Parental Trust of Schools and Its Role in Postsecondary Readiness

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Abstract

Postsecondary education is increasingly important to achieving a middle-class lifestyle, but many students are entering college unprepared and are not graduating. The role of parents in postsecondary preparation could make a difference in preparation. In this study, the author used surveys of parents and students in a Midwestern suburban high school to determine the relationships between parents' level of trust in the school, parents' own educational experiences, parents' knowledge of the postsecondary process, and students' perceptions of their postsecondary readiness skills. A significant correlation was found between parental trust of school and parental postsecondary knowledge (r (126) = .322, $p <$ .05). In linear regression models, student gender and grades were found to be significant predictors of postsecondary readiness skills. The model functioned better for males and lower achievers than for females and higher achievers. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

As the United States increases its focus on sending all young people to college, it is evident that many young adults in this country are not ready for college upon graduating from high school. Although 68% of high school graduates continue on to postsecondary education, this number is attenuated by the high rate of college non-completion (U.S. Department of Labor, 2011). Only 31% of students at typical universities graduate within six years, which means that over two-thirds of students who enroll in universities are not completing their degrees in that timeframe and may not be completing them at all (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). The low rate of college completion may indicate a lack of preparation. College instructors report that close to half of students entering college are not prepared for college-level work, and over half of students take remedial courses in college (Achieve, Inc., 2005; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Additionally, over one-third of college students say they were less equipped than they expected to be upon entering college because their high school did not prepare them for college-level work, and research on high school and college standards corroborates this assertion (Achieve, Inc., 2005; Conley, 2007). Parents agree, especially those whose children attend low-performing schools. They do not believe that their children are being adequately challenged or prepared for college and employment (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008). These reports reveal that only a minority of students are ready for college upon graduating from secondary school, even if they are able to gain entrance to college.

At the same time that some students leaving high school are not ready for college, postsecondary education is becoming not only more desirable but necessary. It is estimated that by the year 2018, 63% of jobs in the U.S. and 70% of jobs in Minnesota will require postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). Over the past two decades, the number of jobs for college-educated workers has increased every year, while the number of jobs for those without college degrees has remained the same or decreased (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). In this time of high unemployment and uncertain jobs, workers without postsecondary degrees are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as those with an advanced degree, and workers with a college degree are currently earning salaries that are 1.8 times those of workers with only a high school degree (U.S. Department of Labor, 2010). Completing a degree after high school is only becoming more important as time goes on, with jobs being created solely for workers with a postsecondary education. In fact, education beyond high school is now considered to be a prerequisite for a middle-class lifestyle (Callan, 2008). This intersection of the importance of a college degree and the lack of college-ready high school graduates is of serious concern for the country.

As education beyond high school is becoming more important, costs associated with that education are increasing. Tuition has gone up, and interest rates on federally subsidized student loans are now variable and set to rise as the economy improves. Students are graduating with large amounts of debt, an average of $24,301 per student borrower (Brown, Haughwout, Lee, Mabutas, & van der Klaauw, 2012). Many students who leave college with unpaid loans are not prepared to obtain a job earning enough

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money to make payments on their debt. This situation could be avoided through better planning before attending college. If students have career goals, knowledge of the education necessary to achieve those goals, and a financial plan, they may not have to take on significant debt. This level of planning, however, is difficult for students to complete on their own.

Preparation for college is a lengthy process that requires the acquisition of appropriate skills, knowledge, and competencies, and young people need help in order to become ready for postsecondary education (Horn & Nunez, 2000). Schools can help students prepare, but they cannot provide extensive assistance to each student. Parents have expertise about their child, enabling them to provide help that complements the school's approach. Parental involvement is essential for educational success, and help from parents may also be a key element in postsecondary readiness (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008). In fact, supporting postsecondary readiness may be the most important role parents can play in their children's future. Many school-based college readiness programs are developing parent components, which include information that the school shares with parents (e.g., www.rampuptoreadiness.com). Such a component is an important way to increase parental knowledge and improve parents' ability to help their children prepare for college. The difficulty in delivering information to parents, however, is that they may not attend to it.

The extent to which parents receive and use this information is dependent on their willingness to participate or listen to the school's messages. A parent who does not trust the school may not be receptive to these programs, and they would be of little use.

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Parental trust can impact how parents hear messages from the school. If the school is disseminating information about postsecondary preparation, it is important for parents to pay attention. The degree to which a parent attends to information from their child's school may depend on their level of trust in the teachers, administrators, and staff they encounter in the school.

Emerging research suggests that parental trust of the school could be an important factor in school functioning and student learning. Research on parental trust of schools has been linked with academic achievement, student identification with school, parent involvement, and school climate (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Adams, 2008; Forsyth, 2008), which are related to postsecondary readiness, but no research exists that specifically investigates a relationship between trust and postsecondary readiness. In addition, little research has been conducted on the differences between parents who trust their child's school and those who do not.

Study Purpose

The connections between parents and college readiness have only begun to be explored. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between parental trust of school, parental past educational experiences, parental knowledge of the postsecondary education process, and student postsecondary readiness skills. The results of this study could provide schools with information on the role of parent relationships with schools in the area of postsecondary readiness. It has the potential to inform how schools communicate with parents through postsecondary readiness programs.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between parental past educational experience and parental trust of school?

2. What is the relationship between parental past educational experience and parental postsecondary knowledge?

3. What is the relationship between parental trust of school and parental postsecondary knowledge?

4. Do parental trust of school, parental past educational experiences, and parental postsecondary knowledge predict student postsecondary readiness skills?

5. How do parents describe their experiences with postsecondary preparation, and what would they like to see change?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter will (a) define college readiness and discuss the parental role; (b) present current theories on parental trust of schools and define trust as used in this study; and (c) review empirical support for factors associated with parental trust of schools and discuss considerations for research on parental trust and college readiness.

Postsecondary Readiness

Throughout this paper, the terms "college" and "postsecondary" are used interchangeably. The skills necessary for success and persistence in college are identical to those needed for success in technical school, other postsecondary education options, and employment as an adult (ACT, Inc., 2006; Lippman, Atienza, Rivers, & Keith, 2008). Thus, the skills and competencies investigated in this paper are applicable to success in any postsecondary educational venue as well as in the workplace.

Due to the low postsecondary readiness skills of today's students, education researchers have begun investigating what being "college ready" means. Comprehensive definitions of college readiness focus not only on content knowledge and the ability to learn what courses are intended to teach, but also on the context of the college culture and the noncognitive factors needed to be successful within that environment. Conley (2007) defined college readiness as "the level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing general education course at a postsecondary institution" as well as "the mindset and disposition necessary to enable this

to happen" (p. 5). This "mindset" is comprised of skills that allow a student to succeed in a postsecondary learning environment.

In their meta-analysis of college retention predictors, Robbins and colleagues (2006) found several factors to be more important even than high school grade-point average ($\rho = .25$) in predicting retention in college: academic goals ($\rho = .34$), institutional commitment ($\rho = .26$), social support ($\rho = .26$), academic self-efficacy ($\rho = .36$) and academic-related skills ($\rho = .37$), which include time-management skills, study skills and habits, leadership skills, problem-solving and coping strategies, and communication skills. Pohl (2012) used these noncognitive factors to create a scale that may be used by secondary students to track their level of personal readiness for college. By including these noncognitive factors, she estimates progress toward college readiness by measuring self-regulated learning, persistence, expectations, and self-efficacy regarding postsecondary education.

Postsecondary readiness is defined in this paper as possessing sufficient skills, both academic and nonacademic, to enroll and succeed in a postsecondary educational environment that is appropriate for attaining a realistic career goal. This definition matches Pohl's (2012) measurement of personal readiness for college, which is based on these personal skills that contribute to postsecondary success.

The Parental Role in Postsecondary Readiness

One segment of the population is much less likely to attend college than others: students whose parents did not attend college. Students whose parents attained a college degree are 1.5 times as likely to enroll in college than students whose parents only have a

high school diploma, and more than twice as likely as students whose parents have not graduated from high school (Choy, 2001). The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) followed a cohort of students from 1988 to 2000, beginning when they were in eighth grade. Analysis of this study found that parental attainment of a bachelor's degree affects a student's likelihood of enrolling in college even when controlling for income, parental involvement and expectations, academic preparation, and peer influence (Choy, 2001). Even when they do enroll in college, first-generation college-going students are less academically prepared, less likely to attain a degree, more likely to drop out of college, and less likely to return once they leave college than students whose parents have a degree (Choy, 2001; Horn, 1998). Once first-generation students do attain a degree, however, it appears that differences between them and other students disappear, and they are able to take advantage of all the benefits that a degree can offer, including higher wages and job security (Choy, 2001). As discussed above, a college degree affords a great improvement in life outcomes, of which students from disadvantaged backgrounds are being left out.

It is clear that students are less likely to enroll or succeed in college if their parents have not attended college. The reasons for this are less clear. Some evidence suggests that it is because parents who did not attend college are less likely to help their children choose rigorous high school courses (Adelman, 2006; Horn & Nunez, 2000). Parents may decide not to be involved in course choice because they are completely unfamiliar with the process of college preparation, even though most parents say they

want their children to attend college (Bridgeland et al., 2008). Parents who attended college can help their children more easily, having gone through the process themselves.

Studies and polls have found that 92% of parents and 90% of high school seniors believe they will attend college (Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup, 2010; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Since the actual enrollment rate is much lower, there is a clear disconnect between student and parent assumptions about college enrollment and reality. The data are currently unclear as to how parental involvement in education influences college readiness. A search of the literature (on ERIC) produced only two articles directly concerning college readiness programs that included a parent component. The more recent of such studies was conducted by Engle, Bermeo, and O'Brien (2006). Through focus groups with 135 first-generation Texas college students who had participated in TRIO college preparation programs, parents reported that they felt more engaged in and comfortable with the college process due to the efforts of program staff to develop relationships with them. In the second study, an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Monahan (1993) investigated the effects of a college preparation program aimed at Black and Hispanic 10th-12th graders in a school with low postsecondary enrollment among those populations. The program consisted of 15 components, three of which included parents: two types of monthly workshops and special evening events. The researcher reported an increase in the number of seniors who applied to postsecondary institutions, from 14 out of 80 students the previous year to 56 out of 82 following the program. The number of 10th-12th graders who took college admissions tests also increased from 35 students out of 400 the previous year to 212 out of 407 following the program. Pre- and

post-tests also suggested that students and parents increased their knowledge about preparing for college through the program.

The term "parental involvement" used in this paper refers to participation by a parent or guardian in any aspect of their children's education, including but not limited to providing encouragement, setting expectations, communicating with teachers, or attending school activities. A strong research base supports the contention that parental involvement in education improves achievement outcomes for students (Fehrmann, Keith, & Reiners 1987; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2007). Students whose parents are involved in their education "are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, enroll in higher level classes, attend school and pass their classes, develop better social skills, graduate from high school, attend college, and find productive work" (Bridgeland, et al., 2008, p. 3). Few studies on the parent role in college readiness have moved beyond parent beliefs and perceptions to parent behaviors. There is emerging evidence, however, that parental involvement could be important in preparing for, enrolling in, and persisting in college. Parental involvement in education has been shown to predict enrollment in college for some students, even when controlling for parent education, background, and student math proficiency (Bridgeland et al., 2008; Horn & Nuñez, 2000; Perna, 2000). Many questions remain as to the nature of the relationship between parental involvement and college readiness.

Research has suggested that parents can increase the likelihood that their children will enroll in college by simply talking about college with their children. Parental support and encouragement have been shown to be the most important factors affecting children's

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college plans in middle school across several studies (Cabrera & Nasa, 2000). Stage and Hossler (1989), in a study of a diverse population of Indiana families, found that parental influence, including parents' college expectations and family discussions about college, explained a third of the variance in students' college aspirations. When parents provide stronger and more frequent encouragement toward college during high school, children have been shown to be more likely to enroll in college (Conklin & Dailey, 1981; Flint, 1992). Parents can also increase their children's likelihood of enrolling in college by discussing course selection, school activities, class material, college admissions tests, and college applications with their children. Horn and Chen (1998) investigated parental engagement with at-risk youth. Their sample included students from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) who had two or more risk factors for dropping out of high school, such as changing schools two or more times, coming from a family with low SES, having low grades, being in a single parent household, having an older sibling drop out, and being retained. The results indicated that when parents expected their children to complete at least some college, those students had almost three times greater odds of attending postsecondary education (odds ratio = 2.99) than students with parents who did not expect them to enroll in postsecondary. They also found that when parents discussed education with their children frequently, those students had two and a half times greater odds of attending postsecondary education (odds ratio = 2.45) than students whose parents discussed education infrequently or not at all.

Areas of College Readiness. Although preparation for college is ultimately a student's own responsibility, young people benefit from support from others throughout

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the process of becoming college ready (Horn & Nunez, 2000). The organization of the college readiness construct into the following areas is taken from the program Ramp-Up to Readiness, a comprehensive college readiness program based on a thorough review of the college readiness literature and recommendations from the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences (Tierney, Bailey, Constantine, Finkelstein, & Hurd, 2009). These areas are components of overall college readiness: academics, admissions, career planning, finances, and personal and social readiness. Each area is considered to be essential for complete postsecondary readiness. The following section highlights evidence for ways in which parents may be able to influence their children's college readiness in each area.

Academic readiness. Parental involvement has been shown to improve student academic achievement, even in high school (Jeynes, 2007). Parents can help students choose high school courses, which have a large impact on college readiness. In fact, taking advanced courses has been found to be the most important predictor of success in college (Adelman, 2006). Students and parents do not always realize that they need to take coursework beyond that required for graduation in order to be ready for college, but schools have been encouraged to communicate with parents about the positive impact of taking more challenging high school coursework (Baker, Clay, & Gratama, 2005; Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Parents with a bachelor's degree were more likely to be involved in high school course selection and more likely to encourage their children to take algebra in eighth grade, which is a strong predictor of later college enrollment (Adelman, 2006; Horn & Nunez, 2000). A significant number of students (39%) reported

that their high school did not prepare them well for success in college, indicating that

they felt unprepared for the rigor of college due to their less challenging high school

work (Achieve, Inc., 2005). This highlights an opportunity for parents to prompt their

children to choose a more rigorous route. Parents have indicated that they often do not

understand the requirements for high school graduation or for admission into college, and

they would like to be better informed (Bridgeland et al, 2008). Parents also reported they

were frustrated by the many people giving them information about their child's

performance, and they would prefer to have a single point of contact at the school

(Bridgeland et al, 2008). Even when they try to obtain information about their child's

performance, they may be confused by the varied information coming from different

school personnel. If parents were better informed about college-appropriate paths through

high school, they could help students choose such routes.

 Admissions readiness. Awareness of college is a prerequisite for admissions

readiness, as students must be aware of college before they can be admitted. Parents can

be an important part of making children aware of college and of what they need to do in

order to be admitted to an institution (Baker et al., 2005). Parents can help children

prepare for and take college admission tests, such as the ACT and SAT, which are

required for admission to many colleges, by making sure their children register for the

tests and have the time and space to study seriously for them. When parents participated

in one school's college preparation program that included parent workshops focused on

academic planning, postsecondary options, and career exploration, the number of

students at the school who took the ACT or SAT and the number of students who applied

to postsecondary educational institutions increased (Monahan, 1993). Completing large application packets, writing admissions essays, and seeking letters of recommendation are often new experiences for high school students, and adult direction may be necessary for success with the lengthy process.

      Career readiness. Career planning is an important aspect of college readiness, as students should realize that careers requiring postsecondary degrees are more prevalent, more lucrative, and often more interesting than other jobs. They must be encouraged to develop career goals and recognize the education and skills necessary to obtain their desired employment. This match between life goals, career planning, and the education necessary to meet those goals may require enrollment in a four-year university or in a technical school, depending on the needs of the individual student. Evidence has long been available for the influence of parents on career choices that require more education and provide greater benefits (see Bell, 1963; Simpson, 1962). Parental career interests have been found to be related to young adult career interests, and parental interest may even influence young adult career paths (Wong, Wong, & Peng, 2011). Parental interest in and encouragement of school achievement has been correlated with having a career plan in high school and planning to attend college (Leung, Wright, & Foster, 1987). Parental support and guidance in career choice, both direct (suggestions, specific experiences) and indirect (modeling, giving resources to explore options) can influence career plans, and absence of this support can lead to a young adult without direction or career plan (Altman, 1997). More than simply sharing information, parents can help their children form better developed career goals and interests in middle school by showing

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them that they are interested in them, believe in them, trust them, and are proud of them. Sharing these beliefs and feelings is more important than sharing facts on college (Keller & Whiston, 2008). Parents can also have an impact on their children's confidence in starting a career. The "career self-efficacy" (including career planning, knowledge of self and others, career decision-making, and school to career transitions) of African-American youth has been shown to be predicted by parental emotional support and career-related modeling (Alliman-Brissett, Turner, & Skovholt, 2004; Keller & Whiston, 2008). Career development was shown to increase when parents talked about careers with their children through a program that focused on parent-child interactions around career issues (Palmer & Cochran, 1988). The research has shown that parental interest, support, and trust can improve young people's career development.

Financial readiness. At most public colleges, tuition has more than doubled in the last decade, and interest on federally-subsidized loans recently doubled. Although the cost of college is high and rising, there is some help available. Many students do not attend college due to real or perceived financial limitations, which are often assumed to be greater than they actually are, especially by low-income families (Kirst & Venezia, 2004). The first step for obtaining financial aid for college is to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Students were shown to be 50% more likely to enroll in college if they complete a FAFSA by May of their senior year in high school, even after controlling for family background, social support, differences in students' qualifications, and neighborhood characteristics (Roderick, Nagaoka, Coca, & Moeller, 2008). Students are unlikely, and in many cases unable, to fill out this complex

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form by themselves. They need tax and income information from their parents, and since it is often the first time a young person will have encountered such a form, they may not be familiar with the terms used or know where to find the necessary information. Parents can help their children identify the true costs of college and complete the FAFSA to defray those costs.

Personal and social readiness. In order to persist, thrive, and truly get the most out of the experience, young people must learn the personal and social skills necessary to succeed in college. Such skills include goal-setting, persistence, motivation, help-seeking, self-discipline, taking responsible risks, self-confidence, and using feedback. Nonacademic factors such as these have a significant impact on persistence and success in college (ACT, 2007). In fact, the strongest predictors of performance and persistence in college were found to be academic discipline, determination, and commitment to college (Robbins, Allen, Casillas, Hamme Peterson, & Le, 2006). Parents can help their children develop these skills throughout their lives. When parents support children's developing independence by giving them responsibilities and allowing them to make choices, they help them feel more competent and responsible for their personal outcomes, and thus more likely to take ownership of their learning (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). Parents can also help their children by focusing on the effort they put into their work over their results, which teaches children to take appropriate risks and seek challenges throughout their life (Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Parents can concentrate on helping their child improve study habits rather than improving grades, which is beneficial for children's motivation to learn (Redding, 2000). Parents can even increase children's

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motivation to learn simply by establishing the value of what children are learning (Clark, 1990; Zimmerman, 1990).

Summary. Parents can be involved in each aspect of college readiness, but they may find that involvement as they conceive of it is too difficult, or they might not know where to start. For example, taking a rigorous course load in high school is clearly important for college enrollment and persistence, but the main way that parents can gain information about coursework is through the school. A lack of parental involvement in their children's high school course selection could indicate a deficiency in communication between the school and parents. If parental trust of school is absent, it could impact a parent's likelihood to engage with and accept information from their child's school. As with coursework, most information that students and parents receive about college admissions tests and financial aid comes from the school, and as a result, a lack of trust in the school could impact how a parent attends to such information. Parents may be more likely to attend to and follow valuable advice from the school on course selection and test preparation if they have a trusting relationship. Collaboration between parents and teachers may be more likely to occur and be successful when mutual trust is present (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Parent – School Trust: Theoretical Underpinnings

There are several definitions of school trust currently being used in the literature. The conceptualizations of trust include trust as related to confidence, vulnerability, and power. The theory and measurement behind these three concepts are presented below, and the definitions of parental trust are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1
Definitions of Trust

Type of Trust	Major Researchers	Definition of Trust
Confidence	Adams, K. & Christenson	Confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship, to achieve positive outcomes for students
Vulnerability	Adams, C. & Forsyth	An individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open
Power	Rosenblatt & Peled	The belief that another individual (or group) makes good-faith efforts to behave in accordance with commitments, is honest in negotiations preceding such commitments, and does not take advantage of another, even when the opportunity is available

Trust as Confidence. Several studies have used the definition that trust is the "confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship, to achieve positive outcomes for students" (Adams & Christenson, 1998, p. 6). This definition of trust was developed by Adams and Christenson (1998) and was based on research of close relationships by

Holmes and Rempel (1989), who referred to trust as "reflecting confident expectations of positive outcomes" (p. 188).

Holmes and Rempel (1989) investigated the relationships of 82 couples, and described trust in these relationships as moving through three stages: predictability, dependability, and faith. The first stage, predictability, is characterized by the parties looking for behavioral indicators of their trustworthiness. In the second stage, dependability, the parties assign each other personal attributes of trustworthiness. In the third stage, faith, the parties are no longer looking for indicators of trustworthiness in behavior or personal attributes, but instead trust each other automatically. Holmes and Rempel also found that people with relationships in the third stage took a longer-term view of their partner's behavior, allowing faith in their partner to override small issues that may cause problems for couples in the first or second stage.

Although this theory is based on personal romantic relationships, Adams and Christenson found that it may apply equally to the development of trust in personal relationships between parents and teachers, administrators, and other school staff. Holmes and Rempel (1989) theorized that trust is built through personal connections, of which there are often few in the parent-school relationship. According to this theory, the school structure can make it difficult for the parent-school relationship to move past the predictability stage, in which parents are looking at school staff's behavior for evidence of trustworthiness rather than believing in their trustworthy personal attributes. This theory also states that when trust is in the early stages, it can be easily derailed by a behavior that is deemed untrustworthy, which places the relationship at significant risk

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for failure. They found that people in high-trust relationships were more likely to assess their partner's actions as positive and understandable, rather than as negative or threatening, since they viewed their partners as inherently trustworthy.

Measurement. This conceptualization of trust is measured with the Trust scale, which focuses on parental trust of teachers as well as teacher trust of parents (Adams & Christenson, 1998, 2000). This scale uses the stems "I am confident that teachers" or "I am confident that parents" followed by 11 statements about parent and teacher behavior and attitudes. Examples of statements from the parent form include "I am confident that teachers are doing a good job teaching my child academic subjects," "…keep me aware of all the information I need related to school," "…are doing a good job encouraging my child to have a positive attitude toward learning," and "…care about my child."

Trust as Vulnerability. This strand of research on trust in schools began with Hoy and Kupersmith (1985) investigating faculty trust. Tschannen-Moran (2001) included teacher trust of parents and students in their research, and finally Adams and Forsyth (2007) investigated parental trust of the school. Research in this group can be classified into several categories: teacher-teacher (often referred to as faculty trust), teacher-principal, teacher-student/parent (or teacher-client), parent-school, and parent-principal (Adams, 2008).

The definition used by these studies was first developed by Mishra (1996), who brought together the work of Rotter (1967) in expectancy, Kee and Knox (1970) in confidence, Deutsch (1958) in risk, and Coleman (1990) in vulnerability to define trust as "one party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the belief that the

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latter party is competent, open, concerned, and reliable." Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) changed the definition to include honesty, and altered 'concerned' to 'benevolent' to define trust as "an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open." This is the definition that has been used most in the last decade, and research has corroborated the importance of these five facets of trust that need to exist in school community relationships (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). This definition aligns with Bryk and Schneider's (2002) theory of relational trust, which is described below, and underscores the risk inherent in choosing to trust another party, as this risk places one in a position of vulnerability.

This conceptualization of trust is drawn from Coleman's theory of social capital, which places importance on the relationships that link people in a social system through a series of sustained social interactions (Coleman, 1988; Coleman, 1990). Coleman viewed high social capital as caused by two elements present in groups: (a) the interconnectedness of group members and the consequent ease of communication among them, and (b) their trust in each other, or their ability to communicate expectations and determine whether they were being met. In his theory, a group will function effectively if members are able to communicate well and trust each other.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) used Coleman's work to develop their own theory of social trust, specifically involved in school communities. They also incorporated several other theories to expand their view of groups and trust. From rational choice theory, they drew on the idea that people choose to trust based on what they can gain from the

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relationship, looking to past interactions and personal reputation to ascertain whether taking a risk to trust someone will result in a benefit. From group theory, they took into account the psychological rewards that come from identifying with a social group and trusting the group's members. From religion and philosophy, they recognized that people may choose to trust based on an acknowledged shared system of values and beliefs that produce the understanding that members will do what that group considers to be correct. By combining these theories and philosophies, Bryk and Schneider developed a theory of relational trust.

Their theory of relational trust is based on the interactions between members of different role groups in an organization, such as parents, teachers, and principals. Relational trust develops through both observations of behavior and feelings that occur during interpersonal interactions. When the behavior of a member of another role group is consistent with expectations, trust becomes stronger. This type of trust also depends on how members feel during interactions with members of other role groups, and how they view the intentions of others. These feelings are rooted in past personal experiences as well as in personal and cultural beliefs. Interactions are viewed through the lenses of respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity. As such, relational trust requires group members to attend to both beliefs and behaviors of the other members. According to this theory, trust develops at three levels: (a) intrapersonal, personal experiences and beliefs that color views of other groups and the organization; (b) interpersonal, interactions between members of different groups; and (c) organizational, where the interactions combine to shape consequences for school functioning. This

theory also draws on the reciprocal exchange premise of social cognitive theory, which holds that people's beliefs and behaviors result from a process of mutual exchanges among the cognitive, behavioral, and contextual factors involved in the construct of interest (Bandura, 1986). The current researchers using this theoretical background investigate school-level variables, as they believe that school trust is not comprised only of individual beliefs, but is a collective view of the school's stakeholders (Adams & Forsyth, 2009).

Measurement. Studies using this definition employ the Parent Trust Scale to measure trust (Forsyth, Adams, & Barnes, 2004). This scale parallels the five facets of trust in Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) definition. It uses a Likert-style response set from one to eight. Sample items from the scale include, "This school keeps me well informed," "Kids at this school are well cared for," "This school is always honest with me," "This school has high standards for all kids," and "I never worry about my child when he or she is there."

Trust in Relation to Power. One study, by Rosenblatt and Peled (2002), defined trust in the context of power, based on the work of Cummings and Bromiley (1996). Trust is defined here as "the belief that another individual (or group) makes good-faith efforts to behave in accordance with commitments, is honest in negotiations preceding such commitments, and does not take advantage of another, even when the opportunity is available" (p. 352). The authors find further support for the relationship between trust and power from Bronfenbrenner (1979), who describes the desired basis of parent-teacher communication to be trust and a power balance that evolves with the relationship.

Measurement. Trust is measured with a seven-item measure, adopted from Cummings and Bromiley's (1996) Organizational Trust Inventory. Example items include "I feel that the school negotiates with me honestly" and "In my opinion the school is reliable."

Trust Defined in this Study. Although the majority of research on trust in schools has been conducted using the definition of trust put forward by Bryk and Schneider (2002), this research has focused on trust at the school level. Holmes and Rempel (1989) defined trust as the confidence that another party will live up to their word and promote the relationship to advance common goals. Research based on Bryk and Schneider's definition measures trust with items that do not address this confidence, but rather address how parents feel about the school in general. These items are not measuring trust in relationships based on the work of Holmes and Rempel, and may in fact be measuring a construct other than trust. The research by Adams and Christenson (1998, 2000), using the definition of trust as confidence, is a better fit for the personal

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relationships that are important to the development of trust between parents and school staff. In the current study, which investigates parental trust of school staff and its relation to postsecondary readiness, the definition of parental trust is the confidence that school staff will act in a way that is beneficial to the parent-school relationship and promotes the mutual goal of preparing students for success after high school and achieving positive postsecondary outcomes.

Summary. Although investigations of trust in schools have been increasing over the past decade, parental trust remains an under-researched topic today. Prior to the turn of the last century, trust in schools had been investigated only from the perspective of teachers and had not included the perceptions of parents (Forsyth, 2008). Three different conceptualizations of trust have been used to investigate parent trust of the school: trust as confidence, trust as vulnerability, and trust in relation to power. Each definition has been paired with a different measure, making it difficult to compare findings.

Empirical Support for the Importance of Parental Trust

Although research on parent-school trust is a young field, a small body of research is developing. Parental trust of school has been found to be associated with several factors at both the school and individual levels. The studies discussed in this section are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Designs and Major Findings of Studies on School Trust

Author(s)	Trust Definition	Sample	Unit of Analysis	Design	Major Correlates
Adams & Christenson (1998)	Confidence	123 parents, 152 teachers	Individual [teachers report general trust of parents]	Descriptive [t-tests, analysis of variance]	Level IV special education; parent involvement in school
Adams & Christenson (2000)	Confidence	1,234 parents, 209 teachers	Individual [teachers report general trust of parents]	Analysis of variance/ Multiple regression	Lower grade level; satisfaction with teacher interactions; credits earned; GPA; attendance
Rosenblatt & Peled (2002)	Power	936 parents, 157 teachers, from 20 schools in Israel	Individual	Structural equation modeling	Enabling school structures; less parent conflict with school
Forsyth, Barnes, & Adams (2006)	Vulnerability	79 schools (parent and teacher reports)	School	Canonical correlation	Enabling school structures; faculty trust; academic performance; collective teacher efficacy
Adams & Forsyth (2007)	Vulnerability	79 schools (parent and teacher reports)	School	Hierarchical multiple regression	Enabling school structures; lower grade level
Adams & Forsyth (2009)	Vulnerability	79 schools (parent and teacher reports)	School	Structural equation modeling	Enabling school structures; student identification with school; academic performance; collective teacher efficacy; school responsiveness
Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell (2009)	Vulnerability	79 schools, 578 parents (parent and teacher reports)	School	Multilevel modeling	Enabling school structures; school membership; student identification with school; lower grade level; academic performance
Kikas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Lyyra, Lerkkanen, & Niilo (2011)	Confidence	Estonia: 543 mothers, 232 kindergarten teachers; Finland: 712 mothers, 712 kindergarten teachers	Individual [teachers report trust of each parent]	Descriptive [Chi-square & loglinear analysis]	School-parent collaboration; country; maternal education

School level. In this section, research is reviewed that has investigated the relationship between parental trust of school and variables collected at the school level, including academic achievement, social outcomes, bureaucratic structures, school membership, faculty trust, and student identification with school.

Academic achievement. At the school level, some evidence exists to support a relationship between parental trust and achievement. Higher academic performance across the school was significantly correlated with higher levels of parent trust of the school (r=.35) in a study of 79 Midwestern schools (Forsyth, Barnes, & Adams, 2006). Adams and Forsyth (2009), using the same sample of schools, found parental trust and overall school performance to be significantly correlated (r=.39). They also developed a structural model in which trust had significant effects on a school's overall academic performance. In this model, trust was viewed as a latent construct within the school, and was measured through parental trust of school and principal, teacher trust of parents, and teacher trust of other teachers and principal. In their model, the total effects of trust (not only parental trust) explained 24% of the variance in a school's overall academic achievement. The direct effects of trust on achievement motivation of students were significant ($\beta = .52$).

Social outcomes. More than on academic performance, the direct influence of trust has been deemed to be greater on social conditions in schools, which may "lubricate" the functioning of schools to increase school responsiveness to parents and students in order to make improved performance possible (Adams & Forsyth, 2009). To

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this end, Adams and Forsyth (2009) developed a structural model that included trust, collective teacher efficacy, school performance, achievement motivation, and socioeconomic status. In this model, the direct effect of trust on school performance ($\beta =$ .24) was not as great as the direct effects of trust on collective teacher efficacy ($\beta = .80$) and motivation ($\beta = .52$). This finding supported their hypothesis that trust impacts social conditions, which may indirectly influence academic achievement. Trust has been thought of as a necessary precursor to effective partnership and collaboration, without which relationships are unlikely to succeed (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Adams & Forsyth, 2007).

　　　Bureaucratic structures and parent influence. Much of the recent research on parent-school trust has focused on the area of school functioning and organizational structures, with the goal of determining how best to organize the power and collaborative structures in schools. Adams and Forsyth (2007, 2009) have led this area of research, and they have labeled school bureaucratic structures as "enabling," when they promote cooperative problem solving, professional autonomy, and bring the valued input of different stakeholders together, or "hindering," with rigid rules, forced compliance of employees, and separation of school stakeholders. Differences in the structure of schools and districts have been found to influence parent trust. When parents in a school perceive the rules, regulations, and control structures as enabling role groups to come together, and when they perceive that they can influence school-level decisions, they report greater trust of the school (Adams & Forsyth, 2007; Adams & Forsyth, 2009; Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009; Forsyth, Barnes, & Adams, 2006; Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002). This effect

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has been determined to be greater than the effects of grade level, socioeconomic status (SES), and school size (Adams & Forsyth, 2007). Over and above these variables, an enabling school structure explained 9% additional variance in parental trust of school and 27% additional variance in parental trust of principal. As schools are naturally organized with less power in school decisions given to parents than to school authorities, parents may feel vulnerable and less trusting, but when parents in these studies perceived that they had more power and were able to collaborate on decisions, they tended to be more trusting of the school (Adams & Forsyth, 2007; Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Another line of research, using surveys of mothers and teachers, suggests that maternal trust of teachers is lower in Estonia than in neighboring Finland. The differences may have been due to the longer history of parent-school partnerships in Finland and the Finnish expectation that all schools work with parents in collaborative relationships (Kikas et al., 2011). Estonia, with its recent Soviet history, has had a school system based on rigid rules with a top-down power structure that did not encourage parental involvement in the schools. These results fit with the previous findings that school structure may be related to trust.

School. In one study, school membership, or which school a student attends, accounted for 16% of the variance in parental trust of school (Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009). This was calculated as the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient, showing that schools had a grouping effect on parent trust levels. The authors used it as justification to add parent trust as a school-level variable in their model.

Faculty trust. Parental trust of school was significantly correlated with teacher trust of other teachers (faculty trust) ($r = .35$) and teacher trust of the principal ($r = .34$) in a study of 79 Midwestern schools (Forsyth, Barnes, & Adams, 2006). In another study with the same sample, collective teacher efficacy (teachers' perceptions of how well all teachers at the school, as a group, impact student learning) was significantly correlated with parental trust ($r = .51$) (Adams & Forsyth, 2009).

Student identification. Student identification with school is important for many aspects of education. Although this could be seen as an individual-level factor, it has only been investigated regarding trust at the school level. Two studies suggested that when students as a group felt a greater sense of belonging to school and saw more value in education, parents were more likely to trust the school (Adams & Forsyth, 2009; Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009). The model from Adams, Forsyth, and Mitchell (2009), which included student identification with school, grade level, and perceived parental influence on school decision-making, explained 15% of the between-school variance in trust. Identification with school and parental influence also had larger individual effects on trust than contextual conditions, including SES, school size, ethnic diversity, and grade level.

Individual level.

Special education. Only one quantitative study has investigated the effects of special education on parent trust. Adams and Christenson (1998) found that parents of children receiving higher levels of intensity of special education services (Level IV) reported higher levels of trust in teachers more than parents of children receiving less

intense services (Levels II/III). They did not, however, find any difference in trust levels between parents of students in special education and parents of students in general education. The researchers attribute this finding to the higher quality and frequency of contact with school personnel likely found with increasing levels of special education service intensity.

Grade level. Parents have been found to be more trusting of schools when their children are in elementary school, but are less trusting when their children are in high school: parental trust levels decrease as grade level increases (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Adams & Forsyth, 2007; Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009). Parent-school communication becomes increasingly challenging as students get older and take on more personal responsibility for their education, which may contribute to lower levels of parental trust. This finding is important for college readiness activities since readiness becomes more critical as grade level increases.

Interactions with teachers. Along with lower student grade level, high parental satisfaction with interactions with their children's teachers strongly predicted parental trust of teachers, together explaining 40% of the variance in parental trust (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Interactions with multiple members of the school can influence a parent's trust of each member of the school organization (Adams, 2009).

Parent involvement. Parents who had been categorized as "high-trust" were significantly more involved than parents with medium or low levels of trust, according to behavioral indicators of involvement such as helping children with their homework or attending school functions (Adams & Christenson, 1998).

Rosenblatt and Peled (2002) found a moderate, negative correlation between parent trust and conflict-based parental involvement with school ($r = -.40$). They also determined that trust mediated the relationship between school climate and parental involvement; in a rigid school climate, high parental trust levels predicted lower levels of conflict-based involvement. They did not, however, find a significant relationship between trust and cooperation-based parental involvement (Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002).

Academic performance. Credits earned per year, grade point average (GPA), and attendance were shown to correlate weakly with parental trust in high school students (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Adams, Forsyth, and Mitchell (2009) found that academic performance, at the school level, predicted parental trust. It was not significant, however, in their combined model that included grade level, student identification with school, and parent-perceived influence on school decisions.

Demographic variables. In most studies, parental trust has not been found to have any significant relationship with parent education, gender, school size, SES, or ethnicity (Adams & Christenson, 1998, 2000; Adams & Forsyth, 2007; Forsyth, Barnes, & Adams, 2006). Adams and his colleagues (2009) found that SES was a small but significant predictor of between-school variation in parental trust, but it had no effect in their combined model, which included grade level, identification with school, and parental influence in school decisions.

In their investigation of trust differences among mothers and kindergarten teachers in Estonia and Finland, Kikas and her colleagues (2011) found trust to vary with mother's education and country. Only nine percent of Estonian mothers with low levels

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of education reported the highest levels of trust, while 51% of Finnish mothers with the same level of education reported high trust.

      Summary. Due to the small amount of research that has investigated parental trust in schools, it is difficult to generalize the results of a few studies. We do see some trends in these studies, however, that point to potential predictors of parent-school trust. There is some evidence that parental trust is higher when parents feel heard and able to influence school decision-making, when they are more involved with their child's education and have more positive interactions with teachers, when their children identify with school, and when teachers at their school trust each other. Few outcomes of parental trust of schools have been studied. Improved academic performance, which is an important aspect of college readiness, has some support as a direct and indirect effect of trust. Trust may also be important in creating the school conditions that improve overall school performance.

Qualitative Data on Parent Trust

      Several qualitative studies have investigated parent trust of schools and educators. Young, Rodriguez, and Lee (2008) conducted a case study of a school with a high proportion of Latino families and found three main obstacles to trusting relationships at the school. The first obstacle was the lack of understanding by school officials as to what "respectful" behavior from parents entailed. Parents described deferring to authority, even when they disagreed with the school, but school personnel interpreted this behavior as indicating trust. The second obstacle was parents who trusted "too much" and felt that the school took advantage of their trust. The third obstacle was active distrust, when

parents felt their children were not treated fairly, when they thought the school did not communicate with them about their child's progress, or when they felt the school did not listen to them. Parents said they were more trusting of school personnel when they were involved in collaboration with the school.

Beard and Brown (2008) interviewed six middle-class African-American mothers with children in a suburban district as part of a phenomenological study. The researchers posed questions based on the definition of trust used by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), which includes benevolence, competence, reliability, openness, and honesty. They reported the obstacles to trust cited by the mothers. The mothers generally did not feel welcomed and heard in the schools, and felt they had to fight in order to be included and listened to by the school. They felt that the schools lacked cultural competence and understanding, and thy questioned the school's commitment to their children's education because the school did not always follow through on their promises. The mothers said that school communication with African-American parents could be improved, and they wanted the school to seek their input on how it could better communicate with them.

Angell, Stoner, and Shelden (2009), in a collective case study, investigated the perspectives of 16 mothers of children with disabilities on trust in schools. They identified factors in parents, teachers, and schools that mothers said increased their trust of the school. Parent factors included their history of trust, their disposition to trust, and communication from their child about the school. Teacher factors included authentic, child-focused caring; frequent, honest, immediate communication; and knowledge about disabilities. School factors included school climate, teaming, and school services.

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In a re-analysis of these data, Shelden, Angell, Stoner, and Roseland (2010) examined the perspectives of mothers of children with disabilities on trust in school principals. The mothers talked about personal and professional attributes of principals, as well as actions principals took within the system, with children, and with families that influenced their trust of the principal. Attributes of principals that encouraged trust included being approachable, showing authentic caring for children and warmth, accessibility, and knowledge of disabilities. Actions taken by principals that encouraged trust were promoting teacher involvement with parents, regular attendance at IEP meetings, taking an active interest in children, listening to parents, offering assistance when needed, and respecting and acknowledging parent perspectives.

Critique of the Literature

Definitions. Three definitions of parental trust have been used in the literature: the confidence that another party will follow through with their promises or act in a way consistent with their words (Adams & Christenson, 1998, 2000), the willingness to risk vulnerability in a relationship based on beliefs about characteristics and intentions of the other parties involved (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), and not taking advantage of the other parties in a relationship, focusing on power among the individuals or groups concerned (Rosenblatt & Peled, 2002). The inconsistency in defining trust contributes to a lack of conceptual clarity. Researchers have defined trust in different ways, used different measurement instruments, and measured potentially separate behaviors and cognitive appraisals. There is a need for consistency in defining the construct.

Measurement. Only a small amount of research on the effects of parental trust of school has been undertaken, as most of the parent-school trust research has investigated predictors of trust. Given the variables that have been associated with trust, such as identification with school, academic achievement, and parent-school collaboration, trust may have important effects on outcomes that are also associated with these variables.

There is also a lack of research on the relationship between parental trust and direct parent and student behaviors. Adams and Christenson (1998, 2000) found that trust was associated with partnership behavior and with parent-teacher interactions. Few others have focused on behavioral indicators and have instead used parents' perceptions to find associations with trust. Variables could be differently operationalized in order to measure actual behavior of parents, rather than opinions and perceptions, to find perhaps more accurate and more useful data. It could also be extended to capture the behavior of students, who may have behavioral responses to their parents' trust of the school.

Unit of Analysis. Much of the work of Forsyth and his colleagues focuses on the school bureaucratic structures that foster collaboration between schools and parents, make home-school partnerships more likely to occur, and give parents more influence in school decisions so they feel like true partners and collaborators. These studies use the school as the unit of analysis, looking at what they call "interrole group trust," a collective attribute of all members of the groups that make up stakeholders in the school community. They use this collective view rather than looking at interpersonal trust, an attribute of each individual making up the groups. The research questions of this group are more concerned with the collective view because they focus on overall school

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functioning instead of individual differences in background and outcomes. In order to focus on individuals rather than schools a whole, studies will have to use individuals as the unit of analysis.

It is important to investigate individual differences in trust because using measures of school-wide trust levels does not account for large amounts of variance. In Adams, Forsyth, and Mitchell (2009), 16% of the variance in parental trust was accounted for by school membership, which still leaves a substantial amount of variability unexplained. This method conceals a large amount of within-group variation. It also has the ability to underestimate individual variation and to encourage misinterpretation of the results, causing inappropriate generalization from group-level to individual outcomes (Luke, 2004). For example, "academic performance" in this study is based on attributes of the school as a whole, not individuals. It is calculated as the Academic Performance Index, which includes a combination of school-wide student performance on state tests, attendance rates, and "academic excellence" rates. It does not give information on the relationship between individual parents' trust of school and individual students' academic performance, although it could easily be misinterpreted as such. There are different outcomes for individual students in the same school, indicating that different factors are at work on different people. This research gives no information on how trust differs between parents at the same school, and how their level of trust affects outcomes for their children regarding college readiness.

A lack of research at the individual level represents a large gap in the literature, as we may be missing the within-group variation in trust and other key variables. When

investigated only at the school level, individual variation in demographics, student achievement, parental involvement, and student identification with school are lost. It is certainly worth looking at trust as a collective property and using it to improve school functioning, but it is also worth investigating individual variation in trust and its impact on individual student outcomes, such as college readiness.

Even in studies that used the individual as the unit of analysis, some detail was lost by measuring generalized trust. Adams and Christenson (1998, 2000) measured teachers' general trust of all parents instead of trust of each individual parent. This was likely due to the difficulty for teachers in completing a large number of trust scales, as well as the sensitive nature of more specific opinions on each parent. Kikas and her colleagues (2011) addressed this by shortening the teacher trust scale, enabling teachers to complete a scale more easily for each student and gather information on teacher trust of each parent. Furthermore, by using a parent-teacher dyad as the unit of analysis, even more information could be gained as to how parent and teacher trust together influence student outcomes.

The Current Study

Even though a postsecondary degree is becoming increasingly important for financial stability, too many students are unprepared for college upon graduating from high school. It is clear that nonacademic factors, such as self-regulated learning and motivation, are important in college readiness, but there are many elements important to the college preparation process that are yet undetermined. Parental involvement in education is important for student success in school, and some research suggests that

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parental involvement in the college preparation process may improve college readiness skills. These findings are based on only a handful of studies, each focusing on different aspects of parental involvement, so it remains unknown which aspects of parental involvement in college preparation are most important.

Evidence has emerged that points to a relationship between parental trust of school and educational outcomes. Trust is correlated with academic achievement, parent-school collaboration, and identification with school, all of which help students stay in school and prepare for college. Since many studies have tended to look at overall parental trust of a school, or the trust culture of the school in general, the literature lacks evidence for relationships between parental trust and individual attributes or outcomes. Research into the effects of parental trust, in particular, has focused on school-wide performance outcomes, rather than on individual students. While this shows the general importance of trust in schools, it limits the ability to understand how trust directly affects parents and their children.

While research has provided support for a link between parental trust and aspects of college readiness, no research has examined this relationship explicitly for individual parents and their children. The current study focuses on parent-student dyads to investigate the association between parental trust, parental educational experience, parental postsecondary knowledge, and nonacademic college readiness skills.

Chapter 3

Methods

Research Questions

This descriptive, exploratory study was designed to investigate the relationship between the personal educational experiences of parents, their knowledge of the postsecondary education process, their trust of their child's school, and the postsecondary readiness skills of students. Specifically, these questions were addressed:

1. What is the relationship between parental past educational experience and parental trust of school?

2. What is the relationship between parental past educational experience and parental postsecondary knowledge?

3. What is the relationship between parental trust of school and parental postsecondary knowledge?

4. Do parental trust of school, parental past educational experiences, and parental postsecondary knowledge predict student postsecondary readiness skills?

5. How do parents describe their experiences with postsecondary preparation, and what would they like to see change?

Participants and setting

Participants in this study consist of 127 parents and their children, who attend a large suburban high school in the metropolitan area of an upper Midwestern city. The sample largely consists of White, educated parents who do not live in poverty and whose children earn high grades. The demographics of the sample are further summarized in

Table 3, and the demographics of the school as a whole are summarized in Table 4.

Possible schools were identified based on their past participation in a postsecondary

readiness program, and schools were approached through emails and phone calls before

discussing the study with interested administrators. One school elected to participate; it

had used a structured postsecondary readiness program over the past three years but was

no longer using the program.

Table 3
Demographic Information of Participants

	N	Percentage
Parent Education		
Some High School	0	0%
High School Diploma or GED	2	1.6%
Some College	6	4.7%
2-year Community or Technical College Degree	14	11%
4-year College Degree	52	40.9%
Graduate or Professional Degree	53	41.7%
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch		
Yes	7	5.5%
No	119	93.7%
Prefer not to answer	1	0.8%
Child Grade Level		
9th	25	19.7%
10th	34	26.8%
11th	36	28.3%
12th	32	25.2%
Child's Academic Grades		
Mostly A's	60	47.2%
A's and B's	45	35.4%
B's and C's	17	13.4%
C's and D's	5	3.9%
Parent Ethnicity (choose all that apply)		
African-American / Black	6	4.7%
Asian / Asian-American	6	4.7%
Caucasian / White	113	89%
Hispanic / Latino	5	3.9%
Middle Eastern	1	0.8%

Table 4
Demographic Information of School

	Percentage
Free or Reduced-Price Lunch	11%
Ethnicity	
African-American / Black	6.2%
Asian / Asian-American	9.1%
Caucasian / White	79.6%
Hispanic / Latino	4.0%
American Indian	0.4%
Two or more ethnicities	0.7%

Measures

Parent participants completed three separate scales, which were presented as a single Parent Survey of School Experiences for logistic reasons, so that parents were not overwhelmed with multiple surveys. The scales included the Trust Scale, the Parental Personal Educational Experience Scale, and the Parental Postsecondary Knowledge Scale. Parents responded to items on all the scales via a four-point Likert-type scale. Parents received a score for each scale, which was the mean of their responses to the scale's items. Thus, each parent had one score for each of the parent scales. Additional information on demographics was gathered through questions on parent level of education, SES, relationship to the student, student grade level, and student grades (see Appendix A for parent scales).

Parental trust of school was measured with a scale based on the Trust Scale developed by Adams and Christenson (1998; 2000). This scale was developed as a methodology rather than a static scale, and it is based on Holmes and Rempel's (1989) theory of trust. This theory views interpersonal trust as "reflecting confident expectations of positive outcomes" (p. 188). In their development of the scale, Adams and Christenson

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(1998) used the following definition of trust in the family-school relationship: "confidence that another person will act in a way to benefit or sustain the relationship, or the implicit or explicit goals of the relationship, to achieve positive outcomes for students" (p. 6). The scale is based on the sentence starter "I am confident that…", which is intended to be used with varied sentence endings appropriate to the school, situation, and research questions at hand. As such, this methodology may be used as a basis for investigating parent trust of school in specific areas. For this study, items were changed and added to the Trust Scale developed by Adams and Christenson (2000) in order to measure parent trust in the area of postsecondary readiness. The new items were based on a review of the literature and were written to maintain a focus on parental trust in the school's ability to promote nonacademic factors that influence postsecondary readiness (see Appendix A for parent scales). This new scale consisted of 13 items and was found to have high internal consistency ($\alpha = .94$). It should be noted that, due to the nature of high school, this scale measures trust in the school in general rather than trust in certain individuals. While in elementary school, parents see their child's teacher as the point of contact, there is not usually one such person in a high school. Parents may interact with the principal or assistant principal for some matters, with a school counselor for other matters, or with any of their child's teachers. For this reason, the prompts were left open for parents to connect the statements with any of the professionals with whom they have contact in the school.

Parental personal educational experience was measured by parents' ratings of their high school experience and their level of engagement in school (see Appendix A for

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parent scales). They were asked to rate their own overall high school experience on a 4-point rating scale from positive to negative. They were also asked to rate their level of engagement in their own schooling by rating the answers to six questions based on cognitive, behavioral, and emotional indicators of engagement. This scale was also found to have high internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$).

Parental postsecondary knowledge was measured by parent ratings of their own level of understanding of the five basic areas of postsecondary preparation: academics, admissions, career planning, finances, and personal and social readiness (see Appendix A for parent scales). Parents were asked to rate their own knowledge in each of these areas. This scale consisted of seven items and was found to have high internal consistency, as well ($\alpha = .89$).

Student personal postsecondary readiness was measured with the Personal Readiness Evaluation for Postsecondary (PREP) (Appendix B), which uses student self-ratings to measure their levels of self-efficacy and expectations, effort and persistence, and self-regulated learning (Pohl, 2012). This rating scale was developed to be used by students to track their own postsecondary readiness progress in the areas listed above, and to determine whether students need further support in developing personal readiness skills for postsecondary education. Although it has not been validated for use as a predictor of postsecondary readiness, no measurement tool has yet established predictive validity for postsecondary readiness based on psychosocial factors rather than solely on academic skills. For this study, it is important to measure personal readiness rather than academic skills, which are insufficient to predict success in even the first year of

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postsecondary education, let alone persistence (Conley, 2007; Zwick & Sklar, 2005). This scale is thought to be the best instrument available to measure the skills students need to succeed and persist in postsecondary education, as well as in their transition to a career. Coefficient alphas of the factors on the PREP ranged from .86 to .90, indicating strong internal consistency (Pohl, 2012).

Procedures

The school administrators indicated that most parents had access to computers and used email as their main method of communication with the school. Parents were emailed a link to the online survey, and they received two follow-up emails over the next few weeks. The first page of the survey was a consent form, requiring the parents to give informed consent before continuing. Parents were provided with an incentive to complete the survey: their names were entered into a drawing to win one of two $50 gift cards.

The children of those parents who completed the survey were then given the PREP at school. They were called out of class, and the researcher explained the survey to them. They asked questions, read and signed the assent form, and completed the PREP. Student PREP scores were linked to the scores of their parents, and they were given an identification number.

To answer the qualitative fifth research question, parents were asked to provide contact information if they were willing to be interviewed. Sixty parents volunteered, and the volunteers were split into three groups based on whether their children had above average, below average, or near average PREP scores. Nine parents (three from each group) were contacted to share their experiences with the school in the area of

postsecondary readiness, and five agreed to be interviewed. All five parents were female, White, and did not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch. Descriptions of the parents and their children's backgrounds are provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Demographics of Interviewees

Parent	PREP	Kids in College	Grade Level	Grades	Level of Education
1	Near avg	yes	junior	C/D's	graduate degree
2	Above avg	no	junior	A/B's	4-year degree
3	Below avg	no	senior	A's	4-year degree
4	Below avg	no	freshman	A's	graduate degree
5	Above avg	yes	senior	A/B's	2-year degree

The PREP was scored on a scale from 0 to 102 (102 indicating the highest level of personal college readiness skills), and the mean was 81.51. Two interviewees had children with PREP scores above the mean (91 and 91), two had children with scores below the mean (74 and 65), and one had a child with a PREP score within two points of the mean (83). They also had scores that ranged above and below the means on the scales of parental trust of school, parental personal educational experience, and parental postsecondary knowledge.

A phenomenological approach was used to guide the interviews and analysis, based on the approach taken by Cresswell (2007). Phenomenological inquiry generally consists of two main questions: What have you experienced in terms of this phenomenon (i.e., interacting with the school and preparing for postsecondary education)? and What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon? In this study, participants were asked to describe what they had experienced in terms of the postsecondary preparation process. They were then asked to

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share where they obtained information about postsecondary readiness in each area: academic, admissions, career, financial, and personal readiness. Finally, they were asked how well they believed the school had assisted in the process and what more the school could have done to help them. Interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes, and participants were given gift cards worth $25 for their participation, in addition to being eligible for one of two $50 gift cards for completing the survey.

Analyses

This study employs a nonexperimental design; it is descriptive and exploratory. Each variable in the study was comprised of a series of items on a four-point Likert scale, with four indicating the highest or most positive response. In order to analyze the ratings from the parent and student surveys, the mean of each participant's responses was calculated for each section of the survey. As such, each parent-child pair has one score for each variable: parental personal educational experience, parental trust of school, parental postsecondary knowledge, and the PREP (student's perceptions of their personal readiness skills). The items on the parent scales are in Appendix A, and the items on the PREP are in Appendix B.

Several of the variables were collapsed and recoded for clarity. The sample included a large number of students identified as White. Students were identified as White, coded as 1, if their parents chose only "Caucasian/White" as their ethnicity, and they were identified as non-White, coded as 0, if their parents chose anything other than, or in addition to, "Caucasian/White." This sample also included high-achieving students, with almost half ($N = 60$) of the students earning "Mostly A's," as reported by their

parents. The majority of the rest of the students earned "A's and B's" (N = 45), and only five students were reported to earn "C's and D's." In order to determine whether differences existed between higher and lower achievers, two groups were formed. Students were considered higher achieving and coded as "1" if they earned "Mostly A's," and they were considered lower achieving and coded as "0" if they earned "A's and B's," "B's and C's," or "C's and D's." Naturally dichotomous variables were also coded with ones and zeros. Parents who reported having another child already in college were coded as "1," and parents without another child in college were coded as "0." Females were coded as "1," and males were coded as "0."

The first three research questions, investigating the relationship between parental personal educational experience, parental trust of school, and parental postsecondary knowledge, were analyzed through bivariate correlations using SPSS. Research question four, examining whether the three parent variables predicted student personal readiness, was analyzed through multiple regression using SPSS. Demographic variables were entered in the first step, and the three predictors of interest were added together in the second step. One parent chose the option "Prefer not to answer" when asked whether his or her child received free or reduced-price lunch. As there was no reason to assume that the child did or did not receive the benefit, this parent-child pair was excluded from the regression analysis.

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the regression analysis was investigated further by splitting the sample into groups and running regression models with these groups. The sample was split based on average grades in order to explore

whether this model worked differently for higher and lower achieving students. One model was run with students who earned mostly A's (N = 60) as reported by their parents, and the other model included students who earned lower grades (N = 66). Although a student receiving A's and B's is not generally considered to be a low-achieving student, students at this school receive high grades. Nearly half the sample reported their grades to be mostly A's, and very little of the sample reported grades lower than B's and C's. Whether this is due to grade inflation or to the true achievement of these students, it can be argued that students receiving anything lower than mostly A's are comparatively lower achieving. The sample was then split by gender in order to investigate whether the model was different for males (N = 60) and females (N = 66).

The purpose of research question five was to gain an understanding of several parents' experiences helping their children prepare for postsecondary education, including where they found the information to do so and how schools could assist them more effectively. The five parent interviews were recorded and transcribed. Statements that described an experience with postsecondary preparation, reflected a feeling about the process, explained a source of information, or described how parents thought they could be supported were extracted from the transcripts. These statements were clustered into themes, which are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Results

Each of the parent scales (Parental Personal Educational Experience, Parental

Trust of School, and Parental Postsecondary Knowledge) consisted of a four-point Likert-

type scale, with four indicating the highest or most positive response. A mean was

calculated for each participant's response, so that each parent-child pair had one score for

each scale. The overall means and standard deviations for each scale were also calculated

and are described in Table 6.

Table 6
Descriptive Statistics for Parent Scales

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Parent Personal Educational Experience	3.23	.624	1	4
Parent Trust of School	3.09	.512	1	4
Parent Postsecondary Knowledge	3.19	.537	2	4

Research Question 1: **What is the relationship between parental past educational**

experience and parental trust of school?

A bivariate correlation was used to determine the relationship between parents'

educational experiences and their trust of school. Both of these scales (parental personal

educational experience and parental trust of school) included items on a four-point

Likert-type scale. The mean of each participant's responses was calculated for each scale,

resulting in one score per participant for each scale. These scores were used to determine

whether a correlation existed between parental personal educational experience and

parental trust of school. No significant correlation was found between these two variables, $r(126) = -0.011$, $p = .90$. Intercorrelations are summarized in Table 7.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between parental past educational experience and parental postsecondary knowledge?

A bivariate correlation was used to determine the relationship between parents' educational experiences and their knowledge of postsecondary education. As above, the mean of parents' responses to items on a Likert-type scale were calculated, and these means were used to determine whether a correlation existed between parental personal educational experience and parental postsecondary knowledge. No significant correlation was found between these two variables, $r(126) = 0.135$, $p = 0.13$.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between parental trust of school and parental postsecondary knowledge?

A bivariate correlation was used to determine the relationship between the level of trust parents report in their child's school and their knowledge of postsecondary education. Again, scores were developed from the means of responses, and these scores were used to determine whether a correlation existed between parental trust of school and parental postsecondary knowledge. A significant correlation was found between parental trust of school and parental postsecondary knowledge, $r(126) = .322$, $p < .05$.

Table 7
Intercorrelations for Parent Scales

	1	2	3
1. Parental Past Educational Experience	--		
2. Parental Trust of School	-.011	--	
3. Parental Postsecondary Knowledge	.135	.322*	--

$* p < .05$

Research Question 4: **Do parental trust of school, parental past educational experiences, and parental postsecondary knowledge predict student postsecondary readiness skills?**

The PREP was scored on a scale from 0 to 102, with 102 indicating the highest level of personal college readiness skills, and the mean was 81.51 (SD = 11.91). A linear regression analysis was conducted to predict student personal college readiness skills from parental trust of school, parental postsecondary knowledge, and parental educational experience. The results are described in Table 8. The demographic variables were entered in the first step, and the three predictor variables were entered in the second step. In both steps, only gender and grades were significant predictors of the PREP score. The demographic variables accounted for 21% of the variance in the PREP in the first step, and in the second step, all of the variables together accounted for 22.5% of PREP variance. Including the variables of interest (Parental Trust, Parental Postsecondary Knowledge, and Parental Educational Experience) increased the amount of variance explained by 1.5%.

Table 8

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Students' Perceptions of Postsecondary Readiness Skills

Step and predictor variable	*B*	*SE B*	β	*t*	*p*	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1:						.210*	
Other children in college	0.14	2.01	.006	0.07	.945		
Grade level	0.48	0.94	.043	0.51	.613		
Parent education	1.00	1.13	.076	0.88	.380		
Free/reduced price lunch	-5.78	4.37	-.111	-1.32	.189		
Gender	7.93*	2.01	.334	3.95	.000		
Grades	6.08*	2.02	.256	3.02	.003		
Ethnicity	-3.01	3.07	-.084	-0.98	.330		
Step 2:						.225*	.015
Other children in college	0.74	2.22	.030	0.32	.740		
Grade level	0.64	1.00	.058	0.64	.521		
Parent education	0.96	1.18	.074	0.81	.418		
Free/reduced price lunch	-4.69	4.58	-.091	-1.02	.309		
Gender	8.21*	2.03	.346	4.04	.000		
Grades	5.80*	2.08	.244	2.79	.006		
Ethnicity	-2.48	3.15	-.070	-0.79	.432		
Parental Trust	2.58	2.07	.111	1.25	.215		
Parental Postsecondary Knowledge	-1.88	2.31	-.084	-0.82	.416		
Parental Educational Experience	1.44	1.79	.075	0.80	.423		

*p < .05

The sample was split into two groups based on average grades, as reported by parents: higher achievers (Mostly A's), and lower achievers (all other grades). Regression analyses were run with each group, and the results are described in Table 9. In the model that only included students with Mostly A's, none of the predictors was significant. In the model including students with grades lower than Mostly A's, gender was significant. The amount of variance accounted for by demographics was similar in both models, but it increased more with the addition of the variables of interest in the model that included students with lower grades.

Table 9

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Students' Perceptions of Postsecondary Readiness Skills among Students with Higher and Lower Grades

Step and predictor variable	Higher Grades[a]				Lower Grades[b]			
	B	*SE*	*p*	R^2	*B*	*SE*	*p*	R^2
Step 1:				.177				.176
Other children in college	1.77	2.28	.441		-0.46	3.27	.889	
Grade level	0.58	0.97	.552		0.58	1.76	.743	
Parent education	0.42	2.03	.837		1.01	1.50	.502	
Free/reduced price lunch	-6.23	5.48	.261		-5.21	6.87	.451	
Gender	4.15	2.45	.095		9.13*	3.18	.006	
Ethnicity	4.49	3.48	.203		-8.69	5.29	.106	
Step 2:				.186				.229
Other children in college	1.11	2.58	.670		1.51	3.71	.685	
Grade level	0.37	1.03	.722		1.52	1.92	.431	
Parent education	-0.18	2.35	.941		1.34	1.54	.388	
Free/reduced price lunch	-6.95	5.75	.232		-3.09	7.99	.700	
Gender	3.79	2.67	.161		9.64*	3.21	.004	
Ethnicity	4.25	3.60	.243		-8.35	5.62	.143	
Parental Trust	0.39	2.37	.871		5.41	3.36	.113	
Parental Postsecondary Knowledge	1.46	2.54	.570		-5.95	4.07	.149	
Parental Educational Experience	0.55	2.21	.805		1.95	3.13	.535	

[a]$\Delta R^2 = .009$ [b]$\Delta R^2 = .053$

p < .05

The sample was also split into two groups based on gender. Regression analyses were run with each group, and the results are described in Table 10. The female model was not significant, and the predictors, both demographics and the variables of interest, explained only a small amount of variance in the PREP. By contrast, the male model was significant, and it accounted for more variance in PREP scores. Demographic variables accounted for more variance in the male model, and the change in R^2 was also greater when adding the variables of interest.

Table 10

Regression Analysis Summary for Variables Predicting Students' Perceptions of Postsecondary Readiness Skills among Male and Female Students

Step and predictor variable	Female[a]				Male[b]			
	B	*SE*	*p*	R^2	*B*	*SE*	*p*	R^2
Step 1:				.094				.209*
Other children in college	-0.59	2.65	.824		1.74	3.24	.592	
Grade level	0.84	1.12	.458		0.17	1.60	.918	
Parent education	0.41	1.60	.801		2.04	1.70	.235	
Free/reduced price lunch	0.23	5.73	.968		-15.59*	7.28	.037	
Grades	5.09	2.61	.055		7.11*	3.37	.040	
Ethnicity	-5.67	5.33	.292		-0.32	4.22	.939	
Step 2:				.130				.272*
Other children in college	0.72	2.92	.805		0.71	3.75	.851	
Grade level	1.35	1.20	.263		0.20	1.71	.907	
Parent education	1.26	1.75	.476		1.51	1.71	.382	
Free/reduced price lunch	-0.12	5.78	.984		-11.03	8.18	.184	
Grades	6.91*	2.96	.023		6.89*	3.35	.045	
Ethnicity	-7.71	5.55	.170		0.72	4.34	.869	
Parental Trust	-1.38	2.69	.611		5.08	3.25	.125	
Parental Postsecondary Knowledge	-3.43	3.06	.266		0.22	3.90	.956	
Parental Educational Experience	-1.20	2.26	.599		3.18	2.99	.292	

[a]$\Delta R^2 = .036$ [b]$\Delta R^2 = .062$
*$p \leq .05$

Research Question 5: How do parents describe their experiences with postsecondary preparation, and what would they like to see change?

This question was asked in order to provide more depth to the exploration of parents' experiences while preparing for postsecondary education. Its purpose was not to develop an exhaustive description of the parental experience, but instead to compile the thoughts of several parents from within this sample, giving examples of their experiences and perception of the process. Five parents were interviewed, and their interviews were recorded and transcribed. Significant statements that pertained directly to the experience

of preparing children for postsecondary education were identified, and these statements were clustered into themes. Given the small number of parents and the purpose of the interviews, inter-rater agreement was not calculated. The themes are not intended to be representative of the general experience of parents preparing children for life after high school; rather, they are examples of the feelings, experiences, and advice shared by these five parents. Tables 11, 12, and 13 summarize these examples and are described below.

Table 11
Parent Feelings about Postsecondary Preparation

	Overwhelmed	Confused	Left Out
Parent 1	Had to initiate contact with school to receive help		Felt that only very involved parents got help
Parent 2	Had to put in extra time and effort, such as visiting colleges on school vacations	Confused about what to prioritize: volunteering, sports, work, or grades	
Parent 3		Received misinformation from the school about internships and whether credits would be accepted by colleges	
Parent 4	Couldn't understand the overall picture or the timing of the process		
Parent 5	Information was too broad; didn't know how or where to find targeted information	Did not understand financial requirements until later in the process	Felt that her kids didn't get enough college preparation information since they weren't on a track that included taking advanced placement classes

Almost all the parents reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount of preparation, the time they had to devote, or the energy they dedicated to finding help with the process. Three parents talked about confusion with requirements or specific misinformation they had been given that led them to feel confused. Two parents shared that they thought other families were receiving more information than they obtained because those families either were more involved or were in an advanced academic track that was seen to lead more directly to college.

Table 12

Parent-Reported Information Sources for Postsecondary Preparation

	Colleges	High School	Outside Resources
Parent 1	Colleges informed her of requirements, such as 4 years of foreign language, which were different than high school requirements	Specific teacher and counselor gave information when asked	Past education and experiences: was formerly a school counselor
Parent 2	Visited colleges and college websites; high school did not provide information on admissions	School gave information on tests; hosted a presentation by a financial planner who clarified aid	Informal conversations with other parents
Parent 3	Visited colleges; high school counselor did not know about a variety of colleges	Parent nights at school helped give information	Sports contributed to character development; books on college preparation helped with process
Parent 4	College representatives at college fairs gave information on academic requirements	Child took a class on how to be a good student, how to learn	Hired a company to complete financial paperwork
Parent 5	Most preparation information came directly from colleges, who gave clearer information than the school		Swimming competitively taught self-motivation

All of the parents reported obtaining the most useful information directly from colleges. All had children who were planning to attend four-year colleges or universities, and they had reached out to colleges through visits, phone calls or emails, and websites. Every parent indicated that the high school was not able to provide the information they sought, such as admissions and academic requirements, so they found the information from colleges. Parent 3, for example, said that her child's counselor was not familiar with a range of different colleges; he could only give her information on several local schools. As her child was interested in leaving the state, she did not receive information on the types of colleges to which she wanted to apply. Some parents did report receiving helpful information from the school: Parent 1 found a teacher and counselor who helped her when she pressed them for information; Parent 2 said the school gave her a lot of

information about the tests required for college entrance; and Parent 4's child took a class

on "learning how to learn" that helped clarify the study skills needed for college

coursework. Parents 2 and 3 also shared that the school hosted parent nights with

postsecondary information and outside resources that helped them understand important

parts of the process, such as finances and admissions. Parent 4 even hired a company to

complete all of the financial paperwork required to submit to schools and apply for aid.

When talking about how their children developed the personal readiness skills necessary

to succeed in college, Parents 3 and 5 discussed the self-motivation, persistence, and

time-management abilities their children had gained from playing sports. One parent

shared that she had gained helpful advice from parents who had already been through the

process with their older children. Overall, these parents reported getting information a

variety of sources, with most of it coming directly from specific colleges.

Table 13

Parents' Advice for Improving Postsecondary Preparation in High School

	Bring Colleges into the High School	Start Postsecondary Preparation Process Earlier	Support Development of Personal Readiness Skills
Parent 1	Other schools have college fairs, which the high school could promote		School was happy with a passing grade, but she wanted her child pushed harder
Parent 2	Event nights, with college representatives at the school, would be helpful; have students visit college as part of school	More information at the beginning of junior year; A comprehensive program that engages parents and students would be helpful	School was easy for child, who did not learn how to work hard; Child is not ready to speak with a college counselor independently
Parent 3	An event night with colleges at school helped, but more colleges would be even better	Readiness program was delayed; should have started by freshman year or earlier	
Parent 4	College fair at school would help	School is behind the ball in starting postsecondary preparation	
Parent 5	An event night with an open forum to ask college representatives questions about college		Child had an easy time in high school and did not have to study until college; school could have helped teach study and time-management skills

The five parents were asked to describe what more the high school could have done to help them prepare, as a family, for postsecondary life. Consistent with their comments that they received the best information directly from colleges, most of their suggestions involved bringing colleges to the high school. Four of the parents talked about evening fairs or events at the school with college representatives available to answer questions, and the other parent wanted the school to promote similar events hosted by other schools. Three parents wanted the school to start talking about postsecondary earlier, as soon as freshman year, instead of waiting until later in junior year. Parent 2 also stated that a comprehensive program for both students and parents would help them understand the process better. Three parents also talked about the need for more guidance in the development of study skills. Two of them described their

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children's high school work as easy, so the children did not have to study hard and did

not know how to work or manage their time for a class that was more challenging. One of

these parents had a child already in college who was forced to develop those skills during

his freshman year, without as much support as he could have received in high school.

Parent 1 wanted to see the school hold high expectations for student work, instead of

accepting a passing grade as "good enough" even if a student was capable of more.

Parent 1 also mentioned that she could have used help with the technology used at school,

such as google drive and online textbooks, in order to benefit from it.

<center>**Chapter 5**</center>

<center>**Discussion**</center>

Purpose

　　Parental trust of school has been found to be related to a number of important variables, but it has never been investigated in the context of postsecondary readiness. This exploratory study was designed to determine whether a relationship exists between the personal educational experiences of parents, their knowledge of the postsecondary education process, their trust of their child's school, and the student's perception of their postsecondary readiness skills. If such a relationship did exist, parent components of college readiness programs could use that information to improve their targeting of parents in order to increase readiness skills in high school students.

Findings

　　Research Question 1. No supported relationship was found between parental personal educational experience and parental trust of school, which was investigated through the first research question. This suggests that parents' memories and perceptions of their own educational experiences are unrelated to the trust they have in their child's school in the area of postsecondary readiness. This question has not been investigated before, although past researchers found evidence that other parent variables were related to parental trust of school, including involvement in school, satisfaction with teacher interactions, and maternal education (Adams & Christenson, 1998, 2000; Kikas et al., 2011). In this study, trust was investigated in relation to postsecondary readiness, whereas in past studies, the measurements of trust have been more global, seeking to

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measure the general trust a parent has in the school. It could be that measuring trust in this more specific way alters the construct. The method of measuring parent personal educational experience may also affect these results, and the simple scale used here may not be the best measurement of parents' experiences. The scales used in this study were deliberately kept brief in order to increase the potential for parent participation, but a more comprehensive measure could possibly provide different results.

Research Question 2. The second research question examined the relationship between the personal educational experiences of parents and their knowledge of postsecondary options for their children. Again, a supported relationship was not found. This lack of a significant relationship suggests that parents' own high school experiences may not be connected to the amount they know about their children's postsecondary educational process. The investigation of this question, in fact each of the research questions, may have been influenced by the characteristics of the sample in this study, which was highly educated, White, and not living in poverty. These parents had a relatively strong understanding of what is necessary to prepare for postsecondary education; no parent had an average Parental Postsecondary Knowledge score below two on a four-point scale. These results may indicate that no relationship exists between the personal experiences and postsecondary knowledge of these parents, but different results might emerge from a sample that included parents with less education or who were living in poverty.

Research Question 3. An investigation of the third research question yielded a moderate, significant correlation between parental trust of school and parental

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postsecondary knowledge, suggesting that these two variables may be related. This could indicate a variety of relationships, such as that parents who trust the school are more likely to gain increased knowledge about the postsecondary process when the school provides such information, or that parents who have already gained more knowledge about postsecondary are more likely to trust the school. Furthermore, a third variable could be influencing both trust and postsecondary knowledge in similar ways. For example, parents who attend school events may increase both their knowledge about school-related topics and their trust of the school, due to more and better interactions with the school. Researchers have found that satisfaction with teacher interactions is related to higher levels of parental trust (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Additionally, parental trust tends to decrease as children grow older, corresponding with less parent-teacher interaction as grade levels increase (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Adams & Forsyth, 2007; Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009). Interactions between parents and school staff may be important to investigate further.

Research Question 4. An investigation of the fourth research question found that parental trust, educational experience, and postsecondary knowledge explained very little variance in students' perceptions of their postsecondary readiness skills. This finding may reflect a true lack of relationship, but it could also reflect measurement issues. In this study, college readiness skills were measured with the Personal Readiness Evaluation for Postsecondary (PREP), which was developed as a self-evaluation tool for students to track their levels of skills important for success in college, including self-efficacy and expectations, effort and persistence, and self-regulated learning (Pohl, 2012). It was

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chosen as the best option for this study because it measures student perceptions of the skills that have been shown to be important to college success (Conley, 2007; Zwick & Sklar, 2005). However, the PREP has not been used as a research tool and has not been validated to predict how a student will perform in college. It can be interpreted here as an indicator of a student's perceptions of his or her personal readiness skills, but not necessarily as a predictor of college performance. Additionally, as with the other research questions, these findings should be interpreted in light of the sample, which is largely White, educated, and relatively affluent. A more diverse sample may have resulted in different outcomes.

Parental trust of school explained very little variance in any of the models. In light of this study's sample, it is worth asking whether parental trust matters. Among highly educated, middle-class, motivated parents, whether or not they trust the school may not affect how they experience postsecondary preparation. Future research with a sample that includes parents with less education and lower socioeconomic status may yield a situation in which trust has more importance.

Student gender and grades were significant predictors of PREP scores, with females and higher achieving students rating themselves higher on the PREP. When the sample was split along gender and grade lines, the results revealed that the regression model functioned differently for males, females, high achievers, and lower achievers. The model explained more variance for males and for lower achieving students.

In the model of lower achieving students, gender was a significant predictor, but it was not significant in the model of higher achievers. Among lower achievers, being

female predicted higher levels of postsecondary readiness skills than did being male. This suggests that female lower achievers may report higher levels of postsecondary readiness skills than male lower achievers. Perhaps lower achieving females are working on developing better study skills, or perhaps they are receiving more messages from teachers and parents encouraging them to have high expectations for their education. Although not significant, the addition of the variables of interest explained more variance in the model of lower achieving students than that of higher achievers, with demographics accounting for similar amounts of variance in both models. Parental knowledge and beliefs may be more important for lower achieving students than high achievers. Interestingly, although also not significant, the importance of trust was greater in the lower achieving model than in the high-achieving model.

In the models split along gender lines, grades were a significant predictor for both the male and the female model. The model of male students accounted for more variance than the other models; the predictors explained 27.2% of the variance in male students' PREP scores. The female model was not significant, and it only accounted for 13% of the variance in PREP scores. Demographics accounted for more variance in the male model than in the female, and the addition of the parent variables of interest increased the explained variance by more in the male model than in the female model. These results suggest that parental knowledge and beliefs may make a larger difference for male than for female students. As with the lower achieving group, trust was more important in the male model than in the female model. These findings point to new directions for trust research, which are discussed below.

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Another interesting, but non-significant, finding involves parental postsecondary knowledge. When parents reported higher knowledge, PREP scores were predicted to be lower for females and lower achievers. Although not significant, the direction of this relationship is noteworthy.

The predictors used in this study explained more variance for male students and lower achieving students than for female students and high achievers. This suggests that these predictors may be more important under certain conditions, including for male students and for lower achieving students. Higher grades predicted higher PREP scores for both males and females; being female predicted higher PREP scores only for lower achievers.

Research Question 5. The parents who were interviewed for this study shared feelings of being overwhelmed, left out, and confused about the process of postsecondary preparation. They received information about that process from colleges, the high school, private companies, and other parents. They would like to see the college preparation process begin earlier in school, college representatives brought into the school, and increased attention paid to the personal readiness skills necessary for independence and success in college. The parents who were interviewed were all planning to send their children to four-year colleges. The school from which the sample was taken was largely White and middle class with highly educated parents, and their concerns should be interpreted in the context of these demographics. A more diverse sample would likely yield different concerns and ideas, which could be useful in gathering information for schools with different populations. It is notable, however, that even in this relatively

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homogeneous, well-educated sample, the college preparation process was described as confusing, overwhelming, and challenging to navigate. If these parents, most of whom have attended postsecondary education, are having difficulty with the process, it is likely much more difficult for parents with little experience in postsecondary education. These results indicate that parents can use more information and support, and a better bridge needs to be built between high schools and postsecondary institutions.

Merits and Limitations

Merits to this study include the parent scales used. These scales should continue to be researched, but they have strong internal consistency and were brief enough that parents were able to complete them. These scales are potential tools to be used in this nascent area of research. The homogeneity of the sample may also be viewed as a merit, although it is discussed in the limitations, as well. A merit to a homogeneous sample is the ability to explore in detail the experiences of one group of families, although the diverse views of different experiences are lost.

Several limitations to this study should be noted. First, this sample was homogeneous. It was drawn from only one school in a middle-class suburb in the Midwest, which includes parents that are relatively highly educated and mostly Caucasian, with few families living in poverty. A more diverse sample could yield different results, and it should be noted that the results from this study may only be generalized to the type of population from which participants were drawn.

Second, this study relies on self-reports from parents and students. As with any self-report, results are dependent on the honesty, understanding, and self-awareness of

each reporter. Although the parents and students were assured that their responses would not be shared with the school, they may have responded in ways that they considered to be socially desirable. In addition, their ability to understand the questions may have impacted how they answered. Finally, the results rely on respondents' ability to know and accurately communicate their beliefs. Respondents may differ in their level of self-awareness, which could impact the validity of their responses.

Another limitation involves demographic data that was not collected for students. It is not known whether the students were taking advanced placement (AP), honors, or general classes, and information on special education status was not collected.

There may be a potential systematic bias for the data collected in this study. In a study that aims to explore parental trust, parents who do not trust the school may not have chosen to participate precisely because they have low trust. The school sent the researcher's letter and survey link to parents, and those who do not trust that school may have been less likely to participate. In this way, parents with low trust of the school may have been systematically excluded from the study.

Future Directions and Implications

Taking into account the limitations of generalizing the results of this study, it does have merits that extend the research on trust and postsecondary readiness. This study looked at parent trust in the specific area of postsecondary readiness. In the past trust has been investigated more globally, asking whether parents trusted school staff overall. This more refined focus could be used with other variables in the future to investigate parental trust in specific areas. Past studies of trust in the parent-school relationship have not

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looked at trust as a predictor, but it could be used to predict a variety of outcomes for children and families. This study has explored the use of trust as a predictor of postsecondary readiness skills. While it was not found to be a significant predictor, findings from this study could be further explored. Parental trust, in relation to postsecondary readiness, was found to be significantly correlated with parental postsecondary knowledge. This relationship should be investigated further to determine its direction and relationship with other explanatory variables.

Several results from the regression analysis could fuel new research. For lower achieving students, being female predicted higher PREP scores. This finding could lead to interesting follow-up studies, such as replicating the findings with a more diverse sample and investigating the reasons behind it. For example, female students who are not earning straight A's may be receiving different messages than males, or they may be working harder to develop better study skills. It would also be interesting to examine the possibility that parental beliefs may be more important for males and lower achieving students. The results suggested that parental trust might be more important for students who do not earn straight A's, which would be exciting to explore.

The interviewees reported that they would like to see more college fairs or event nights involving college representatives at the high school. Not only would these events increase parents' understanding of college preparation, they would also increase interactions between parents and school staff. Parents may be looking for more interactions with the school, especially as opportunities for interaction wane in high school. These parents also appear to be asking for more chances to interact with college

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representatives at the high school, which has the potential to increase collaboration among these parties. Increasing interactions and the flow of information between high schools, colleges, and parents could ultimately help parents obtain more information about college preparation.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationships among parental trust of school, parental educational experience, parental postsecondary knowledge, and student postsecondary readiness skills. Only one supported relationship was found, between parental trust and parental postsecondary knowledge. While other relationships were not supported, a larger, more diverse sample may find different results.

The importance of exploring parental characteristics, beliefs, and experiences in relation to postsecondary readiness should not be forgotten. While it is ultimately students' choices and skills that will cause them to succeed in college, they are influenced by parenting throughout their lives. If schools can intervene with parents, more students may develop the skills necessary to graduate with the postsecondary degrees required for success in today's economy.

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Appendix A

Parent Survey of School Experience

Please put an X in the box that best describes your answer. **"Postsecondary"** means any school or training after high school. This could include attending a community college, technical school, 4-year university, cosmetology school, etc.

I am confident that teachers and staff at this school…	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
are doing a good job teaching my child academic subjects				
are helping my child set goals for his/her education				
are helping my child develop good study skills				
are helping my child believe that she/he can be successful in college or technical school				
encourage my child to put in effort even when schoolwork is difficult				
are teaching my child how to solve problems when faced with a challenge				
encourage my child to try hard even if he/she is afraid of failure				
are showing my child that schoolwork is valuable and relevant to his/her success after high school				
are doing a good job encouraging my child to have a positive attitude toward learning				
are doing a good job preparing my child for college or technical school				
are doing a good job keeping me well-informed of my child's progress toward meeting requirements for college or technical school				
are keeping me aware of all the information I need related to postsecondary education				
are doing a good job encouraging my child to go to college or technical school				

Please rate your agreement with the following statements:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have a plan to help my child get the money he/she needs to pay for his/her postsecondary education.				
I know what tests my child needs to take to get into the postsecondary school she/he wants to attend.				
I know what high school courses my child needs to take to get into the postsecondary school she/he wants to attend.				
I understand what it takes for my child to complete an application for college or technical school.				

I know the options available to help pay for postsecondary education.				
I know what nonacademic skills (e.g., motivation) my child needs to succeed in postsecondary education.				
I know how to help my child prepare for a career.				

How would you rate YOUR OWN overall experience when YOU were in high school (<u>circle one</u>)?

Negative   Somewhat negative   Somewhat positive   Positive

When YOU were in high school, how much…	Not at all	Somewhat	A fair amount	Very much
did you feel your teachers were helpful and supportive?				
did you feel that you belonged in the school?				
were you interested in your classwork?				
did you participate in your classes?				
did you participate in extra-curricular activities?				
did you try hard to do your best work, even when it was challenging?				

<div align="center"><u>Please circle your answer.</u></div>

What is your child's name? (Once your answers are linked with your child's, your child's name will be removed from the data and will not be saved anywhere.)

    ◊   _____

What grade is your child in?

- ◊ 9
- ◊ 10
- ◊ 11
- ◊ 12

What are your child's grades? (Mark <u>one</u>.)

- ◊ Mostly A's
- ◊ A's and B's
- ◊ B's and C's
- ◊ C's and D's
- ◊ D's and F's

What is the highest level of education you have completed? (Mark <u>one</u>.)

- ◊ Some high school
- ◊ High school graduate / GED
- ◊ Some college
- ◊ 2-year community college or technical school graduate
- ◊ 4-year college or university graduate
- ◊ Graduate / Professional degree
- ◊ *Other* _____

Does your child qualify for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch at school?
- ◊ Yes
- ◊ No
- ◊ Prefer not to answer

What is your relationship to the student?
- ◊ Parent
- ◊ Aunt or Uncle
- ◊ Grandparent
- ◊ Foster parent or Guardian
- ◊ Older sibling
- ◊ Other _____

Which of the following categories describe your ethnic background? (mark all that apply)
- ◊ African-American/ Black
- ◊ Asian/ Asian-American
- ◊ Caucasian/ White
- ◊ Hispanic/ Latino
- ◊ Middle Eastern
- ◊ Native American
- ◊ Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander
- ◊ Other _____

Are you willing to participate in a short interview about your child's preparation for postsecondary education?
- ◊ Yes
  - o Phone number or email address: _____
- ◊ No

Personal Readiness Evaluation for Postsecondary (PREP)

Name: _____ **Gender:** _____ **Date:** _____

Note: In this survey, the word *college* refers to all educational opportunities available to students after high school, including four-year, two-year, community, and technical college.

Determine whether you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, or strongly agree with the following statements and fill in the appropriate response.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I will achieve my academic goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I can do my schoolwork well if I try hard.	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Working hard in school now will help me in my future.	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I plan to get more education after I graduate from high school.	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. I plan to earn a college degree.	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I can imagine myself as a successful college student.	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I will get into college.	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. If I work hard, I will succeed in college.	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I will finish college even if there are obstacles in my way.	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Getting a college degree will help me achieve my future goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. I am hopeful about my future.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Determine whether you do the following never, rarely, sometimes, or often and fill in the appropriate response.	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often
12. I try to do my best in my classes.	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. I put my schoolwork before other activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐
14. Even when my schoolwork is boring, I keep working until I finish it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
15. I turn in my schoolwork on time.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Determine whether you do the following never, rarely, sometimes, or often and fill in the appropriate response.	Never	Rarely	Some-times	Often
16. When I work on an assignment, I focus on getting it done correctly.	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. I make sure I understand an assignment when I work on it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. When I come to a difficult question in my schoolwork, I try to answer it.	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. I use feedback from my teachers to improve my	☐	☐	☐	☐

	assignments.	□	□	□	□
20.	I follow through on commitments that I make.	□	□	□	□
21.	I make sure I finish what I start.	□	□	□	□
22.	I work hard to achieve the goals I set for myself.	□	□	□	□
23.	If I fail at something, I try again.	□	□	□	□
24.	I use a planner/assignment book/agenda to keep track of my assignments.	□	□	□	□
25.	I plan things out before I begin my schoolwork.	□	□	□	□
26.	I make an outline before I write a paper, even if it is not required.	□	□	□	□
27.	While I study I ask myself questions to make sure I understand what I'm studying.	□	□	□	□
28.	When I do an assignment, I try to connect it to my life somehow.	□	□	□	□
29.	I try to connect class reading to something interesting.	□	□	□	□
30.	While reading for class, I stop once in a while to review what I've read.	□	□	□	□
31.	I combine information from class and from the book when I study for a test.	□	□	□	□
32.	When I get stuck on a question, I talk through it with someone.	□	□	□	□
33.	After I solve a problem, I make sure the solution worked.	□	□	□	□
34.	I check over my completed schoolwork to make sure it's correct.	□	□	□	□