Campbell & Wescott, 2019; Kiyama, 2018; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). Two thirds of Hispanic households earn less than $100,000 per year. In 2020, nearly 1 in 5 Hispanic families lived at or below the poverty rate (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b). Hispanic students currently attending college made up one fourth of students in
the bottom 25% income bracket and this number is halved in the top 25% income bracket (Campbell & Wescott, 2019). These students have been faced with greater barriers that are compounded as they attempted to pursue their postsecondary educational goals.

Public programs, including federal TRiO programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2022) and Early Academic Outreach Programs (EAOP, n.d.), were developed to assist low-income and aspiring first-generation college students in preparing for their transition to higher education. Additionally, secondary schools have attempted to also help these students through counseling offices and college and career centers, which are offices specifically built for students in pursuit of postsecondary educational goals (Cunha et al., 2018; Heimerman, 2012; Stillisano et al., 2014). These are support methods that may assist some students, but the fact of the matter is that the educational system in the United States was not built for students who do not fit the mold of White, middle-class, native English-speaking individuals.

**Purpose of the Study**

This exploratory case study examined how a large high school on the central coast of California has supported students who will be the first in their families to attend college. In particular, this study focused on 2022 graduates who spoke a language other than English (LOTE) at home. Through qualitative interviews with students, staff, and faculty members, this research study analyzed how these specific students of this graduating class were supported through various policies, practices, and procedures implemented by the staff and faculty of this secondary school.

**Research Question**

To better understand the supports available to students at this particular high school, one overarching question was developed: How are aspiring first-generation
Latinx college students who speak a LOTE at home supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived by students, staff, and faculty?

**Research Design**

This research study followed a case study research design. This type of research is focused on answering only a few questions with in-depth inquiries, studying the particular unit of analysis to better understand new relationships and concepts (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The unit of analysis in this case study was the small group of students who spoke a LOTE at home and were part of the high school graduating class of 2022. This case study was exploratory (Fusch et al., 2017; Yin, 2018) as the purpose was to learn more about the support systems available to these students as they pursued their postsecondary educational goals. Data points about the number of students in this particular unit of analysis were available through state publications, but these data points did not provide a clear picture of what is happening for and with these students. Therefore, adopting an exploratory perspective allowed this case study to develop a nuanced understanding of what support systems are currently in place for these students before advocating for change based solely on data points.

**Design Type**

Case studies are focused on learning as much as possible about the unit of inquiry, including norms, behaviors, and roles (Bhattacharya, 2017). Additionally, “cases are bounded by time and activity” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 14) and this design type “relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion” (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Case study research is typically used with “how” and “why” research questions, without attempting to manipulate the behavior of the participants, and while maintaining a focus on recent and relevant events (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2018).
Methodology

To collect enough data to allow for triangulation, as recommended by Yin (2018), this research study included demographic surveys, interviews, observations, artifacts, and analytic memos. This research study started with demographic surveys to inform the interview protocols. Observations and artifacts were collected to obtain a more holistic view of the support systems in place. Finally, analytic memos were created as the research study progressed to maintain a timeline of activities and take notes of emerging themes.

Rationale

Case study research “involves in-depth contextual study of a person, people, issue, and place, within a predetermined scope of study” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 26) to answer “how” or “why” questions (Yin, 2018). The research question that guided this study asked, “How are students supported?” and, therefore, fit this particular research design very well. Additionally, by focusing entirely on the students who spoke a LOTE in this particular graduating class, I deepened understanding of the supports available to this very vulnerable student population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In doing so, this research study “capture[d] the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation” (Yin, 2018, p. 50). In this study, these circumstances included the everyday practices, policies, and procedures that these students were faced with while attending this particular secondary school.

Positionality

I identify as a White, Latina, and Korean, female, monolingual English-speaking, first-generation college graduate, and I was born and raised in the same community I studied. I attended undergraduate college out of state and returned to my hometown 6 years ago to teach high school science and raise my own family where I was raised. As a result, I had direct personal connections to this community and this research study.
However, I walked the fine line of both insider and outsider (Holmes, 2020). At the time of this study, I had taught at the high school where this study took place for 4 years and my course load was predominantly 12th grade students; at the onset of this study, I was teaching four sections of graduating seniors, with a total of about 120 students. I built a rapport with these students and this relationship allowed me to hold an insider's status. Additionally, by teaching so many 12th grade students, I got to know other 12th grade teachers on campus and several of the guidance counselors and administrators. We were all colleagues, and these relationships also granted me insider status with these participants.

However, I was also an outsider to many of the participants as well: as a White-passing mixed race, monolingual English-speaker, I have not faced the deficit ideology, prejudices, and systemic barriers that Latinx students and their families have faced. This disconnect may have played a role in this study's lower than projected participation rates, as discussed later. But I was hopeful the relationships I built and continued to build with students would help to overcome these concerns and help me to bridge this outsider status.

**Strategies to Mitigate Researcher Bias**

With my relatively close relationships with many of the participants in this study, I understood I needed to work to maintain compassionate objectivity. I did so through regular reflection and journaling, with particular focus and review of my interactions with participants: my words and phrases, my tone, my initial and immediate responses and thoughts. With this particular focus, I hoped to identify any lapses in bias or any indication of potential acceptance of deficiency as neither of these were suitable or appropriate for this study. Additionally, I regularly studied the framework of community cultural wealth (CCW; Yosso, 2005) and reminded myself of the different types of capital with which participants may be coming to this study, capital that may not be regularly
recognized by society at large. Overall, I worked to maintain neutrality and an open mind to the ideas, perspectives, and viewpoints each of the participants contributed toward this study.

**Setting**

The city of Nina (a pseudonym for anonymity) was located on the central coast of California and was largely an agrarian community with a population of roughly 110,000 people. The city itself was relatively isolated from large urban communities and services, being a couple hours north of Los Angeles and several hours south of the San Francisco Bay Area. Both the city’s population and economy have grown considerably in recent years, but it has continued to face economic disparities. The median household income in the city in 2019 was $63,000, well below the state average of $75,000. The city’s poverty rate was 14.5%, which was higher than the state average of 11.5%. The city was host to six high schools: three comprehensive public high schools, one alternative public high school, one charter high school, and one private Catholic high school.

**Population and Sample**

Nina High School (also a pseudonym) was a large, public, comprehensive high school and at the time of this study, it was made up of over 3,900 students, of which 95% identified as Hispanic or Latinx. Sixty-two percent of students were identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged, although no further data were available regarding family socioeconomic status. Figure 13 shows the breakdown of languages spoken in students’ homes: Spanish, English, Mixteco, and unidentified others. Additionally, Figure 14 shows the classification of students based on their English abilities and fluency. It was a homogenous student population on campus, but these students continued to be marginalized by society at large.
At the time of this study, the high school employed 165 credential teachers, 10 counselors, four administrators, and 455 support staff members, including two guidance technicians, three psychologists, two licensed nurses, one speech therapist, one speech and language pathologist, two migrant advisors, one community liaison, one homeless
liaison, one crisis intervention specialist, one outreach consultant, one Mixteco interpreter, and one Spanish interpreter. The demographic data of all of these faculty and staff members are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Demographics of Faculty and Staff at Nina High School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Identify as Hispanic/Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support staff</td>
<td>455</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Additional gender identification information was unavailable at the time of this study.

The demographics of the faculty and staff at Nina High School were slightly more reflective of the demographics of teachers at public schools in the United States at large (Schaeffer, 2021), as seen in Figure 15. More often than not, students’ racial and ethnic identities are not reflected in the faculty and staff of the schools these students attend. Even when schools consist of more than 90% underrepresented students, only about a quarter (27.7%) of the teachers identify as Hispanic (Schaeffer, 2021). Nina High School was about 10% more reflective than the national averages, but still fell short of the 95% of students who identify as Hispanic or Latino.
Figure 15

**Percentage Distribution of Public School Teachers in the United States, Differentiated by Various School Descriptions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL CLASSIFICATION</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Pacific Islander</th>
<th>American Indian or Alaska Native</th>
<th>Two or more races</th>
<th>White</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional public</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter school</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PERCENT OF MINORITY STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENT OF MINORITY STUDENTS IN SCHOOL</th>
<th>&lt;10</th>
<th>10-24</th>
<th>25-49</th>
<th>50-74</th>
<th>75-89</th>
<th>90+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>94.9</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>79.2</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PERCENT OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENT OF STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE OR REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH</th>
<th>&lt;25</th>
<th>26-50</th>
<th>51-75</th>
<th>76-100</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>81.1</td>
<td>63.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data may not total to 100% due to rounding. From America’s Public School Teachers Are far Less Racially and Ethnically Diverse Than Their Students, by K. Schaeffer, 2021, Pew Research Center (https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/12/10/americas-public-school-teachers-are-far-less-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-than-their-students/)

**Participation Criteria**

To gain a better understanding of the experiences of students and overall postsecondary educational supports available at this high school, it was crucial to identify and include all relevant stakeholders. Bronfenbrenner’s (1981) theory on ecology of human development created a basis for selecting these stakeholders and also further supported the bounded unit of analysis: the graduating class of 2022. Bronfenbrenner’s
theory identified the developing person, or graduating students, not as blank slates but rather as dynamic entities that are changing their environment as much as their environment is changing them. Taking a step back to look at students’ microsystem, or the space in which “interpersonal relations [are] experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics” (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p. 22) provides a list of stakeholders who were invited into this study. Figure 16 shows the microsystem affecting students in the school system.

**Figure 16**

*The Microsystem of Interpersonal Relations as Pertaining to Students’ Secondary School*

By focusing only on the school and how the school and the environment or culture of the school affects the students—and how the students affect this culture—provided a list of participants that could help to create a thorough view of the supports and systems in place for students. Specific stakeholders who participated in this study and the criteria they met to do so are highlighted in Table 6.
Table 6

List of Stakeholders and Participant Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder</th>
<th>Participation criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>● Graduate of the Class of 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Went through the college admissions process to attend a 4-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Identified as “reclassified English proficiency” OR speak a language other than English at home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>● Taught primarily 12th grade students OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Taught Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>● Counseled students who graduated in June of 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and Career Center Specialist</td>
<td>● Responsible for overseeing the College and Career Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Mentored students who graduated in June of 2022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>● Administrator who managed the counseling department and, by extension, the College and Career Center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rationale for Participants

Each of the participants played a significant role in the power and knowledge of the practices, policies, and procedures associated with the support systems in place to assist students in their pursuit of postsecondary educational goals (see Figure 17). This figure was developed using Jarrett’s (2017) four types of organizational politics to determine the power and influence key stakeholders have on the supports for aspiring first-generation Latinx college students at this particular high school.
First, teachers and students were placed in the weeds: the cross-section between individual levels of political activity and informal sources of power. These stakeholders often create their own informal coalitions to better assist students in their pursuits of postsecondary educational goals.

Second, guidance counselors were placed in the region called the rocks due to their formal authority and titles, but individual levels of action. Guidance counselors work one-on-one with students to assist them in creating their plans for postsecondary education and work and can help students to create the strong foundation needed for success in adulthood. However, with the formal power of creating students’ class schedules, these individuals may also serve as gatekeepers, preventing students from enrolling in specific classes that may benefit them in the pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals.
Third, administrators were placed in the region called the high ground due to their formal authority and organizational levels of political activity. These individuals specifically oversee the College and Career Center and provide the checks and balances needed to ensure this Center is adhering to its published goals of supporting students interested in attending higher education. However, because they are removed from the day-to-day processes, their role is at the organizational role rather than the individual role.

Finally, the region called the woods refers to the cross-section between organizational levels of political activity and informal sources of power. The counselors responsible for the College and Career Center fit this role as they uphold the implicit norms and guidelines surrounding the Center. Additionally, they create the various events for students and their families to learn more about postsecondary educational and work opportunities. Therefore, these counselors are aware of the hidden norms, rules, and guidelines associated with the Center and may be responsible for unintentional gatekeeping in the choices of what events and information to publicize and when these publications are posted.

Each of these groups represents a variety of stakeholders directly impacted by the practices, policies, and procedures that are implemented as a way to support students in their postsecondary educational pursuits. By including each of these groups of stakeholders, data were triangulated and dependability and reliability of the study increased, creating a clear and holistic view of the support systems available for students on this particular secondary school campus.

**Sampling Strategies**

Initial demographic surveys were developed using Google Forms and sent via email to all 12th grade students 1 month before graduation. Based on the responses to the survey, interview invitations were sent to those graduates interested in continued
participation in the study. If students identified as “reclassified English proficient” or as students who spoke a LOTE at home and they also underwent the college applications process during their senior year of high school, they were invited to participate in an individual interview. In Spring 2022, 635 students graduated: 418 enrolled in the local community college and 265 enrolled in 4-year universities the following fall (Nelson, 2022). Roughly 80% of students spoke a LOTE at home; therefore, about 210 students met the criteria for interview invitations.

All 12th grade teachers were invited to participate in individual interviews ($n = 20$). These teachers represented a variety of subjects, including math, English, government, macroeconomics, science electives, language electives, and visual or performing arts electives. The individual interviews were limited to 1 hour, based on teachers’ preparatory time.

All AVID teachers ($n = 8$) were invited to participate in individual interviews as well. These teachers were each assigned a graduating class and they work with the same class of students until those students graduate 4 years later. Then they are assigned a new graduating class with the incoming ninth graders the following fall.

All counselors were invited to participate in individual interviews. There were eight counselors and two guidance technicians, all of whom were very invested in students’ success and already expressed interest in participating in this study. The counselors were paired up and assigned to graduating classes, very similarly to the process for AVID teachers. The two counselors who were assigned to the graduating class of 2022 were invited to interviews.

In the College and Career Center, counselors were specifically designated to work with students interested in going to college and students interested in entering the workforce while in high school or immediately after graduation. The counselors typically rotated each year, alternating their focus between college and the workforce. There were
three counselors in the College and Career Center and all three were invited to interviews. Finally, there was only one administrator overseeing the counseling department and one head administrator overseeing the entire school. Both were invited to interviews.

**Data Collection**

The overarching research question for this study was: In what ways are aspiring first-generation Latinx college students supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived by students, staff, and faculty? Table 7 identifies the specific data collection methods used and further discussion follows.

**Table 7**

*Data Collection Method and Corresponding Rationale*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data collection method</th>
<th>Rationale for use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demographic survey for students</td>
<td>• Provided insight into participants' demographic backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Laid the groundwork for interviews with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews</td>
<td>• Students:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Provided students with an opportunity to expand on their responses to the demographic survey and openly discuss their experiences as they prepared for and applied to 4-year universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Following semistructured format allowed for consistency between interviews while maintaining a casual enough tone to encourage staff and faculty to speak freely of support systems currently in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic memos</td>
<td>• Created an opportunity to begin to identify patterns in responses between participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Became a space designated for introspection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instrumentation**

After several informal conversations with students and colleagues at this secondary school, I developed an interest in the support systems available to the students at this school as many of them speak a LOTE at home. Several of my own students expressed concern for their college readiness, particularly the intangible
components, including understanding college culture, how to decide which college and subsequent major would be best for them, and the transition to college and moving away from family. Additionally, conversations with fellow teachers gave me insight to some of the supports provided in classrooms and connections made with families. Taken together, these conversations led to the development of this study and the selection of particular data processes discussed in the following section.

**Pilot Study**

Additionally, I created a pilot survey and asked one of my classes of 12th grade students to take it and provide feedback on any questions for which they had concerns. As a result, I adjusted two of the demographic questions (i.e., languages spoken at home, parents’ level of education), adjusted the last two questions in the digital questionnaire to multiple choice rather than free response, and removed Likert survey questions to cut down on overall length. Finally, I used this pilot survey to create an outline to the interview protocols I used for the interviews with students.

**Processes**

As seen in Table 7, a variety of data collections methods were used to triangulate the information collected. This study started with a demographic survey administered to students and included in Appendix A. This survey included 17 items and examples include: What is the highest level of education your parents completed? Did you participate in Advanced Placement (AP) classes. The survey used short answers, checklist, and multiple-choice questions.

Following the survey, students were asked to participate in individual interviews. Later, the staff and faculty members discussed in the previous section were also invited to participate in individual interviews. Each group of participants (students and staff/faculty) were interviewed using different protocols; however, each protocol had six questions reviewing their perceptions of supports available to aspiring first-generation
Latinx college students and the effects of language use and reclassification status, as seen in the appendices.

Throughout the research study, analytic memos were used to develop a more holistic view of the support systems available to students. These memos were written after each interview to fully document the experience and create a stable record of events. Additionally, analytic memos were written after meeting with committee members, discussing data with colleagues, and each phase of data analysis. During each session of writing, notes were taken as quickly as thoughts came in and then reviewed for clarity and understanding.

**Data Analysis Protocol**

The demographic data collected through surveys were analyzed by creating various tables and charts to visualize the data more clearly. Summary data were collected, including male versus female participation, a bar graph indicating how many of each type of honors or Advanced Placement (AP) class was named, and pie charts were created to show the percentage of students who participated in various organizations.

Throughout the data analysis process, I read and reread the interview transcripts many times, looking for codes with each read-through. Qualitative analysis was broken into cycles, “first coding is analysis—taking things apart. Second cycling coding is synthesis—putting things back together into new assemblages of meaning” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 6, italics in original). I started with descriptive coding (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2021) by identifying key points in the interviews that appeared with more than one participant, including English courses, family pride, teachers, and counselors acting as mentors, community events, and students’ timeline of preparing for 4-year universities, among others. I created a matrix using a spreadsheet to visualize all of these different codes next to each other and doing so allowed for easy movement of the codes to group them together.
Then, I assigned each of the descriptive codes to a form of CCW as part of the second cycle of coding (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2021). This was done after grouping the codes together based on similarities. For example, I grouped the codes “English classes,” “language fluency label,” “academic English,” and “language brokers” into one group and then assigned this group to linguistic capital. I reread the interview transcripts again to ensure each descriptive code did indeed fit in its particular type of capital and found some codes fit into more than one type of capital and needed to be redefined. I repeated this stage of data analysis several times until the definitions for each code were explicit and each code fit well in a particular form of community cultural wealth.

In this analysis, I used triangulation, case analysis, and cross-case analysis to ensure the codes and themes found were credible. I treated each stakeholder group as a case and found codes in these groups, then I compared the codes across the groups as the cross-case analysis. I focused on identifying similarities and differences in the interview data to thoroughly define the codes and decipher themes. In doing so, I identified themes in groups, in the forms of capital of CCW and to determine overlap of the forms of capital across the stakeholder groups as well.

**Strategies for Validity**

To mitigate bias, triangulation of data was needed and accomplished through the use of varying types of validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2018). Using multiple forms of validity “enhances [my] ability to assess the accuracy of the findings and convince readers of that accuracy” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 199). As such, I worked to mitigate bias through data saturation due to the variety of stakeholders included and methodological variation due to the wide range of methodological approaches used.

First, triangulation increased the validity of this study in two ways. Triangulation itself is “examining evidence from different sources and using it to build a coherent
justification for themes” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 199). The first use of triangulation was to include so many different stakeholders, from students to teachers to administrators, thereby providing a more thorough view of the support systems available to students at this particular secondary school. Each group of stakeholders held a very different perspective and, therefore, added another layer to the overall picture. The second use of triangulation was through a variety of methodological approaches, including the demographic survey and semistructured interviews, as discussed in the previous section. The demographic survey was one source of data to be compared and contrasted to the data collected through the individual interviews. Combining each of these approaches mitigates bias and increased the validity of the study (Miles et al., 2020).

Additionally, to ensure credibility and dependability of data collection, I audio-recorded and transcribed all interviews. For each of the individual interviews, I sent a copy of the transcript to the participant to review and ensure accuracy, providing the participant with an additional opportunity to provide input and ensure their voice had been heard correctly. This is also known as member checking and it provides another layer of validity to the overall research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Nearly all participants were satisfied with the accuracy of the interview transcripts: only one counselor–participant corrected two acronyms used in his interview but indicated that the information was correct and accurate.

Next, to ensure trustworthiness of the codes I created, I sent a survey with my codebook to colleagues also studying education in social justice and methodology professors. I created the codebook included in Appendix B, which lists each code and corresponding definition and the different types of capital included in the community cultural wealth theoretical framework. Then, I created a survey using Google Forms with eight excerpts from the interviews to be assigned to different types of capital and five
excerpts from the interviews to be assigned specific codes in a particular type of capital. Figure 18 shows an example of an excerpt to be assigned a type of capital. Due to the overlap between types of capital, colleagues were encouraged to select all types of capital they believed applied to this particular excerpt.

**Figure 18**

*Example From Trustworthiness Check on Types of Capital*

> "I think it affects them in a sense that it pulls them back when it comes to their English skills. It just goes back to the academic part of it where the student will know Spanish, the student will know English. But when it comes to their writing... Seldom do we come across a student that's like a solid writer. And a lot of them, you can see that they are English language learners."

☐ Aspirational capital
☐ Familial capital
☐ Linguistic capital
☐ Navigational capital
☐ Resistant capital
☐ Social capital

Four colleagues and one methodology professor responded to the Google Form. I communicated with two colleagues and the professor to discuss the results and the codes used. After these discussions, I further refined the codes and their definitions to make them clearer based on this feedback. There was an average 88% agreement on the different types of capital used; therefore, I kept each of these excerpts aligned. Additionally, there was a small selection of codes that did not appear to fit nicely into any of the types of capital and after some discussion with a colleague, it became clear these codes had their own new heading of financial literacy capital: the skills needed to adequately prepare for the costs associated with postsecondary education and navigate through the application processes.

The second half of the Google Form asked respondents to check how well excerpts matched with specific codes to align with the definitions provided in the
codebook. Figure 19 provides an example of the questions used. For code definitions with a greater than 85% match, I kept the definition. For those with less than 85% match, I revised the definition and asked colleagues to review the excerpt and code definition again. Doing so ensured the definitions I created were clear enough for replicability.

**Figure 19**

*Example From Trustworthiness Check on Code Definitions*

![Example From Trustworthiness Check on Code Definitions](image)

Finally, one of my dissertation committee members recently taught at this particular high school and was very familiar with this student and city population. I leaned on his experience to ensure I properly and accurately represented these stakeholders. Through several conversations about the data collection process and data analysis protocol, he found how this research study “will resonate with people other than [me]” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). Doing so increased the construct validity of the research study and avoided subjective judgements (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018).
Conclusion

In this chapter, I delineated the principles of case study research design as a methodology to understand the research inquiry guiding this study: In what ways are aspiring first-generation Latinx college students who speak a LOTE at home supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived by students, staff, and faculty? This study used a cross-section of stakeholders to develop a broad, holistic view of the overall support systems available, triangulating surveys and individual semistructured interviews from different perspectives to build up validity and reliability. The data were analyzed through member checks, two rounds of coding, and feedback and discussions with colleagues. Additionally, the data were compared both between and across stakeholder groups. Although this study was limited to a single case of one particular secondary school in a significant time constraint, it has added to the growing field of literature on the specific characteristics that have been effective in creating support systems for the very vulnerable population of students who are the first in their families to attend college and also who speak a LOTE at home.
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS

This research study sought to answer the question: In what ways are aspiring first-generation Latinx college students who speak a language other than English (LOTE) at home supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived by students, staff, and faculty at one high school? The students in this study attended one secondary school on the central coast of California and graduated in June 2022. Demographic survey data were collected in May 2022 and qualitative data were collected through interviews with the same group of students, and staff and faculty in fall of 2022. These data were analyzed with multiple rounds of coding using the community cultural wealth (CCW) framework as a lens (Yosso, 2005). The types of capital delineated in this framework are further described in Table 8.

Table 8
Types of Capital in Community Cultural Wealth Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of capital</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aspirational capital</td>
<td>Hope and motivation to pursue goals and dreams, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial capital</td>
<td>Pride and cultural traditions associated with close family ties and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic capital</td>
<td>Skills developed through communication in more than one language, dialect, or style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigational capital</td>
<td>Knowledge necessary to navigate social institutions and systems, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistant capital</td>
<td>Skills developed specifically in the face of systemic oppression and inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital</td>
<td>The networks and support systems developed through friends, peers, and communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In this chapter, I first summarize the results of the demographic survey to share identifying information about the students directly from the students. I then analyze the common themes that emerged from stakeholder interviews independently for students, counselors, teachers, and administrators, triangulating these data in the different types of capital in CCW as both case analysis and cross-case analysis. In this process, I found the types of capital are each on their own spectrum; rather than a binary of either having the capital or not, each type of capital is made up of a gradation in which stakeholders may have some or quite a bit of the capital. These gradations are discussed further in each stakeholder group. Then, I explain the findings of overlapping forms of capital across stakeholder groups: the process of accumulating different types of capital causes these types to become so woven together they overlap and are difficult to distinguish from each other. I discuss which types of capital overlapped as disclosed across the stakeholder groups. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a summary of these findings.

**Demographic Survey Results**

The demographic survey was sent out to all graduates of 2022, roughly 1 month before they finished high school. Of the 705 students to whom this survey was emailed, 9.5% (n = 67) responded and completed the survey; 73% (n = 49) identified as female while 27% (n = 18) identified as male and none of the respondents selected “other.” Students then answered racial and ethnic identity questions: 98.5% (n = 66) of respondents identified as Latino or Hispanic and of these students, 100% of those
students identified specifically as Mexican. Further information was collected through the demographic survey regarding students’ language classification labels. The choices for this question included “native” English speaker; reclassified English proficiency, or those who speak a LOTE at home and have taken tests to achieve English fluency; and English language learners (ELLs), or those who speak a LOTE at home and are currently taking English support classes. Figure 20 shows how students identified themselves: 25.4% \((n = 17)\) students identified as “native” English speakers, 25.4% \((n = 17)\) students identified as reclassified English proficient, and 49.3% \((n = 33)\) students identified as ELLs. All of the demographic data collected were used to gain a better understanding of how students identified and described themselves to best represent these students for the remainder of this research study.

**Figure 20**

*Students’ Self-Identification Language Fluency Label*

![Diagram showing language fluency labels: Native English Speaker (25.4%), Reclassified English Proficiency (25.4%), and English Language Learner (49.3%).]

Additionally, data were collected on students’ parents’ educational levels to better understand the support systems students had at home specifically related to the college application and transition processes. Table 9 lists students’ selections indicating the level of education their parents completed. With this information, I was able to then focus
solely on students who were the first in their families to attend college \((n = 58)\) because their parents did not have any experience in higher education.

**Table 9**

*Parents’ Education Level*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than high school</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school degree/diploma</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s (2-year) degree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s (4-year) degree</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD or higher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because this study was centered around first-generation college students, I focused on those students’ responses to demographic questions about their plans after high school. Figure 21 shows a breakdown of students’ responses: 34.5\% \((n = 20)\) students planned to attend a 4-year university, 51.7\% \((n = 30)\) students planned to attend a local community college, 6.9\% \((n = 4)\) planned to attend a trade or vocational school, 5.2\% \((n = 3)\) students planned to join the military and 1.7\% \((n = 1)\) students planned to work.
The demographic survey data also showed students’ plans for after high school. Of the 67 respondents, 58.2% ($n = 39$) went through the application process and all of these students (100%, $n = 39$) were accepted to at least one 4-year university. However, only 53.8% ($n = 21$) of those accepted plan to enroll in a 4-year university. Of the 46.2% ($n = 16$) of students who went through the application process and were accepted to a 4-year university, but would not enroll, 87.5% ($n = 14$) planned to attend a local community college and 12.5% ($n = 2$) planned to enlist in the military. The interviews discussed in the following section dove further into the decision-making processes of the students who underwent the application process but did not enroll in a 4-year university.

**Analysis of Interviews**

In total, 12 interviews were conducted in fall of 2022 with four groups of participants: (a) five students, (b) three counselors, (c) three teachers, and (d) one administrator. Each of these participants represented a stakeholder group directly affected by or impacting the support systems available to aspiring first-generation college students. The interviews were 28–49 minutes in duration with 12–18 pages of transcript per interview: students’ interviews averaged 29 minutes, counselors’
interviews averaged 37 minutes, teachers’ interviews averaged 35 minutes, and the administrator interview was 38 minutes. In this section, I provide more details on each of the participants and in the next section, I will discuss themes that were identified.

**Student Participants**

Students who indicated interest in expanding upon their responses to the demographic survey were invited to participate in an individual interview. Of the 20.9% \((n = 14)\) of students who initially indicated interest, only 7.5% \((n = 5)\) of the students participated in the follow-up interview. These five students met the original criteria of having had applied to 4-year universities, were accepted to at least one university, and they each spoke a LOTE at home. Each student participant was given a pseudonym to maintain anonymity. Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and member checked.

Also shown in Table 10, each student explained their English language fluency and plans for after high school. Luis identified as a “native” English speaker but said he and his family spoke another language at home. He planned to enlist in the military, postponing his college plans. Lorena was reclassified as English proficient in elementary school and planned to enroll in the local community college. However, she was already working on transfer applications to attend a 4-year university the following year. Edgar was reclassified as English proficient in middle school and also planned to enroll in the local community college. Additionally, he had decided attending a 4-year university was no longer an option at all. Yosef was reclassified as English proficient in elementary school and was the only student of the five to enroll in a 4-year university immediately after high school graduation. Finally, Adriana was also reclassified as English proficient in elementary school and planned to enroll in the local community college. She shared she was undecided and may eventually transfer to a 4-year university after earning an associate’s degree.
Table 10

Background Information for Student Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Language fluency</th>
<th>Plans after high school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>Native English speaker, but also speaks Spanish at home</td>
<td>Enlisting in the military (Air Force); plans to use GI bill to attend a 4-year university later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>Reclassified as English proficient in elementary school</td>
<td>Attending community college and working to transfer in 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar</td>
<td>Reclassified as English proficient in middle school</td>
<td>Attending a community college; no longer interested in attending a 4-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yosef</td>
<td>Reclassified as English proficient in elementary school</td>
<td>Attending a 4-year university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>Reclassified as English proficient in elementary school</td>
<td>Attending a community college; vague plans to transfer to a 4-year university at a later date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These interviews were completed during fall of 2022 and all but one—Luis’s interview—were done using Zoom. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed.

Although the goal was to have semistructured interviews using the interview protocol in Appendix C as a guide, the students appeared nervous and timid, so they rarely expanded upon their responses without some encouragement. Therefore, these interviews became much more structured than originally intended and there was significant agreement in responses among each of the students.

Counselor Participants

Five counselors were invited to participate in individual interviews to provide perspectives from staff members representing the secondary school. Two guidance counselors were invited because they were assigned to the graduating class of 2022 when those students began high school in fall of 2018. They assisted students in creating their yearly class schedules and plans for postsecondary education. All three counselors in the College and Career Center were invited because they were responsible for planning the
various informational events for students and their families to learn more about postsecondary educational and work opportunities.

A total of three counselors participated in interviews: both guidance counselors and one counselor from the College and Career Center. Both guidance counselors had over 6 years of experience in school guidance and counseling at the time of this study. They worked closely with the graduates of 2022 all 4 years, splitting the class in half alphabetically: Mr. García had students with last names A through L and Ms. Martinez had students with last names M through Z. The counselor from the College and Career Center, Ms. Lincoln, was originally hired as a guidance counselor and worked in that role for 8 years before moving to the College and Career Center. She was assigned to the college side of the Center and, therefore, worked closely with students interested in attending college, serving in this role for 5 years. After the class of 2022 graduated, she shifted the career side of the Center and continued to work in this role. Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and member checked.

**Teacher Participants**

All teachers of the 12th grade courses were invited to participate in individual interviews (n = 20). Three teachers volunteered. Just as with the students and counselors who participated, each teacher was provided a letter of identification to maintain anonymity. Mr. Sterling had taught mathematics for 15 years and coached wrestling at the high school for 10 years. Ms. Sampson had taught science for over 30 years and Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) classes for 12 years. Finally, Mr. Roth had taught English for 8 years and AVID classes for 3 years. These interviews were 28–42 minutes in length and were semistructured in nature as conversations flowed. Each interview was audio recorded, transcribed, and member checked.
**Administrator Participant**

The assistant principal responsible for overseeing the counseling department and College and Career Center and the head principal responsible for the entire school were both invited to individual interviews. The head principal was able to participate and his interview was 38 minutes, audio transcribed, and member checked. He was identified as Mr. Johnson to maintain confidentiality.

Mr. Johnson had over 15 years of administrative experience, in roles ranging from department chair to grant writing to principal, across the central coast. Most recently, he became one of the assistant principals at this particular high school and worked for over 5 years in this role, predominantly managing curriculum and learning. He became the head principal during the 2019–2020 school year and continued to serve in this role at this time.

**Themes in Stakeholder Groups**

Each of the interviews was analyzed through Yosso’s (2005) CCW lenses, focusing on each of the types of the cultural capital shown in Figure 22. Some forms of capital created supports for the aspiring first-generation college students while others created barriers. Each of the interviews were analyzed first for inductive codes, then deductively for the types of capital. It must be understood that from the data analyzed, not every stakeholder group shared data on every type of capital, but this study focused on sharing those who did speak in each type of capital. Additionally, each type of capital was not binary, but rather a spectrum of steadily accumulating the capital into wealth. In this section, I discuss the themes of each type of capital that arose as a result of this analysis in stakeholder groups, maintaining that each type of capital is separate but connected, as shown in Figure 22.
Aspirational Capital

As discussed earlier in this chapter, aspirational capital refers to the hope and motivation to pursue goals in the face of adversity (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). In this study, this form of capital was operationalized to focus on the hope and perseverance to set and pursue postsecondary educational goals as first-generation college students. It was shared across stakeholder groups that students struggled to build aspirational capital due to the difficulties they faced.
Students' Narratives Reflect Teachers’ Assistance in Developing Aspirational Capital

Students explained teachers and counselors served as mentors to them, providing them with this aspirational capital through formal events and informal conversations, as seen in Table 11. They explained teachers went beyond their contractual duties of classes to support students in their pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals. They built up students’ confidence and reassured students that they were capable of succeeding in college. They offered assistance in learning how to seek help, what college culture could be like, and what opportunities may be available to students through college. Students expressed gratitude for their teachers’ help and guidance as teachers pushed students to be more confident in themselves.

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luis</td>
<td>“Last year, Mr. [Teacher D], he has been really helpful. Mr. [Teacher E] for my junior year when I was on Zoom and to now, he was also good and really helped.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>“It’s a combination of like, all my teachers, because I feel like I asked them the most about like, college expectations like and I will just like interrogating you as well! And just asking teachers to really understand what I’m getting into basically.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edgar</td>
<td>“All these great teachers, you know, that they kind of persuaded me, especially my senior year, I need to do something with my life.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yosef</td>
<td>“AP physics with Mr. [Teacher F] was the most challenging class I’ve ever taken. But it helped me in my mentality and whatnot and like, even though a lot of people always repeat that you shouldn’t be afraid to ask for help. I still always felt that way. And in Mr. [Teacher F]'s class I never really felt that way. And it helped me, just like not being scared of asking for help.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adriana</td>
<td>“I’m grateful for all of my teachers, straight through junior high and high school. But I feel like it was really my senior year teachers that really pushed me . . . I was like, ‘Maybe I shouldn’t go to college’ because I wasn’t really confident in my major. And it was my senior teachers that really helped me. They really helped me put me back on my feet and be like, ‘you can do it.’”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Counselors Experienced Building up Aspirational Capital in Students**

Although helping these students work through the rather complex application process, the counselors also found they built up aspirational capital in students. Ms. Lincoln bonded with a student whom she encouraged to attend her alma mater of University of California, Los Angeles. She said:

I was like just try! And he was a brilliant kid, he had a 4.0 plus GPA, but it was just that doubt that he had in himself and so I was joking with him one day and I said “you’re going to go to my alma mater and graduate one day and I’ll go to your graduation party and I’ll hook you up with swag!”

It was clear through these interviews that the counselors appreciated these personal connections with the students and the trust of the families. They listened to students’ stories and experiences and helped to build up their confidence as students put additional pressure on themselves. Ms. Lincoln explained:

It’s like “I have to set a good example, I have to succeed, I have to be there for my younger siblings, I have to be there for my family–my cousins will be looking to me” I think a lot of it is false pressure that they’re putting on themselves.

And it’s really just reminding them “we’re proud of you.” And I love to reiterate to them that their families are proud of them, no matter what. And just look at what you’re accomplishing and what you’re going to set for generations to come.

As a result of these close relationships, the counselors were able to share quite a bit about the barriers these students face. The interviews with counselors flowed organically as they shared stories and lamented about the struggles these students are confronted with.
Administration Discussed Students’ Need for Further Development of Aspirational Capital

Mr. Johnson made it apparent during his interview that aspirational capital appeared to be difficult for students to obtain. He often described students as being hesitant to move away and attend 4-year universities immediately after high school, possibly due to fear of the “unknown.” He explained, “Kids usually aren’t afraid of work. It’s not the extra work. It’s not what scares them. I think it’s like all of us, I guess. It’s the sense of the unknown, like, “What am I walking into?” To build the hope and motivation to attend 4-year universities immediately after high school—the aspirational capital—and to develop the skills needed to persevere in adapting to college culture—the resistant capital—that fear of the “unknown” must be minimized, Mr. Johnson talked about ways to do so, including more visits to college campuses and openly discussing college culture. But he also explained this fear can be minimized by building students’ self-esteem up and reassuring them that they are capable of success. He stated, “so, I think, just try to let them know that they’ve come through 9, 10, 11, 12 here in California public schools and that, if we’ve done our job—and we have—then they’re ready for the next step.” From the perspectives of all of the stakeholders, students are encouraged to work toward their goals and continue building aspirational capital while staff and faculty assist in this process through mentorship.

Familial Capital

As described earlier, familial capital refers to the pride and traditions associated with close family relationships (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). In this study, this form of capital was operationalized to specifically refer to the influence students’ families have on their postsecondary goals and their families’ involvement in their education. From each stakeholder group’s perspective,
families were a facilitative support for students: families encouraged students to apply to 4-year universities and supported their postsecondary educational goals.

**Students Described Families’ Strong Support**

Each of the students shared that for as long as they could remember, there was an expectation from their families that they would go to college. Adriana was very direct as she explained:

> It’s just since I was – we were, me and my siblings, were all young. It was just an expectation to go to college. Our mother was like, you’re going to college and if you’re not going to college, you’re going to work. You’re not going to get a free pass. So, no, there’s no like, build up. It was just always there. I’m going to college.

This distinct expectation from families fell into the theme of Familial Capital: pride and cultural traditions associated with close family ties and relationships (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005); and specifically operationalized in this study as the influence students’ families have on their postsecondary goals and their families’ involvement in their education. This influence appeared as pride, expectations, and influences on students’ decisions to pursue postsecondary education. As such, students shared these familial expectations to attend college were part of their family’s way of ensuring the next generation would be more “financially secure” and perform “less back-breaking labor.” Lorena said:

> [My family] has always pushed that on to me, and because they told me stories about their backgrounds and how they wish that they could have an opportunity to go to school like I do. And obviously I can see the way that they’ve struggled, and how hard they work all the time. So, they’re always trying to tell me like, we don’t want you to break your back in the future, like, have back issues like really early on, so they were always like, we don’t care. You could go to college, like
even, you know, community college, but as long as you get a job where you’re not
going to be doing a lot of heavy lifting and things like that.

Additionally, students recognized the financial insecurity and volatility their families have endured and sought ways to avoid that stress again. Yosef said:

I just want to help my family – I don’t want them to be where we were when I was in elementary school, like first, second, and third, like our financial situation was not great. I was like, “I don’t want my family to ever experience that again, or people in future generations for my family to ever experience that again.” So, that’s kind of what led me to wanting to apply to school, to college.

These expectations and a sense of responsibility to help their families led students to set and pursue postsecondary educational goals. The close relationships they have with their families in familial capital very clearly served as a point of inspiration and motivation to pursue postsecondary education.

Counselors Shared Narratives of Families’ Influence and Support

Each of the three counselors spent the majority of each of their individual interviews talking about students’ families. The counselors discussed students having a feeling of responsibility surrounding fluently understanding their home language as many of them serve as language brokers for their families. Mr. García and Ms. Martinez explained although the school had translators on campus, many times the parents and families would still turn to the students to translate material and information for them.

Ms. Lincoln described this weight, stating:

I think that’s the big issue. Like, are they thinking in Spanish? Or are they thinking in English? How are they able to translate it to their families? How are they able to deal with those stressors? You know, it’s almost like living in two worlds, two personalities trying to come together and succeed.

The counselors also understood some families may have different priorities for
students outside of education, but they encouraged families to support students in their pursuit of postsecondary education. Ms. Lincoln explained this context when she said, “It’s a cultural thing: you do what your parents tell you to do . . . And I’m not going to encourage kids to go against what their parents say.” But as Mr. García explained, “It’s interesting because it seems like the families want them to go to college. I would say the majority of families want their kid to go to college.” Ms. Lincoln very succinctly explained this disconnect when she said, “A lot of our students are first generation, so their parents are coming in [to the College and Career Center] and they’re field workers. So, they don’t know what it takes.”

Mr. García shared that he and the other counselors used the informational events to explain to parents that attending a 4-year university right after high school increased students’ likelihood of earning a bachelor’s degree: 80% of students who attend a University of California immediately after high school will finish that degree while only 20% of students at the local community college will transfer to a 4-year university and less than half of those students will actually earn a bachelor's degree. He said, “it’s about trying to get them to understand, you want to go with the best percentages possible and increase your odds of being successful.” Although there may be some hesitancy to start, Ms. Lincoln explained:

To get them to buy into the dream and buy into the whole college experience . . .

That’s quite profound. That’s awesome. Because when they do finally buy in, it’s like they are supporting these kids 5000%. Like “oh, we’re going to college now!”

The counselors explained there are families that are completely supportive of their students attending a 4-year university immediately after high school. Ms. Lincoln explained, “It’s funny because once they trust you, they trust you. Like you’ll see the younger siblings coming in and ‘go see Ms. Lincoln!’”
Teachers Discussed Family Support and Varying Degrees of Engagement

With language and academic support in place, all three teachers believed these students could successfully attend 4-year universities immediately after college. As Ms. Sampson stated, “Our students are smart and can get into universities” and with familial support, they can do very well there. The teachers shared snippets of this familial support and encouragement throughout their interviews. Mr. Sterling said, “Parents don’t want their kids working in the fields, but they’re making them because they want them to experience it. So, they don’t have to do it for the rest of their life.” Mr. Roth reiterated this sentiment when he said, “I can say that the parents I’ve talked to, I know that that’s an expectation [to attend college] . . . They’re supportive families. They’re families that know their kids are involved with a lot of different activities.” Because students are typically the first in their families to attend college, their families can only provide limited guidance on how to apply and enroll.

Each of the teachers discussed building a team with families to best support students as they worked toward these postsecondary educational goals. Ms. Sampson described the importance of this team when she said:

We need to get our parents more involved from day one. There needs to be some sort of systemic and systematic way to pull parents in and for them to see all the possibilities for their children’s future that can start at the high school and needs to be supported and backed up.

But Mr. Sterling and Mr. Roth discussed the struggles with engaging parents and families. As Mr. Sterling said, “I feel like parents don’t participate, overall.” Mr. Roth was more descriptive when he explained, “I have limited contact with most of the families. I talked to them mostly on Back to School Night. That’s when I meet most of them and then I don’t really talk to them again.” With such limited contact with families, a clear divide between home and school develops for the students and they must find the
information about applications and admissions processes on their own. This conflict and its implications are discussed further in the next chapters.

**Administration Explained Familial Expectations Can Be a Source of Encouragement and Pressure**

Additionally, Mr. Johnson discussed the familial capital these students hold: the pride students’ families have in their accomplishments, the expectations families have for their students’ success, and the close ties students have with their families throughout their childhood into adulthood. He shared:

> A lot of kids have come back and said that they really felt the pressure of being successful. Which I mean, a certain amount of pressure, I guess is healthy. But there’s definitely a happy medium there. You know, like, you know, wanting to be completely stressed out and feeling the weight of all of that on their shoulders. . . . But I think they do feel like they’re not [in college] for them. They’re [in college] for the whole family and that’s added pressure.

He went on to explain this pressure to meet expectations and make their families proud can be very heavy for students, in large part because “they realize what sacrifice that their parents have put in to get them to that place.” As a result, students’ success is also their parents’ and families’ success, making it that much more crucial to work through the hurdles into higher education.

**Linguistic Capital**

This study focused on students who speak a LOTE at home because these students often face significantly more barriers than native English-speaking students. Rather than using bilingual or multilingual to describe these students’ skills, “speak a language other than English” was used because in the pilot study, some students explained they did not feel fluent in their home language or in English. Although their families were fluent in their home language, students were only conversationally fluent
and many felt they were still ELLs, working toward English fluency. They described being in flux with their language skills as they struggled to build linguistic capital. In this study, linguistic capital was operationalized to specifically refer to students’ skills and abilities students build in English as nonnative speakers. Each of the stakeholder groups addressed the linguistic barriers students’ face and some described the effects of the reclassification process, from ELL to English fluency proficient.

**Students Described Developing Linguistic Capital Through Their English Skills as Assuring and Beneficial**

The semistructured interview protocol for students included specific questions about English proficiency labels and the reclassification process. But the conversation was very structured as students provided very short responses and did not elaborate without further probing. Luis was identified in the school system as a “native” English speaker, but shared his family spoke Spanish at home. Lorena, Yosef, and Adriana remembered very little of the reclassification process and Lorena, in particular, was unaware the “reclassified fluent English proficient” (RFEP) label had followed her through high school. Edgar was RFEP most recently and shared the process was not very intimidating and once he was placed in general English classes, he did not feel like there was much of a difference. He said:

I didn’t think it was such a big difference. I just felt like I still needed to work a little bit more on my English. And I mean, that’s for everybody. You know, nobody’s like, perfect with their English. Like, there’s always something to improve on.

Yosef, on the other hand, found confidence as a result of the reclassification process, as he said:

I just felt more confident afterwards. Because I felt like oh, I’m proficient in this now. I just found more confidence. I began to read harder books and whatnot.
And then I think that kind of led me to become like a better student in the future. So, that all added to my self-esteem but I wouldn’t say it was crazy, I guess.

Additionally, all five students felt their English classes were most helpful in preparing them for college. Luis, Lorena, Yosef, and Adriana all took the expository reading and writing course developed by the California State University system to assist students in preparing for collegiate-level English courses. Luis said the course was most helpful with “essays and how to understand them better.” Lorena said the course “did a pretty good job at preparing me because I know that high school is different than college because the expectations in college are way higher than they are.” Yosef shared, “It was just so much work. And it gets you used to the mentality that you need to have once you’re a college student. You can’t really slack off, right?” Finally, Adriana explained, “I feel like English classes were the most helpful for me because they actually spoke more about college—in terms of what to expect and sometimes we even did college level assignments.” These English classes represented the development of linguistic capital, operationalized in this study to refer to the skills and abilities students build in English as nonnative speakers or bilingual speakers. All five students named English classes as the most helpful in preparing them for college, indicating they found linguistic capital to be crucially important.

Counselors Recognized the Inaccessibility of Linguistic Capital due to Language Barriers and Struggles

The counselors each talked about aspiring first-generation college students feeling underprepared, especially in regard to their academic English abilities. Because the majority of students at this particular high school spoke a LOTE at home, they did not have unrestricted access to the linguistic capital necessary to build their English skills. Their families used another language fluently and often spoke very little English,
causing the students to live in both linguistic worlds and work toward developing both, or more, languages. Ms. Martinez summarized this struggle, stating:

The students are super intelligent and they can speak to you but when it comes to the, like, academic portion of it, when it comes to their academic writing and like the academic vernacular, it’s just not there because it wasn’t built in the home. They’re not going home to parents that are like, Alright, let’s get your vocabulary today. You know, like the last thing that’s on their mind. So, I think that has been one of their biggest struggles is just writing. And then having to catch up to that level of writing once they’re actually at the college level.

But the counselors also discussed students working really hard toward English proficiency. Ms. Martinez shared that some students “see English as the prominent language” and they work really hard to achieve fluency. Ms. Lincoln explained the English support and development classes available at this high school while Mr. García explained that when students are reclassified “the good news for them is one less class they have to take. And then also you know, it’s a major achievement.” Obtaining this linguistic capital is incredibly challenging, but these counselors explained they firmly believed these students were capable of achieving English fluency.

*All Teachers Have Worked With English Language Learning Students and Seen the Development of Linguistic Capital*

With 88% of students receiving or having previously received English support services, Ms. Sampson was very succinct when she said, “Every teacher teaches ELD [or English language development] students.” Because teachers are with students for 50 minutes every day, 5 days each week, they are in the unique position to be able to build rapport and are able to provide services as needed, above and beyond their contractual duties. Mr. Sterling shared although he was a math teacher, he also provided assistance in English language skills because that was what students needed to learn the curricular
content. Teachers outside of the English department are not formally trained in teaching ELLs; any training these teachers have was sought out on their own time. Ms. Sampson explained the shift in tools teachers have used to connect with these students, stating:

We relied heavily on translation services, through Google, sometimes through aides and sometimes even through other students. And that was effective but it wasn’t effective, I don’t think, in terms of learning the content. It was effective in getting through the class. So, now we have got programs in which we’ve got aides going out with designated students and the courses and the teachers are designed around helping those students learn their English better within the content area.

Mr. Sterling and Ms. Sampson discussed a relatively new program specifically for students who were new to the country and to the English language. They explained these students were put into cohorts and they took classes together along with a bilingual instructional aide who provided translation services. Additionally, bilingual teachers were often asked to teach the courses for this cohort to provide content instruction in students’ home languages as well. Neither Mr. Sterling nor Ms. Sampson were bilingual teachers; however, and thus they were unable to provide firsthand experience of these classes.

The Administration Explained Students Have Overcome Incredible Language Barriers in the Development of Linguistic Capital

Mr. Johnson addressed the language differences: the vast majority of students at this particular high school spoke a LOTE at home. As such, these students did not have access to the nuances of the English language at their fingertips. He explained:

There’s little things like idioms and just catchphrases and some vocabulary that still throw students. Or they can speak fluently and comfortably in a nonacademic lexicon, but when they go to a 4-year school, it is a more academic, very academic environment.
Mr. Johnson recognized the barriers students were confronted with in their development of linguistic capital and admired them working toward English fluency in the face of adversity. He had such respect for these students to even attempt to learn English and become fluent in an entire language while also learning curricular content, in addition to any responsibilities they may have outside of school. He referred to these students and their language capabilities as “awesome and impressive” and explained that he described these students as “success stories.”

Navigational Capital

In this research study, navigational capital was operationalized to encompass the skills necessary to know how to prepare for college, how to apply to college, and later, how to transition to college. Each of stakeholder groups shared narratives that indicated navigational capital was inaccessible to first-generation college students who did not have the resources to skillfully work their way through the maze of college and financial aid applications. Each of the following excerpts showed staff and faculty tried to share this capital with students and their families, but it simply was not enough for many students to make the transition directly to a 4-year university immediately after high school.

Students’ Struggle With College Preparations Were Magnified due to the Inaccessibility of Navigational Capital

When it came time to begin preparing for college, Lorena really encompassed a feeling that each student shared when she said, “I feel like [my parents] automatically thought like, oh, after high school, you’re just going to go to college. They don’t really know that you have to apply, that they have to select you.” As a result, the students explained that they waited to really concentrate on college preparations. Edgar was most succinct when he said, “to be honest, it was pretty much last minute.” Each of the students explained they began researching colleges and working to secure high grade
point averages at some point during their junior year, knowing college applications would go out at the start of their senior year. These interviews took place after senior year and after graduation; looking back, these students shared regret that they had not started preparing for college earlier in high school. Luis said:

I want to say sophomore year but I feel like that’s too early. But like for me, my opinion, that I feel like that’s the right time because okay, you’re done with the freshmen year of getting into high school. Sophomore year is where “Okay, I gotta start working even harder now,” you know. And then junior year is when you’re preparing to be a senior and the senior year is “Okay, I should know what to do by now.”

Lorena felt even a year earlier would have ultimately been beneficial as she explained:

Like right when high school starts because like that’s the period where what matters the most. So, I think that could have helped them, even myself, because I really didn’t know about how it worked up until, like, maybe junior year when I really got the concept of like, Oh, they’re looking for students who can present, like, leadership skills or things like that.

Yosef explained his experience in waiting until junior year to start researching and preparing for college, stating:

It’s tough because when you’re a freshman, you’re not really thinking about those things. And you’re just trying to get adjusted to high school and just getting used to the environment. And as a sophomore, you’re kind of along the same pathway and it doesn’t start until like junior year, where you start to think like, “Oh, what do I want to do,” and this and that.

When students did begin preparing their college applications, they turned to the counselors for assistance and guidance. Luis explained he and his family met regularly with both Mr. García and Ms. Martinez for help on how to apply for college and financial
aid, stating:

Mr. García and Ms. Martinez have been doing this for years, of course, with past students. From my experience, I feel like they did good. They told us, you know, they helped us, they told us what needs to be done and what doesn’t need to be done, what you should do, that sort of thing.

Yosef spoke at length about Ms. Lincoln’s influence and support during his college application process, describing her mentorship as most helpful during this time period by stating:

Ms. Lincoln, 1000%. She helped me so much during those couple of months. She was going over my essays and sitting down and having conversations with me and exchanging emails. And taking a large part of her time to help me and other friends when I was applying to college. It was really helpful. I don’t think I would be here without her.

Finally, although all five students went through the college application process and all five were accepted to at least one 4-year university, only one student enrolled in the fall of 2022. Ultimately, three of the students explicitly shared the final decision was dependent on financing their education. Luis explained the limited financial aid, stating:

Once I saw how much money they were gonna give me, it was a no . . . We did the financial aid for all the schools. And we got the financial aid back from one of the schools, but it just wasn’t enough.

Lorena weighed her choices between moving away and overall cost before deciding attending a community college first was the best choice for her. She said:

So, I didn’t know if I wanted to spend a lot of money on all four years. Because it is a lot of money. But at the same time, I was considering, you know, some freedom away from my parents, and then just kind of growing up on my own. But then also the money aspect is, like, huge and that’s something that I really had to
consider. So, I ended up just choosing [community college] for that reason.

Yosef was accepted to a state university that was close enough to commute to and was able to factor this distance into his decision. He said:

It was financial aid, it was the package I got. I was like, “I live so close to CSU [City] and I can get a housing exemption and reduce my costs.” And thanks to that my first 2 years are covered. And even if I get less financial aid as time goes on, I will still be able to pay it off, so we’ll be okay.

This pattern of finances dictating the decision of whether or not to pursue postsecondary education was persistent and was discussed further in interviews with staff and faculty. It appears more than simply not having the financial means to attend a 4-year university immediately after high school, students and their families struggled with the financial aid applications. Adriana surmised:

I don’t know if this is a common answer but with the people I’ve talked to, we wish they [teachers and counselors] would teach us more about how to handle things financially. Because it’s a big part of college like you’re in charge of your finances now there’s a lot of things like scholarships, bills you have to pay and stuff like that. And it’s really like, piling up and sometimes I get confused still.

In conclusion, navigational capital was not limited to only college applications and learning how to transition into higher education, but finances also played a very large role. As first-generation college students, these students do not have someone in their home who they can mentor them through these processes and, therefore, they rely on staff and faculty at the high school to provide this information and guidance.

**Counselors Shared Navigational Capital With Students**

As discussed by the students in the previous section, the counselors at this high school provided a great deal of guidance through the college application and admissions processes. Mr. García went into detail with an example of how they would help students
to develop the navigational capital specifically associated with preparing for postsecondary education. He said:

An example I’ll use is one from last year. There was a student who knew what they wanted to study – or major in – but they didn’t know what college they wanted to go to. And we have other students that happened to them as well. But what we did, we came up with a college worksheet. So they needed to come up with like 10 colleges, so they would come up with some like dream colleges that maybe there’s a very slim to none chance that they’ll get in. Then there’s some like ideal colleges where they do meet the requirements and they would probably have a good chance to get in and then they have the safety colleges, which are like if you don’t get into your ideal ones, at least you have these.

So, we would in this case, you know, I talked to this student and I was like alright, let’s look at schools that are pretty good for what you want to major in. So, we looked those up and then actually I gave her the websites as well. And I had her do those and I had her basically do the research, almost kind of on her own. And so she did it and I think we met like a week later and she had the whole thing filled out and so we talked about it and she ended up applying to the schools. She went from not knowing which school to go to, to now she had a pretty good idea and she felt comfortable with that.

The counselors also shared how students requested assistance and guidance with the college applications themselves. Ms. Martinez explained students often struggled with finding what they thought was unique and powerful about their experiences while writing their personal statements for the applications. She said:

It’s awesome in the sense that you really get to hear their stories, and it is wild that they think their situation is normal. Like, it’s crazy how they’re like, oh, yeah, I had to take care of this, I was cooking at home, I was doing all this. And I’m like,
You need to write that down. And they're like, Why, everybody does it. And I was 
like, You need to understand that this is you right here. And even though you and 
your friends do this, like you’re applying with this many people and these other 
people possibly never have to do any of that. Like, they get home, they do their 
homework and their food is chillin’ for them. Like that’s not what they have to go 
through.

Ms. Martinez went on to say, “So, it’s amazing. And it’s very humbling to hear their 
stories, what they have to go through.”

Additionally, each of the counselors discussed the financial burden these families 
face when their students work toward attending a 4-year university. Mr. Garcia and Ms. 
Martinez explained during informational events for families, they worked very hard to 
explain that if families would like their children to attend universities immediately after 
high school, they needed to start saving for the costs of higher education in ninth grade – 
or even earlier: Ms. Martinez, in particular, explained she wanted to start working with 
the local elementary schools to start building rapport with their families and start 
encouraging families to save. Additionally, Mr. García explained these informational 
events were “specifically for financial aid because a lot of our students – especially like 
first gen students . . . they qualify for so much financial aid.” Both of these counselors 
have seen students go through the rigorous process of applying to colleges and for 
financial aid, but not having enough funds to actually attend. Ms. Lincoln described how 
upsetting this can be, stating:

I hate that it comes down to money, but it does come down to money because 
these kids are smart enough. They have the grades, they have the ability, they 
have the activities. But it’s the dollars. It’s the dollars. And it’s not that we have 
money set aside that we can just give to everybody.
The counselors did not downplay the high cost of postsecondary education, but they viewed this cost as an investment in the students’ futures and the futures of their families. Mr. García shared that he tried to explain the following to this students:

As a family, it will be better for you because if they end up getting a better paying job, then they can help you more financially, if they decide to do that later on, which a lot of our students want to do. I mean, that’s why a lot of them will want to work even in high school. They want to work to help the family so a lot of them want to get a good paying job so that they can help their parents.

But each of the counselors shared the families did not always view the costs associated with education as an investment. Additionally, Ms. Lincoln explained many families in the area did not use any kind of credit or loan systems: they only used cash. Therefore, there was a skepticism surrounding educational loans that stopped families and their students from using loans, thereby preventing students from financing their education and going straight to a 4-year university. With this in mind, the counselors tried to work with parents as early as possible and encourage them to save for their children’s education. Ms. Martinez used herself as an example of this when she shared both in the interview and with students and families during an informational event. She said, “I told my dad, ‘You need to start taking out money.’ And he was like, ‘I don’t have money.’ And I was like, ‘You have money to buy beer, you have money for me.’” She explained sharing this memory often shocked both students and families, but she used it to explain that saving for college often required hard conversations and sacrifices. Ms. Martinez explained she was aware of the financial struggles many of these families may faced because she was in a similar position as a student, but her own education was worth the sacrifice and investment.
Teachers Attempted to Also to Share Navigational Capital With Students

Although students shared they often turned to the counselors for guidance and mentorship in regard to college applications, the teachers explained they tried to help as well. Mr. Sterling explained how he tried to encourage students to seek this assistance, stating:

I always tell them, you know, every teacher on the campus went to college. You know, a lot of our students only depend on the counselors. You know, I gotta go see my counselor, I gotta go see my counselor. And it’s like every teacher here, just open a door to a teacher’s classroom, any random person, they got a college degree, they applied to college, they applied to scholarships. They did the exact same thing that you did, that you’re trying to do.

Many teachers on campus have participated in “College Thursdays,” where every Thursday, teachers were encouraged to wear attire from their alma mater or another college in the hopes of encouraging students to ask about those colleges. Yet, students appeared to struggle with following through and asking their teachers questions about their college experiences. Mr. Roth offered possible reasons for this when he said, “Our students are fairly passive. It’s very difficult for them to approach their teachers.” As a result, few teachers share navigational capital with students at students’ request.

The Bureaucratic Process Requires a Significant Amount of Navigational Capital

Mr. Johnson also discussed the skills needed to navigate into and through higher education. He admitted students did not often turn to the principal with questions about college or financial aid applications, but he was proud to review what teachers and counselors were doing to help students. He explained the counselors offered workshops and informational events to help guide students through the applications and teachers often offered advice and suggestions regarding college culture. He shared his personal
experiences of helping his own son apply for college and financial aid, stating, “The process is not good. I knew it wasn’t but it wasn’t until I was the one at the kitchen table at midnight with my son’s application that I really understood.” But he also recognized the struggle in losing this mentorship after graduating from high school and shared:

In fact, our district is talking about formalizing that and having a designated person that is a lifeline to all our students that have left here and are at their next level education – the 2-year or 4-year college – so that there’s someone to call and go “hey!” Because when you’re at Sacramento State or wherever and you don’t know anybody like that, you can call back and go “Hey, Ms. Lincoln” and just to have somebody that would be huge.

Providing mentorship and passing on navigational capital both through and after high school is one way in which this particular high school was attempting to provide support to these students and helping them to overcome the barriers they faced while pursuing postsecondary education.

**Resistant Capital**

As discussed earlier, resistant capital includes the skills developed specifically in the face of systemic oppression and inequality (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). In this study, this form of capital was operationalized to refer specifically to the ability to persevere and push forward in spite of societal barriers in reference to the challenges in assimilating or adapting to college culture. Both the counselors and teachers in this study discussed behavior they have seen in students indicating a need to develop resistant capital further.

**Counselors Identified the Need to Build up Resistant Capital**

Each of the counselors shared stories and details about students struggling to develop resistant capital as they coped with the “culture shock,” as Ms. Martinez described it. She shared the following story:
[A student] got accepted into the computer science program at UCSB [University of California, Santa Barbara]. And UCSB has the smallest College of Engineering. She had a 1% chance to get in. Once the numbers came back to us. They had this many applicants. They had this many spots. Once we did the math, we were like you had a 1% chance and you got in . . .

But she didn’t make it because she was in engineering, which is male dominated. She was the only girl there. She was the first in her family. She didn’t have that support. And like I had her email and I hooked her up with who was my EAOP [Early Academic Outreach Program] advisor at UCSB at the time. I was like get connected with him, like he kept me in, he was able to connect me. And she came back.

With these stories and experiences in mind, the counselors worked to assist students in preparing for the challenges associated with adapting to college culture. Ms. Lincoln explained that students still had access to the resources at their high school for up to a year after graduation, Mr. García spoke about workshops that the counseling department put on for students to teach them self-advocacy skills, and Ms. Martinez discussed teaching students how to build their own support systems in college by joining outreach programs and first-generation students’ clubs. She explained that she tells students, “you just need to remind yourself like you belong here, that you got there for a reason. Stay there.” Those students who do succeed and enroll in a 4-year university immediately after high school provide inspiration and hope, more aspirational capital, for the counselors to refer to when talking to the next graduating class. Ms. Martinez stated:

[A student] was a senior my first year and she was determined to go to Harvard and she did it. She was first generation and she was so determined to go study abroad and that’s what she did! She just finished and it’s like, it’s just so amazing to me because now I’ve been around long enough that I’ve seen the cycle, from
freshmen in high school to graduating from college. And it’s just WOW. It’s like, you did it!

These counselors were very clearly personally invested in these students and genuinely wanted them to succeed, for themselves, for their families, for their school. They shared narratives and experiences that demonstrated their dedication to helping these students develop the capital they would need to succeed at 4-year universities while also building a close team with their families. In doing so, they created a support system for students to fall back on and gain strength from. As Ms. Lincoln shared, “I love to reiterate to them that their families are proud of them, no matter what. And just look at what you’re accomplishing and what you’re going to set for generations to come.”

**Teachers Discussed Networks as a Pathway to Build Resistant Capital**

Through personal connections with students, the teachers recognized students really struggled with maintaining the resistant capital needed to succeed in postsecondary education. They took the approach that a network and sense of belonging was one way to build up resistant capital and help students maintain the perseverance needed to keep moving forward in pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals. Ms. Sampson explained students struggled to build these networks themselves and with the lack of a network, “[they] don’t feel like [they]’re part of things, [they]’re going to come running home.” Mr. Roth hypothesized students were hesitant to build networks and ask for help because “[they] don’t want to stand out. If [they] do, it’s like what’s wrong with [them]. [They] become socially, not untouchable, but like looked at.” Therefore, a significant part of building this resistant capital with students results in teachers encouraging them to pursue their goals and persevere through difficult times.

**Social Capital**

Social capital refers to the networks and support systems developed through friends, peers, and communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal,
2001; Yosso, 2005) and it was operationalized in this study to refer to networks developed between school members, families, students, and community members. Staff and faculty discussed the challenges in building these networks with students and their families, but recognize that this form of capital can be very helpful to students as they work toward their goals of postsecondary education.

**Counselors Discussed Difficulties in Building Social Capital With Families**

The counselors held informational events for families to learn about high school graduation requirements, college applications, admissions processes, and financial aid opportunities and “success nights” to celebrate students’ college acceptances and scholarship awards. Ms. Martinez explained they “try to loop families in and make sure they are included in all of that.” However, Ms. Martinez shared, “We have about 700 students [in the graduating class] and we’ve only had about 200 parents show up.” The counselors struggled to understand the limited participation and Mr. García said, “We do our workshops and in Spanish as well, you know, [but the families] might not be getting all their answers, their questions answered or anything like that.” This disconnect was difficult to overcome and the counselors were unsure of how to build up social capital with families further.

**Teachers Work to Build Social Capital in Students and Their Families**

Each of the teachers shared how they have worked to build connections with students and their families. They each approached this situation in a unique manner: Mr. Sterling was a coach and referenced his connections with his players and their families; Ms. Sampson was a veteran teacher who has seen a variety of program come and go and instead discussed the personal connections made in the classroom, even with the responsibilities of learning standards and curricular content; and Mr. Roth was currently an AVID teacher and focused on these particular students and helping these students to connect in their cohorts. In each case, however, the teachers stressed the importance of
connections with students, building rapport, and encouraging students to ask questions, as seen in Table 12. Because teachers are with students for 50 minutes each day, 5 days each week, they can build relationships with students and assist students in the development of their own social capital. However, doing so does go above and beyond their contractual duties and demonstrates the dedication teachers develop to their students.

Table 12

Teachers’ Accounts of Building Connections With Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Quotation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Sterling</td>
<td>“Call the parents, get a translator. That’s what I do in wrestling. You know, I make sure all of my coaches give kids a ride home so they know where kids live and stuff like that. So, that’s something that goes the extra mile. Like one of the best coaches that ever coached college football... The first thing he did was he went to every kid’s house. They went to every kid’s house that was on the team. And, you know, they went and talked to the parents... I go and I don’t care. I go and I hang out, I’ll eat, get to know the parents, all that.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Sampson</td>
<td>“The teachers’ main focus – because of the structures that are in the high school – are teaching standards. And I really think in the future, some of the standards need to be the students’ well-being and their mindset for the future... And although the counselors are really hard working, they can’t be with those kids everyday like the content teacher can.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Roth</td>
<td>“[AVID] is assistance throughout all four years. And I think it helps build a community, build a sense of the group, a cohort. It’s something that’s constant. There’s a lot of change in high school, but if you have one class that follows you all the way through with one teacher who’s cheering you on the whole way, you may be more likely to... achieve your goals.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administration Described Pathways to Build Social Capital

Lastly, Mr. Johnson focused on the support team and network that staff and faculty in the high school attempted to build with families. He explained the importance of developing this team with parents and how he wanted to help parents and families as their children work through high school. He said:
Because if it’s your first child going into high school, you know the graduation’s coming in four years and college is after that, but it’s kind of a maze. And it’s pretty intimidating, really, as far as all the stuff that the counselors started talking about: graduation requirements and A-G requirements. And parents are often looking around like “I don’t know what he really means” and “what’s the difference in all those things” and “there’s applications and I know it’s expensive, but I don’t know about financial aid,” you know? All those things.

So, if you’re a parent, as all parents are, and you want the best thing for your kid and it’s stressful, because you don’t know if you know the right stuff, “Am I doing the right thing?”

And so what I would like to do is have this over the four years, have a running curriculum, so that they do know financial aid and they do know what the college application is and what good study habits are and what A-G is and what graduation requirements are.

Building this team and network with parents, providing these resources, and helping to guide parents and students through high school ultimately produces social capital—defined in this study as the network between the school, families, and students. This capital can change the postsecondary trajectory for these students and their families, overcoming societal hurdles and helping students also develop aspirational and resistant capital.

Themes Across Stakeholder Groups

Although there were patterns in the groups of participants, certain themes and patterns were also found across groups of participants. As in the previous section, the interviews were analyzed through Yosso’s (2005) CCW lens, focusing on a variety of types of capital that are inter-connected, as seen in Figure 22. However, these types of capital are not entirely separate entities; rather, they often overlap and converge. As a
result, new lenses through which to analyze data are created, further demonstrating the interconnectedness of cultural wealth.

In this section, I review the patterns across the stakeholder groups to answer the research question: In what ways are aspiring first-generation Latinx college students who speak a LOTE at home supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived by students, staff, and faculty? Students, staff, and faculty often shared narratives of similar events from different perspectives, resulting in different codes but similar themes to emerge that fell under multiple forms of capital. Additionally, participants shared ideas on how to increase students’ cultural wealth in regard to their postsecondary educational goals and these ideas were also representative of overlapping forms of capital. This analysis illustrates the interactions between types of capital and their use as overlapping lenses.

**Familial and Linguistic Capital Created a Pathway for Students to Stay Connected With Their Families Through Home Languages.**

Familial capital is described as the pride and cultural traditions associated with close family ties and relationships and linguistic capital includes the skills developed through communication in more than one language, dialect, or style (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). As demonstrated in Figure 23, these two forms of capital can be used as separate lenses, but they also have significant overlap. With this particular population of students and families, bilingualism, and, therefore, linguistic capital, rises due to required ELD and support classes. These language skills directly impact familial capital because they may solidify the close ties between students and their families as students provide translation services and work very closely with their families: they provide a connection between students’ families and the schools, bringing two parts of the student together. But these skills may also detract
from familial capital as students forge their own path forward using English as a stepping stone.

**Figure 23**

*Overlap Between Familial and Linguistic Capital*

---


All of the students interviewed explained their families were most influential in their decision to attend college after high school, as Edgar described this as “a family thing” and Yosef said, “It was just an expectation to go to college.” Teachers agreed with this sentiment and Mr. Roth in particular noted that “with parents I’ve talked to, I know that [college] is an expectation.” Also, the families are very proud of their students for going to college, as Ms. Lincoln said, “I love to reiterate to them that their families are
proud of them, no matter what. And just look at what you’re accomplishing and what
you’re going to set for generations to come.”

Additionally, there was consensus across the board that one of the leading
reasons to attend college was for students to avoid the struggle their families have
endured and later help ease that struggle as well. Lorena shared the effect witnessing her
family’s hardships had on her decision, saying, “I can see the way that they’ve struggled,
and how hard they work all the time. So, they’re always trying to tell me like, we don’t
want you to break your back in the future.” Yosef explained he wanted to help his family
avoid future financial hardships, stating:

I just want to help my family – I don’t want them to be where we were when I was
in elementary school, like our financial situation was not great. I was like, “I don’t
want my [current] family to ever experience that again, or people in future
generations for my family to ever experience that again.”

Ms. Sampson, a teacher participant, explained students focused on their families and
how to help them financially. She said:

Family is the unit and you stay with your family. So, [the message to students], I
think, has to go deeper than this is what you can do. It has to be “you’re going to
do that, you’re going to be able to help your family”

Mr. García said he saw how much students worked to help their families financially and
used this as a platform to explain why it was important for students to continue their
education. He said:

As a family, it will be better for you because if they end up getting a better paying
job, then they can help you more financially, if they decide to do that later on,
which a lot of our students want to do. I mean, that’s why a lot of them will want
to work even in high school. They want to work to help the family.
Finally, Mr. Johnson, the administrator, explained it usually took students the duration of high school to recognize and appreciate the financial hardships their families have endured. He said:

Freshmen necessarily don’t always get the big picture, but by the time they’re seniors and they’re graduating, they’re successful students and they’re applying, and they’re going to a 4-year college, they do see the big picture. And they realize what sacrifice that their parents have put in to get them to that place.

It was clear across each of the participant groups that family was incredibly important and students wanted to help their families financially. However, it was an incredibly difficult decision to leave home. All five students interviewed were accepted to 4-year universities, but only one was enrolled. The counselors shared data indicating over 180 students applied to 4-year universities, but they predicted only around 60 students would actually enroll. Concrete data were difficult to obtain because it was all collected on a volunteer basis.

The staff and faculty participant groups discussed the impact that very close family ties may have on students’ decisions to move away to attend college. They shared the challenges families face in letting go and watching their children move away, stating it is incredibly difficult for families to do this. Ms. Sampson, a teacher, explained:

Having to leave home is humongous because not many in the families do—and the ones that do, come back different and that causes the pain of a change in the mindset and it’s hard to take in from the family. . . . And then the person who has come back feels a little alienated and the people that they’re coming back to feel like they’ve been left behind.

Mr. Johnson shared another perspective on this same concern:

I know that every parent wants what’s best for their kids. That’s not in question whatsoever. But it is more economic and it’s less scary for the parent if the
student’s in [local community college] and living at home. It is a lot less frightening thing to enter into rather than moving to Oregon or Arizona and not see my student until Thanksgiving.

Mr. García, a counselor, summarized these difficulties when he said, “So, it seems like the parents are on board with it until it gets to go time and then some of them have some trouble letting go.”

From the students’ perspective, it was not conveyed as a fear of letting go, but rather students fear of who will be able to help their families while they are living far away in school. Ms. Martinez shared:

They know sometimes their parents need their help. And they don’t feel right leaving them. Because they’ll be like, I know my parents need my help. I know my parents would live a lot easier if I were to stay and then work part time and I can help them out at least a little bit and I’ll go to school.

One of the most critical ways students help their families is through translation services or language brokering. The counselors explained they typically interacted with families more than teachers and administrators on campus and they saw the language barriers firsthand. Although there were translation services and full-time translators currently available, as Ms. Sampson, a teacher participant, shared in a previous section, these were not always available. As a result, the families often continued to turn to the students to help with translating and explaining what was being said. As Ms. Lincoln said, “Your family doesn’t speak English and you and a lot of things get lost in translation.” Ms. Martinez explained further that this responsibility to translate fell to the students, stating:

We have some parents that will speak Spanish, they won’t speak English. We have some parents that just straight up speak Mixteco, nothing else. And the student is the person that’s reading all the incoming mail and all that stuff.
There is a very distinct overlap between familial and linguistic capital present in this community as students have a very strong sense of pride and connection to their families while they are also forced to develop English language skills to better help their families. It creates a very unique schism between home and school and, as Ms. Lincoln stated, “it’s almost like living in two worlds, two personalities trying to come together and succeeding.”

With the development of English language skills, many students are reclassified from ELLs to RFEP. Although there are those students who Mr. Roth, a teacher participant, explained, “get classified as long-term English learners [and] are unbelievably frustrated with school because they feel like they’re stuck in a loop that never ends,” there are also those students who go through the process and do eventually become reclassified. There was agreement across participant groups that this reclassification process often leads to increased confidence in students’ abilities and recognition that this is an accomplishment. As Yosef shared earlier, he “felt more confident” and it “added to [his] self-esteem.” The counselors shared a similar perspective, identifying reclassification as something to be celebrated, as Mr. García stated:

It’s a major achievement. And we tell them like you’re gonna get celebrated if you do it and they usually have a celebration party at the vet’s hall. And, and yeah, so it’s just about, you know, just encouraging them to get reclassified.

Additionally, Mr. Johnson, the administrator agreed:

I think as a general rule, they are kind of undervalued because they’ve already accomplished this huge undertaking. They’ve done K through 12 curriculum and at the same time, they’ve acquired another language. They have become completely bilingual, which is totally awesome and impressive. . . . And
sometimes we just talk about, “oh he’s just reclassified.” Well, yeah, he is, but he’s done this incredible feat. So, they’re success stories.

Although students are developing this linguistic capital, Ms. Martinez, a counselor, noted an increasing number of students will stop using their home language. She said:

Some of these kids just don’t care to have it. It feels like more kids are this way. I don’t know if they’d rather know English because they see English being the prominent language and they don’t see Spanish getting them anywhere. I’m not sure.

By purposefully focusing on English and moving away from their home language, students are effectively creating a division in their families. It appears that in pursuit of the development of linguistic capital, students may, at times, lose some of their familial capital.

Again, familial and linguistic capital have significant areas of overlap. Students reported their families were their sources of inspiration in their pursuit of postsecondary education and they were working to help their families. These claims were supported by staff and faculty who have seen and heard similar stories firsthand. However, students struggle with the language barriers between English and their home language: they are often placed in the role of language brokers and are responsible for learning English, but some struggle to keep a foot in both worlds. Although familial and linguistic capitals each provide a lens through which to analyze these data, combining the two lenses together has created a much more nuanced image of the delicate balance these students uphold.

Building Social Capital Strengthens Students’ Familial Capital and Creates a Venue to Share Navigational Capital

As discussed in the previous section, familial capital is focused on the pride and cultural traditions associated with close family ties and relationships (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital refers to the
knowledge necessary to navigate social institutions and systems, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers and social capital describes the networks and support systems developed through friends, peers, and communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). In this research study, each of these forms of capital was operationalized to focus on how they affected students’ progress toward attending a 4-year university immediately after high school. Each of these types of capital can be used as a lens through which to analyze the support systems in place for students, but they can also be combined to create a more detailed lens that highlights the intersections between family engagement and expectations, skills needed to navigate higher education, and the social support networks available and built. Figure 24 provides a visual representation of these intersections and the resulting overlapping lens through which these interviews were also analyzed. Through this analysis, it became clear to provide adequate navigational capital to students and their families, the school needs to work alongside students and families to build social capital. But to effectively build social capital, it is imperative that the staff and faculty meet families and find new ways to welcome them to campus to begin building rapport and connections.
As discussed in previous sections, students felt very supported by their families in their pursuit of higher education. It was a point of family pride that these students would attend college and the families were relieved that students would not perform back-breaking labor to earn a living. However, as Lorena said, “I feel like my parents never really had a really good understanding of how the college system works and how to apply...
and everything." The teachers agreed with this sentiment, but reported very few parents and families participated in informational events provided by the school. Yosef agreed, stating “I know we have had events like that, where it’s like, ‘oh, students and parents can come to this!’ And not many people go.” The counselors explained further, as Ms. Martínez stated, “We have about 700 students [in the graduating class] and we’ve only had about 200 parents show up.” But staff and faculty recognized the urgency in working with parents and families as each of the previous sections focused on participant groups highlighted the influence of families on students’ postsecondary educational goals. Ms. Sampson was very clear when she said:

We need to get our parents more involved from day one. There needs to be some sort of systemic and systematic way to pull parents in and for them to see all the possibilities for their children’s future that can start at the high school and needs to be supported and backed up.

But teachers have limited contact with families as they primarily communicate through the students. Instead, counselors were typically the point of contact for families. Luis explained:

My parents will contact my counselors first. Because they met my counselors first—-they met my counselors first and a few times. So, they’re like, “Okay, well, let’s see your counselor and see what’s going on.” . . . The counselors have been doing this for years, of course, with past students. From my experience, I feel like they did good. You know, they helped us.

By working as the initial point of contact and building rapport with students and their families, the counselors are able to begin building a support network for students alongside the families.

Multiple participants across groups reported once counselors were able to begin building social capital with families, they began working to share navigational capital.
The following events were mentioned throughout interviews as events for families to learn more about their students’ education:

- Cafécito: Mr. Sterling stated, “we have coffee with the principal. You know, that’s pretty much giving them information.”

- University of California Success Night: Ms. Lincoln, stated, “we do our senior honors night. It’s all about family, it’s all about celebrating.”

- Informational Events: Mr. Johnson stated:

  [Counselors] have the nights where the kids come in with the families and they fill out the applications and things like that. And there’s a tremendous amount of opportunity there to talk to both moms and dads and the students as far as not only how to do the application, but why this is important and what they need.

Therefore, the opportunities to begin building a support team with families for the students was present through the school. And yet, as discussed in the previous section, parents and families rarely attended these events.

Students and teachers understood the gap between the informational events and attendance and they offered ways to build a bridge between the school and students’ families. Lorena proposed a “mandatory meeting” at the start of each year for parents to better understand what would be happening that year for their student and how to prepare. Yosef discussed finding ways to make these informational events “more comfortable” and “more casual” so families and counselors have a chance to “sit down and have a conversation.” The students described community events that were more focused on building connections and rapport than solely disseminating information. The events they imagined were characterized by their families’ cultures and traditions surrounding food and casual conversation. Ms. Sampson independently built on these students’ ideas and she was much more logistically detailed when she stated:
[Parents and families] need to be here on campus at meetings in the evening, after work is over. It needs to be convenient for them. It needs to be translated. They need to feel welcome here. And if we can’t do it during the weekday nights or evenings during the week, then we need to have something on the weekends, probably Saturday or Sunday.

Following the students’ and Ms. Sampson’s—a teacher—recommendations would result in the school essentially meeting families where they are to build a support network. More casual events focused on building a team with families by incorporating more casual practices that are reflective of students’ and families’ cultures would be bringing in students’ familial capital to build their social capital. Doing so may result in more than roughly 28% (n ≈ 200) of families in attendance of these events, as reported by Ms. Martinez in the previous section.

Each of the participant groups described the need for families and schools to work together, to create a support network, and to build social capital. But each of the participant groups also recognized although the school offered a variety of informational events, very few families attended. Ultimately, students and teachers recognized to build social capital, schools needed to recognize and celebrate students’ familial capital. Once social capital and their resulting support networks have been built, then navigational capital can be shared effectively and more students will have increased access to the labyrinth of postsecondary education.

**Aspirational, Navigational, and Resistant Capital Are so Intertwined That Building up one Capital Will Build up all Capitals**

Aspirational capital is described as the hope and motivation to pursue goals and dreams, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers and resistant capital is described as the skills developed specifically in the face of systemic oppression and inequality (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005).
Navigational capital, again, is the knowledge necessary to navigate social institutions and systems, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Demonstrated visually in Figure 25, there was an overlap between the three forms of capital during the analysis of qualitative data in this research study as students, staff, and faculty shared their experiences and ideas regarding students’ postsecondary educational goals. All three forms of capital were closely intertwined in this research study: building up students’ hopes and goals for postsecondary education involves sharing the skills needed to navigate higher education successfully and encouraging students to persevere in spite of societal barriers associated with higher education. In this section, I review participants’ discussions regarding the local community college, encouraging students to take the leap into the “unknown,” and how staff and faculty wished they could help students to achieve these goals if they had unlimited time and funding.
In previous sections, I shared details of accounts from staff and faculty about students’ hesitancy to leave home and attend a 4-year university immediately after high school. Counselors explained students may feel guilty about leaving because they believed their families needed their help and it would be easier on the families for them to stay. Mr. Johnson shared that students are often afraid of the “unknown:” being first
in their families to attend college meant they did not know what to expect or how to prepare, which can be incredibly frightening and stop students from leaving. Teachers shared they understood students’ families were the focal point and students struggled to leave home for fear of not having a place when they return. All of these fears and concerns, despite being credible, ultimately impeded students’ aspirational capital and prevented them from achieving their goals.

In the city where this school was located, students had access to a local community college. Roughly half the graduates of 2022 planned to attend this community college and pursue their postsecondary educational goals through this route. As Mr. Johnson—the administrator—said, this community college was “one of [their] best assets,” but it “can be a negative influence” because it provides “an easy way to still pursue [one’s] education right there and [they] don’t have to go to the scary expensive unknown place.” The counselors shared that the transfer rate from the community college to 4-year universities was about 20% and the rate of students achieving a bachelor’s degree after attending this community college was less than 10%. As Mr. García explained, “What happens is a lot of our students have intentions of being a full-time student, you know, and then life starts happening.” Ms. Lincoln explained this in a different way when she said, “They get to [local community college] and they get stuck and they get comfortable.” As a result, many students discontinue their journey to a bachelor’s degree by either earning an associate’s degree or withdrawing from school.

Not every student is prepared for a 4-year university immediately after high school and the local community college does provide a viable pathway toward postsecondary education. As Ms. Lincoln explained, “Some kids just are not ready and they need that support at home. And they need to find out who they are as an adult versus a high school student. And why not go for free?” In California, the first year at any public community college is covered through grants for students and they are not
responsible for paying tuition out of pocket. However, there has continued to be some students who are concerned about taking this pathway toward a bachelor’s degree, like Yosef who shared some of his concerns while debating his options, stating:

[It was] the uncertainty of like, how much more difficult is it to get accepted as a transfer? I think that kind of loomed in the back of my head when I wanted to go straight to [local community college].

Staff and faculty focus on these particular students—students whose goals include earning a bachelor’s degree—but they are unsure of whether or not to attend the local community college first. These specific students are encouraged to take the leap to enroll and attend 4-year universities, especially after going through the maze of applications.

As shared in previous sections, these students may take that leap to enroll and attend, but then withdraw and come home and the counselors and teachers explained that this was mostly due to a lack of a support network. The counselors were cited in previous sections sharing their experiences with students returning home because they did not have a way to feel included on campus and they did not feel like they belonged. Additionally, Ms. Sampson stated, “If you can’t socialize at college, and you don’t feel like you’re part of things, you’re going to come running home. And some of our students don’t do well with that. And then they come home.” To combat this fear of not feeling like they belong, the counselors have shared their own experiences in facing adversity and persevering through the struggle with students in an attempt to inspire them. Ms. Martinez, a counselor and alum of the high school, shared:

I was like, it was a culture shock for me. Like I came to Nina High School, it’s browntown. Everyone looked like me. And then I went to UC [City], and I’ve never seen so many white people in my life. . . . And they were like, [shocked noises] . . . And I was like “no, like, I’m not saying this in any way. Like I’m being very honest. You never think it makes you feel some type of way but it does make
you feel some type of way when you’re in a lecture hall with 500 other students that are White, and it’s you and one other person that you see that looks like you.” . . And then they’re like, “What . . . “ And I was like “that gets to you and you just need to remind yourself like you belong here, that you got there for a reason, like, stay there.”

Many staff and faculty members were alumni of this particular high school, like Ms. Martinez, a counselor, and they were able to connect with students through this shared experience to describe the culture of college. The teachers discussed an event called March of [Mascots] that takes place every fall semester for one full day. Alumni are invited to return to the high school, set up a booth in the football stadium, and share their successes with current students, with a particular focus on those who have left this city to attend a 4-year university or receive other training and later returned to this area. Students and teachers are invited to attend the event at their convenience throughout the day and talk with alumni about what steps they took to reach their goals. Ms. Sampson explained:

The power of the March of [Mascots] originally was that those kids came from their neighborhoods. Those kids went to their school, those kids sat in their seats, those kids had the same teachers that they did. And with all of those commonalities, look at where they’re at. And it was trying to paint a picture of what the future could be for them.

In recent years, this event has shifted to be more of a combination of a college and job fair and there has been less emphasis on including alumni. The teachers expressed disappointment that this event was no longer a source of inspiration for students.

In addition to modifying the March of [Mascots] to inspire students and share guidance in regard to postsecondary goals, staff and faculty had several ideas about how to build aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital. Mr. Johnson, the administrator,
focused his goals to help students on “providing the student with support systems, where
the students that do go off and go into the additional ‘unknownness’ of a 4-year
somewhere, they have a lifeline to come back to, they know that they can still have that.”
This “lifeline” would be a way for students to build navigational capital through a
resource they are already familiar with and consequently, build resistant capital and the
confidence needed to continue working toward their goals away from home.

The teachers in this study also had ideas on ways to assist students in developing
these types of capital, with particular focus on aspirational capital. They were focused on
motivating students on a regular basis by working with the students they have in their
classes. Mr. Sterling suggested:

If every teacher had, like three students in every class that you picked to focus on . . . Then I think that would change the whole culture of the school . . . If all teachers did that, you never know what’s gonna happen within that one little talk for like 30 seconds. They’ll remember that for the rest of their life. Who knows, right? That was the teacher that told me I had the ability. It was a turning point.

Ms. Sampson took it a step further and promoted the use of a homeroom of sorts,
stating:

They hear about them in one fell swoop, but the kids may not remember it down
the line when they need it. So, I think that one way that our school can help those kids more is to consistently broadcast those programs and have maybe little classroom tours that go during period one or period two or whatever . . .

Both of these ideas worked toward the common goal of inspiring students and sharing
the information students need to pursue their goals. In doing so, teachers would be
building up aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital.

Finally, the counselors also had ideas about how to motivate and encourage
students. They were already working taking students on trips to visit college campuses,
but if they did not have to worry about funding these trips, then both Mr. García and Ms. Martínez took these trips further. Mr. García focused on providing students with a day-to-day look into college-life, stating:

Pie in the sky is like we take them to like every college in California, for sure. And maybe some in other states, but you know, just getting them out of this area, showing them what other cities look like, showing them what colleges look like, you know that kind of stuff. What would be cool is if, not only that, but maybe when they did these trips, maybe they could stay—like a maybe it could be like a week-long thing and they could stay like a couple of days on campus like in a dorm and go to class and see what it’s like to be a university student and see how all the students are on campus and all that.

Ms. Martinez, on the other hand, focused on taking students to the opposite coast of the United States, and including parents in these visits. She said:

So, if I had all the funding in the world, I would take a massive trip to the east coast and hit up one of the schools close to there, just so they can see there’s a different world outside of Nina, like a much different world . . . And I would definitely make that a trip for students and for parents because I know some more parents are also like, this is what they know, this is their comfort . . . And I think once they’re actually there, then they’ll be like, okay, you know, this might be something for me, this might be something I can do. And I would hope that the parents get behind that.

These ideas from the counselors would provide students with the venue to build aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital. Physically being on college campuses places students in an entirely new environment, but with the support network they already have. They would be able to immediately start building new connections, thereby building resistant capital, and ask questions of those who work in college campuses, thus
also building navigational capital. These college trips could be the stepping stone for many students to have the confidence to follow through on enrolling in 4-year universities and work toward their bachelor’s degrees.

Aspirational, navigational, and resistant capitals in this research study focused on students setting postsecondary educational goals, finding pathways to achieve those goals, and maintaining the confidence and determination to follow through. Although the local community college provides a viable pathway to students’ postsecondary educational goals, some students essentially get stuck and do not follow through on achieving those goals. The students in this study shared a glimpse into how to build these forms of capital for all students while the staff and faculty shared their ideas on what they would do to help students if they did not have to worry about time or funding. At the end of the day, staff and faculty were dedicated to working with students however they could.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I reviewed the findings of this research study from the demographic survey and semistructured individual interviews. The demographic survey was taken by 9.5% (n = 67) of students and provided additional background information directly from the students’ perspectives. The semistructured interviews were initially analyzed by stakeholder groups and then again analyzed across the stakeholder groups. Each of the students interviewed spoke a LOTE at home and they each had applied and were accepted to a 4-year university— but only one enrolled. Each of the counselors and teachers interviewed worked closely with the graduates of 2022 and the administrator interviewed supervised the College and Career Center.

Students shared their families’ encouragement of their postsecondary educational goals set them the course to later attend college. However, with limited navigational capital, they began the process of preparing for college in their junior, or
even senior, years of high school and they relied heavily on the mentorship of teachers and counselors. The students recognized the uphill battle they faced academically due to their experiences with speaking a LOTE at home. Finally, students disclosed that finances and the lack of financial aid was the deciding factor in their decision to attend a 4-year university immediately after high school.

Counselors explained they saw the pivotal role families play in students’ postsecondary educational goals and shared how they worked to develop a team with both students and their families to share navigational capital. They each also noted the importance and need for building up students’ aspirational capital and reassuring students they would be able to succeed in higher education. But in this work, they also recognized students’ struggles with academic English and the language barriers directly impacting students and their families. Additionally, the counselors discussed the financial barriers affecting students and their families, lamenting the fact that the decision for a student to attend a 4-year university often came down to the money. Finally, the counselors shared the how they built up resistant capital in students, often using their own experiences as examples.

Teachers also shared their experiences working with students, highlighting 75% of students identified themselves as ELLs or REFP, every teacher worked with these students. They shared how they were able to communicate and connect with students, recognizing the strong familial ties and parents’ support for their students. However, teachers also explained they often struggled to engage with families and rely on students to communicate information instead. Yet, they still found ways to provide mentorship and navigational capital to these students, encouraging them to pursue their goals.

Mr. Johnson, an administrator, focused primarily on the “success stories” of students who were reclassified as English fluency proficient. He explained that familial expectations can be both encouraging and taxing as students want to succeed, but are
afraid of the “unknown.” Finally, he admitted the processes of applying for college and financial aid were confusing and overwhelming, explaining that he and other administrators were seeking ways to provide additional assistance to students and families working through these applications.

Additionally, analyses were done across these stakeholder groups, identifying how Yosso’s (2005) CCW framework can be used as a kaleidoscope rather than a single lens (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). In doing so, familial and linguistic capital were overlapped to see the important work students do as translators for their families, both in educational and professional spheres. Additionally, familial, navigation, and social capital were overlapped to see how respecting and building on familial capital can create the social capital needed to then share navigational capital. Finally, aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital were overlapped to reveal how interconnected each of these types of capital were for students; their aspirational and resistant capital grew as they earned more navigational capital and their confidence in the pursuit of higher education grew. In each of these instances, this research study demonstrated the complexity of the CCW framework and the close associations between different types of capitals. In the next chapter, I situate these findings among the current literature and expand on the meaning and implications of these data.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

It’s just since I was—we were, me and my siblings, were all young. It was just an expectation to go to college. Our mother was like, you’re going to college . . . It was just always there. I’m going to college. (Adriana, Student-Participant)

Unlike commonly held assumptions regarding Latinx families and aspiring college students (Chlup et al., 2018; Crawley et al., 2019; Rutter et al., 2020), the student participants in this study demonstrated a contrary narrative surrounding familial support. In fact, as seen in the previous section, these students had familial support as Latinx students to pursue their postsecondary educational goals. But the other forms of capital that needed to be built up further to achieve success, including navigational, social, aspirational, and resistant capital, were not as easily accessible. The support systems available to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students through the secondary school were not available intentionally or systemically, but their dedication to their families and their goals was clearly evident.

This research study focused on one graduating class of over 700 students, made up of over 95% Latinx students, at one secondary school on the central coast of California. Students were surveyed to learn more about how they identified. Furthermore, semistructured interviews with students, staff, and faculty were conducted, recorded, and transcribed. These interviews were then analyzed for themes both in these stakeholder groups and across them, initially using Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) framework.

Themes arose in groups as participants shared very similar experiences. Students shared their families were most influential in their decision to attend college after high school, while teachers and counselors were the most helpful. Students shared speaking a language other than English (LOTE) at home created barriers between home and school,
but working through the reclassified as English fluency proficient (REFP) process increased their confidence in their English skills. However, these linguistic skills presented unique challenges surrounding students’ roles as a language broker for their families as well. Counselors explained (a) families played a crucial role in students’ decisions regarding their postsecondary education, (b) students often doubted themselves and their abilities, and (c) much of their work was focused on building on students’ and families’ navigational and social capital. All of the teachers worked with English language learner (ELL) students as roughly 80% of students at Nina High School (a pseudonym) were labeled as ELLs by educational institutions. Although teachers recognized the strength and support families provided to students, they disclosed struggles in communicating with parents and families as well. Finally, the administrator expressed awe for the students several times where he described learning a new language while learning content as an “incredible” feat. Additionally, he explained his desires to work alongside families to support students and briefly shared plans and ideas on how to do so.

Across the stakeholder groups, patterns emerged about students’ familial, aspirational, navigation, linguistic, and social capital (Yosso, 2005). All of the stakeholder groups discussed the overlap between the skills needed to communicate fluently in different languages—linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005)—and the pride and practices in families—familial capital (Yosso, 2005). Each group noted and praised families for providing incredible support for students while also recognizing the struggles associated with developing the capital needed to navigate educational institutions, especially as these students were the first in their families to go to college. Finally, analysis of all of the groups together revealed that aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital were very intertwined and, therefore, explicitly sharing information about the “norms” of college culture works can help to strengthen students’ motivation.
to attend college and build on their resilience to work toward their degrees in the face of adversity.

Through analysis of all of the qualitative data discussed in the previous section, this research study sought to answer the following question: In what ways are aspiring first-generation Latinx college students who speak a LOTE at home supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived by students, staff, and faculty? In this chapter, I discuss the different support systems available to these students as described by participants in this study in response to the research question: (a) mentorship provides needed navigational capital; (b) although students felt strongly supported by their families, this support was not visible to staff and faculty; and (c) students’ English language development (ELD) was supported across all classes. I also discuss one area students did not feel supported: financial aid literacy. Finally, I explain discrepancies found between data provided by the school and data provided by students themselves before closing the chapter with a brief summary.

**Students Felt Supported Through Mentorship**

As discussed in the previous chapter, aspiring first-generation Latinx college students have struggled to build up aspirational, navigational, and social capitals. These are all very closely related as they are defined as the hopes and goals, the know-how, and the networking in a social institution, respectively (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, these types of capital were operationalized in this research study to be focused on students’ postsecondary educational goals: the hopes and goals of attending a 4-year university, the knowledge to navigate the application and admission processes, and the networking required to successfully transition. To develop these forms of capitals, students in this study discussed mentors as entry points to higher education, differentiating between formal and informal mentors who shared information about college culture, college admissions, and the overall experience of attending a 4-year university. These mentors
served as one way in which students felt supported in this process and this aligns closely with current literature as described in the subsequent paragraph.

**Mentors Are key Entry Points**

Mentors often serve as an entry person, or as Brazil-Cruz and Martinez (2016) described them, institutional brokers. They are “powerful tools” (O’Hara, 2022, p. 324) who can help students both academically and personally. These individuals are often counselors or teachers who connect with students and their families and become their first point of contact. This was seen in this research study as students shared they turned to either counselors or teachers to help and provide guidance through the college application, admissions, and transition processes. One student explained the counselors were often his family’s point of contact when he said, “My parents will contact my counselors first because they met my counselors first—they met my counselors first and a few times.” This repeated contact laid the groundwork for a trusting relationship to be built between the school and the family, allowing the transfer of navigational capital. Therefore, mentors are incredibly helpful to students as they provide guidance and advice about application processes, but they also need time to share this information.

Michel and Durdella (2019) reported the importance of mentors sharing information about college culture, helping students to identify resources they may need, and guiding students through the maze of higher education. When discussing the college and financial aid application processes, the administrator in this study said, “I knew it wasn’t [good] but it wasn’t until I was the one at the kitchen table at midnight with my son’s application that I really understood.” The students in this research study discussed teachers sharing this information to “really understand what [they’re] getting into” and counselors “taking a large part of [their] time to help me and other friends when I was applying to college.” By sharing this navigational capital, staff and faculty were able to help students make sense of the application and admissions processes that are incredibly
complicated, even for those who have gone through these processes and earned college degrees.

It is also critical for mentors to have the time and access to students to share information consistently over the course of all 4 years of high school. Rutter et al. (2020) found regularly sharing information and consistently exposing students to possible postsecondary educational outcomes helped students to feel most supported. Glass (2023) echoed these results and explained frequent meetings are as important as the topics discussed during meetings; meeting monthly to review smaller chunks of information is more beneficial than meeting annually to review large chunks of information. As a result of recognizing the importance of frequent meetings to steadily share information about college and financial aid application processes, guidance counselors at Nina High School were currently working toward this consistent cycle as they met with students regularly to provide information and advice. Ms. Sampson, a teacher, suggested “classroom tours” in which counselors took a few minutes for each class period to share small pieces of information in more frequent intervals as students currently “hear about them in one fell swoop but the kids may not remember it down the line when they need it.” Therefore, providing information in smaller increments more often can work toward the consistency Rutter et al. (2020) and Glass (2023) found to be successful.

Gonzalez and Morrison (2016) concluded students who are able to identify a mentor often have higher levels of persistence in the pursuit of their educational goals. Glass (2023) explained “more time with a mentor and having more mentors were important for students’ likelihood of enrolling in college” (p.165). Again, this study supports these notions as all of the student interviewees in this study were able to identify specific mentors and they were actively pursuing their educational goals. These mentors may serve as the entry point into higher education, but they need time to share
information and advice. Participants in this research study also differentiated between formal and informal mentors, attributing different qualities to each.

**Formal Mentors Were Provided to all Students**

Formal mentors are provided by the institution; these mentors are assigned to each student and the burden of creating this mentorship lies with the mentors rather than the students. At Nina High School, two guidance counselors are assigned to each graduating class, but with such large graduating classes, each guidance counselor was responsible for connecting with over 350 students each. Studies spoke to the importance of individualized attention for students working to finish college applications and to gain the navigational capital needed to succeed in enrolling in a 4-year university immediately after high school graduation (M. Martinez et al., 2019; O’Hara, 2022). This is not feasible with so many students assigned to each of the guidance counselors. The close mentorships described by current literature is only possible when the students reach out for additional meetings with the counselors beyond what is required.

However, additionally formal mentorship is available through the College and Career Center. In the Center at Nina High School, there were now two full-time college counselors, one of whom was Ms. Lincoln in this research study, and their focus was entirely on providing this individualized support for students interested in applying to college. Ilic and Rosenbaum (2019) shared the success that full-time college advisors have had in focusing solely on assisting students with their college and financial aid applications; their findings align very closely with what both Yosef and Ms. Lincoln shared. Yosef spoke about the influence Ms. Lincoln had when he said, “She was going over my essays and sitting down and having conversations with me and exchanging emails.” The mentorships available through these college counselors in the College and Career Center provided the individualized attention students need to close knowledge gaps, as noted in the studies by M. Martinez et al. (2019) and O’Hara (2022), and to
build lasting relationships with students’ families and, therefore, assist students’ families for years to come. As Ms. Lincoln shared, “Once they trust you, they trust you. Like, you’ll see younger siblings coming in and go ‘See Ms. Lincoln!’”

**Students Sought Informal Mentors on Their Own**

Informal mentors were not provided by the school, but rather, sought out by students on their own time at their own volition. Students described teachers as informal mentors, and teachers corroborated these assertions, but they also suggested alumni were, or could be, informal mentors for current students. The five students surveyed each identified specific informal mentors they found on their own and explained the close guidance these mentors provided.

Teachers in this study worked to build personal relationships with students as they encouraged and supported students through this process and served as informal mentors when requested by students. O’Hara (2022) asserted the importance of developing personal and authentic relationships to best support students in the pursuit of their goals. Students in this study echoed this finding. Edgar explained “my senior teachers really helped me . . . back on my feet and be like ‘you can do it’” and “all of these great teachers, you know, they kind of persuaded me, especially my senior year, I need to do something with my life.” This encouragement and support built up students’ aspirational capital and confidence to pursue their postsecondary educational goals. These students' teachers cultivated close mentorships with these students, above and beyond their contractual duties, and these students in particular benefitted from this time and guidance.

Published literature has also discussed the role of alumni as informal mentors providing guidance to current students. Amaro-Jimenez and Hungerford (2013) and later Crawley et al. (2019) explained alumni mentors are frequently very successful in assisting current students because they are able to connect over similar experiences and
backgrounds. Current students see pieces of themselves in successful alumni and gain confidence in knowing others who are like them were able to achieve their goals. Ms. Sampson, a teacher in this study, discussed the March of [Mascots], an event in which alumni return to the high school to meet with current students and share their experiences. She explained this event was successful because “those kids went to their school, those kids sat in their seats, those kids had the same teachers they did. And with all those commonalities, look at where they’re at.” Additionally, Nina High School employed a significant number of alumni, including Ms. Martinez in this study: roughly 20% of teachers \((n \approx 35)\) and 40% \((n = 4)\) of counselors. These alumni are able to share their experiences in both attending the high school and pursuing their postsecondary educational goals. These particular mentors connect with students in ways other mentors struggle as they understand the unique situation these aspiring first-generation Latinx college students are in. They understand the delicate balancing act of familial responsibilities, personal goals, and fear of the “unknown” and they are able to use their own experiences of working through these difficulties to serve as role models in this support system.

Ultimately, mentors are a critical support system for students who are interested in attending a 4-year university immediately after high school, especially those who will be the first in their families to do so. This research study adds to the current literature, identifying how mentors have assisted students in the college application, admissions, and transition processes. Formal mentors were guidance counselors assigned by the school, but due to large graduating classes, they are unable to make personal connections with every student, leaving the burden of developing a mentorship on the students themselves and causing many students to fall in the cracks. Conversely, informal mentors were those who students sought out on their own time and found ways to connect with their teachers or alumni around them. Students interviewed in this study
were able to identify specific informal mentors to assist them as they worked toward their goal of obtaining a 4-year degree. They attributed a significant portion of their aspirational and resistant capital to the mentorship of their teachers and explained that they and their counselors provided the needed navigational and social capital needed to successfully apply to 4-year universities, and for one student, successfully enroll immediately after high school. However, although informal mentors associated with the high school were very helpful in students’ pursuit of their postsecondary education in this research study, students’ families were the most influential.

**Students Felt Supported by Their Families**

Familial support is very important for students and aspiring first-generation Latinx college students are no different. However, their families are often seen as unengaged or disinterested despite being incredibly invested and supportive of their children’s education and future goals (Chlup et al., 2018; Rutter et al., 2020). Students, in turn, are often dedicated to giving back to their families financially and with community cultural wealth in the form of their own navigational, social, and resistant capitals. In this section, I discuss the support system that families have provided students in this research study and how it is situated in current literature.

**Invisible Support**

Latinx students are often faced with preconceived notions regarding their families’ involvement in their education because that involvement is not always seen (Chlup et al., 2018; Michel & Durdella, 2019). Parents and families struggled to interact with the bureaucratic institution of education and as such, struggled to develop networks and relationships with staff and faculty (Chlup et al., 2018). This was seen in this research study as one teacher shared, “I feel like parents don’t participate, overall,” and another shared, “I have limited contact with most of the families.” Students pointed out that “not many people go” to information events and the counselors agreed, as Ms.
Martinez explained, “We have about 700 students [in each graduating class] and we’ve only had about 200 parents show up.” This difficulty in connecting parents with schools creates barriers in developing navigational and social capital, but these capitals are necessary in creating trusting relationships between families and schools (Crawley et al., 2019; Cuevas, 2020; Hansen-Thomas & Sourdot, 2015).

Because staff and faculty do not see families’ support for students themselves, they adopt a deficit perspective that support is not present at all. However, communication is key. Amaro-Jimenez et al. (2020) reported parents who participated in conferences, workshops, and informational events increased their navigational and social capital as they learned more about the possibilities and opportunities available to their students. Michel and Durdella (2019) had similar findings: communication plays a central role in developing relationships and connections with families. The teachers in this research study addressed this issue; Ms. Sampson said, “[Families] need to be here on campus at meetings in the evening, after work is over. It needs to be convenient for them. It needs to be translated. They need to feel welcome here.” It is critical to build relationships with students and their families and fully integrate them into the educational system (Covarrubias, 2021; Cuevas, 2020). Doing so will allow students to capitalize on their family’s support, which serves to validate students’ postsecondary educational goals and further motivate them to continue their pursuit (Bueno et al., 2022). Familial support and encouragement are paramount and serves as a source of inspiration for many students.

**Struggles of Being First**

Yasuike (2019) reported Latinx families often felt dissuaded from approaching school officials or representatives and Rutter et al. (2020) went further to explain this often leads to misperceptions of what is available and what students are capable of achieving. This research study agreed with these findings as one counselor shared, “a lot
of our students are first generation, so their parents are coming and they’re field workers. So, they don’t know what it takes.” Without having experienced higher education for themselves, many of these families do not have the implicit knowledge associated with college culture (Clayton et al., 2019). Students agreed with this sentiment when one student said, “I feel like my parents never really had a really good understanding of how the college system works and how to apply and everything.” As a result, students often work through the maze of applications on their own and slowly build up aspirational and navigational capital themselves.

Additionally, as first-generation college students, students already face barriers and hurdles trying to fit together their school lives with their home lives (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). The counselors shared instances of students working after school, taking care of younger siblings, and helping their families, in addition to their daily school work. They described this balancing act as “amazing” and “humbling” while students often brushed it off as “normal.” This awareness of the responsibilities students have outside of school and respect for the close ties they have with their families provided a way for staff to connect with students, and eventually their families. Developing relationships between their families and the schools alleviates significant amounts of stress off of these students, allowing students to flourish (Suwinyattichaiporn & Johnson, 2022).

**Responsibilities and Recompensa**

Students explained they “see the way that [their family has] struggled, and how hard they work all the time. So, they’re always trying to tell [them], like [they] don’t want [them] to break [their] back in the future.” In sharing these stories of struggle and showing their children how hard they have worked, families were striving for resilience in their children and encouraging them to persevere (Marrun, 2020; Rocha, 2021). This support builds resistant capital in students and helps them to develop a strong sense of
family responsibility (Boden, 2011; O’Hara, 2022). In this research study, students discussed wanting to give back to their parents and families, as one student said, “I just want to help my family—I don’t want them to be where we were when I was in elementary school . . . our financial situation was not great.” This sentiment was echoed by the administrator in this research study who said, “[students] realize what sacrifice that their parents have put in to get them to that place” and as a result, students work very hard to overcome the challenges associated with accessing higher education. Students see postsecondary education and academic success as their family duty to repay their parents for the sacrifices they have made (Yasuike, 2019). The counselors in this research study also addressed this dedication to academic success and later financial gain when one of them said “a lot of [students] will want to work, even in high school. They want to work to help the family, so a lot of them want to get a good paying job so that they can help their parents.” Working to help their families is one way students feel they are able to give back and thank their families for their support, encouragement, and sacrifice (Huynh et al., 2023; Yasuike, 2019).

Although families may strongly encourage their students to attend a 4-year university immediately after high school, there may also be hesitancy to send their students away. As one of the counselors shared, “It seems like the parents are on board with it until it gets to go time and then some of them have trouble letting go.” Cuevas (2020) explained families often experience three stages after their students leave for college: empty nest syndrome, then pride, and later recompensa, or reward. When students initially leave, families struggle with the empty nest and changing family dynamics (C. Harper et al., 2020), especially with students playing such an integral role in the family, as discussed in the previous section. These findings were reflected in this research study as staff and faculty discussed the difficulties families have in sending their children off to school. The administrator explained, “It’s less scary for the parent if the
student’s in [local community college] and living at home. It is a lot less frightening thing to enter into rather than moving to Oregon or Arizona and not see my student until Thanksgiving.” One of the teachers reiterated this sentiment when she said, “Having to leave home is humongous . . . and the ones that do, come back different and that causes the pain of change in the mindset and it’s hard to take in from the family.” The changing family dynamic applies pressure to students who attempt to reconcile the differences between their family’s and college’s cultures (Huynh et al., 2023; Storlie et al., 2016). But eventually, these feelings surrounding an empty nest give way to pride and reward as families reflect on the sacrifices they have made and the significant progress their children have been able to make as a result (Cuevas, 2020).

With pride and recompensa in mind (Cuevas, 2020), students and their families look forward to how students’ academic success changes the trajectory for their families. Luedke (2020) reported students often envision themselves as role models for younger siblings and cousins because they accumulate navigational and social capitals through their own experiences that they later share. In doing so, students are using their own CCW, specifically navigational, resistant, and social capital, to bring about change (Cuellar, 2021) and simultaneously, making their families proud. As one of the counselors said, “I love to reiterate to [students] that their families are proud of them, no matter what. And just look at what you’re accomplishing and what you’re going to set for generations to come.”

In conclusion, these aspiring first-generation college students are trailblazers (Storlie et al., 2016) and they should be celebrated as such. The support and encouragement students receive from their families is irreplaceable and motivating. Staff and faculty should be embracing this support from families and further guiding students and their families by sharing the navigational and social capital needed for success in postsecondary education.
Students Felt Supported in Their Language Development

At this secondary school, 17% of students were ELLs and 71% had been reclassified as proficient in English fluency. Therefore, it was reasonable to assume 88% of students spoke a LOTE at home. With such large numbers of students adopting English as a second language, “every teacher teaches ELD [or English language development] students.” As such, every staff and faculty member needs to understand how to work with multilingual students and how to provide suitable support as students develop their English language skills, as they acquire content-area knowledge.

Students’ Full Linguistic Repertoire

Language “is not simply a sum” of students’ home languages and English (García, 2020, p. 557); it is not a “zero-sum game, in which learners have finite cognitive space available for language learning” (Lee & Handsfield, 2018, p. 159). Rather, language acquisition flows and develops organically, creating a full linguistic repertoire made of all languages students know and understand (Flores & Rosa, 2015). Students who are given the opportunity to “draw across [their] linguistic and cultural resources with intention” are building curricular meaning and language skills simultaneously (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017, p. 252). This process is called translanguaging (García & Li, 2014) and this is what was described by the teachers in this study.

One of the teachers explained, “We relied heavily on translation services, through Google, sometimes through aides and sometimes even through other students.” These initial attempts of translating curricular content for ELLs to access the lessons each day and hopefully understand the content on an elementary level was really only “effective in getting through the class.” However, as the number of ELLs has grown to become the majority of students on campus, teachers and students at this high school “have got programs in which [they’ve] got aides going out with designated students and the courses are designed around helping students learn their English better in the content
area.” Teachers are not using specific models, like sheltered instruction observation protocol or specially designed academic instruction in English, but rather, many are using piecemeal techniques, like Google Translate and other translated materials. The courses “designed around helping students learn” include bilingual teachers and bilingual instructional aides providing instruction in both English and student’s home languages. These are no longer monolingual classrooms dedicated to the sink-or-swim mentality, but instead, these classrooms have invited in students’ home languages to help them make sense of English (Cummins, 2009; Daniel & Pacheco, 2016; DiNapoli & Morales, 2021; Lee & Handsfield, 2018; Malsbary, 2014).

The ability to invite students’ home languages in and encourage students to use both their home language and English to make sense of the curricular content is likely possible because this high school has a very homogenous student population: 78% of students speak Spanish at home, 11% speak English at home, and 8% speak Mixteco, an Indigenous language of Mexico, at home. Because the vast majority of students use the same languages, resources can be condensed to focus on combining English and Spanish together for students to use both as needed. This process of purposefully inviting students to use their full linguistic repertoire to make sense of curriculum would likely be more challenging if more languages were present.

The Jaulas of ELD Classes

Although many teachers do have the ability and resources to invite students’ home languages into the classroom as they encourage students to learn academic English and instructional content simultaneously, these students continue to be classified as ELLs. As such, they are required to take specific English development or English support classes. Mr. Roth explained the students who were “classified as long-term English learners are unbelievably frustrated with school because they feel like they’re stuck in a loop that never ends.” The language labels create jaulas, or cages, that create additional
burdens on students to prove themselves (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021). Furthermore, Latinx students often face ethnic biases that delay the reclassification process, causing many of these students to stay in the language development and support programs longer than average (Umansky et al., 2020).

Although all students take general English courses throughout high school, those students who have not yet been REFP take English development or English support classes as their elective courses. As a result, they are unable to take elective courses of their choosing, including photography, art, weightlifting, and so on, until they have passed the reclassification exams. The longer these students stay in the language development and support programs, the more frustrated they feel that they are not able to take ownership over their class schedule nor take courses they are personally interested in.

Those students who do eventually complete the reclassification process successfully and move into general English classes do not “think it was such a big difference” and explained that it “added to my self-esteem, but I wouldn’t say it was crazy.” Staff and faculty, on the other hand, view the reclassification process as “a major achievement” that is “awesome and impressive.” Students are celebrated with a “party at the vet’s hall” and congratulated for “accomplishing this huge undertaking.” The administration explained this admiration as recognition that students have “done K–12 curriculum and at the same time, they've acquired another language.” The respect and praise were clearly evident; however; there was no mention of how to streamline this process, ensure students are able to move out of language and support programs more quickly, or allow students to take more control over their course schedules earlier.

**General English Writing Classes**

Once students were in general English classes, they found general English classes to be very helpful in their preparation for college coursework, to the point that the
students in this study only mentioned English classes. This supports Reid and Moore’s (2008) findings that the class most cited as beneficial for college preparation is English. Students explained in English classes, they learned “what to expect and sometimes we even did college level assignments” thereby building up students’ confidence in their English skills and capabilities. This echoes Kanno and Varghese’s (2010) findings that a lack of English skills leads to insecurities that prevent students from participating and developing these skills further. Students at this high school appear to be breaking this mold through their English classes that were “just so much work” as one student said, “it gets you used to the mentality that you need to have once you’re a college student,” which echoes what Wahleithner (2020) reported in their study on the effects of rigorous writing classes in high school on students’ perceptions of college preparedness. Students in this study were overall very pleased with their English classes, stating they “did a pretty good job at preparing me.”

Counselors who assisted students with the writing portions of their college applications, on the other hand, recognized the difficulties that multilingual students often face. One counselor said, “the students are super intelligent and they can speak to you, but when it comes to the academic portion of it, when it comes to their academic writing and like, the academic vernacular, it’s just not there.” Unfortunately, nonnative English speakers may lack the familiarity and awareness of “hidden codes” that are used in academic English (White & Ali-Khan, 2013, p. 27). These are skills that take significantly more time to develop: students are expected to use academic English after only 2–3 years of support programs while research has shown it generally takes 7–10 years to achieve that level of fluency (Green, 2003; S. Harper, 2011). That time simply is not available to students, but they are still expected to demonstrate fluency.

Ultimately, integrating students’ home languages in the classroom provides them with a way to stay connected to their homes and families while also finding their place in
a predominantly English-speaking sphere (Daniel & Pacheco, 2016). In doing so, students are able to use their full linguistic repertoire to learn curricular content and academic English at once. Students in this study felt supported in their language development, especially through the English classes that required rigorous writing and college-level reading, like the expository reading and writing course. In their pursuit of bilingualism at this secondary school, these students were never seen as “failed native speakers” (Cook, 1999, p. 194), but rather as “success stories.”

**Students Felt a Lack of Support in Developing Financial Aid Literacy Capital**

Each of the stakeholder groups in this research study discussed the immense financial strain higher education places on students and their families. Students shared the decision to attend a 4-year university immediately after high school came down to the cost, counselors discussed the struggles students and their families face when it comes to financial aid applications, and the administration understood the process of applying for financial aid was “not good.” All of the stakeholder groups appeared to share the same feeling as Ms. Lincoln, a counselor, when she said, “I hate that it comes down to money, but it does come down to money.”

This struggle with financial aid is not unique to this particular high school. Several studies have addressed students’ concerns regarding both applying for and receiving financial aid, explaining that cost and lack of financial aid is a driving factor in students’ decision to attend college and continue their studies (e.g., Amaro-Jimenez et al., 2020; Brookover et al., 2021; Duncheon, 2021; Hansen-Thomas & Sourdot, 2015; Marrun, 2020). It ultimately comes down to navigational capital, specifically focused on higher education: the skills and knowledge needed to navigate through the complex web of applications for college admittance and financial aid. Tichavakunda and Galan (2020) found that the majority of gaps in knowledge shared by students, especially first-generation college students, were about financial aid. Therefore, a subsection of
navigational capital that is solely focused on finances and financial aid can be described as financial literacy capital.

The counselors in this study explained that they worked to share financial literacy capital through information nights because the students at this high school “qualify for so much financial aid.” However, participation in these events was limited; as described in a previous section, roughly 28% of families attended these events due to barriers in communication, time, and resources. As a result, students do not apply for nor receive all of the financial aid they qualify for and the financial aid packages they do receive “just aren’t enough.” Rutter et al. (2020) explained often communication barriers and low participation with families lead to misperceptions of financial aid and with this in mind, it is even more critical for schools to find ways to connect with students and their families to share this capital.

First-generation college students, particularly Latinx students, are more likely to work to pay for the tuition and fees of college (Marrun, 2020; Wilbur & Roscigno, 2016). They need the explicit knowledge of financial literacy capital in navigational capital to learn how to work their way through the maze of higher education. Schools can, and should, offer this information to support their students and students’ aspirations (Trevino & DeFreitas, 2014; Yasuike, 2019).

**Discrepancies in Data**

Although this research study was focused on identifying support systems, or lack thereof, for aspiring first-generation Latinx college students, the data collected also produced unexpected findings. There were significant discrepancies between the data provided by the administration and the data provided by the students themselves. In this section, I review the disparity in racial and ethnic data and the lack of transparency surrounding language fluency labels.
Racial and Ethnic Data

When developing this research study, background and demographic data were collected directly from the high school, as discussed in Chapter 3. However, these data did not align with what was seen on campus and further necessitated the demographic survey discussed in Chapter 4. The discrepancies between the racial and ethnic data provided by the high school and the data collected through this research study were not insignificant and further demonstrate that Whiteness is the assumed “norm.”

Initial data were collected directly from the high school to learn more about the student population. The high school provides a standard intake questionnaire for all students and the data provided by this questionnaire indicated over 95% of students identified as Latino or Hispanic and over 80% of students identified as White. However, these data gave pause because visual presentations of race present on campus do not align with these percentages.

This research study found 98.5% of respondents identified as Latino or Hispanic and of these students, 100% identified specifically as Mexican. These data are so vastly different from the data provided by the high school that further investigation was needed. It was revealed that the high school’s intake questionnaire used White as a default response if students did not select a race or ethnicity, regardless of students’ response to identify as Latino or Hispanic. Therefore, the high school's data from the intake questionnaire do not provide a clear image of the racial make-up of the student population and it further promotes assumptions about the assumed “norm.”

As Carr (2016) said, “Whiteness is often rendered invisible through its process of normalization” (p. 62) and, as seen in the intake questionnaire provided by the high school, it is the assumed selection. Even though it is a simple intake questionnaire that is often not referenced again throughout a student’s time in high school, it is an example of how Latinx students are erased. They do not fit the “norm” of White, English-speaking
students and unless they purposely seek out ways to identify themselves, they are erased and their unique racial identity is ignored.

Although racial and ethnic data were not used in response to the research question, this discrepancy in the data called for a closer look. Although the high school identifies over 80% of students as White, 0% of students in the demographic survey identified themselves as White. The continued push for White to be seen as the norm and, therefore, default in the intake questionnaires and forms only serves to uphold racial hegemony and promote biases.

**Language Fluency Labels**

In this research study, there were discrepancies in reported language fluency label data and students’ self-identified language fluency labels. The high school reported 12% ($n = 86$) of the graduating class of 2022 was labeled as native English speakers, 71% ($n = 498$) as REFP, and 17% ($n = 121$) as ELLs. However, in this research study, 25.4% ($n = 17$) students identified themselves as native English speakers, 25.4% ($n = 17$) as REFP, and 49.3% ($n = 33$) as ELLs. This is also shown in Table 13.

**Table 13**

*Comparison of Language Fluency Labels, as Provided by Administration and Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fluency label</th>
<th>Preliminary data provided by administration</th>
<th>Self-identification data provided students in demographic survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native English speakers</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reclassified as English fluency proficient</td>
<td>498</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These language fluency labels were created by the administration based on students' home languages and proficiency in an English fluency exam. Those students who spoke English at home were labeled “native” English speakers while those who
spoke another language at home were asked to take an exam to prove their fluency. Those deemed “fluent” were reclassified and those who were not were labeled as ELLs and assigned to language development and support programs discussed in an earlier section. Even when a student becomes fluent in English, they will never be labeled as a “native” English speaker.

Two of the students interviewed explained they had identified themselves as native English speakers in the demographic survey because they thought the reclassification label had been dropped when they moved on to middle school and then high school. They were surprised to learn the label had traveled with them, the jaula had not been removed (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021). This confusion and surprise illustrated the distinct lack of transparency associated in the education system and further demonstrates the barriers students are confronted with even as their English fluency grows.

The continued ambiguity of language fluency labels adds to the unnecessary complications associated with education. Rather than using students’ input and self-identification labels, the school aligns with whatever label was provided by another social institution. This removes students’ agency and further promotes the use of labels that do nothing more than define an “other” and separate students based on their home languages rather than their capabilities.

Conclusion

After multiple rounds of analysis of the qualitative data collected through interviews, both in stakeholder groups and across stakeholder groups, findings revealed themes that aligned with Yosso’s (2005) CCW framework and themes that demonstrated overlap between the different types of capital in the CCW framework. The findings were then reviewed through another round of analysis to answer the research question: In what ways are aspiring first-generation Latinx college students who speak a LOTE at
home supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived by students, staff, and faculty? Three support systems were mentioned by all of the stakeholder groups while one system was distinctly lacking.

Students felt supported through mentorship, by their families, and with their language development. Mentors, in the form of counselors and teachers, served as institutional brokers (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016) and key entry points for students to begin to develop the navigational capital needed to pursue their postsecondary educational goals. Students in this study were each able to identify an informal mentor who helped to guide them through the college and financial aid application processes. However, those students who are unable to identify an informal mentor are likely unsupported through this process. Students felt supported and encouraged by their families in their work toward higher education, even though staff and faculty did not always see this support in participation in informational events. These students described feeling a sense of responsibility to give back to their families in thanks for their sacrifice and support as students worked toward their postsecondary educational goals. Finally, students felt supported in their ELD as many teachers on campus purposefully invited their home languages into the classroom. However, the ELD classes that take up an elective course time slot can cause students to feel “unbelievably frustrated” or like a jaula (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021). Those students who were successful in their reclassification exams and no longer in language development classes explained that their general English classes were most helpful in their preparation for college.

However, students felt distinctly unsupported in their search for financial assistance. Although all five students in this research study were accepted to 4-year universities, only one enrolled immediately after high school graduation. All five student-participants explained the decision to enroll, or not, came down to the amount of financial aid they received with their acceptance. Through triangulation between
stakeholder groups, it became clear that financial aid literacy capital, a subsection of navigational capital, was inaccessible to students and their families. Although this information can be shared through informational community events (Amaro-Jimenez et al., 2020; Covarrubias, 2021), the systemic changes needed to truly make a difference for students whose goal is to earn a 4-year degree would include streamlining the financial aid application process or making higher education a part of public education, funded by the government rather than individual students and their families.

Throughout this chapter, I linked the previous findings to the current literature and found that this research study aligns with findings from other studies: mentors are critical support systems, especially for first-generation Latinx college students (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; O’Hara, 2022; Rutter et al., 2020); students feel strongly supported by their families in their pursuit of postsecondary educational goals (Bueno et al., 2022; Chlup et al., 2018; Crawley et al., 2019; Michel & Durdella, 2019); and using their home language to make sense of English and content curriculum is beneficial for students (Reid & Moore, 2008; Varghese & Fuentes, 2020; Wahleithner, 2020). In the next and final chapter, I review the research study and identify implications, recommendations, and limitations.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

It’s very humbling to hear their stories, what they have to go through. (Ms. Martinez, a counselor-participant)

Our students are smart and can get into universities. (Ms. Sampson, a teacher-participant)

They’re success stories. (Mr. Johnson, administrator-participant)

As described in the previous quotes, staff and faculty at one high school in California strongly believed the aspiring first-generation Latinx college students they have met and worked with are successful in higher education. Staff and faculty shared they have seen the barriers students and their families face and how staff and faculty have offered help and assistance to students to overcome those barriers, simultaneously expressing respect for the work students and their families do while also maintaining a deficit perspective on families’ involvement in their students’ education. This final chapter presents a summary of this research study and important conclusions drawn from the findings presented in previous chapters. I provide a discussion of specific implications and close with recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

This exploratory case study answered the research question: how are aspiring first-generation Latinx college students supported in their journey toward higher education, as perceived and experienced by students, staff, and faculty in one high school in California? In particular, this study focused on students who speak a language other than English (LOTE) at home, but may not identify themselves as bilingual or multilingual as they do not feel confident in their fluency in either home languages or in English. Students, staff, and faculty were all included in this study as crucial
stakeholders directly impacted by the practices, policies, and traditions in place for students interested in attending higher education.

**Review of Methodology**

This study used a case study research design to answer the singular research question by studying one unit of analysis (Bhattacharya, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018): the students who speak a LOTE at home and were part of the high school graduating class of 2022. This case study was exploratory (Fusch et al., 2017; Yin, 2018) because the purpose was to learn more about the support systems available to these students as they worked toward their postsecondary educational goals. By including the experiences of students, staff, and faculty, data were collected to allow for triangulation, thereby strengthening the trustworthiness of the findings. I aimed to “capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday situation” (Yin, 2018, p. 50) through “in-depth contextual study” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 26), therefore exemplifying the case study research design.

**Overview of Data Collection and Analysis**

With the graduating class of 2022 as the unit of analysis, the criteria to participate centered on students who were part of this class and staff and faculty who worked primarily with this class. Of the 705 students at Nina High School (a pseudonym), 9.5% (n = 67) participated in a demographic survey and of those, 7.5% (n = 5) participated in a semistructured interview. All 12th grade teachers and Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) teachers were invited to participate (n = 28) and 10.7% (n = 3) participated in semistructured interviews. There were two guidance counselors who worked with the graduating class of 2022 throughout their 4 years of high school and both counselors participated in semistructured interviews. There were three counselors in the College and Career Center and one of these counselors
participated in this study (33%). Finally, the head principal of the school also participated in a semistructured interview.

Data were initially collected through a demographic survey sent to all of the graduates of 2022 to provide insight into students’ backgrounds as described by students themselves and lay the groundwork for interviews with students. Then, semistructured interviews were conducted with all participants following the interview protocols (See Appendix C and D). These protocols were used as a guideline for the interviews, but participants were encouraged to speak freely and lead the conversation. The students’ interviews provided an opportunity for students to expand on their responses to the demographic survey and to openly discuss their experiences as they prepared for and applied to 4-year universities. The staff and faculty interviews followed a semistructured format to allow for consistency as they spoke about the support systems currently in place for students. Additionally, analytic memos were routinely written throughout the research study to begin identifying patterns and as a space for introspection.

The demographic survey was analyzed using various tables and charts, as shown in Chapter 4. The interviews were analyzed first through descriptive coding (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2021): identifying key points in the interviews that appeared with more than one participant with the aid of a spreadsheet to better visualize these points. Then, I grouped codes together based on similarities as part of the second cycle of coding and I assigned each group to a form of community cultural wealth (CCW) from Yosso’s (2005) framework. Additionally, emerging codes also demonstrated some types of capital overlapped and created new lenses through which to analyze the data. Throughout this analysis, I used single-case analysis, treating each group of stakeholders as a separate case, and cross-case analysis as I compared codes and patterns across the groups of stakeholders.
Synopsis of Major Findings

As discussed, data were initially analyzed with the stakeholder groups seen as separate cases, using the CCW framework described by Yosso (2005) as a lens. Then data were analyzed across stakeholder groups through cross-case analysis and several cases of overlap between types of capital were identified. In this section, I review the individual types of capital between cases and the overlap of types of capital across cases.

Themes Within Stakeholder Groups

Each of the stakeholder groups shared how students were supported and barred from access to postsecondary education. In this study, the types of capital did not exist within a binary of having the capital or not, but rather, a spectrum in which students may have a range of development of each type of capital. Development of each of the forms of capital provided additional support for students, but they frequently faced barriers in this work and often turned to staff and faculty for assistance.

Aspirational capital was operationalized to shift from all hope and motivation to pursue goals in the face of adversity (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005) to focus primarily on students’ hope and perseverance to pursue goals in higher education. The narratives shared by students and counselors indicated this form of capital in students was growing; students explained teachers worked to build up their confidence and reassure them they were capable of succeeding in postsecondary education and counselors discussed experiences in which counselors also built up students’ confidence and encouraged students to pursue their postsecondary educational goals. The administrator interviewed in this study explained students have aspirational capital, but continued progress in this area will help them to further strengthen their resolve in working toward their goals. Therefore, although students held some aspirational capital in the form of loose postsecondary educational goals, staff and
faculty encouragement helped to further strengthen this capital as students developed more details surrounding their goals and how to achieve them.

Familial capital was operationalized to focus on families’ influence and relationships specifically for students interested in attending higher education rather than the wide-encompassing pride and traditions associated with all close family relationships (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Students in this study shared their families strongly supported them in their pursuit of postsecondary education. One student explained, “It was just an expectation to go to college.” Another student said, “[My family] has always pushed that on me because they told me stories about their backgrounds and how much they wish they could have an opportunity to go to school like I do.” Counselors shared similar stories. One stated, “Families want them to go to college.” Another stated, “They are supporting these kids, 5,000%.” Teachers also described families as “supportive” and explained that families often want their students to attend college because they “don’t want their kids working in the field” alongside them. The administrator reiterated this narrative when he explained that students often “feel like they’re not [in college] for them[elves]. They’re there for the whole family.” Familial capital and the support from families for students to attend college is often very strong for these students and serves as a source of reassurance and encouragement.

Linguistic capital was very important throughout this study as the focus was on students who speak a LOTE at home. This form of capital refers to the skills developed through communication in more than one language, dialect, or style (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Each of the stakeholder groups shared stories in which students were faced with language barriers and how they struggled to slowly and steadily develop their linguistic capital, highlighting the differences in abilities between students’ conversational English versus academic
English. Each of the students said their English classes were most helpful in this process and the teachers shared ways in which they have integrated translation tools in other classes. The success of these tools was very limited, but the recent development of a cohort program in which students were supported by bilingual teachers and instructional aides was much more successful. The counselors and administration focused on the language fluency development program and explained that reclassification from ELL to English proficient is a huge accomplishment for students. The students who remembered this process explained the new label did provide a slight confidence boost and they were relieved to be in general English courses without the additional English development or support courses taking the place of elective courses in their daily schedules. There was agreement across the stakeholder groups that this form of capital is under continued growth and development, as one student said, “There’s always something to improve on.”

Navigational capital, in general, refers to the knowledge, often implicit, needed to navigate social institutions and systems (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005) and this capital was operationalized to focus on the social institution of higher education in this research study. Students shared their experiences of relying heavily on counselors to build up their navigational capital as they worked through the college and financial aid application processes. As one student explained, “Ms. Lincoln was . . . taking a large part of her time to help me and other friends when I was applying to college.” Counselors, in turn, shared their experiences in assisting students: helping students identify which colleges to apply to, encouraging students to write in their applications about the struggles they have endured, and searching alongside students for financial aid and scholarship opportunities. Additionally, the teachers discussed how they attempted to support students as well; teachers explained students often turn to the counselors before anyone else, but that teachers try to provide
another layer of support. Unfortunately, both students and counselors shared the financial aid process created the most barriers and the lack of financial assistance was the most often cited reason for students to not enroll in college immediately after high school. As one counselor explained, “I hate that it comes down to money, but it does come down to money because these kids are smart enough.” The administrator empathized with students’ struggles to develop navigational capital, recognizing “the [application] process is not good” and it is incredibly difficult to work through the bureaucracy of higher education and financial aid without a mentor who has been through the process. In this study, staff and faculty were working together to help students build navigational capital needed to work through the maze of higher education and financial aid applications.

In this study, resistant capital was operationalized to refer specifically to the ability to persevere and push forward in spite of societal barriers and challenges in assimilating or adapting to college culture. Counselors and teachers both shared the concern that students need to continue building resistant capital to succeed in higher education and they recommended students do so by finding connections and building a support system in college. Counselors and teachers recognized first-generation Latinx college students are often not reflected in higher education and the tertiary educational system as a whole was not built with these students in mind. As a result, counselors and teachers focused on encouraging students to find ways to feel a sense of belonging, reminding them “you belong there, that you got there for a reason. Stay there.” Additionally, counselors and teachers shared concerns that students need more help in building this form of capital.

Finally, social capital refers to the networks and support systems developed through friends, peers, and communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005) and was operationalized in this study to refer to community
networks developed between school members, families, students, and community members. Staff and faculty explained building these networks with families has been challenging, as one counselor stated, “We have about 700 students [in the graduating class] and we’ve only had about 200 parents show up.” But all staff and faculty recognized it is critically important for families to be involved. Counselors explained they hold informational events in the evenings and these events are always translated into families’ home languages, while teachers explained their daily interactions with students allowed them a pathway to build networks with families. The administration discussed information they want to share with families, but recognized a lack of connections with families may cause this information not be shared. These networks and the subsequent social capital must be built between students, families, staff, and faculty, but staff and faculty at this high school shared their struggles to do so.

The narratives and experiences from participants in each of the stakeholder groups demonstrated how the capitals in the CCW framework are not binary, but rather a spectrum. Students may have varying levels of capital. They, and staff and faculty, discussed ongoing attempts to build capital through sharing knowledge and making connections. In the next section, I discuss how types of capital may overlap, resulting in additional themes from the data.

**Themes Across Stakeholder Groups**

The second round of analysis found themes across stakeholder groups showed different types of capital are intertwined. Through the narratives shared in this study, working to strengthen one type of capital would also build other types of capital at the same time, indicating different types of capital overlap. Specifically, students, staff, and faculty shared narratives that showed an overlap between familial and linguistic capital; familial, navigational, and social capital; and aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital.
Familial and linguistic capital overlapped as language became a way for students to feel supported and connected by their families. Students and counselors discussed how students serve as language brokers to their families, even when the school provides translation services. With this responsibility, counselors explained students are often hesitant to move away to attend a 4-year university, stating, “They don’t feel right leaving them. Because they’ll be like, I know my parents need my help. I know my parents would live a lot easier if I were to stay.” Even though the school provides translation services, students often assist their families as language brokers in addition to working outside the home, caring for younger siblings or cousins, and helping their families in the home, too. The close familial ties students hold look very different from the individualism often seen in White, middle-class families and reflect an interdependence and shared perspective on success for the family. Therefore, the overlap in these two forms of capital represents an additional difficulty that students must acknowledge and resolve in their pursuit of postsecondary education.

Familial, navigational, and social capital overlapped in this study because building networks and connections, or social capital, with families would also strengthen students’ familial capital, or the pride associated with close family relationships. These networks and family ties could serve as a pathway for staff and faculty to share information and skills related to navigating through the social institution of higher education, or navigational capital, with students and their families. Participants in each of the stakeholder groups discussed the importance of these networks between the school and families to learn more about the college and financial aid application processes. Staff and faculty discussed some of the events that families are invited to, including Cafécito, UC Success Night, and informational events, but they and students also shared the low attendance rates. Students suggested making these events “more comfortable” and “more casual” while teachers suggested “meetings in the evening, after
work is over” or even “on the weekends,” but firmly stating families “need to feel welcome here.” These events currently maintain a rigid feel, with staff, faculty, and administrators at the front of the room, steering the conversation and following a previously set agenda. They do not allow for a casual give-and-take in conversations, but rather uphold boundaries put in place by the educational institution. Each of the stakeholder groups recognized the importance in building up the social capital with students and their families, highlighting the strengths of strong familial capital, and sharing navigational capital through these networks and family ties.

Aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital also overlapped considerably as staff and faculty shared knowledge and taught skills related to persevering through higher education. Teachers and counselors addressed the difficulties that students face in learning how to feel a sense of belonging in higher education, stating, “If you can’t socialize at college, and you don’t feel like you’re part of things, you’re going to come running home.” As one counselor explained:

You never think it makes you feel some type of way but it does make you feel some type of way when you’re in a lecture hall with 500 other students that are White and it’s you and one other person that you see that looks like you.

This struggle to feel like they belong in a higher education environment that is predominantly White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022), upper-class (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020b), and monolingual English-speaking (Covarrubias, 2021), affects many students and can wear down their resistant capital; staff and faculty at this high school recognize this problem. Therefore, staff and faculty work to help students to build support networks and a sense of belonging in higher education by making connections with students, establishing rapport, and helping students expand their networks into college and collegiate support programs. Teachers and counselors together found building navigational capital in students helped to also strengthen their aspirational and resistant
capital; as students learned how to navigate higher education, their confidence in the pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals and resilience in themselves grew as well.

The themes found across the stakeholder groups indicated the types of capital in this framework are not separate entities to be defined and built individually. Rather, these types of capital intersect, overlap, and are closely intertwined. Therefore, building one type of capital inevitably builds another type of capital.

**Findings Related to the Literature**

The findings of this study aligned with the current research in several ways: (a) students often feel supported through mentorship that provides needed navigational capital; (b) students feel supported by their families, even if that support is not visible to staff and faculty; (c) ELD is supported in all classes, not only English classes; and (d) students struggle to build navigational capital directly related to financial aid literacy. In this section, I relate each of these findings to current literature.

**Mentorship Provided Needed Navigational Capital**

Counselors and teachers often serve as mentors to students and their families, working as the first point of contact, as one student explained, “My parents will contact my counselors first because they met my counselors first.” They are institutional brokers (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016), “powerful tools” (O’Hara, 2022, p. 324), and key entry points for students and their families working toward postsecondary educational goals. This study provides additional support for the current literature describing the importance of mentorships in the development of navigational capital, particularly in regard to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students.

To have successful mentorships, the relationships need to be personal and authentic (O’Hara, 2022). This can be accomplished through frequent and meaningful contact (Glass, 2023; Rutter et al., 2020) focused on individualized attention to close
knowledge gaps (M. Martinez et al., 2019). Students in this study understood when staff and faculty were going above and beyond their contractual duties to “have conversations with me and exchange emails” and help them “really understand what [they're] getting into.” They also shared staff and faculty worked to build students’ confidence as they worked toward becoming the first in their families to attend college, reminding students “You can do it” and taking a genuine interest in students’ goals. This work builds the authenticity of the mentorships and allows for trust to grow between students with the staff and faculty. As one of the counselors said, “Once they trust you, they trust you. Like, you’ll see younger siblings coming in and go ‘See Ms. Lincoln!’”

Through mentorship, students and their families are able to steadily build connections with the school and also learn more about the intricacies of higher education and the associated application processes. These relationships are incredibly important and helpful for students’ later success in postsecondary education as well. Although students in this study explained staff and faculty were most helpful in their pursuit of higher education, students said their families were most influential.

**Support From Families Is Often not Visible to Staff and Faculty**

Many studies have stated Latinx students face difficulties regarding their families’ involvement in their education because this involvement is not always seen. Chlup et al. (2018) reported families struggle to develop relationships with staff and faculty. Rutter et al. (2020) explained barriers in communication lead to misperceptions and misunderstandings. Crawley et al. (2019) stated the responsibility to ask for help and guidance often falls to families who may not know what they do not know. This study reported similar findings as one teacher shared, “I feel like parents don’t participate, overall” and another said, “I have limited contact with most of the families” while counselors disclosed roughly only 28% of families participate in informational events.
Although staff and faculty do not witness families’ support for their students, they recognize the invaluable role families play in their students’ postsecondary educational goals and are constantly looking for ways to include families in the college application processes. As one teacher said, “[Families] need to be here on campus . . . It needs to be convenient for them. It needs to be translated. They need to feel welcome here.” Thus far, these events have been focused on sharing information rather than building rapport and the “sit and get” approach with staff and faculty at the front of the room, lecturing with the use of a microphone, dissuades families from attending. The informational events discussed in the literature focused on building relationships with families have been shown to increase families’ navigational and social capital (Amaro-Jimenez et al., 2020), play a central role in developing connections with families (Michel & Durdella, 2019), and further validate students’ educational goals (Bueno et al., 2022).

Without personal experience in higher education, students in this study explained their families felt out of place on campus and that their families “never really had a good understanding of how the college system works and how to apply.” This is similar to current literature that has explained Latinx families felt discouraged from approaching school officials to address the implicit knowledge of college culture out of respect for the authoritative roles teachers and administrators hold, leading to miscommunication and misperceptions (Clayton et al., 2019; Rutter et al., 2020; Yasuike, 2019). As a result, the responsibility to navigate the application processes falls to the students and they must find ways to learn more about higher education while also balancing school, work, and family responsibilities, similarly to first-generation Latinx college students in Kouyoumdjian and colleague’s (2017) study.

Furthermore, students in this study reported feeling similarly to students in other studies who felt strongly supported by their families and often pursued higher education as a way to repay their families for sacrifices their families have made (Huynh et al.,
As discussed in earlier chapters, 62% of students at this high school are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. The students in this study shared, “I see the way that [my family has] struggled and how hard they work all the time” and “I just want to help my family.” Staff and faculty echoed these thoughts, saying, “They realize what sacrifice that their parents have put in to get them to that place” and “[Students] want to work to help the family.” This aligns with several studies with the following findings: (a) students whose families who have built up resilience were more likely to persevere in higher education (Marrun, 2020; Rocha, 2021); (b) Latinx students often develop a sense of family responsibility (Boden, 2011; O’Hara, 2022); and (c) Latinx students often find that working to help their families is one way they can give back and thank their families for their support and sacrifice (Huynh et al., 2023; Yasuike, 2019).

Like published literature (Chlup et al., 2018; Cuevas, 2020; Michel & Durdella, 2019), staff and faculty in this study held a deficit perspective on families’ support for students because they did not witness it themselves. However, students expressed strong support from their families and shared although they struggled to be the first in their families to attend college, they were eager to do so to give back to their families. Students felt supported by their families and used their home language to maintain a close connection to their families.

**ELD Is Supported Across all Classes**

English skills are developed through classes specifically designed to help students obtain academic fluency. Students take annual exams to determine their level of English fluency and, if deemed sufficiently fluent, students are reclassified from ELL to reclassified English fluency proficient (RFEP). At the high school in this study, 17% of students were classified as ELLs and an additional 71% were reclassified as proficient in English. Studies have shown it takes the average learner 5–7 years to obtain fluency in
academic English, but students are expected to be reclassified within 2–3 years (Ryoo, 2015; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

With such a large majority of students who speak a LOTE at home, “every teacher teaches ELD [or English Language Development] students.” There has been a shift in language studies to recognize language “is not simply a sum” of home languages and English (García, 2020, p. 557), but instead language develops organically, creating a robust linguistic repertoire (Flores & Rosa, 2015). The process of using multiple “language skills simultaneously” (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017, p. 252) is called translanguaging (García & Li, 2014). Teachers in this study described this process when they discussed the tools used to teach curricular content to students who are still working toward academic English fluency.

One teacher explained, “We relied heavily on translation services, through Google, sometimes through aides, and sometimes even through other students.” Recent changes in the science and math classes in this high school have resulted in “programs in which [they] have got aides going out with designated students and the courses are designed around helping students learn their English better within the content area.” Students’ home languages are purposefully welcomed into all classrooms and students are encouraged to use both their home language and English to make sense of the curricular content, breaking away from the mold of monolingual classrooms (Daniel & Pacheco, 2016; DiNapoli & Morales, 2021).

Although students were supported in their ELD in all classes each day, the counselors in this study explained, “When it comes to the academic portion [English], when it comes to their academic writing, and the academic vernacular, it’s just not there.” Subsequently, all of the students in this study named their English classes as most helpful in developing these skills, stating these classes helped them to learn, “what to expect and sometimes [they] even did college level assignments,” One student said,
“[these classes] get you into the mentality that you need to have once you’re a college student. Like other studies in this field (e.g., Reid & Moore, 2008; Varghese & Fuentes, 2020; Wahleithner, 2020), this research study found students’ English classes built students’ confidence in their English skills, particularly classes that included rigorous writing assignments.

ELD is a critical component to students’ success in higher education. Additionally, the tools and cohort programs adopted by this high school have allowed students to cultivate these skills by attempting to incorporate their full linguistic repertoire. It is a support provided by the high school that is particularly helpful to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students who speak a LOTE at home as they are able to develop their English fluency within an academic environment while also learning curricular content.

Financial Aid Literacy Capital Is Inaccessible

Finally, each of the stakeholder groups discussed the inaccessibility of financial aid and the critical role this played in students’ decision-making processes. The lack of sufficient financial assistance was a leading cause for four of the five student to postpone attending a 4-year university immediately after high school. Through interviews with staff and faculty, it became clear students postponed due to more than simply a lack of funds; students in this study struggled to obtain the navigational capital needed to find and apply for all of the financial aid for which they qualified. This was also seen in Tichavakunda and Galan’s (2020) study, where they found the most significant gaps in knowledge shared by first-generation college students were about financial aid. Additionally, Marrun (2020) and Wilbur and Roscigno (2016) found that first-generation Latinx college students were more likely to work to pay for the tuition and fees of college. Therefore, the current literature and this current study all indicate
students need explicit knowledge of financial aid literacy capital within navigational capital to find and apply for adequate financial assistance.

Financial aid literacy capital, as a subsection of navigational capital, refers to the knowledge needed to navigate through financial aid, grant, and scholarship applications and to identify resources available both on and off school campuses. This capital must be explicitly taught to first-generation Latinx college students for students to obtain sufficient funds for their college education. In this section, I reviewed major findings in this study and specified how they related to current literature. In the next section, I discuss findings that were unanticipated through this research study and how they relate current literature.

**Unexpected Findings**

Although this research study answered how aspiring first-generation Latinx college felt supported in the pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals, other findings presented themselves as well. This research study (a) gave rise to another approach to using Yosso’s (2005) CCW framework, (b) revealed discrepancies in institutional and self-reported racial and ethnic data, and (c) highlighted the lack of transparency in the education system, especially regarding language fluency labels. In this section, I elaborate on these unexpected findings and relate them to the current literature.

**Using CCW as a Kaleidoscope**

While analyzing the qualitative data collected semistructured interviews, it became apparent the types of capital in Yosso’s (2005) CCW framework can and do overlap considerably. Previous studies have often focused on only one type of capital at a time (e.g., Crawley et al., 2019; Glass, 2023; Kornbluh et al., 2021; Yasuike, 2019) although Yosso and García (2007) explained these types of capitals can overlap, like a kaleidoscope. As Figure 26 shows, all six types of capital can overlap to create many,
many lenses through which to analyze data further. In this study, I found themes in the overlap between linguistic and familial capital; familial, navigational, and social capital; and aspirational, navigational, and resistant capital. These overlapping lenses warranted more attention and revealed further findings across the stakeholder groups, discussed in previous sections.

**Figure 26**

*Community Cultural Wealth Framework, Seen as Overlapping Lenses*

“This is no slum!” A critical race theory analysis of community cultural wealth in Culture Clash’s *Chavez Ravine,* by T. J. Yosso & D. G. García, 2007.

This method of using the overlap between types of capital as a lens through which to analyze data can be adopted for use in future studies and further demonstrates the intersectionality of cultural capital. Culture itself is not made up of singular pieces, but many overlapping characteristics, practices, and traditions. Similarly, the types of capital in this framework are not made up of singular pieces in isolation, but rather overlap and intersect. As such, cultural capital should also exemplify an intricate network of knowledge, skills, and abilities and celebrate racial and ethnic identities, even when faced with possible erasure, as discussed next.

**Discrepancies in Racial and Ethnic Data**

This research study was focused on Latinx students, particularly those who spoke a LOTE at home; therefore, there was an assumption that findings would be related to language and language fluency. However, it was very surprising to find significant discrepancies in racial and ethnic data. These discrepancies provided a clear example of how White was seen as the “norm” and anything else was different or other.

Preliminary demographic data were collected from the high school’s administration from their standard intake questionnaire presented to all incoming students in the ninth grade. These data showed over 80% of students in the graduating class of 2022 were White. However, these data did not correlate with the visual make-up of the student population on campus. Students who participated in the demographic survey (9.5%, n = 67) provided in this research study were given the opportunity to identify their race and ethnicity: 98.5% (n = 66) self-identified as Latino or Hispanic and
of these students, 100% identified specifically as Mexican. These data were wildly different from the preliminary data from the high school.

Further investigation revealed the high school's intake questionnaire asked students if they identified as Latino or Hispanic and then asked them to specify further by selecting White, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, or Native American. If students did not specify further, the questionnaire defaulted to White, regardless of students' response to identify as Latino or Hispanic. This default to White demonstrates a focus on White as the norm and what is expected, pushing students who identify as any other race or ethnicity to the margins.

This erasure of students' identities was unforeseen and troubling as it further promoted the normalization of Whiteness (Carr, 2016). Unfortunately, racial and ethnic labels were not the only unexpected findings in this study as language labels also presented themselves.

**Lack of Transparency Seen in Language Proficiency Labeling**

In this research study, preliminary data collected from the administration of the high school showed 12% ($n = 86$) of the graduating class of 2022 was labeled as native English speakers, 71% ($n = 498$) as REFP, and 17% ($n = 121$) as ELLs. However, in the demographic survey, 25.4% ($n = 17$) students identified themselves as native English speakers, 25.4% ($n = 17$) as REFP, and 49.3% ($n = 33$) as ELLs. With such significant differences between the population at large and the sample (9.5% of students, $n = 67$), follow-up questions were asked during the semistructured interviews with students.

Of the five students interviewed, two had identified themselves as native English speakers in the demographic survey, but the language label assigned to these students by the high school was REFP. Students individually explained they had gone through the reclassification process in elementary school and thought the label had been dropped when they moved on to middle school. They were surprised to learn the label traveled
with them, but this surprise demonstrates the lack of transparency in educational institutions and the maintenance of linguistic hegemony.

Although students who have been REFP were called “success stories” in this study, the label of “reclassified” indicates a continued difference and inferiority of their language capabilities. Rather than referring to these students as simply English speakers as they have become, they are continually reminded that English was not their first language and they are “other.” As Shapiro (2014) said, this label “simultaneously essentializes English Language Learners as linguistically deficient and disregards their proficiencies in languages other than English” (p. 387). These labels work as jaulas, or cages, that continually remind students they do not exist within the norm (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021).

Although this research study learned more about the support systems available to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students, unexpected findings also presented themselves. Through multiple rounds of qualitative analysis, a new method of using Yosso’s (2005) CCW framework was developed. Discrepancies in racial and ethnic data between the high school and students’ self-identifications revealed examples of White used as the default or “norm.” Language fluency labels demonstrated the distinct lack of transparency in the social institution of education and the jaulas (Abril-Gonzalez & Shannon, 2021) that follow students who speak a LOTE at home. In the next section, I return to the focus of this research study and discuss the implications, recommendations, and limitations as a result of the findings.

**Conclusions**

This research study focused on support systems available to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students, especially those who speak a LOTE at home. A variety of stakeholder groups, including students, counselors, teachers, and administrators were interviewed to provide a holistic view of these support systems.
Overall, students felt supported through mentorships, their families, and in their language development and these support systems were triangulated with input from staff and faculty. All parties agreed that students do not have sufficient support in obtaining financial aid literacy capital. In this section, I discuss the implications of this study, recommendations for this particular high school, limitations of this study, and future research suggestions.

**Implications**

This study found although aspiring first-generation college students at this high school made up of over 95% Latinx students with very high college acceptance rates, students also had very low college enrollment rates. All five of the students interviewed in this study were accepted to 4-year universities, but only one enrolled. Comparing students’ experiences with staff and faculty narratives showed the biggest factor in students’ decision to enroll, or not, in a 4-year university immediately after high school was financial aid; a lack of sufficient financial assistance led students, whose end goal was a bachelor's degree, to alternative pathways, including community college and the military. As one counselor said, “[These students] have the grades, they have the ability, they have the activities. But it’s the dollars.”

Additionally, these findings were triangulated to indicate families play a central role in the decision-making process, but communication with families is limited. Reasons varied among participants, but these can be surmised by one teachers’ input, who said, “[Parents and families] need to be here on campus at meetings in the evening, after work is over. It needs to be convenient for them.” The student who enrolled in a 4-year university explained this was a family decision and he would not have enrolled without his family’s support. Likewise, the four students who were accepted but did not enroll immediately explained support their families had for their postsecondary educational goals, but they and their families struggled to understand the maze of
applications into and through higher education. Therefore, it is critical that families are included in the college and financial aid application processes and information on how to navigate these social institutions is intentionally, strategically, and consistently shared. In the following section, I specify recommendations resulting from these implications.

**Recommendations**

Each of the stakeholder groups in this research study provided recommendations on how to include families in informational events on campus more frequently to provide the navigational capital needed to enter higher education and build the social capital that can provide additional support systems. In particular, participants discussed community events, the March of [Mascots], a weekly check-in program, and a support network after high school.

Students and teachers discussed informational events for parents and families to attend on campus to build and strengthen their networks with staff and faculty. Students suggested rather than meeting with families during the week, events should also be offered on the weekends. They also proposed events should be casual to encourage parents and families to mingle and talk with staff and faculty rather than a “sit and get” approach. Teachers reiterated these events and strongly advised translators be made available, all materials be offered in students’ home languages, and the focus of these events should be on welcoming families. For instance, events could become more welcoming by inviting food trucks, booking local bands, and spreading the event out to encompass the entire campus rather than only in the library or cafeteria. There is an opportunity for informational events to become community events by bringing the community onto the campus and intentionally making space for families to feel welcome.

Teachers also discussed the March of [Mascots], an annual event in which alumni return to campus for a weekday college and job fair on the football field. During this event, alumni set up booths and teachers bring their classes at their convenience to
peruse the booths and learn more about the pathways alumni have taken after high school. However, in recent years, the March of [Mascots] has become more open-ended and the focus has shifted to be a job and college fair rather than a celebration of alumni and a way of connecting current and past students together. Teachers in this research study recommended returning this event to its beginnings by focusing again on welcoming alumni back to campus and encouraging former students to become mentors to current students, in essence, formalizing this process to encourage mentorships between alumni and current students. In doing so, the March of [Mascots] would become “unique” and “exclusive” to this particular high school once more.

Additionally, Ms. Sampson, a teacher, suggested, “If we had some sort of a program where every Monday during period one, all students looked at this kind of career counseling or this kind of emotional thinking or this kind of ‘what are you going to do in the future?’ or this kind of ‘what's your plan for the future?’” Starting in ninth grade, as advised by the students in this study, this weekly check-in would give teachers the time and space to build rapport with students and work toward becoming an advocate for these students and their families. In doing so, it would provide some of the benefits of the cohort-style of the AVID program without requiring all students to take an additional class.

Finally, the administration discussed implementing a program for previous students in which they are able to access college and career counselors after they have graduated. As Mr. Johnson explained, “When you’re at Sacramento State or wherever and you don’t know anybody like that, you can call back and go ‘Hey, Ms. Lincoln’ and just to have somebody that would be huge.” This would help students to begin their postsecondary social network while still in high school and it would provide them with a way to obtain the navigational capital they need while in higher education.
These recommendations are ways staff and faculty can create pathways for students and their families to feel welcome on campus and also provide the capital students need as they work toward their postsecondary educational goals. Further recommendations in regard to future research are discussed below.

**Limitations**

This was a single case study of one secondary school on the central coast of California with a student population that was 95% Latinx and of which only 11% spoke English at home. With such a narrow focus of study, it was incredibly difficult to make generalizations, although this study may serve to contribute to future theories and generalizations (Schwandt & Gates, 2017). This aligns with most qualitative research studies as the focus is not to draw generalizations about a particular population group as a whole, but rather to identify key elements of these studies that can be transferred into new environments or applied to new groups of participants. Therefore, although this was a single case study, elements from this case study may be transferable to other case studies and populations.

Additionally, there were limitations involved with my role as a teacher of these student participants. This role may have prevented me from objectively analyzing the data with a critical eye as these participants were my students and colleagues. Although I built a rapport with my own students, I was not able to do so with the entire graduating class of 2022. Therefore, there was a possibility of skewing the data to catered toward my own students as they were more likely to participate in this study, rather than a more unbiased view of all students’ viewpoints.

Furthermore, by focusing solely on experiences and perceptions, I excluded the collection of artifacts from informational events and campus visits. These sources of data would have been helpful in developing a deeper and more critical understanding of the support systems available to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students and served
as an additional form of data to triangulate with the participants’ interviews. However, inclusion of these artifacts would have shifted the focus of this research study and therefore, they were excluded.

Finally, time constraints presented themselves as significant limitations. I was unable to develop a rapport and interview the families of students to take a more holistic approach with another viewpoint and stakeholder group. Such relationships take significant amounts of time that were unavailable during this research study. Additionally, although a multiple cases approach, rather than a single case approach, would provide increased validity and reliability in themes and results (Quintao et al., 2020), it was not feasible to complete in the limited time frame. Therefore, this research study was limited to a single case of the students who speak a LOTE at home and are part of the graduating class of 2022.

**Future Research**

Ideally, this research study will be replicated with the next graduating class to adopt the multiple cases approach. Through the comparison between graduating classes, additional data may present new findings or perspectives. As a result, generalizations and recommendations may become more informed to better suit aspiring first-generation college students, specifically Latinx students.

Furthermore, although families were not included in this study, they should be included in future studies. Attempts were made to include families in this specific study, but the families declined invitations to participate. Participation in research studies requires a significant amount of vulnerability from families and there simply was not enough time to build the rapport and trust needed to establish a strong enough foundation to allow for that vulnerability. Therefore, connections and relationships need to be built before families can be approached regarding future research.
Additionally, this case study, and the case studies focused on future graduating classes, should be transitioned into a longitudinal study to compare 4-year university enrollment rates, transfer rates from community colleges to 4-year universities, and college graduation rates. Using the findings from this study, guidelines should be implemented to successfully build systemic informal mentorships, connections with families and the local community, and financial aid literacy capital. These changes must be intentionally, systemically, and consistently applied and the effects of these changes must be observed and recorded. Adjustments should be made to best support aspiring first-generation Latinx college students as determined through further studies on rates of 4-year university enrollment and college graduation.

Findings from this research study indicated mentorship is critical, families are students’ biggest supporters, language development influences college preparations, and financial aid is an ongoing hurdle. Therefore, finding ways to build connections with families in order to develop mentorships, language development, and share financial aid information will help students the most in the pursuit of their postsecondary educational goals and recommendations reflect the same. The study was limited in time and scope. Consequently, future research would do well to use this study as a starting point and expand to include multiple cases and more stakeholders before shifting to a longitudinal study to learn about the effects of current support systems and modified support systems reflective of the current study.

**Concluding Remarks**

This research study showed how aspiring first-generation Latinx college students feel supported in their educational journey, especially those students who speak a LOTE at home because these students in particular face “unique cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic challenges” (Flink, 2018, p. 402). This was done through semistructured interviews with students, staff, and faculty to obtain a more comprehensive view of
current systems of support at one particular high school in California. The key takeaway from this study was relationships.

Students described genuine and compassionate relationships with teachers in which they were taught, supported, and challenged. They described authentic and trustworthy relationships with counselors in which they felt seen, learned about higher education, and shared their own stories. Students described close and supportive relationships with their families in which students were encouraged to pursue their goals, reminded of how hard their families had worked, and found inspiration to change the trajectory for future generations.

Staff and faculty described relationships with students and students’ families. Staff and faculty told stories of sharing a guide to the maze of educational institutions, learning about the struggles students have faced, and finding common ground in the shared local community. They told stories of how hard students have worked against and through societal barriers, how much their families have sacrificed in support of their students, and how proud they are of the graduates they have gotten to know.

To share navigational and social capital, build aspirational and resistant capital, and celebrate familial and linguistic capital, personal connections must be in place first. These connections cannot be built overnight nor without genuine effort. Authentic relationships are built with steady and consistent demonstrations of communication and trust. Staff and faculty need the time and resources to establish relationships with students and their families through regular meetings or events in which staff and faculty share reliable information and learn more about students’ experiences with barriers and successes. Students and their families need time and opportunities to feel welcomed to campus, ask questions, and learn from and with staff and faculty.

Each of the stakeholder groups needs time to build relationships. Community and alumni events, weekly check-ins with teachers, and a network for recent graduates
are all support systems that require time to build the relationships necessary to share information and learn from each other. These are systemic changes across the ecological systems surrounding students, including families, teachers, counselors, and administrators. The support systems that students named in the study, including mentorships, familial encouragement, and language development, all took significant amounts of time to build. But each of these support systems mentioned were built through genuine and authentic relationships, which take time and resources to cultivate.

It comes down to relationships.
REFERENCES


Alvarez v. Lemon Grove School District, Superior Court of the State of California, County of San Diego (1931).


Brazil-Cruz, L., & Martinez, S. S. (2016). The importance of networking and supportive staff for Latina/o first-generation students and their families as they transition to higher education. Association of Mexican American Educators Journal, 10(1), 130–158.


Mendez v. Westminster School District, 161 F.2d 774 (9th Cir. 1947).


U.S. Census Bureau. (2022, February 24). *Census bureau releases new educational attainment data*. https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/educational-attainment.html#:%3B:text=the%20Hispanic%20population.,,From%202011%20to%202021%2C%20the%20percentage%20of%20adults%20age%2025,20.6%25%20for%20the%20Hispanic%20population


APPENDIX A

Demographic Survey

1. What gender do you identify as?
   - Male
   - Female
   - Nonbinary
   - Other
   - Prefer not to say

2. Please specify your race. Click all that apply.
   - Caucasian/White
   - African-American/Black
   - Latino or Hispanic
   - Asian
   - Middle Eastern, North African
   - Native American
   - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   - Other
   - Prefer not to say

3. If you selected Latino or Hispanic above, please specify which country you identify with below. Click all that apply.
   - Argentina
   - Bolivia
   - Brazil
   - Chile
   - Colombia
   - Costa Rica
   - Cuba
   - Dominican Republic
   - Ecuador
   - El Salvador
   - Guatemala
   - Honduras
   - Mexico
   - Nicaragua
   - Panama
   - Paraguay
   - Peru
   - Puerto Rico
   - Uruguay
   - Venezuela
   - Spain

4. Which language fluency label do you identify with?
   - English Language Learner (ELL)
   - Reclassified English Proficient (RFEP)
   - “Native” English speaker

5. If you selected “Reclassified English Proficient (RFEP)” above, how old were you when you were reclassified?

6. Which language(s) do you speak at home?
7. If you selected “Other language” above, what language do you speak at home?
8. What is the highest level of education your parents completed?
   - Less than high school
   - Some high school
   - High school
   - Some college
   - Associate's, or 2-year degree
   - Bachelor's, or 4-year degree
   - Master's degree
   - PhD or higher
9. What is the highest level of education your older siblings completed?
   - Less than high school
   - Some high school
   - High school
   - Some college
   - Associate's, or 2-year degree
   - Bachelor's, or 4-year degree
   - Master's degree
   - PhD or higher
   - Not applicable/not relevant
10. Did you take an Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) elective class while attending Santa Maria High School?
    - Yes
    - No
11. Did you take Advanced Placement (AP) or honors classes?
    - Yes
    - No
12. If you took Advanced Placement (AP) or honors classes, which classes did you take?
13. Did you participate in Upward Bound with California State University, or University of California -
    - Yes
    - No
14. Did you participate in Educational Talent Search with California State University or University of California,?
    - Yes
    - No
15. Did you participate in the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP)?
    - Yes
    - No
16. Did you use resources in the College & Career Center?
    - Yes
    - No
17. If you DID use resources in the College & Career Center, what exactly did you use there?

18. What are your plans after high school?
   - Taking time off to work
   - Attending trade or vocational school
   - Attending community college
   - Attending a 4-year university
   - Joining the military
   - Other

19. Did you apply to 4-year universities?
   - Yes
   - No

20. If you DID apply to 4-year universities, do you plan to attend a 4-year university?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Maybe

21. If you ARE attending a 4-year university in fall 2022, please select all that apply:
   - It is located in California
   - It is a public university (like University of California or California State University)
   - It is located in a different state in the United States
   - It is located in a different country
   - It is a private university

22. If you DID apply to 4-year universities, but you are NOT attending a 4-year university in the fall, what do you plan to do instead?
   - Attend a community college
   - Attend a trade or vocational school
   - Work full-time
   - Work part-time
   - Join the military
   - Help care for family or friends
   - Other

23. Are you interested in participating in a follow-up interview?
   - Yes
   - No

24. If you responded “yes” above, please provide your personal email address:
## APPENDIX B

### Codebook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>First cycle of coding</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Capital</td>
<td>Skills developed through communication in more than one language, dialect, or style (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano &amp; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005); In particular, students’ skills and abilities students build in English as nonnative speakers</td>
<td>English Classes</td>
<td>Students’ experiences in English classes in high school</td>
<td>Academic English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency Label</td>
<td>Students’ experiences with varying English fluency labels (language learner, English proficient, native English) and descriptions of this process</td>
<td>Language Brokers</td>
<td>Examples of students’ experiences as the ones responsible for translating back and forth between their home language and English for their families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Barriers</td>
<td>Examples demonstrating how difficult and nuanced the process is to translate between English and students’ home languages in ways that ensure understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familial Capital</td>
<td>Pride and cultural traditions associated with close family ties and relationships (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano &amp; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005); Specifically, the influence students' families have on their postsecondary goals and their families' involvement in their education</td>
<td>Family’s Influence</td>
<td>Examples of families’ roles in students’ decision-making process regarding postsecondary education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family's Influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Student's Pride</td>
<td>Descriptions of students' feelings of pride for their families as a result of their educational achievements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Responsibilities</td>
<td>Narratives describing students' responsibilities in the family in which these responsibilities influence whether or not they seek postsecondary education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proactive Families</td>
<td>Examples in which families are very active and heavily involved in their child's education (e.g., attending information nights, contact)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disengaged Families</strong></td>
<td>Examples in which families are not active with students’ education and instead rely on students to handle all educational matters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Afraid to let go</strong></td>
<td>Descriptions of families’ feelings of fear to let their child/student move to a 4-year university; fear of the unknown from parents and families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Navigational Capital</strong></td>
<td>Knowledge necessary to navigate social institutions and systems, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano &amp; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005); Especially focused on finding ways to provide students with the knowledge needed to navigate higher education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers as Mentors</strong></td>
<td>Experiences with teachers working as mentors for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Counselors as Mentors</strong></td>
<td>Experiences with counselors working as mentors for students and their families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teams &amp; Coaches</strong></td>
<td>Experiences with coaches working as mentors and advocates for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assistance after High School</strong></td>
<td>Mentorship after high school graduation, provided by current high school teachers and counselors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Military pathway</strong></td>
<td>Using the military as a pathway to attend a 4-year university (e.g., GI Bill, benefits, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community college pathway</strong></td>
<td>Using community college to ease into postsecondary education while continuing to live at home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Capital</strong></td>
<td>The networks and support systems developed through friends, peers, and communities (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano &amp; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005); The networks developed between school members, families, students, and community members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community nights</strong></td>
<td>The counseling department works to provide informational events to build a network with families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team of Family &amp; School</strong></td>
<td>The social support system built through rapport and trust between families and staff/faculty to create a team working together to help the student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developing skills</strong></td>
<td>Specifically, the development of skills needed to build a social network (e.g., asking for help, taking risks, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Building a network</strong></td>
<td>Specifically, actions or behaviors of building a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspirational Capital</td>
<td>Hope and motivation to pursue goals and dreams, even when faced with systemic and structural barriers (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano &amp; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005); Specially, the hope and perseverance to set and pursue postsecondary goals as first-generation college students</td>
<td>Starting the journey</td>
<td>Discussion of when students start to focus on and work toward preparing for postsecondary education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploring beyond home</td>
<td>Building up aspirational capital includes taking students to see and envision college campuses.</td>
<td>Building Confidence</td>
<td>Describing the work associated with building up students’ confidence and encouraging them to apply to 4-year universities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community college as hindrance</td>
<td>The local community college offers a way for students to continue their education, but many do not transfer to 4-year universities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistant Capital</td>
<td>Skills developed specifically in the face of systemic oppression and inequality (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Solórzano &amp; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2005); Specifically, the ability to persevere and push forward in spite of societal barriers in reference to the challenges in assimilating or adapting to college culture.</td>
<td>Monetary perseverance</td>
<td>Although students can work and make money now, they need to understand that with a college degree, they will be able to make more money later.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehension around First in the Family</td>
<td>Students are worried and apprehensive about being the first in their families to attend college.</td>
<td>Lack of network</td>
<td>Students’ experiences in preparing for or attending 4-year universities without a support system present at the university.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determined to make it</td>
<td>Experiences and narratives exemplifying resistance and determination to succeed in postsecondary education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Literacy Capital – branch of navigational capital</td>
<td>The skills needed to adequately prepare for the costs associated with postsecondary education and navigate through the application processes</td>
<td>Too expensive</td>
<td>Parents and/or families cannot afford for students to attend a university.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial apprehension</td>
<td>Parents and/or families refuse to take out loans or lines of credit for students’ education.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confusion with applications</td>
<td>Students and their families may often get confused on how to apply for all of the financial aid they qualify for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid nights</td>
<td>The counseling department offers informational events to offer families assistance in applying for financial aid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol: Students

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Just as a quick reminder: the purpose of this study is to learn more about the supports available to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students at Santa Maria High School. You are being asked to participate because you are a recent high school graduate and you participated in the initial survey.

Anything you say is confidential and none of your identifying details will be shared with anyone for any reason. If at any time you do not want to participate, you can withdraw without penalty. You will be able to see this transcript, make corrections, and consent to the findings before it is presented or published anywhere. Does this sound okay? Do you have any questions?

1. In the survey, you identified as “reclassified English proficiency.” Tell me about the process of reclassification. When did it happen? How did you feel about this process then? How do you feel about the process now?

2. Can you describe the effects reclassification has had on your education? Are there things that were beneficial, challenging, or you wish you could change?

3. What classes do you think have been most helpful to you in preparing for college? Why?

4. Can you describe/draw a timeline of critical events that led to you applying to college?

5. Who was most influential in your decision to apply for and prepare to attend college? Why?

6. Who was most helpful in your decision to apply for and prepare to attend college? Why?
APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol: Staff and Faculty

Thank you for participating in this interview.

Just as a quick reminder: the purpose of this study is to learn more about the supports available to aspiring first-generation Latinx college students at [occluded]. You are being asked to participate because you have worked with students who prepared for and applied to college.

Anything you say is confidential and none of your identifying details will be shared with anyone for any reason. If at any time you do not want to participate, you can withdraw without penalty. You will be able to see this transcript, make corrections, and consent to the findings before it is presented or published anywhere. Does this sound okay? Do you have any questions?

1. Tell me about your experiences working with students who are English language learners or who have been reclassified as English proficient. What do you enjoy most about working with students whose native language is not English? What is most challenging? Can you provide examples?

2. Tell me about your overall experience working with students who will be the first in their families to attend college.

3. Can you think of a time when a student approached you about applying for attending college? What happened? Please include as many details as possible.

4. We discussed some of the challenges associated with working with students whose native language is not English. How do you think these challenges affect students who are interested in attending college?

5. In your opinion, how are students whose native language is not English supported in their college aspirations?
6. In your opinion, are families invited to be part of the college preparation process? Please explain.
Institutional Review Board Approval

IRB #: IRB-2022-464
Title: Analysis of One Secondary School’s Support for Aspiring First-Generation Latinx Students: A Case Study
Creation Date: 5-11-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Tiffany Cunningham
Review Board: USD IRB
Sponsor:

Study History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Submission Type</th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Review Type</th>
<th>Expedited</th>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Approved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Key Study Contacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany Cunningham</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>[Redacted]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarina Molina</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td>[Redacted]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>