

Bethel University

Spark

---

All Electronic Theses and Dissertations

---

2020

## Understanding the Whole Student Approach and Its Influence on the Graduation Rates of Hispanic/Latino ELL Students within Catholic High Schools

Pamela Marie Patnode  
*Bethel University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://spark.bethel.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Patnode, P. M. (2020). *Understanding the Whole Student Approach and Its Influence on the Graduation Rates of Hispanic/Latino ELL Students within Catholic High Schools* [Doctoral dissertation, Bethel University]. Spark Repository. <https://spark.bethel.edu/etd/503>

This Doctoral dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Spark. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Spark.

Understanding the Whole Student Approach and Its Influence on the Graduation Rates of  
Hispanic/Latino ELL Students within Catholic High Schools

Pamela M. Patnode

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Bethel University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

St. Paul, Minnesota

2020

Approved by:

Advisor, Dr. Tracy Reimer

Reader, Dr. Kristen Nichols-Besel

Reader, Dr. Marta Shaw

Copyright 2020

Pamela Patnode

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## Abstract

Spanish speaking English Language Learners (ELLs) represent a large and rapidly growing student population. Although many Hispanic/Latino ELL students are at risk for academic failure, Hispanic/Latino students who attend Catholic schools are more likely than their public school peers to graduate from both high school and college. The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential role that student validation plays within the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices that lead to Hispanic/Latino ELL student academic achievement in Catholic high schools. The researcher performed on-site observations, document analysis, as well as interviews and focus groups at a culturally diverse, high performing, urban Catholic high school. Nineteen faculty and staff members from the school participated in the study. Focus groups and interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. One overarching theme was identified as the main reason for this schools' consistent success with on-time graduation and college acceptance among their Hispanic/Latino ELL students. That overarching theme was identified as care for the whole student. This overarching theme was upheld by two secondary themes which included practical support structures and relationship building. Five subcategories that uphold the overarching theme and its secondary themes were identified as academic supports, cultural practices, spiritual supports, student validation, and college and career readiness support. Additional research that examines the "whole student" approach at more Catholic high schools and public schools is recommended. In addition, Catholic high school educators and administrators are encouraged to review the care for the whole student practices that St. Benedict Catholic High School performs (as identified in this study) and consider implementing appropriate practices within their own schools.

## Acknowledgments

As is the case with most endeavors, this project would not have happened without the unfailing help and support of many people.

First and foremost, I thank my husband and my children. Throughout countless hours of writing, research, and class time, you supported me every step of the way. I appreciate your patience (I know I was distracted at times from the needs of the family) and your belief that I could accomplish this goal. Your support means more to me than I can express. I love you!

Thank you, Mom and Dad. You instilled in me a strong faith and a strong work ethic, both of which I have relied upon not just throughout this doctoral journey, but, most importantly, throughout this journey of life. Thank you for being such remarkable role models and wonderful supporters of me and my family.

Dr. Tracy Reimer, my advisor. It is difficult to express my gratitude for your support, encouragement, insights, and guidance. The finished project is better because of your careful eye and wisdom. I truly appreciate you and your Christian witness. Thank you!

Dr. Kristen Besel-Nichols and Dr. Marta Shaw, my readers. Your suggestions to the research and the dissertation significantly elevated its overall quality. Thank you for being on my team. It was truly a joy and an honor to work with both of you.

Jill Fagen (my peer partner), Kristi Flesher, and Theresa Anderson - we are the Four Musketeers. What a blessing for me to journey through this doctoral process with the three of you. I gained so much from working with you during summer residencies and from reading your work over the course of these three years. You represent the best that education has to offer and you inspire me.

The principal at St. Benedict's Catholic High School<sup>1</sup> and the participants in the study. I am truly grateful to you for welcoming me into your school and sharing your experiences with me. Your expertise in Catholic education will allow others to learn from you in order to help more Hispanic/Latino ELL students.

Finally, and most importantly, I thank God the Father whose unfailing love upholds my very being, supports our family, and provides every good gift.

*Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus*

<sup>1</sup> Pseudonym used to protect confidentiality.

Table of Contents

List of Tables ..... 9

List of Figures ..... 10

Chapter 1: Introduction ..... 11

    Introduction to the Problem ..... 11

    Statement of the Theory ..... 13

    Statement of the Problem ..... 14

        Growing numbers of ELL students ..... 14

        Barriers to graduation ..... 14

        The Catholic school context ..... 15

    Purpose of the Study ..... 16

    Research Questions ..... 17

    Significance of this Study ..... 17

        Research significance ..... 17

        Practical significance ..... 19

    Definitions ..... 19

    Organization of the Remainder of the Study ..... 22

Chapter II: Literature Review ..... 23

    The Hispanic/Latino ELL Student Population..... 23

        Hispanic/Latino enrollment in Catholic schools ..... 24

    Barriers to Graduation..... 26

        Cultural practices that influence on-time graduation ..... 28

        Academic practices that influence on-time graduation ..... 33

Faith-based practices that influence on-time graduation .....	39
Validation Theory .....	42
Catholic education and validation .....	43
Summary .....	46
Chapter III: Procedures and Research Design .....	48
Introduction .....	48
Research Method and Design .....	48
Research Questions .....	49
Setting .....	50
Sampling Design .....	51
Instrumentation and Measures .....	52
Data Collection .....	55
Field Tests .....	56
Data Analysis .....	56
Limitations and Delimitations .....	57
Ethical Considerations .....	58
Protection of participants .....	58
Awareness of researcher positionality .....	59
Validity and reliability of the data .....	60
Chapter IV: Results .....	62
Introduction .....	62
Discussion of Sample .....	62
Introduction to Themes .....	65



Overall theme answering Research Question #1.....	67
Secondary theme 1: Support structures .....	68
Secondary theme 2: Relationship building .....	69
Academic practices that support Hispanic/Latino students .....	70
Structured time .....	71
Tutoring program .....	72
Standards-based grading .....	73
Professional development .....	73
High academic expectations .....	74
Cultural practices that support Hispanic/Latino students .....	76
Validation of culture .....	76
Specialized personnel roles .....	78
Clubs, classes, and activities .....	79
Spiritual practices that support Hispanic/Latino students .....	80
The daily <i>examen</i> .....	82
Love for one another .....	82
Service .....	83
Shared values .....	84
The role of student validation .....	84
Approach to discipline .....	85
Student recognition .....	86
College and career readiness .....	88
Corporate work study program .....	89

School-driven college process .....	91
Summary of the Findings .....	94
Chapter V: Discussion .....	96
Overview of the Study .....	96
Research Questions .....	96
Conclusions .....	97
Implications .....	100
Implications for practice .....	100
Recommendations for future research .....	107
Concluding Comments .....	108
References .....	109
Appendix A: CITI Certification of Completion .....	122
Appendix B: VIRTUS Safe Environment Training Certificates of Completion .....	123
Appendix C: E-mail from Principal Granting Permission to Talk with Faculty and Staff of the School .....	124
Appendix D: E-mail Letter Requesting Participation in the Study .....	125
Appendix E: Informed Consent Letter .....	126
Appendix F: Focus Group Questions .....	128
Appendix G: Codes used by researcher and analyst .....	130
Appendix H: Student's Notes from Daily <i>Examen</i> .....	131
Appendix I: Permission for Use .....	133
Appendix J: Samples of Researcher Memos .....	134

## List of Tables

1. Focus Group Questions and Their Relation to Research Objectives and Theory .....	54
2. Data Collection Overview .....	63
3. Themes .....	95
4. Summary of Recommended Practices for Catholic Educators .....	106

List of Figures

1. Minnesota Graduation Rates Among Hispanic/Latino Students Compared to ..... 12  
Other States

2. Practices That Lead to Student On-Time Graduation ..... 45

3. Student Demographics at St. Benedict Catholic High School ..... 51

4. Overarching Theme, Secondary Themes, and Practical Supports ..... 66

5. Photograph of “Cura Personalis” on Wall of School ..... 67

6. Photograph of High Expectations Quotes Found on Wall of School ..... 75

7. Cultural Support Decorations ..... 77

8. Photograph of Picture Found in Conference Room Representing Luke 5:17-19 ..... 81

9. Student Validation Signage ..... 88

10. College-Bound Signage Found in School ..... 93

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction to the Problem

“He is failing every class,” said the headmaster of the Catholic high school in the fall of 2018. That was the main topic of conversation at Pablo’s<sup>2</sup> first parent-teacher conference during his ninth-grade year. As a Hispanic/Latino ELL student, Pablo was on track to become a statistic very familiar in the United States today—another statistic for Hispanic/Latino student academic failure. Despite these statistics and challenges, the school was determined to change the direction of Pablo’s course so that he would achieve academic success.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), 88% of the state’s White students graduated on time in 2017 (MDE, 2018). With 83% of overall students graduating on time, it marked a record high graduation rate for the state of Minnesota (Koumpilova, Webster, & Mahamud, 2018). However, not everyone celebrated. Only two-thirds of Hispanic/Latino students graduated on time (MDE, 2018). According to the Minnesota Department of Education 2018 Report Card, only 53.1% of female Hispanic/Latino ELL students, and less than half (44.2%) of male Hispanic/Latino ELL students graduated on time in 2018. With the number of Hispanic/Latino ELLs rising rapidly, the low graduation rates among this population are cause for concern. Figure 1 represents Minnesota’s 2014 Hispanic/Latino graduation rates compared with the rest of the nation.

<sup>2</sup> This name is a pseudonym

# Graduation rates

HOW MINNESOTA RANKS AMONG THE 50 STATES



*Figure 1.* Lager’s depiction of Minnesota’s Hispanic/Latino 2014 graduation rate ranking compared to other states (Lager, 2016).

English Language Learners (ELLs) are the largest and fastest growing population in the United States (Corpora, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, C., 2017; Elliott & Parks, 2018). Among this population, more than half are native born, 80% of them speak Spanish as their first language, and half of these Spanish speaking students come from families that identify as Catholic (Corpora, 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2018; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009). Hispanic/Latino ELL students are also among the most at risk for academic failure in American schools (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Huerta, Tong, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2016).

Catholic schools are beginning to invest in recruitment efforts among Latino families within their communities in an attempt to bring more Latino students into their classrooms

(Aldana, 2016; Corpora, 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2017). This poses a significant challenge for Catholic schools who do not have the resources or training to support struggling ELL students (Lichon & Dees, 2017; Vera, Heineke, Carr, Camacho, & Israel, 2017). Not only do few Catholic schools have teachers who are trained in working with Latino/Hispanic ELL students, many of these Catholic schools lack the resources to hire specialists and provide the necessary tools and services to adequately assist struggling students (Lichon & Dees, 2018; Vera, Heineke, Carr, Camacho, & Israel, 2017).

Despite limited resources and training, the historical success of Catholic schools suggests that they are generally able to realize high academic achievement with Hispanic/Latino students (Contreras, 2016; DeFiore, 2006). Hispanic/Latino students who attend Catholic schools are 42% more likely to graduate from high school and two-and-a half times more likely to graduate college than their peers in public schools (Lichon & Dees, 2017; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009). Practitioners and researchers wonder why Hispanic/Latino students attending Catholic schools are achieving at such a rate and what Catholic schools are doing to achieve this success.

### **Statement of the Theory**

One theory that may explain the success of Hispanic/Latino students who attend Catholic schools is Rendón's (1993) student validation theory. This theory defines validation as "an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (Rendón, 1993, p. 17). According to Rendón, all students possess "creativity and exuberance for learning," (1993, p. 22) and need to be validated for what they know and believe (1993). In a Catholic educational framework, students are validated through the principles of Catholic doctrine, while also being challenged not only to understand course material, but also to apply it to the sacredness and dignity of the individuals

within society (Malewitz & Pacheco, 2016). Within Catholic schools, educators strive to educate the whole child and the whole of reality (Arthur, 2015; Giussani, 2001). This education approach includes validating and supporting a student's tradition, which is defined as "the whole structure of values and meanings into which a child is born" (Giussani, 2001, p. 52).

### **Statement of the Problem**

**Growing numbers of ELL students.** English language learners (ELLs) are children who speak a language other than English in the home (Lichon & Dees, 2017). The ELL population of students is the fastest growing population in the United States representing nearly one child in every four school age children (Corpora, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017; Elliott & Parks, 2018). "It is safe to say that all teachers will, at some point in their careers, have at least one ELL under their tutelage" (Nguyen, 2012, p. 129). ELLs constitute a heterogenous group representing much diversity in race, language ability, generation in the United States, nationality, and proficiency in either their first language and/or English (Nguyen, 2012). Numerous ELL families come from low socio-economic backgrounds with nearly six in 10 English language learners receiving free or reduced lunch (Nguyen, 2012; Vera et al., 2017).

Many Spanish speaking ELL students are failing in American schools (Huerta, Tong, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2018). Researchers acknowledge that the national dropout rates for Hispanic/Latino students are still among the highest measured totaling 12.7% for Hispanics/Latinos compared to 4.3% for Whites and 7.3% for African-Americans (Corry, Dardick, & Stella, 2016; Elliott & Parks, 2018). Among the ELL population of Hispanic/Latino students, the dropout rate climbs to a national rate of close to 20% (Civic Enterprises, 2019).

**Barriers to graduation.** The high level of Hispanic/Latino student dropouts is of grave concern (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Civic Enterprises, 2006; Howard, 2010; Valenzuela,



Garcia, Romo, & Perez, 2012). Research indicates that high school graduation offers numerous advantages that those who drop out of school do not enjoy. According to a 2006 report by Civic Enterprises, high school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty, in prison, and in poor health. Dropouts are also less likely to volunteer, to vote, or to participate within their community (Civic Enterprises, 2006). In addition, dropouts “cost the United States \$200 billion over the lifetime of those individuals through greater amounts of public assistance they are likely to require” (Schachter, 2013, p. 36). The highest rate of dropout occurs in the ninth grade (Hinman, 2009). Many educators are focusing on ninth grade as the “make or break year” that determines whether a young person will advance or drop out of school (Roderick, Kelly-Kemple, Johnson, & Beechum, 2014; Willens, 2013). Often, struggling youth need social and emotional support coupled with academic intervention, all of which is lost if the student drops out of school (Hinman, 2009).

Researchers have identified numerous barriers to graduation for Hispanic/Latino ELL students. Some of these barriers include low socio-economic status (Elliott & Parks, 2018; Valenzuela, Garcia, Romo, & Perez, 2012), the difficulty acquiring academic language (Valenzuela, Garcia, Romo, & Perez, 2012; Zwiers, 2008), differences in cultural understanding of education including parental involvement and student-teacher relations (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010), deficit ideologies, social and political hierarchies (Valenzuela, Garcia, Romo, & Perez, 2012), as well as spiritual practices (Aldana, 2016).

**The Catholic school context.** Despite barriers to graduation, as well as limited resources and training, Catholic schools are generally able to attain high levels of academic achievement among Hispanic/Latino ELL students, including on-time graduation (Contreras, 2016; DeFiore, 2006). Historically, Catholic secondary schools have demonstrated success with graduation rates

and college readiness for all students, including minority students (Contreras, 2016; Setari & Setari, 2016). Hispanic/Latino students who attend Catholic schools are more likely to graduate from high school and college than their peers in public schools (Contreras, 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2017; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009). These achievements encourage Catholic educators to consider additional ways to better serve the ELL population (Contreras, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017; Lichon & Dees, 2017; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009).

Within the state of Minnesota, roughly 69% of 2018 students in the city of Minneapolis graduated on-time, with 54.1% of Hispanic/Latino ELLs graduating on-time (MDE, 2018). Located within the Minneapolis school district is a Catholic high school that boasts a 100% graduation rate with a 100% acceptance rate to college or the military (“Student demographics,” 2019). This Catholic high school is comprised of 98% students of color, 85% of whom are Hispanic/Latino. In addition, 86% of the students in this Catholic high school qualify for free or reduced lunch (“Student demographics,” 2019). Although numerous studies across different academic subjects have been undertaken to examine best practices in helping ELLs close the achievement gap (Huerta, et al., 2016; Iyitoglu & Aydin, 2015; Nguyen, 2012; Tous, Tahriri, & Haghghi, 2015; Zweirs, 2008), few of these studies have been conducted with high school age students within Catholic schools. Due to historical success, more research needs to be conducted to identify effective practices for Hispanic/Latino ELL students at Catholic high schools.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Through qualitative research, this study investigated a high performing, culturally diverse Catholic high school to better understand how Catholic educators support Hispanic/Latino ELL students to achieve high levels of academic success. The purpose of this study was to explore

Hispanic/Latino ELL on-time graduation and the potential role that student validation plays within the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices that lead to student academic achievement.

### **Research Questions**

In order to understand the role of student validation in successful graduation rates of Hispanic/Latino ELL students, this study investigated the question, “What practices at a high performing, culturally diverse Catholic school do educators perceive are most essential in helping the Hispanic/Latino ELL student feel validated and graduate on time?” Secondary questions included the following:

1. What academic practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
2. What cultural practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
3. What spiritual practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
4. How does student validation intersect with the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices of this school?

### **Significance of this Study**

**Research significance.** The reasons for the high level of Hispanic/Latino ELL high school dropouts are varied and complex (Aldana, 2016; Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Elliott & Parks, 2018; Valenzuela, Garcia, Romo, & Perez, 2012; Wilkins, & Kuperminc, 2010; Zwierns, 2008). Research has explored the academic and cultural barriers to graduation among this population, along with possible solutions to help Hispanic/Latino ELL students (Huerta, et al., 2016; Iyitoglu & Aydin, 2015; Nguyen, 2012; Tous, Tahriri, & Haghghi, 2015; Zwierns, 2008).

However, few of these studies have examined high school age students within Catholic schools. Little research has sought to uncover the role of spirituality (the faith of the institution in combination with the faith of the individual student) and its connection to academic outcomes (Aldana, 2014; Drew, Cortt, & Bec, 2019).

The qualitative research of this study intended to deeply explore the validation experiences among Hispanic/Latino ELL high school age students at an urban, highly diverse Catholic high school that has achieved a 100% graduation rate and a 100% acceptance rate to college or military over a consecutive nine-year period. Through this investigation, interviews and focus groups with educators sought to discover how student validation intersects with academic, cultural, and spiritual practices within a Catholic high school, leading to high graduation rates. Although studies have explored the role of culture in academic success, no studies have explored this intersecting factor among practices within Catholic high schools. One study undertaken by Aldana (2016) at an all-boys Catholic high school explored the role of a “culture of brotherhood” in fostering Hispanic/Latino students’ sense of belonging. Other studies have focused on academic practices and their role in helping students attain academic success. For example, Thielman (2012) explored the successful turnaround of a Catholic high school in Boston, examining curriculum, leadership, daily schedule, and the role of a work-study program while a study of a Catholic high school in Kentucky examined brain-based learning theory and its role in helping students with learning differences develop dignity for themselves and others (Malewitz & Pacheco, 2016). Another study compared the practical actions of the college counselors and teachers of two Catholic high schools in one city, exploring the relationship between the practical actions and the student graduation rate and college acceptance rate (Aldana, 2014). These studies focused on individual elements of school experience without

seeking the underlying factor that unifies (or divides) them all. The information gathered through this qualitative research within the high performing Catholic high school adds to the current gap in literature.

**Practical significance.** Stakeholders have an interest in improving graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students. The current dropout rate of Hispanic/Latino students is as high as 50% or greater in certain communities (MDE, 2018). High school dropouts are more at risk to be unemployed, in poor health, and in prison (Civic Enterprises, 2007). The number of Hispanic/Latino students is increasing at a rapid pace, suggesting that this is a population group in need of attention (Corpora, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017; Elliott & Parks, 2018).

Catholic schools have initiated targeted marketing efforts to increase enrollment among Hispanic/Latino students (Corpora, 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2017). Understanding how to best serve this growing population of students benefits the teachers and administrators of the 6,289 Catholic schools within the United States (NCEA, 2019). Despite limited resources and training, Catholic schools have seen higher levels of graduation rates and higher levels of college acceptance among Hispanic/Latino students than public schools have achieved. However, few can explain the overall reason for this success. This study intended to uncover how student validation is carried out within the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices that one highly successful urban Catholic school employs. This information will be of value to Catholic educators who desire to better serve the Hispanic/Latino student population.

## **Definitions**

*Academic language* includes “the set of words, grammar, organizational strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher-order thinking processes, and abstract concepts” (Zwiers,

2008, p. 20). “The mastery of academic language is arguably the single most important determinant of academic success for individual students” (Francis et al., 2006, p. 7).

*Academic practices* are defined as those actions that relate to the attainment of learning outcomes among students (Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation, 2019; Merriam-Webster, 2019a).

*Catholic high school* is defined as a traditional school that educates students in grades nine through 12 following principles of Catholic doctrine as outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) and other Church documents.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) is a text that articulates Catholic doctrine, “attested to or illumined by Sacred Scripture, the Apostolic Tradition, and the Church’s Magisterium” (CCC, 1994, para. 3). It is the “sure norm” for teaching the faith within the universal Catholic church.

*Collectivism* is a cultural perspective common among Hispanic/Latino families in which the needs of the group (including the family) supersede the needs of the individual (Arevalo, So, & McNaughton-Cassill, 2016).

*College-going culture* is created by schools that build momentum among the students for post high school studies or military service. These schools create this culture by having a mission statement focused on a college-going culture for each and every student coupled with resources to help all students attain this goal (Aldana, 2014).

*Cultural practices* are defined as those actions that relate to the habits, traditions, and social interactions of a particular group of students (Merriam-Webster, 2019b).

*English Language Learner* is defined as a student who speaks a language other than English at home (Lichon & Dees, 2017). Although there are many levels that categorize English

language proficiency, for this study the term ELL includes all students who come from a family that speaks Spanish in the home.

*Hispanic/Latino ELL students* are defined, in this study, as those students living in the United States who represent a variety of countries including Mexico, Guatemala, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and other Spanish speaking countries in the Western hemisphere.

*Individualism* is a cultural perspective common within the United States' educational system. This perspective validates autonomy, assertiveness, and self-fulfillment among other individual characteristics in students (Arevalo, So, & McNaughton-Cassill, 2016).

*Parental involvement* is typically defined by educators working within United States as school-based parent participation which includes attendance of parents at school sponsored events (Vera et al., 2017). Hispanic/Latino parents have a broader definition of parental involvement which includes home-based activities (Vera et al., 2017; Hill & Torres, 2010).

*Parochial school* is a synonym for Catholic school.

*Spiritual practices*, in this study, are defined as those actions that relate to the Catholic faith and its expressions (Merriam-Webster, 2019c).

*Standards-based grading* is a system of assessing and reporting that describes student progress in relation to standards. Standards-based grading also provides an effective way to give feedback to students using clearly defined criteria for specific learning standards. (Marzano, 2020).

*Triangulation* is the accumulation of information from more than one source which allows for a fuller understanding of the phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

*Validation theory* was developed by Rendón in 1993. This theory states that when students are validated academically and/or interpersonally, the students begin to believe they can be successful (Rendón, 1993).

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

Chapter Two reviews the literature of this study, beginning with literature related to high school graduation rates and the consequences of dropping out, continuing with barriers to graduation and research-based practices (academic, cultural, and spiritual) to improve student learning, and concluding with research about the conceptual framework and theory. Chapter Three describes research procedures and methods. Chapter Four discusses research findings while chapter Five explores the implications of those findings and provides suggestions for additional research.



## Chapter II: Literature Review

The literature review begins with an examination of the current status of English language learners (ELLs) within the United States, specifically focusing on Hispanic/Latino ELLs. The chapter explores the efforts of Catholic schools to recruit Hispanic/Latino students and their past success in educating this student population. An investigation of *cultural* barriers to graduation is presented while highlighting research-based cultural practices that help students graduate on-time from high school. An in-depth look at *academic* barriers to graduation is undertaken, followed by research-based academic practices that support Hispanic/Latino ELL students. Finally, a summary of the research related to *spiritual* practices that influence academic outcomes is presented along with theory.

### **The Hispanic/Latino ELL Student Population**

English language learners (ELLs) are children who speak a language other than English in the home (Lichon & Dees, 2017). The ELL population, among whom the large majority come from Spanish speaking families, is growing rapidly in the United States (Corpora, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017; Elliott & Parks, 2018). According to Instituto Cervantes (2017), there are more Spanish speakers living in the United States than there are Spanish speakers in Spain. Moreover, many Spanish speaking families identify as Catholic, and they come from low socio-economic backgrounds (CARA, n.d.; Corpora, 2016; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016; Nguyen, 2012; Prater, Lichon, Dees, & Roach, 2018; Vera et al., 2017).

Spanish speaking ELL students are among the most vulnerable for academic failure in American schools (Huerta, Tong, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2018). Although the dropout rates for Hispanic/Latino students are still among the highest measured, more Catholic schools are beginning to invest in recruitment efforts among Hispanic/Latino families

within their communities in an effort to bring more Latino students into their classrooms (Aldana, 2016; Corpora, 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2017). This poses a significant challenge for Catholic schools who do not have the resources or training to support struggling ELL students (Lichon & Dees, 2017; Vera, Heineke, Carr, Camacho, & Israel, 2017). “The demand for services for students with special needs [including ELL students] far exceeds the capacity [of Catholic schools] to respond in almost all cases” (DeFiore, 2006, p. 453). Despite limited resources and training, Catholic schools have demonstrated remarkable academic success with Hispanic/Latino students (DeFiore, 2006; Setari & Setari, 2016). Due to the higher graduation rates and higher college acceptance rates of Hispanic/Latino students who attended Catholic schools in comparison to their public school peers, Catholic educators are encouraged to consider additional ways to better serve the ELL population (Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017; Lichon & Dees, 2017; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009).

**Hispanic/Latino enrollment in Catholic schools.** Among the increasing number of Hispanic/Latino Catholics in the United States, only 3% attend a Catholic school (Notre Dame Task Force, 2009). As a result, Catholic schools have directed marketing efforts toward increasing the enrollment of Hispanic/Latino students (Blackett, 2001; Corpora, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017). This is both an economic practicality and moral practice for Catholic schools (Corpora, 2016).

As of 2016, there were a total of 1,939,574 students enrolled in 5,368 Catholic elementary/middle schools and 1,200 secondary schools (Corpora, 2016). Declining enrollments and parochial school closures in urban areas across the United States have forced many Catholic institutions to reevaluate marketing efforts and student populations. It is also the case that a substantial number of Catholic school closures have occurred in urban areas where many

Hispanics/Latinos live (Corpora, 2016). The practicality of the declining enrollment numbers has caused parochial schools to make greater efforts to invite Catholic Hispanic/Latino families into their schools.

Catholic social justice principles encourage parochial school leaders to reach out to this ELL population. Historically, the origin of Catholic elementary and secondary schools in the United States was rooted in the desire to provide education to Catholic, low-income immigrants (Corpora, 2016). Sacred Scripture and the teaching of Church documents provide Catholic school administrators compelling rationale to assist struggling learners within their schools (Blackett, 2001; DeFiore, 2006). Since the 1970s, Church documents have encouraged parish leaders and Catholic school administrators and educators to be proactive in their inclusion of and help of students with special learning needs, including English language learners (DeFiore, 2006; USCCB, 2002). The National Catholic Education Association's (NCEA) 1998 text *Is There Room for Me?* reignited both support and momentum to the special education movement within Catholic schools (DeFiore, 2006). Although special education and ELL are different, the NCEA's 1998 text opened the door to discussion about helping all struggling students, including ELL students.

Accepting English language learners (and other struggling students) requires that Catholic schools be able to meet the needs of these students (DeFiore, 2006). One area of particular challenge is that of ELL students with diagnosed learning disabilities. It is an especially daunting task to realize that "English-language learners (ELLs) with special needs consistently languish in the American school system" (Park & Thomas, 2012, p. 52). Training for teachers has not kept pace with the realities of the classroom in the U.S. due to the rapid increase of ELLs with LD" (Nguyen, 2012). With regard to English language learners, Catholic

schools face unique challenges, which include identifying and labeling students without the benefit of federal guidelines, procedures, and funding afforded public schools (Vera et al., 2017). Meeting the academic challenges of Hispanic/Latino ELLs is a challenge for Catholic educators who may not be trained in best practices among diverse learners. While the number of ELLs (with and without special needs) is increasing dramatically, the number of Catholic teachers and leaders prepared to teach and care for them lags behind (Lichon & Dees, 2017; Zimmerman, 2008). An additional challenge for Catholic high schools, in particular “those with competitive academic programs and selective admissions policies, is how to maintain standards of excellence and still broaden the range of student learning needs served” (DeFiore, 2006, p. 458).

There is a body of research related to ELL students and struggling learners that recommends on-going teacher training in differentiating instruction, integrated-literacy intervention, cultural awareness, and related classroom management for Catholic school educators at the K-12 level (Blackett, 2001; Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Huerta et al., 2016; Tran, 2015; Zwiers, 2008). However, “there is a dearth of Catholic education research that reflects the actual experiences of minority populations attending Catholic institutions” (Aldana, 2016, p. 176). Additional research and programs are needed to best support, not only academic practices, but also the necessary cultural, familial, and spiritual practices of ELL students at the Catholic high school level (Aldana, 2014; Aldana, 2016; Behnke et al., 2010; Bempechat, Kenny, Blustein, & Seltzer, n.d; Thielman, 2012.).

### **Barriers to Graduation**

Nationally, the high level of Hispanic/Latino student dropouts has generated much attention. Numerous studies have attempted to address the problem of the persistent achievement gap between ELL students and native English-speaking students (Huerta et al., 2016; Walker-

Tileston, & Darling, 2008; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010). Few of these studies, however, have focused on the “educational policies and practices that will enhance success” (Bempechat et al., n.d., p. 233).

Understanding the reasons for Hispanic/Latino ELL students dropping out of school is challenging. Research indicates that the barriers to graduation among Hispanic/Latino ELL students are numerous and complex (Aldana, 2014; Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Corry, Dardick, & Stella, 2016; Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Valenzuela, Garcia, Romo, & Perez, 2012; Vera, et al., 2017). The consistent underachievement of subgroups such as ELL and special needs led the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to call attention to this important issue. NCLB held schools accountable for reducing the achievement gap between ELLs and their White peers (Park & Thomas, 2012). However, the act did not provide an outline or specific direction on how to help these struggling students (Park & Thomas, 2012).

Research on English language learners during the 21<sup>st</sup> century has uncovered certain practices that help ELLs with and without special needs (Nguyen, 2012; Park & Thomas, 2012; Zimmerman, 2008). ELLs with special needs are students who are acquiring English as an additional language while also possessing disabilities (Kangas, 2017). The issue of special needs and the English language learner is complex. ELLs with diagnosed learning disabilities possess issues related to children with special needs and all of the needs of the English language learner (Nguyen, 2012; Park & Thomas, 2012; Zimmerman, 2008). ELLs with special needs are at risk for being marginalized if they are viewed as either students with disabilities *or* ELLs (Kangas, 2017). Determining the actual number of ELL students with special needs has been inconsistent and inaccurate. Research has indicated that learning disabled ELLs are both overreported and underreported—depending upon the district and the assessments used (Kangas, 2017; Nguyen,

2012; Park & Thomas, 2012; Zimmerman, 2008). In either case, “general education and special education teachers, even those with high efficacy, feel least efficacious with ELL students” (Zimmerman, 2008, p.21).

Indeed, researchers have noted that ELLs are commonly taught by educators who lack training in working with these students (Nguyen, 2012; Park & Thomas, 2012). Low teacher quality has serious consequences for Hispanic/Latino ELL students (Valenzuela et al., 2012). A common recommendation among researchers is for on-going professional development programs to be offered to all teachers and staff to provide them with knowledge about Hispanic/Latino ELLs, their cultural backgrounds, and best classroom practices to help these students (Kangas, 2017; Prater, Lichon, Dees, & Roach, 2018; Zimmerman, 2008).

No Child Left Behind, despite its intent to help struggling students—including a focus on the high rate of Hispanic/Latino dropouts, may have exacerbated the problem through its focus on testing and strict accountability. At the classroom level, these pressures create a “perverse incentive to narrow curricula in order to concentrate on improving test scores and inhibiting the development of innovative pedagogical practices” (Valenzuela et al., 2012, p. 23). Another researcher noted that teachers should rely more on classroom observation of ELL performance than test scores (Park & Thomas, 2012). Valenzuela et al. (2012) suggested that strict testing and accountability have caused educators to abandon approaches to education that build on students’ cultures and native languages (p. 23). This raises concern because validating a student’s culture appears to influence student achievement (Valenzuela et al., 2012).

**Cultural practices that influence on-time graduation.** Research indicates that school culture plays an important role in overall learning for students (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Green, 2017; Hayes et al., 2014; Hill & Torres, 2010; Howard, 2010). Cultural differences that

influence Hispanic/Latino graduation include a collective perspective, compared to an individualistic perspective; Hispanic/Latino parents' understanding of parental involvement; and the parental and student understanding of the teacher-student relationship and how this relates to their perception of success (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Green, 2017; Hayes et al., 2014; Hill & Torres, 2010; Howard, 2010).

The collectivist framework of values explains one significant cultural reason for dropping out of high school is the desire to get a job to help contribute to one's family (Behnke, Gonzales, & Cox, 2010). This sense of family obligation is consistent with collectivist values common among Hispanic/Latino families. An individualistic framework, for which the United States educational system is known, includes "autonomy, assertiveness, freedom of choice, self-fulfillment, and a sense of personal uniqueness" (Arevalo, So, & McNaughton-Cassill, 2016, p. 4). In contrast, collectivism includes an interdependence of members within the group through the functioning of social roles, duties, and obligations (Arevalo, So, & McNaughton-Cassill, 2016; Hill & Torres, 2010; Watson, Sherbak, & Morris, 1998). These collectivist values, common within the Hispanic/Latino culture, may include a Latino student's responsibilities such as taking care of siblings and preparing meals. These responsibilities may detract from school related responsibilities/activities (Hill & Torres, 2010). It is this collectivist perspective, in which the needs of the family supersede the needs of the individual, that partially explain the reason why students drop out of school in an effort to help support the family through a job or other means.

This collectivist perspective can cause challenges for the teacher and the student within the classroom (Arevalo, So, & McNaughton-Cassill, 2016). Research noted that students of diverse cultures for whom the collectivist framework is their norm might engage differently in a

number of classroom situations including how they converse with authority figures, interact with other students, assist another student in the classroom, verbally answer questions, or analyze a word problem (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Howard, 2010).

Researchers acknowledged the importance of teachers being familiar with the culture of the students within the classroom (Hill & Torres, 2010; López, 2016; Zimmerman, 2008). One researcher suggested that teachers who use instruction that considers students' culture are an asset that can reduce educational disparities (López, 2016). The opposing deficit ideology believes that "students need to learn to fit in and leave their 'deficient' cultural and language practices behind" (Alfaro & Bartolomé, 2017, p. 13). A deficit orientation toward students and/or low expectations can prove detrimental (Hill & Torres, 2010; Kangas, 2017; López, 2016; Scanlan & Zehrbach, 2010). Students in schools that do not value cultural diversity have lower motivation and tend to reject the schools (Hill & Torres, 2010).

A cultural practice that can affect on-time graduation is parental involvement. Parental involvement can benefit both students and schools (Joseph, Vélez, & Antrop-Gonzalez, 2017). Some of the benefits of parental involvement include better academic achievement for students (including higher graduation rates), as well as better teamwork between teachers and parents (Joseph et al., 2017; Vera et al., 2017). However, teachers and parents may have differing views of the meaning of parental involvement. Researchers encourage teachers to recognize and respect cultural differences and work collaboratively with parents of ELL students (Park & Thomas, 2012).

Parental involvement of Hispanic/Latino families traditionally ranks low (Joseph et al., 2017). Many parents of ELL students want to be involved in their children's education but, due to their limited English ability, limited knowledge of resources and options, conflicting work



schedules, a feeling of being undervalued, and differing cultural norms between interactions with parents and teachers, these parents may not be able to be as involved as they would like to be (Hill & Torres, 2010; Joseph et al., 2017; Vera et al., 2017; Zimmerman, 2008). The definition of parental involvement differs between teachers and Hispanic/Latino parents. Teachers define parental involvement as school-based involvement which includes attending field trips, volunteering within the school, attending parent-teacher conferences, and attending school-sponsored events (Vera et al., 2017). Barriers often prevent Hispanic/Latino parents from participating in school-based involvement opportunities. However, many Hispanic/Latino parents are actively involved in home-based activities (Vera et al., 2017). Some of these home-based activities include monitoring homework, making certain a student gets to bed on time, making certain a student wakes up for school on time, and providing additional structure that aids in academic achievement (Vera et al., 2017). Studies indicate that many Hispanic/Latino parents believe they are responsible for developing their students into moral, respectful, well-behaved, and responsible adults. These parents also believe it is the role of the teacher, not the parents, to develop the student academically (Hill & Torres, 2010; Vera et al., 2017).

***Cultural practices within Catholic schools.*** Catholic schools demonstrate cultural practices that affect on-time graduation. Research has suggested that the positive and strong sense of school community found within Catholic high schools has positively influenced Hispanic/Latino students (Aldana, 2016). According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*, one important universal principle within Catholic education is the validation of the human person, recognizing that each and every individual has dignity because that person is made in the image and likeness of God (CCC, 1994, para.1700-1715, 1930-1934). Actions within Catholic schools are directed toward serving the common good, which leads to a greater

sense of community (Arthur, 2015; Pope Paul VI, 1965; Garrone, 1977; CCC, 1994). One researcher noted that, in addition to the core academic curriculum provided by Catholic schools, an “emphasis on the communal aspect of these schools concludes that the values, social activities and formal organizations contributed to the effectiveness of these institutions” (Aldana, 2016, p. 177).

Research of Catholic schools revealed that those who have a “college-going” culture realize significant success in both high school graduation rates among their Hispanic/Latino ELL students as well as high percentage of college or military acceptance rates among these graduates (Aldana, 2014; Thielman, 2012). According to research, there are five necessary elements to create a college-going culture. These elements include: (a) academic momentum, (b) an understanding of how college plans develop, (c) a clear mission statement, (d) comprehensive college services, and (e) coordinated and systemic college support (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). It is especially important for urban schools to create a college-going culture that is inclusive of students from all cultural backgrounds (Oakes, 2003). According to researchers, urban and public schools with a majority of the student population made up of students of color have been largely unsuccessful in establishing a college-going culture for all of their students (Allen, Kimura-Walsh, & Griffin, 2009; Corwin & Tierney, 2007). However, a study of two Catholic high schools in a culturally diverse, urban location noted a strong college-going culture:

Observations in classrooms demonstrated a focus on academic momentum. Both schools also had provisions for students who did not pass coursework to ensure they remained college-eligible and on a path toward high school completion. Students were often counseled consistently to ensure they passed coursework or provided options to retake coursework, therefore, ensuring they would graduate in four years. (Aldana, 2014, p. 139)

The valuing of the individual, the community culture of Catholic schools which aligns with the Hispanic/Latino collectivist construct, and a college-going focus may be factors in the continued success of Catholic schools in attaining higher graduation rates than public schools.

The Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) has begun asking the question: “What can be done to narrow the achievement gap by extending the Catholic school advantage to more Latino children?” (Notre Dame Task Force, 2009, p. 13). The “Catholic school advantage” of which the ACE speaks relates to studies that have demonstrated the higher level of achievement among Hispanic/Latino students who attend Catholic schools compared to those who do not (Lichon & Dees, 2017; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009). Some of these achievements among Hispanic/Latino students of Catholic schools include higher graduation rates of both high school and college, greater levels of civic engagement, and an increased commitment to community service as adults (Corpora, 2016; DeFiore, 2006; Setari & Setari, 2016). However, it has also been observed that negative practices related to school culture within Catholic schools can increase dropout rates among students (Aldana, 2016). In studies examining students’ sense of belonging and the experiences of parents in Catholic schools it was discovered that negative teacher perceptions, parents’ sense of not being valued or welcomed, and classrooms that do not celebrate both students and families had a negative effect on overall student performance and parental involvement among Hispanic/Latino students and their families (Aldana, 2016; Joseph et al., 2017; Vera et al., 2017). It appears that providing guidance to educators and administrators on creating a positive cultural environment for Hispanic/Latino ELL students, coupled with academic support, is critical to the overall success of Hispanic/Latino students.

**Academic practices that influence on-time graduation.** A concern over high dropout rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students as well as the significant achievement gap between

Hispanic/Latino students and White students has resulted in much research directed toward ELLs, especially at the elementary school level (Howard, 2010; Huerta et al., 2016; Lichon, 2017; Nguyen, 2012; Tran, 2015). Research indicated numerous challenges that Hispanic/Latino students face within the classroom including differences in cultural worldviews, parental involvement, academic language acquisition, low socio-economic status, and educators who are not trained to recognize the gifts these students bring to the classroom nor how to differentiate their teaching methods to best instruct a diverse student body (Huerta et al., 2016; Lichon, 2017; Tran, 2015; Walker-Tileston & Darling, 2008).

Research identified that one hurdle that ELLs must overcome is the acquisition of academic language, which is distinct from social language (Huerta et al., 2016; Zwiers, 2008).

When a student walks up to a newspaper stand and purchases a newspaper, he utilizes his conversational language skills to converse with the clerk and make the purchase. In contrast, other skills altogether are used to read and understand the front-page article, as well as to discuss the pros and cons of the proposed policy change that the article describes. The student might use still other skills to compare the writer's opinion to his, and to the opinion of the store clerk. The oral and written language required to be able to engage in the latter "conversation" will involve more advanced and specialized vocabulary, more complex sentence structures, and more complex discourse structures than that required for the former. (Francis, Rivera, M., Lesaux, Kieffer, & Rivera, 2006, p. 7)

If academic language is not mastered, many students will lose their interest in schooling because they cannot understand what they read nor what is discussed in class, possibly leading to increased dropout rates (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Kweldju, 2015). Researchers

emphatically advised that “The mastery of academic language is arguably the single most important determinant of academic success for individual students” (Francis et al., 2006, p. 7).

There appears to be confusion among educators regarding the definition of “academic language” (Heineke & Neugebauer, 2018). Although “academic language” has become a commonly used phrase within schools and universities, a survey of 332 teachers revealed that 84% of respondents had a misunderstanding of the term. Some teachers thought it meant the language of textbooks, others indicated it meant the language of schools, some labeled it the opposite of social language, while still others considered it the language of teachers or a phrase used only for ELL students (Heineke & Neugebauer, 2018, p. 74). One recognized definition of this term states that academic language includes “the set of words, grammar, organizational strategies used to describe complex ideas, higher-order thinking processes, and abstract concepts” (Zwiers, 2008, p. 20). Academic language moves beyond vocabulary building to include discipline-specific words, phrases, grammar patterns, sentence structures, text features, and classroom discourse. Some research suggests that academic language is not a prerequisite for learning. Rather, it is the medium through which learning actually occurs (Heineke & Neugebauer, 2018).

The definition of academic language as moving beyond vocabulary to more sophisticated language skills is consistent with the academic vocabulary knowledge theory which suggests that vocabulary comprises more than one’s stored word-definition knowledge. Vocabulary must also include “familiarity with the vocabulary of literacy” along with one’s ability to make sense of semantic features and word parts, phrases, and sentences (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015, p. 39). Without academic language acquisition, students are not able to comprehend content being delivered (through listening) and consumed (through reading), nor can they produce content

(through speaking and writing). According to some researchers, “language is the central achievement necessary for success in schooling” (Corson, 1988, p. 3). A lack of academic language contributes significantly to the literacy achievement gap between ELLs and native-English speakers (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015). A lack of academic language is a barrier to many students’ learning (Huerta, et al., 2016; Zwiers, 2008).

Researchers examined different theories when testing instructional methods designed to help ELLs improve academic language comprehension. One of these theories is Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This educational framework is based on research in the learning sciences that informs the creation of flexible learning environments. UDL provides a blueprint for developing instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone (Reid, Strnadova, & Cumming, 2013). Despite the increased standardization of education throughout the nation, educators still have multiple curricular and instructional options from which to choose. UDL recognizes that due to the remarkable diversity of students within a classroom, educators must acknowledge and affirm the uniqueness of each student while also providing the necessary support to meet the needs of these diverse students within the context of an increasingly standardized educational world (Stewart, Walker, & Reville, 2018).

The understanding of the gifts that diversity can bring to the classroom, rather than the deficits, relates in part to the Multiple Intelligences theory (MI) (Gardner, 2006). Gardner’s MI theory suggests that each human being possesses different skills, problem-solving capabilities, relational understandings, and cultural awareness that are termed *intelligences* (Aldana, 2016; Gardner, 2006). This theory recognizes the limited definition of *intelligence* that an IQ test or a standard academic test (such as the SAT or ACT test) can provide. MI upholds the variety of strengths people possess, including diverse learners in the classroom (Gardner, 2006). Some

researchers suggest that MI theory affects learning to read in either one's first language or a second language claiming that reading is influenced by multiple factors including the diverse learning of others, a student's background knowledge and comprehension strategies, as well as the motivational backgrounds of others (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Iyitoglu & Aydin, 2015; Stewart et al., 2018). Researchers note that, for English language learners to fully reap the benefits of their varied skills and strengths, educators must ensure that language and literacy instruction leverages the students' strengths in order to maximize learning (Park & Thomas, 2012; Stewart et al., 2018). Educators who do not recognize or work with the rich cultural diversity that English language learners bring to the classroom will handicap the ability of ELLs to fully develop their language abilities (Nguyen, 2012).

There is strong evidence to suggest the value of UDL and MI as they relate to helping English language learners acquire academic language (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Howard, 2010; Iyitoglu, & Aydin, 2015; Walker-Tileston, & Darling, 2008). In addition, other research-based classroom practices appear to help Hispanic/Latino students. Some of the recommended practices include: a) using comprehensible input such as offering students visual clues to help them decipher what is being discussed and/or expected, gestures, body language and facial expressions; b) giving Hispanic/Latino ELL students a head start and an opportunity to work with peers (including Spanish speaking peers); c) utilizing delayed error correction techniques to correct improper language use; d) using predictable and consistent classroom management routines; e) offering peer tutoring; and f) employing a collaboration model in which faculty and staff can exchange ideas (Graves, 2016; Nguyen, 2012). Research has suggested that these practices can be beneficial for all Hispanic/Latino ELL students, including high school age ELLs with special needs (Nguyen, 2012).

Critically important in this realm of ELL instruction and learning is that “once students have begun school, reading is arguably the most important subject area for academic success” (Howard, 2010, p. 15). Numerous reading theories abound, some with evidence-based support, and others that appear more questionable. The oral reading fluency theory suggests that students who are able to read quickly and fluidly, reserve more cognitive resources for the complex task of understanding the meaning of the text (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015). According to the National Reading Panel, oral reading fluency is considered one of the five components of reading instruction along with phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and text comprehension (National Reading Panel, n.d.). However, studies have indicated that English language learners may be able to decode words quickly and score well on a Words Correct Per Minute (WCPM) test, “yet still lack the lexical, syntactic, and semantic knowledge needed for comprehending grade-level texts” (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015, p. 37). Additional concern related to oral reading fluency and the Hispanic/Latino ELL student includes the limitations of the comprehension tests, limitations that provide measurement for “simple comprehension” - measuring superficial processing of relatively straightforward texts, while ignoring the intricacies of the content (Snow, 2018, p. 314). In fact, students are required to undertake challenging comprehension tasks in their homework and classroom participation whose demands may not be reflected in the standardized comprehension assessments that are widely used (Snow, 2018). While a struggling ELL student may receive a good mark on a comprehension exam, this score may not reflect their struggle with daily work, classroom participation, and comprehension.

In contrast to the oral reading fluency theory, the oral language proficiency theory suggests that an English language learner’s oral language proficiency is foundational to their reading comprehension (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015). This theory recognizes the value of



students possessing a large mental database of language to aid them in reading comprehension. “We know that children’s differences in language ability, more than any other observable factor, affect their potential for success in schooling” (Corson, 1988, p. 3). Developing one’s oral language is, thus, critical for success and can be accomplished through the listening to large quantities of well-written (and well-articulated), sophisticated language coupled with the memorization of well-written English (Corson, 1988; Nguyen, 2012; Pudewa, 2013a; Pudewa, 2013b). “No matter what the subject area, students assimilate new concepts largely through language, that is, when they listen to and talk, read, and write about what they are learning and relate this to what they already know” (Corson, 1988, p.12). In all, the oral language proficiency theory suggests that ELL students require more than rapid decoding skills to develop academic language—skills that employ their ability to listen (and comprehend what they hear), to read, to speak, and to write well in the English language.

Despite research presenting academic practices that benefit ELLs, graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students continue to languish. Additional research suggests that something more than improved instructional methods is needed to improve graduation rates among this student population (Behnke et al., 2010; Bempechat et al., n.d.; Valenzuela et al., 2012).

**Faith-based practices that influence on-time graduation.** Research has examined the academic and cultural needs of Hispanic/Latino ELL students. Additional research that examines the role of faith in student achievement is needed (Drew, Cortt, & Bec, 2019). As secularization grows, there has been a philosophical shift in the meaning of education from a whole formation of man/woman to its purely technical and practical aspects (Gleeson & O’Neill, 2018). This shift was observed by Catholic author G.K. Chesterton more than a century ago when he noted,

“Whereas the former [education of the whole person] conveys a philosophy by which one can understand the cosmos, the latter [technical skill development] is not a philosophy but the art of reading and writing unphilosophically” (Chesterton, 1907, p. 50). While Chesterton supported a Christian philosophical understanding of education, the question of whether or not a student’s faith or the faith practices of a school influence the academic achievement of students is challenging to define.

Catholic schools world-wide hold certain universal educational principles that positively validate students (Arthur, 2015; Garrone, 1977; Pope Paul VI, 1965). In one study of Catholic schools in Australia, Gleeson and O’Neill (2018) asked student-teachers attending a Catholic university to identify the most popular reasons for choice of a college/university. According to the researchers, the most popular reasons for choice of a school “were 'convenient location', 'reputation as a caring school' and 'reputation for academic excellence'. Choice of school on 'religious grounds' was second last in importance just ahead of 'financial grounds'” (Gleeson & O’Neill, 2018, p. 60). However, when asked to choose between bi-polar statements regarding the fundamental purposes of education, nearly two-thirds of respondents saw the primary purpose of schooling in terms of educating the whole child, facilitating personal well-being, and promoting active citizenship rather than achieving high grades, good jobs, and promoting economic growth (Gleeson & O’Neill, 2018). The understanding of the purpose of education provided by the respondents aligned with the Catholic education philosophy.

Catholic schools have consistently demonstrated higher academic achievement among their students compared with students in public schools (Corpora, 2016; DeFiore, 2006; Setari & Setari, 2016), causing researchers to carefully consider the applicability of the direct and indirect effects of religion on educational attainment for explaining differences between faith-based

education achievement that persist despite controls for education advantage and resourcing (Drew, Kortt, & Bec, 2019). In a longitudinal study of academic achievement of students who attend religious schools versus students who attend the government sponsored schools in Australia, the results suggested that faith, within the faith-based schools (which represented Catholic, Anglican, Jewish, and Islamic schools) may offer an academic advantage.

The most important finding of our empirical work, however, was the persistence of differences in performance even after we controlled for an extensive array of socio-educational advantage, resourcing and demographic factors. This suggests that some of the theories and work found in the religion and education attainment literature may well be applicable to education performance. Indeed, while religion is clearly not the only driver of differences in performance it is noted that the size of the coefficients [was] often substantial, including in schools where all students are known to be affiliates. (Drew, Kortt, & Bec, 2019, p. 16)

A study at a Catholic college in the United States discovered that female students who reported higher levels of spirituality were more likely to be connecting with others who share common interests with them. “The sense of direction, support and meaning derived from these relationships may have boosted their belief and confidence in overcoming academic adversities to do well in school” (Ekwoye & DeLauer, 2019, p. 93). Researchers and practitioners notice improved academic outcomes among students who attend faith-based institutions. However, pinpointing the reason(s) why this occurs—and the role of spirituality within these results—has proven difficult to articulate, with numerous variables appearing to influence the overall outcomes.

## **Theoretical Framework: Validation Theory**

In 1993, Rendón, a professor at the University of Arizona, conducted a study of culturally diverse students in which the researcher heard these non-traditional students voice their need for validation. Through the study, which included interviews with ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse college-age students, Rendón discovered that when “external agents took the initiative to validate students, academically and/or interpersonally, students began to believe they could be successful” (Rendón, 1993, p. 11).

Regarding in-class academic validation, Rendón (1993) learned that these important practices included faculty who demonstrated a genuine concern for teaching students, faculty who were personable and approachable to students, teachers who treated students equally, instructors who structured learning experiences that allowed students to experience themselves as capable of learning, faculty who worked individually with students who needed extra help, and faculty who provided meaningful feedback to students (Rendón, 1993). Respondents in Rendón’s research study also indicated the importance of people such as faculty members, classmates, parents, and other community members interpersonally validating them inside and outside of class (Rendón, 1993).

Rendón (1993) identified six characteristics present in the definition of validation.

1. Validation is an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and interpersonal growth,
2. Influential in helping students feel capable of learning, causing them to feel a sense of self-worth,
3. Necessary for student development,

4. Can occur in and out of the classroom. Validating agents can include significant others, faculty and staff, friends, family, classmates, coaches, tutors, counselors, other family members, and resident advisors,
5. A developmental process—not an end in itself,
6. Most effective when offered early in a student’s [school] experience. (p. 17)

Researchers of ELL students note that some ELL students have “checked out from their educational experience by the time they reach the secondary level due to years of feeling that their language, cultural traditions, and histories are not valued in the academic classroom” (Stewart, Walker, & Revelle, 2018, p. 40). Conversely, the Minnesota Department of Education (2018) issued a report acknowledging that “the ability to communicate in multiple languages and navigate distinct cultural settings are significant assets that need to be understood and supported in our schools (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018, p. 1).

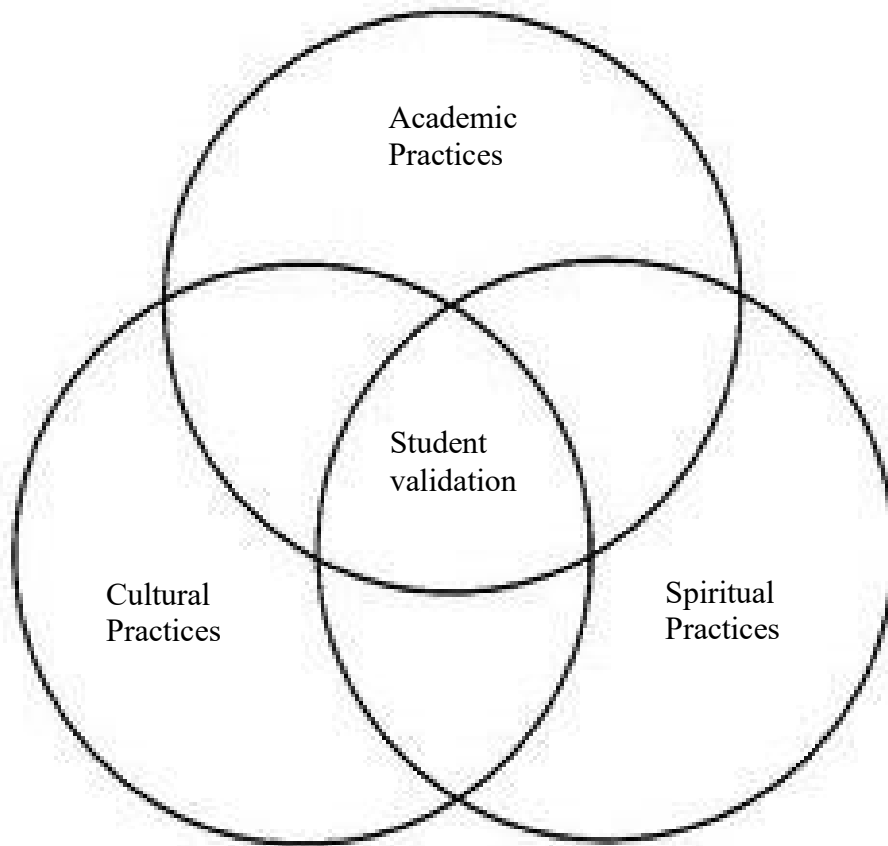
Rendón’s 1993 research demonstrated that validation practices led to students believing they could accomplish their goals. Research at Catholic high schools noted an increase in graduation rates and college acceptance rates when schools had a “college-going” culture which supported students and expressed the belief both collectively and individually that *all* students were capable of achieving the goals of graduation and college or military acceptance (Aldana, 2014; Malewitz & Pacheco, 2016).

**Catholic education and validation.** The Catholic education framework supports Rendón’s (1993) understanding of student validation. Catholic schools, founded in the United States more than a century ago, were established to serve immigrant and marginalized communities (Arthur, 2015; Lichon & Dees, 2017). The Catholic schools served immigrant students in a “Gospel-centered environment that honored the inherent God-given dignity, gifts,

and culture of each child” (Lichon & Dees, 2017, p. 1). Moreover, Catholic teaching supports the validation of all students as noted in the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education’s 1977 text, *The Catholic School*.

In the certainty that the Spirit is at work in every person, the Catholic school offers itself to all, non-Christians included, with all its distinctive aims and means, acknowledging, preserving and promoting the spiritual and moral qualities, the social and cultural values, which characterise different civilisations. (Garrone, 1977)

Despite significant changes within the United States in Catholic education in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, upholding the dignity of each individual, forming the whole person, and looking for ways to serve the common good have remained consistent teachings and practices within Catholic schools (Arthur, 2015; Garrone, 1977; Pope Paul VI, 1965). As Fr. Steve Ulrick, pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Parish and School, stated, “I see the gift in you and I delight in that gift. Would you be willing to share that gift with others in the community?” (Homily, July 21, 2019, n.p.). The researcher wondered if it was through the validation practices suggested by Rendón (1993), embedded within the principles of Catholic education of validating the student, their culture, and their values, that one might find a reason for the success Catholic schools are having in graduating Hispanic/Latino ELL students.



*Figure 2.* Practices that lead to student on-time graduation. This figure illustrates the interplay of various factors that might influence on-time graduation among Hispanic/Latino ELL students within a Catholic high school. The figure shows student validation as the possible unifying force among the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices designed to improve student achievement.

## Summary

English language learners, in particular Hispanic/Latino students, suffer from lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates than White students (Huerta, et al., 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2018). Numerous benefits are forfeited when a student does not graduate from high school (Civic Enterprises, 2006).

Studies have indicated barriers to graduation including academic and cultural barriers (Aldana, 2016; Behnke et al., 2010; Elliott & Parks, 2018; Valenzuela et al., 2012; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010; Zwiers, 2008). Research has suggested that academic language development and the overall mastery of literacy and communication at all levels of instruction (K-12) is necessary for ELLs to attain success (Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Zweirs, 2008). The mastery of academic language can be achieved through trained educators employing research-based methods (Francis et al., 2006; Grasparil & Hernandez, 2015; Zweirs, 2008). Studies have also demonstrated that a positive school culture that upholds the cultural differences of Hispanic/Latino students and their families is influential in higher graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino students (Behnke et al., 2010; Green, 2017; Hayes et al., 2014; Hill & Torres, 2010; Howard, 2010).

Catholic schools are actively recruiting Latino students to address declining enrollment in urban areas (Corpora, 2016). These religious schools are well poised in their mission and values to offer a positive culture to Hispanic/Latino ELL students (Aldana, 2014). Parochial schools have an additional faith-based benefit that influences student academic gains. Researchers have acknowledged that training must be provided to Catholic educators and administrators to ensure that the education they offer is delivered in an effective manner for ELL students, and that the



culture is one that has a positive, rather than an alienating effect on these students (Aldana, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017).

Despite limited resources, and in many cases limited training, Catholic schools appear to offer an advantage to Hispanic/Latino ELL students. Hispanic/Latino students who have attended Catholic schools graduate at higher levels from both high school and college than their public-school peers (Contreras, 2016; DeFiore, 2006; Setari & Setari, 2016). Researchers wonder why Hispanic/Latino students attending Catholic schools are achieving at such a rate and what Catholic schools are doing to achieve this success (Contreras, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017; DeFiore, 2006; Lichon & Dees, 2017; Notre Dame Task Force, 2009; Setari & Setari, 2016). Rendón's (1993) validation theory suggests that students who are validated by in- and out-of-class agents believed they could accomplish their goals. Research is needed to explore the possible intersection of student validation with the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices of Catholic schools.

## **Chapter III: Procedures and Research Design**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore Hispanic/Latino ELL on-time graduation and the role that student validation plays within the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices that lead to student academic achievement. This chapter describes the research method selected for this study and the rationale for choosing this method. Information about the research setting and demographics of the sample pool from which participants were selected was discussed. The sampling process and ethical considerations were reviewed. Finally, a brief overview of the data collection instruments and procedures is addressed.

### **Research Method and Design**

A qualitative approach was selected for this research. Qualitative research utilizes a discovery-oriented approach to research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This inductive approach seeks to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a problem (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Patten, 2014). In contrast to deductive reasoning, which seeks a cause-and-effect relationship between variables, inductive reasoning “makes broad generalizations from specific observations” (Bradford, 2017, para. 6). Theory developed through inductive reasoning is developed “from the bottom up” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 6).

Selecting a qualitative approach permits conversations with specific groups of people in their natural environment. Qualitative researchers tend to focus their research efforts on smaller numbers of people, often spending considerable amounts of time with the participants they study in their natural environments (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patten, 2014). Because the information desired from this study was directed toward discovery through interviews and observations, a qualitative approach was selected (Creswell, 2014; Patten, 2014).

The type of qualitative research this study employed was a single site case study that utilized focus groups and interviews, on-site observations, and document analysis. The qualitative case study focuses on a single location, a single subject, single collection of documents, or a single event (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). By using the case study approach, one can focus deeply on a single site. In this study, the focus was a high performing, culturally diverse Catholic high school, allowing the researcher to gain important perspectives into those practices that lead to Hispanic/Latino ELL student success. A single site case study permits a researcher to closely study the people, practices, and environment of the selected school, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. Elements of ethnography were employed in order to understand how people within the selected school interact with one another, with the curriculum, and how they experience the cultural and spiritual elements of the school (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Through focus groups and interviews, on-campus observations, and document analysis, a researcher is able to gather empirical evidence "in the field" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patten, 2014). These research practices also allow for triangulation. Triangulation uses multiple sources of information to cross-check the data collected through different methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although triangulation originally meant using more than one source to verify validity of the information obtained from a single source, the definition utilized in this study aligns with a more modern definition in which the accumulation of information from more than one source allows for a fuller understanding of the phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

### **Research Questions**

In order to understand the role of student validation in successful graduation rates of Hispanic/Latino ELL students, this study investigated the question, "What practices at a high

performing, culturally diverse Catholic high school do educators perceive are most essential in helping the Hispanic/Latino ELL student feel validated and graduate on time?” Secondary questions included the following:

1. What academic practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
2. What cultural practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
3. What spiritual practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
4. How does student validation intersect with the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices of this school?

### **Setting**

The location of this case study was St. Benedict Catholic High School,<sup>3</sup> which is one of 13 Catholic high schools within the Twin Cities. Focus groups and interviews, observations, and document collection were conducted on the school campus. St. Benedict Catholic High School is a four-year, college-preparatory school founded in 2007. St. Benedict’s is located in an urban center and currently enrolls 504 students with a near 50-50 split between male and female students. Among the 504 students, a significant majority are Hispanic/Latino, less than 20% are African/African-American, and 86% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch (“Student demographics,” 2019).

<sup>3</sup> St. Benedict Catholic High School is a pseudonym

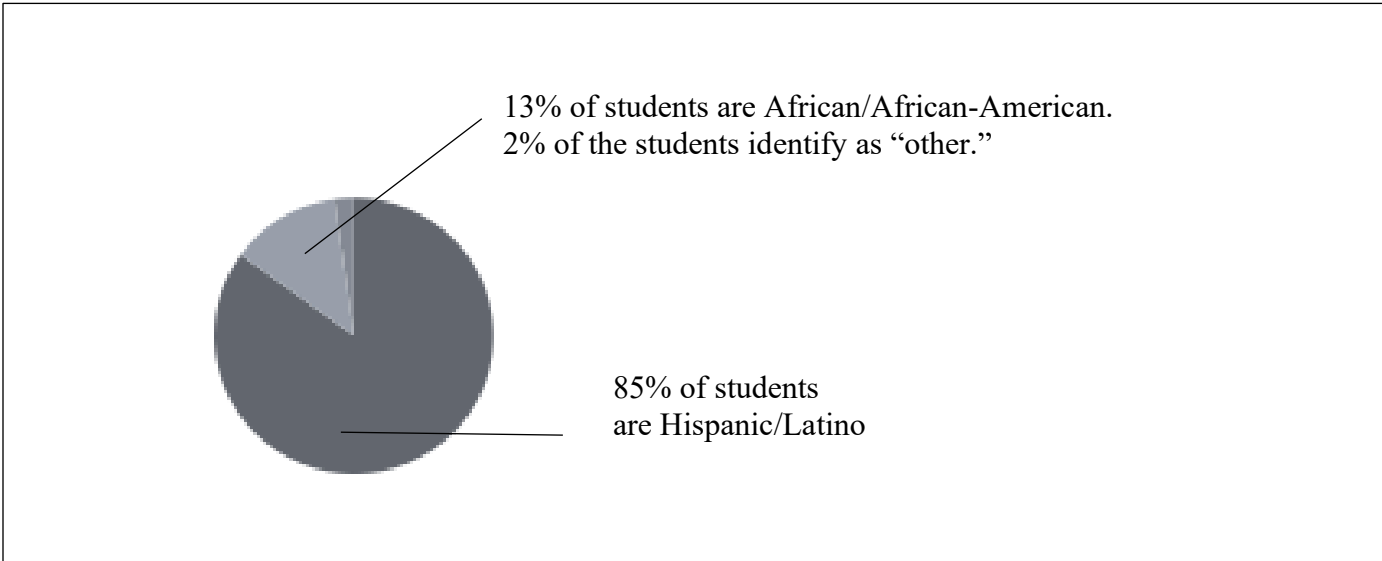


Figure 3. Student demographics at St. Benedict Catholic High School. The pie chart notes that 98% of the student population is comprised of students of color (“Student demographics,” 2019).

St. Benedict’s was selected because it has maintained a 100% graduation rate and 100% rate of acceptance to college or military for nine consecutive years (school brochure). The school district in which it resides has a graduation rate of 69.2% for all students and a graduation rate of less than 50% for its Hispanic/Latino ELL students (MDE, 2018).

**Sampling Design**

Purposive criterion sampling was employed for collecting data. According to Patten (2017), researchers use purposive sampling when they believe certain individuals will be sources for good information. Purposive criterion sampling requires criteria salient to the research questions to be applied when selecting a sample (Patten, 2017). The criteria in this study included selecting administrators and teachers who work directly with the Hispanic/Latino ELL students at St. Benedict Catholic High School, representing a variety of grade levels and subject areas, with a minimum of one teacher per grade level and one teacher per core subject area (math, literacy, science, and social studies) and the arts. It was desirable to have male and female

teachers participate in the interviews. Two single person interviews and five focus groups of two to five participants were conducted.

Talking with students and/or parents of the school would have been ideal, and would likely have uncovered valuable information. However, due to concerns over student privacy, permission was only granted for interviews with teachers. Because the educators at the school know the students and work with the Hispanic/Latino ELL students of St. Benedict's, they were well poised to offer insights into the reasons for the high and consistent on-time graduation success rate among this student population.

### **Instrumentation and Measures**

This study utilized a semi-structured focus group format. Semi-structured indicates that the researcher does not need to ask only those questions planned before to the interview. There is flexibility in asking additional questions to clarify a response or dig deeper into meaning (Patten, 2017). Focus group questions were selected based upon research uncovered in the literature regarding academic, cultural, and spiritual practices that may aid in student on-time graduation. Questions were also included to explore if validation plays a role in successful student on-time graduation. The interviews and focus groups followed the format recommended by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) which suggested the following:

1. Researchers should begin the interview by disclosing the intentions of the researcher, any payment that is offered to participants, information about confidentiality, a reminder that the participants can voluntarily stop answering questions at any time, and request permission to record the interview.
2. Next, researchers should ask general questions to build rapport with the participant while gathering demographic information.

3. Ask open-ended questions related to the research, questions that ask for experiences, opinions, feelings, knowledge, or sensory data.
4. When necessary, ask probing questions to clarify and/or to more deeply explore a comment or experience of the participant.

Table 1

*Focus Group Questions and Their Relation to Research Objectives and Theory*

Research Objective	Subcategory or Theme	Question
Opening		<p>1. Tell me a little bit about your experience teaching Hispanic/Latino ELL students at St. Benedict’s Catholic School.</p> <p>2. Nationwide, and even within the Twin Cities, Hispanic/Latino ELL students have low graduation rates. St. Benedict’s however, has a 100% graduation rate. Why do you think that is?</p>
Explore institutional practices that help students attain graduation.	Academic practices that lead to high graduation rates	3. Are there academic practices of this school that lead to high on-time graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino students? If so, please describe them.
Explore institutional practices that help students attain graduation.	Cultural practices that lead to high graduation rates	4. Are there cultural practices at St. Benedict’s that lead to on-time graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students? If so, please describe them.
Explore institutional practices that help students attain graduation.	Spiritual practices that lead to high graduation rates	5. Are there spiritual practices at St. Benedict’s that lead to on-time graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students? If so, please describe them.
Explore institutional practices that help students attain graduation.	Validation practices that lead to high graduation rates	6. How do educators at St. Benedict’s validate students? Does validation occur through academic, cultural, and spiritual practices? If so, how?
Closing		<p>7. Are there other practices that we have not discussed but are important to on-time student graduation?</p> <p>8. Is there anything that you would like to add that I have not asked?</p>



## Data Collection

Permission to conduct interviews and focus groups was granted by the principal (Appendix C). An invitation to participate in a focus group was e-mailed to the selected teachers, administrators and specialists working with Hispanic/Latino ELL students (Appendix D). The invitation was re-sent via e-mail the week prior to the focus groups taking place. A time for the interviews and focus groups was established by the principal and an informed consent document (Appendix E) was delivered to participants along with the focus group questions (Appendix F).

Potential participants were informed both of the purpose of the study and their position to provide helpful information to other Catholic high school educators working with Hispanic/Latino ELL students. Participants were also informed of the assurance of confidentiality. An explanation of the process for maintaining confidentiality was provided.

The informed consent document (Appendix E) was presented to participants at the time of the interview/focus group. The hard copy was signed before the focus groups or interviews began. A copy of the focus group questions can be found in Appendix F. Per the request of the principal, interview questions were e-mailed to participants in advance of the interviews and focus groups, informing participants of the nature of the research while allowing participants to think about the questions prior to meeting. Following each focus group, the researcher wrote memos to record initial thoughts and reactions to the discussion, as well as any emerging relationships, themes, or patterns in relation to the research questions (Appendix J).

In addition to focus groups, permission to review documentation was requested. Permission was also requested to make on-campus observations including in-class observations.

Documents were requested while on campus. These documents included flyers, annual reports, student notes from the daily *examen*, and on-campus signage. The researcher analyzed

these documents off site, looking for themes, relationships, or patterns in relation to the research questions and/or the interview responses. Observations were made while on campus including teacher-student interactions, student-student interactions, artwork displayed in the hallways, and the daily schedule. On-site observations were recorded in a notebook which included notes related to the document analysis.

### **Field Tests**

Focus group questions were field tested with members of the dissertation committee. Following approval of the focus group questions, a mock focus group was scheduled with six Catholic high school teachers who work with Hispanic/Latino ELL students, but do not work at the school in which the study was conducted.

### **Data Analysis**

Recorded focus groups were transcribed through a confidential transcription service. Upon completion of the transcription, the researcher verified the accuracy of the transcription by reading through all of the transcriptions while comparing them to the recording. Any personally identifiable information including names, family information, and class periods the participant teaches were removed. Following the removal of personally identifiable information, respondents were sent a copy of the transcript and recording to check for accuracy.

Upon completion of the accuracy and confidentiality verification, the researcher read through the transcripts numerous times in order to become familiar with the entirety of the data while seeking emergent themes. Next, open coding was utilized to identify meaning units, information that related to the research questions as possible reasons for the high graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students, and whether or not student validation plays a role in this

academic achievement. After assigning initial codes to groups of meaning units, the names of the codes were selected.

Multiple reads of coded text were completed to perform axial coding through which categories were determined based upon higher order labels that encompassed several concepts (Orcher, 2014). Finally, through selective coding, a core category was developed to establish a storyline (Orcher, 2014). An independent analyst provided input during the coding process to promote credibility and transferability.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study utilized qualitative research to explore the role of student validation through the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices of a high performing, diverse Catholic high school. This study occurred in a single Catholic high school, so the findings may or may not be applicable to other school settings. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not seek widely generalizable findings (Patten, 2017).

One area of limitation for this study is that only teachers were interviewed. Although it would have been ideal to interview students and parents, permission was not granted to do so. Therefore, the views of students and parents were not be addressed in this study.

A second limitation of this study includes the setting. The selected school is located in an urban area in the state of Minnesota. This school was selected because of its consistently high graduation rates in contrast to the public school district's low graduation rates among the Hispanic/Latino ELL population. Information gathered from a school in a different state with different demographics may yield different results.

A third area of limitation includes the time constraints of the focus groups. When discussing academic, cultural, and spiritual practices within a Catholic high school, and the

possible role of student validation in contributing to student success, many ideas, practices, and opinions can be shared. A one-hour time limit necessarily limits the number of questions and probes that can be asked, possibly limiting the quality of the data collected.

Finally, the information collected reflects current demographic trends and cultural realities. With demographics continually shifting, the needs of Hispanic/Latino ELL students may be different in the future than they are at present. This study sought to provide insights to the needs and possible solutions for Hispanic/Latino ELL academic achievement at this moment in time. Application of the information in the future, however, should be cautiously considered.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Due to the nature of qualitative research which includes interacting with people, ethical questions needed to be addressed. These considerations included establishing safeguards in order to protect the participants of the study from any harm (Creswell, 2014). In addition, the validity and reliability of the data must be considered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Protection of participants.** According to the 1979 Belmont Report, researchers working with people must adhere to three components namely: (1) respect for persons, (2) beneficence, and (3) justice (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). Respect for participants, beneficence, and justice extend beyond avoiding harm to seeking the participants' well-being (United States Department of Health and Human Service, 1979). One way to protect study participants is to plan ahead and be prepared (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Likewise, numerous steps were taken before the interviews and focus groups with teachers began. First, approval from Bethel University's IRB was required. Part of this approval process demanded successful completion of CITI training. The researcher completed this training (Appendix D). The Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis required all adults interacting with

youth and vulnerable adults to go through their Virtus Safe Environment training. This is an on-line program coupled with a three hour in-person class. Required re-certification is part of the process. The researcher completed this certification and re-certification (Appendix E).

Permission from the principal to be on site to conduct focus groups was granted (Appendix C).

Finally, a willingness to consent to participate in a semi-structured focus group form was provided and collected from all participants. While this study could not guarantee anonymity, it assured confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information in transcripts. Transcripts are stored on a password-protected laptop that only the researcher has access to.

**Awareness of researcher positionality.** Qualitative researchers have been challenged with the concern that their research is prone to being influenced by the biases of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Being aware of the potential for bias is the first step in improving objectivity. Disclosing the researcher's past experience with the problem or with the participants is important in qualitative research. Doing so allows the reader to understand both the researcher's relationship to the study as well as any possible biases that the researcher may hold (Creswell, 2014). Focus group participants may also hold biases toward the researcher conducting the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher of this study reflected upon possible biases and recognized the following considerations. As a Catholic educator working with Hispanic/Latino ELL students in a different Catholic high school, the researcher has an interest in finding the best methods to support Hispanic/Latino students within the Catholic school setting. Because the researcher is familiar with both the Catholic school setting and the Hispanic/Latino ELL population, the researcher was seen as trustworthy within the setting of the study. Being an educator within a Catholic school among the student population of intended

study, the researcher took a non-judgmental stance while being respectful (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher attempted to add knowledge rather than pass judgment, while striving for objectivity (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

As a practicing Catholic, the researcher understands Catholic faith principles. From an ethnographic perspective, this could have posed a challenge. The researcher's familiarity with the Catholic faith and Catholic practices may have led to the researcher taking for granted certain practices without questioning or perhaps even noticing them as potentially significant. Second, the researcher values the Catholic faith which could limit objectivity. Therefore, the researcher aimed to approach the focus groups and the on-site observations as though seeing the faith and the practices for the first time.

Next, the researcher sought information on practices that best help Hispanic/Latino ELL students achieve academic success. Although the researcher speaks Spanish and has lived with Hispanic/Latino families, the researcher is not of the same ethnic origin. Some participants of marginalized groups may be suspicious of members of the dominant culture doing research on the marginalized group, which may influence the information they share or the way they behave in front of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Validity and reliability of data.** According to qualitative researchers, the trustworthiness of the data is often directly linked to the trustworthiness of those collecting the data. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) have suggested that the "validity and reliability of a study depend upon the ethics of the investigator" (p. 260). One way to ensure validity and reliability is to conduct the study with integrity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Two practical recommendations from Orcher (2014) related to improving the integrity of the research is for researchers to engage in self-disclosure before focus groups are conducted, and for beginner qualitative researchers to record

responses rather than relying solely upon note-taking. The researcher followed these recommendations. Finally, the awareness of researcher bias—and the possible influence of this bias on the study—must be considered.

## **Chapter IV: Results**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices within a Catholic high school that lead to on-time graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students. Participants in focus groups and interviews included faculty and staff members of St. Benedict Catholic High School<sup>4</sup> in an urban area of Minnesota. Participants represented staff members, administrative positions, teachers of different subjects and grade levels, representatives of counseling services, and males and females. Respondents met on the campus of St. Benedict Catholic High School. This chapter describes the results of the interviews, focus groups, on-campus observations, and document analysis. Information about the sample is discussed. The research questions and themes are reviewed in great detail. Finally, a summary of the findings is presented.

### **Discussion of the Sample**

In November, 2019, this researcher attended a promotional luncheon hosted by faculty, staff, students, and board members of the school; participated in a school tour; conducted focus groups; conducted interviews; reviewed documents; and also participated in in-class observations. A total of five focus groups and two interviews were conducted at St. Benedict's Catholic High School and two in-class observations were undertaken. Nineteen adults participated in the focus groups and interviews including: one administrative assistant to the principal, one assistant principal, one licensed social worker, three grade level deans, one director of campus ministry, one full-time campus ministry volunteer, one admissions

<sup>4</sup> Pseudonym for the school



coordinator, nine subject area teachers representing all grade levels as well as the sciences, humanities, and physical education, and one Title 1 teacher.

Due to the need to protect confidentiality of the participants, all of whom work at the same school, limited demographic information was collected. A summary of the information is included in Table 2 sorted according to the date of the interview/focus group. Each focus group lasted between 50-55 minutes. The interviews lasted 30 minutes each. Focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai transcription service.

Table 2

*Data Collection Overview*

Position at School	Grade level	Gender	Number of years at the school	Focus group/ interview date
Administrative Assistant to principal	All	F	4 years	Nov. 4, 2019
Humanities Teacher	9 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup>	F	13 years	Nov. 4, 2019
Science/Math Teacher	11 <sup>th</sup>	M	7 years	Nov. 4, 2019
Grade level Dean	10 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup>	F	3 years	Nov. 4, 2019
Humanities Teacher	9 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup>	F	2 years	Nov. 5, 2019
Dean of Curriculum/ Health teacher	All 9 <sup>th</sup>	F	2 years	Nov. 5, 2019
Science Teacher	All	F	3 years	Nov.5, 2019
Grade level Dean Humanities Teacher	12 <sup>th</sup> 11 <sup>th</sup>	M	3 years	Nov. 5, 2019
Assistant Principal	All	M	13 years	Nov. 6, 2019

Table 2 continued

*Data Collection Overview*

Admissions Coordinator		F	3 years	Nov. 6, 2019
Campus Ministry Volunteer	All	M	3 months	Nov. 6, 2019
Position at School	Grade level	Gender	Number of years at the school	Focus group/ interview date
Director of Campus Ministry	All	F	3 months	Nov. 6, 2019
Humanities Teacher	9 <sup>th</sup> and 11 <sup>th</sup>	F	2 years	Nov. 6, 2019
Physical Education Exercise and Nutrition	9 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup>	M	5 years	Nov. 6, 2019
Science Teacher	9 <sup>th</sup>	F	3 months	Nov. 6, 2019
Title 1 Teacher	All	F	1 year	Nov. 6, 2019
Licensed Social Worker	All	F	3 years	Nov. 7, 2019
Science Teacher	12 <sup>th</sup>	F	5 years	Nov. 7, 2019
Science Teacher	9 <sup>th</sup> and 10 <sup>th</sup>	M	6 years	Nov. 7, 2019

**Research Questions**

In order to understand the role of student validation in successful graduation rates of Hispanic/Latino ELL students, this study explored the question, “What practices at a high performing, culturally diverse Catholic school do educators perceive are most essential in

helping the Hispanic/Latino ELL student feel validated and graduate on time?” Secondary questions included the following:

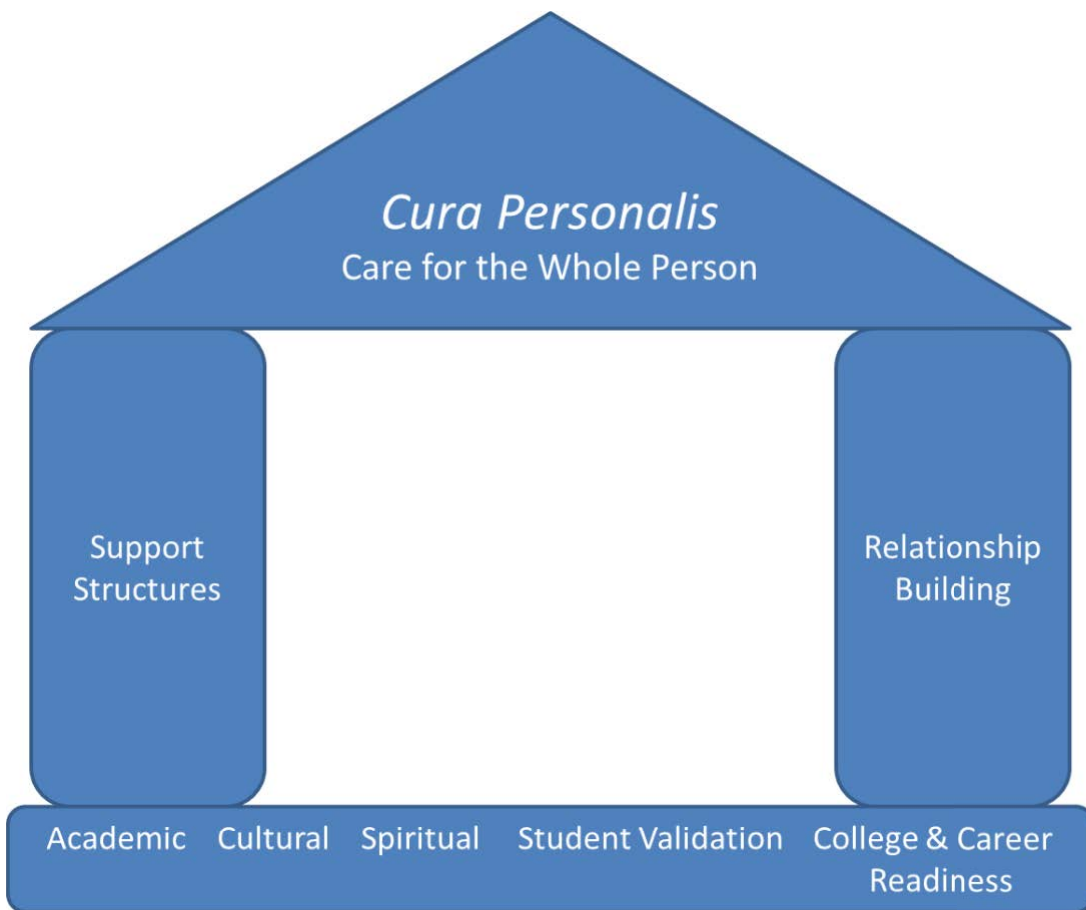
1. What academic practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
2. What cultural practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
3. What spiritual practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
4. How does student validation intersect with the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices of this school?

### **Introduction to the Themes**

The researcher entered data into the software program MAXQDA for the purpose of sorting the data. The first step in the process was to identify themes. Focus group and interview data, analyzed according to Krueger and Casey’s (2015) recommendations, yielded an overarching theme that was noted as crucial for on-time graduation of Hispanic/Latino students. This overarching theme was discovered to be upheld by two secondary themes. The overarching theme which was identified by every participant in the study was the theme of *cura personalis*. *Cura personalis* is the Latin phrase meaning *care for the whole person*. As one teacher noted, “I think one of the key successes, you know, we talk a lot about *cura personalis* at our school . . . care for the whole person. And part of it is we truly feel that students, if they don't feel that they are loved and safe, and if they don't have relationship[s], then they won't be as likely to succeed.” *Cura personalis* is consistent with Catholic teaching which states, “The school must begin from

the principle that its educational programme is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person” (Garrone, 1977, para. 29).

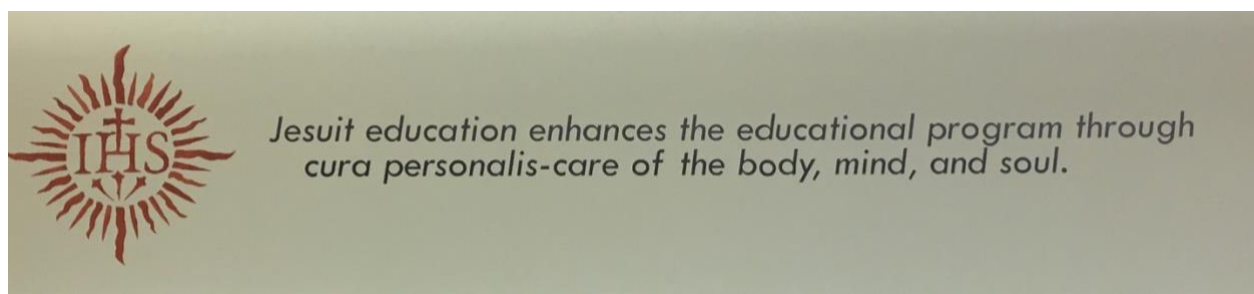
Participants also identified secondary themes that assist in caring for the whole person. Those secondary themes fell under the categories of practical support structures and relationship building. Finally, subcategories that uphold practical support structures and relationship building were identified as academic supports, cultural practices, spiritual supports, student validation, and college and career supports. Figure 4 illustrates the overarching theme and its supports.



*Figure 4.* Emerging from focus groups and interviews was the overarching theme of *cura personalis*, care for the whole person. This theme was identified as the main reason for the 100% success rate of students graduating on-time from St. Benedict Catholic High School. *Cura personalis* is upheld by the secondary themes of: practical support structures and relationship building. In addition, the subcategories of academic, cultural, spiritual, and college and career practices along with student validation uphold the support structures and relationship practices, which in turn bolster the care for the whole person.

**Research Question: What practices at a high performing, culturally diverse Catholic school do educators perceive are most essential in helping the Hispanic/Latino ELL student feel validated and graduate on time?**

The “care for the whole person” was not an articulated research question, yet emerged as the overarching theme for the success of the Hispanic/Latino ELL students at St. Benedict’s Catholic High School. Every participant in the focus groups and interviews mentioned the theme of caring for the whole student. During a student led tour of the school, the student also mentioned this theme. Moreover, the theme is visible in school documents and even painted on the walls of the school in numerous visible locations as demonstrated in Figure 5.



*Figure 5.* Photograph of a quote found on the wall at St. Benedict’s Catholic High School. This quote mentions the theme of *cura peronalis*, an overarching theme embraced by members of the school.

One science teacher noted, “if we’re talking about ... practices that lead to students feeling connected here, I would just say ... the fact that this place is all about *cura personalis* - it’s caring for the whole student, ... whether that means Catholic or not, whatever it’s about, it’s about *cura personalis*.”

Respondents noted that *cura personalis* is achieved through the intentional implementation of practical support structures and the formation of relationships between faculty, staff, students, and families.

- **Support Structures:** This code was used when a respondent mentioned that *cura personalis* is realized by the numerous support structures that exist within the school.
- **Relationship Building:** This code was used when participants discussed the importance of relationship building among students, faculty, staff, and families, leading to a sense of belonging.

**Secondary Theme 1: Support structures.** The secondary theme of support structures appeared in all five of the focus groups. Respondents mentioned the overarching theme of *cura personalis* and followed this comment by highlighting support structures. For example, one dean stated, “[*cura personalis*] it's a philosophy ..., but it's ... also very much embedded in [the] structures that people have put in place.” Numerous respondents mentioned the theme of caring for the whole person and then articulated the structures that allow them to do so, identifying the academic practices that help students, the mental health care, the spiritual care of students, as well as cultural practices and college and career supports that work together to care for the whole person. As another academic dean noted, “We sometimes do a student study. Say we have five students who are really struggling academically, emotionally, socially whatever it might be. We will say, what's our plan for support?” This study can take two forms. It can be a self-reflective questionnaire that students complete, or it can be a survey of teachers who reflect upon the needs and wellbeing of their students. A teacher acknowledged that this care sends a message to students that “we're not giving up on you.”

The assistant principal provided an illustration of the need for caring for the whole person when he mentioned that caring for the whole person is similar to a car having four wheels. If any of the tires are low or flat, “carrying it around doesn't go so well.” He suggested the need to talk about faith, family, friends, and education, those four things – and having supports in place to be able to do so.

**Secondary Theme 2: Relationship building.** The secondary theme of relationship building emerged as both the intentional practice of caring for the whole person, as well as the fruit of doing so. Faculty and staff of the school were intentional about building relationships with students and one another. This focus on relationships led to a greater sense of belonging and community. So common was the mention of strong community that it was difficult, at times, to code this theme properly. Some participants included relationship building in their subcategory examples of spiritual practices and student validation. Others mentioned it when discussing the theme of caring for the whole person. Krueger and Casey (2015) recommended coding “similar comments with the same code” (p. 142). Therefore, when a participant mentioned the idea of community building in relationship with *cura personalis*, the researcher coded this comment with the main theme of caring for the whole person. However, when a respondent specifically mentioned a separate, subcategory practice when discussing the idea of relationship building, the researcher coded the comment with the specific subcategory mentioned.

Within the overarching theme of *cura personalis*, numerous participants identified the need to build relationships with students. The idea of building relationships with students was identified 27 times throughout the discussions. The admissions coordinator shared that she often hears students and families saying, “I like ... this school because there is more community, feels

more like family, the teachers really get to know [us] on a personal level, we're not just one number.” Likewise, a teacher who is also an alumna of the school acknowledged,

I think the teachers form such a great community, the faculty, the staff. As a newer teacher in the building, feeling comfortable to teach my classes and to feel comfortable in the building is so important to be able to be myself and give my best self to my teaching practice. The staff, faculty, everyone is so supportive of each other as well as the students. It just helps us be at our best.

Another teacher concurred stating, “I would echo that. I see that students see that their teachers get along with each other and ... I think that students feel like their teachers are approachable.” Teachers “getting along” with one another is observed on campus as well as off campus during the weekly Friday Happy Hours that are well attended by faculty and staff.

Other teachers noted a general belief that “education comes through relationships” and the faculty and staff at St. Benedict’s Catholic High School “try to build community.” One teacher explained that “relationship building with all students is a key part of our jobs.” The Director of Campus Ministry observed that “genuinely thinking about the student as a whole person and ... connect[ing] with them and, and build[ing] those relationships—fosters ... that whole person development.”

**Secondary Research Question 1: What academic practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?**

Academic supports are established practices that help students attain on-time high school graduation and acceptance to college or military. Sixty-three times throughout the focus groups and interviews respondents mentioned an academic support structure that helps students achieve graduation. Krueger and Casey (2015) note that, with focus groups, the “analytic process is more



than arriving at the number of times a comment was said” (p. 147). The authors guide researchers into analyzing themes based upon frequency, extensiveness, intensity, specificity, internal consistency, and participant perception of importance (p. 147). The specific academic support practices which were mentioned five or more times and which met the additional guidelines provided by Krueger and Casey (2015) such as intensity, internal consistency, and participant perception of importance include:

- **Structured Time During School Day:** This code was used when participants discussed the scheduled, day-time opportunities for students to receive help with academic work.
- **Tutoring Program:** This code was used every time a participant mentioned tutors or the tutoring program.
- **Standards-based Grading:** This code represented the reference to the grading program implemented at the school.
- **Professional Development and/or Coaching of Faculty:** This code was utilized when respondents mentioned a practice that improves faculty performance including professional development and mentoring/coaching.
- **High Academic Standards with Supports:** This code was used when participants mentioned the high rigor, high academic expectations of the school.

**Support practice: Structured time.** Structured study time was mentioned by faculty and staff 24 times throughout the focus groups and interviews. Specifically, participants mentioned practices within the scheduled calendar and the school day that allow students to complete work, receive help, and meet standards. The practices identified by respondents include “9<sup>th</sup> hour,” lunch and learn, standards completion day, Saturday school, summer school, and the Bridge

Program for incoming freshmen. Participants acknowledged that “most of our parents are not able to give our students help at home so we try to provide our students with that help.”

Therefore, the school provides time during the day and calendar year to help students complete their work and continue to advance.

One example of the scheduled support is the last period of the day. The school day extends until 4:00pm, allowing for a ninth period. This “9<sup>th</sup> hour” is a structured study time in which students complete homework and/or meet with the teacher or tutors to receive help. One teacher described the 9<sup>th</sup> hour as “the built-in study continuation process.” In addition, Saturday school allows seniors who are falling behind to complete missing work or fulfill standards with tutors and teachers available to help. The academic year is 10 months, which includes two weeks of summer school available for freshmen, sophomores, and juniors who need to complete work or gain skills in order to advance to the next grade level. Finally, there is a two-week summer Bridge Program for incoming freshmen that helps them master English and math skills, as well as prepare for the Corporate Work Study Program.

These structured opportunities make it difficult for a student not to pass. As one teacher observed, “there's no option to repeat a grade. [I]f you're not passing your standards, ... well, you're here from 3:15 to 4:00 working with teachers, you're working with tutors during your structured study, you're reassessing. And ultimately, if it gets to the end of the year, and you're still in that place, you're here in summer school. So, there's this net that makes it really hard to not pass.”

**Support practice: Tutoring program.** St. Benedict Catholic High School utilizes tutors for students. Tutors can be employees of the school or volunteers. Specifically mentioning tutoring nine times throughout the discussions, respondents explained that students typically

work with tutors once or twice each week. Tutors are available during the school day, for Saturday school, during the scheduled standards-completion days, and during summer school. One teacher stated, “We have some great tutors in the school, and also tutors who come from outside and volunteer their time to work every day with their students, which I think is a really big help.” A science teacher shared that as many as half of his students will require tutoring at some point. The tutoring program is closely linked with the structured study schedule allowing students to receive help while on the school campus during the school day.

**Support practice: Standards-based grading.** Participants explained that St. Benedict’s had developed a standards-based grading program that moved away from the traditional letter grade program. Rather, students earn a numerical score that represents their level of mastery of certain standards. The purpose of standards-based grading was to make certain that students mastered skills before advancing. One teacher explained, “You have to actually come back and repeat the skills and do the skills and do the tests until you show basic proficiency in it.” Another teacher concurred stating, “We keep retesting until they demonstrate mastery.” Although three participants speculated whether or not this standards-based grading helped or hindered a student’s performance in college, 16 of the 19 participants suggested that standards-based grading contributed to the academic success of the students.

**Support practice: Professional development and/or coaching among faculty.** Respondents referenced faculty development 16 times throughout the discussions, referring to both professional development programs and coaching. One teacher explained,

As for faculty and staff professional development, there's a kind of a concentrated group called the instructional leadership team made up of between seven and eight staff

members and some administration who run professional development throughout the year.

The focus of professional development was determined by teachers in a collaborative manner that identifies

a consistent issue and [determines] how do we tackle that issue consistently and unified across the staff rather than, you know, one initiative here and one initiative there. [We] try to create a common language, common practices, and stick with one issue and go deeply. ... I think it's the most organic PD I've ever been a part of.

In addition, coaching is provided to all faculty by the academic deans and principal. This occurs through bi-weekly, grade-level meetings, and experienced teachers mentoring new teachers.

**Support practice: High academic expectations with support.** Faculty and staff suggested that students at St. Benedict's Catholic High School are held to high academic standards, and practices are in place to help students meet those high expectations. The high expectations established for students are communicated through school documents which state that St. Benedict's Catholic High School students "study, work, graduate and succeed." In addition, quotes on the walls of the school challenge students to raise their own expectations to strive for more. One quote states, "'Mediocrity' has no place in a Jesuit school world view." Another quote exhorts the "Magis," which calls students to "the More" as illustrated in Figure 6.

One academic dean explained that, "We hold our students to high academic standards. ... Our job is setting goals with students, to keep working with them, talking with their parents, teachers, do what is needed to bring the student along." Keeping with the theme of *cura personalis*, additional help is made available to students to assist them in succeeding. Those supports could be academic, but they may also be cultural, spiritual, familial, or other college

and career readiness practices. For example, one student who regularly struggled with getting to school on time was provided with an alarm clock. This solution worked, and the student was no longer late to school. Therefore, students are given high expectations while also provided help in achieving the established goals.

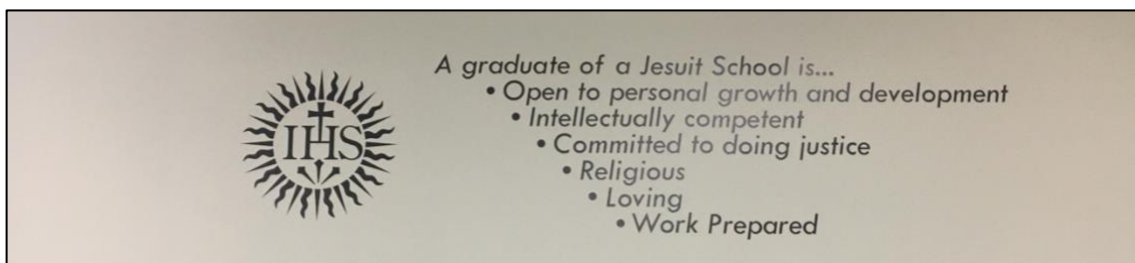
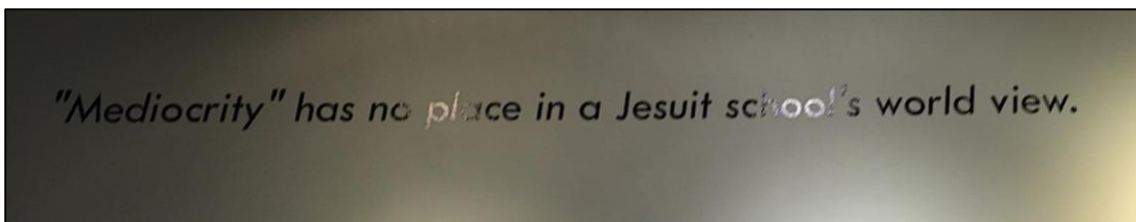
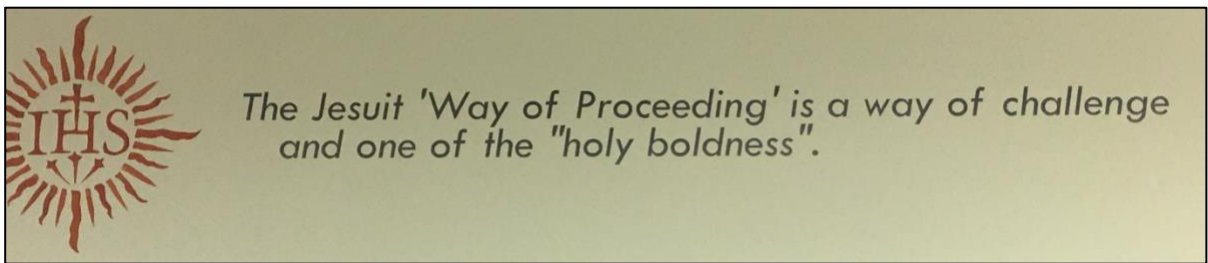
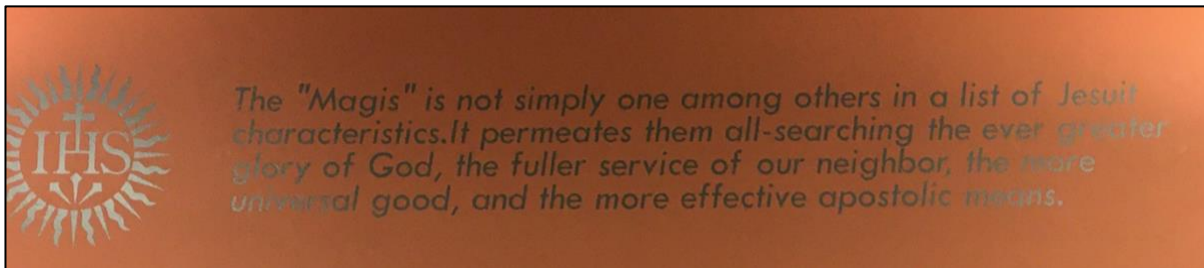


Figure 6. Photographs of quotes found on the walls at St. Benedict's Catholic High School. These quotes challenge students to raise their expectations, to strive for higher goals.

**Secondary Research Question 2: What cultural practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?**

Participants identified cultural assistance within the school that help students attain on-time high school graduation and acceptance to college or military. These supports were identified as ways in which the school practically lives out its *cura personalis* mission. Thirty-seven times throughout the focus groups and interviews respondents mentioned cultural support structures that help students achieve graduation. The practices mentioned five or more times and which included the additional guidelines provided by Krueger and Casey (2015) such as intensity, internal consistency, and participant perception of importance include:

- Validation of the Hispanic/Latino Culture: This code was used when a respondent identified a practice that validates the student's culture.
- Specialized Personnel Roles: This code was employed when a respondent mentioned home-school liaisons and social workers.
- Clubs, Classes, and Activities: This code was used when a participant mentioned a cultural club, class, or activity that supported the culture of the students.

**Support practice: Validation of Hispanic/Latino culture.** St. Benedict's Catholic School has a student population made up of 85% Hispanic/Latino students. This majority population is supported in many ways, including in the validation of the Hispanic/Latino culture. One teacher explained, "We really try to validate their culture. ... We want [them] to know English but we don't want [them] to lose Spanish or whatever [their] home language might be. 'I don't want you to leave your culture, live in both worlds.'" A second teacher noted, "Another thing that we do to honor their language backgrounds is offer a class where you are speaking totally in Spanish. You're reading in Spanish, you're writing in Spanish, and you're learning to do

it well, really well.” A Latina teacher who is also an alumna of the school observed that in “the climate we live in now, it's hard to feel accepted. It's hard to feel like your culture is welcomed. But here [at St. Benedict's], it's like, I'm so proud. I can speak Spanish and I'm so proud. ... I just think it's like the love for the culture that is uplifted here, where at other schools it might not be.”



*Figure 7. Photographs of cultural support for el Día de los Muertos at St. Benedict's Catholic High School and use of Spanish within the school.*

Respondents noted the use of the Spanish language as an intentional practice to culturally assist the students of St. Benedict's and their families. Respondents explained that Spanish is incorporated into the Masses offered at the school, many of the teachers speak Spanish, signage around the school is provided in English and Spanish, the name of the school is in Spanish, the admissions personnel speak Spanish, and communication going home to families is in both English and Spanish. The admissions coordinator explained that she can understand the language and, as an immigrant herself, she can also understand the culture.

The Hispanic/Latino culture is also validated through the incorporation of Hispanic/Latino celebrations including Our Lady of Guadalupe and *ofrendas* during el Día de los Muertos, as well as the use of “group work and a lot of verbal things in our group work and discussion . . . which is a more culturally sound practice for Latinos.”

**Support practice: Specialized personnel roles.** St. Benedict’s Catholic High School provides specialized personnel roles that help students achieve success. These specialized roles strive to uphold the overarching theme of *Cura Personalis* (care for the whole person). Among the people mentioned, the home-school liaisons and social workers were mentioned a total of fourteen times throughout the focus groups and interviews.

The home-school liaisons are “dedicated just to communicating with families. They are bilingual and they also publish all of our family newsletters in both English and Spanish so that they are accessible to all families.” The home-school liaisons will also communicate messages to parents for teachers who do not speak Spanish. The home-school liaisons serve as support for cultural practices, student validation, college and career readiness, and relationship building between faculty, staff, and teachers.

Social workers play an important role in the school. One teacher exclaimed, “The social workers are so dedicated to our students, and just go so above and beyond just caring for them and their needs.” The primary role of the social workers is to assist individual students. Social workers understand not only the Hispanic/Latino culture of the students, but also the low-socioeconomic, urban culture in which students live. According to a social worker at St. Benedict High School, some of the tasks that the school social workers perform for students include “counseling, driving a kid to the hospital, making doctor's appointments, they can make home visits, they meet with really high need kids once a week. They're there for crisis issues and



they're also there for ongoing small groups.” Respondents mentioned that, although some schools have counselors or social workers involved in student scheduling, at St. Benedict’s, the social workers do not perform the scheduling. That task is completed by the deans. Rather, social workers focus on the mental and emotional needs of the students. St. Benedict’s works with Catholic Charities to provide three, part-time social workers to serve the 500 students of the school. Acknowledging the value of the work that the social workers do, one respondent stated, “I mean, that's another huge part of our successes, we have social workers who ... work their butts off.”

**Support practice: Clubs, classes, and activities.** Another practice mentioned by participants included the numerous clubs, classes, and activities that support the Hispanic/Latino culture. Respondents mentioned a multicultural club and the Society of Hispanic Engineering Professionals as two clubs in which many students participate. One teacher stated that these clubs are of value because students “feel connected, they feel like, you know, they've been heard, their ideas matter and they have a place where they can go to and be who they are.” St. Benedict’s Catholic High School offers a Heritage Spanish class for students who speak Spanish but can benefit from extra practice in reading and writing in Spanish. Respondents mentioned a Unity and Diversity day as an activity that supports cultural diversity, and the Hispanic Heritage month which celebrates their culture. Because not all of the students in the school are Hispanic/Latino, a few participants acknowledged a cultural tension that exists within the school. Faculty and staff are conscientious about supporting all students and their cultural backgrounds. Therefore, additional clubs and activities also exist (such as the Muslim club and the Black student association) which support students of other identities. As a social worker noted, “I'm trying to be as inclusive as we can to all of our student voices.”

### **Secondary Research Question 3: What Spiritual Practices of This School Do Educators Perceive are Most Beneficial in Helping Students Graduate on Time?**

Respondents frequently identified spiritual supports within the school that help students and uphold the overall mission of *cura personalis*. Sixty-one times throughout the focus groups and interviews respondents mentioned spiritual support practices that benefit students. A science teacher who is not a Christian stated, “the glue that ... ties together the culture of this building, I think, ultimately goes down to [it being] a Jesuit identity. And very much that means not necessarily a group of people who are all Catholic but like, [it is] the Jesuit Ignatian culture in this building, I think, is a primary, foundational glue.” Another teacher concurred. She suggested that the importance of the spiritual culture permeates the mission of the faculty and staff. While referencing a picture of a Gospel story that hung in the conference room (See Figure 8), the teacher explained,

I like to see that picture right there, of the paralytic being brought in (Luke 5). And that's our metaphor for our school. ... That image with the disciples are this, the people tried to get to Jesus but couldn't because they were blocked. So, they put a hole in the roof so they could get the person to Jesus. We also try to create different and unique opportunities. When the pathway to success is blocked for our students, we create new and unique opportunities for them to succeed.

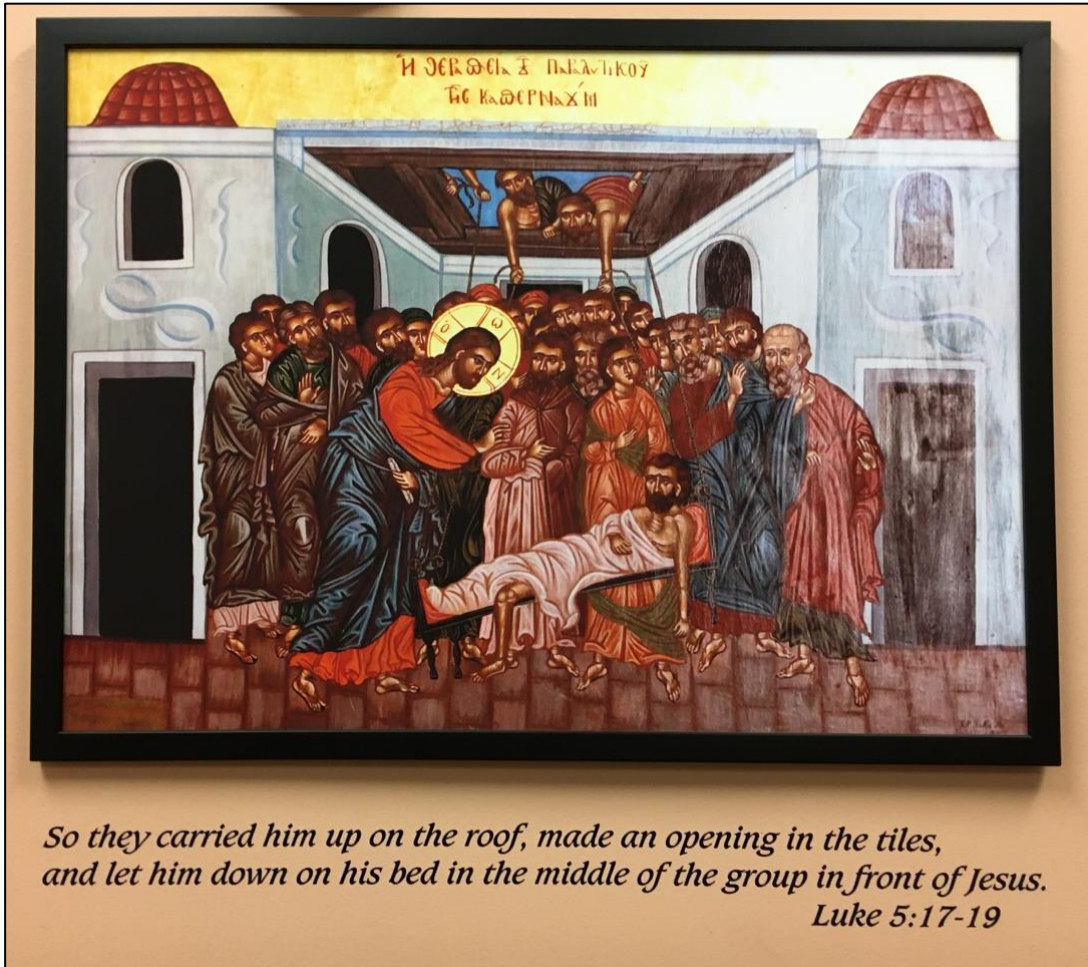


Figure 8. Photograph of the picture of the biblical story of the paralytic being lowered to Jesus through the hole in the roof. This picture hangs in a conference room at St. Benedict Catholic High School and serves as an important reminder to faculty and staff to seek ways to help students achieve success despite challenges that block the traditional pathways to success.

Beyond the office of campus ministry, celebrating the Mass, and the four-year religion class requirement, additional spiritual practices of the school were identified throughout the focus groups and interviews. The spiritual support practices mentioned five or more times include:

- The Daily Examen: This code was used when a respondent mentioned the daily Jesuit practice referred to as the *examen*.
- Love for One Another: This code was employed when a respondent mentioned the intentional practice of fostering a sense of love and acceptance.

- Service: This code was used when a participant mentioned service projects in which students participate.
- Shared Values: This code was utilized when a respondent mentioned the importance of shared values as a tool for relationship building.

**Support practice: The daily *examen*.** Consistent with Jesuit practice, the faculty, staff and students of St. Benedict’s Catholic High School participate in a daily, communal prayer/reflection that focuses on finding God in all things while expressing gratitude. The campus ministry volunteer stated that the *examen* is “a real shared experience of prayer as a school community.” A teacher further explained this daily, school-wide practice by saying, “What it is, is every day as a community, everybody in the building knows that we're pausing. And we're thinking of something to be grateful for, or listening to the story of one member of ... our space, and they share an important thing to them. And it's like, ... everyday we'll pause and we'll check in with who you are as a person what, what's happening in life because you know what, that's probably more important. So, going back to the *examen*, ... it's a spiritual, cultural practice shared in this building.”

Appendix H shows the notes shared by a student who led the *examen* while the researcher was on campus. This student said she was grateful for the strong community and feeling of acceptance found at the school. Fostering a sense of love and acceptance is a spiritual practice mentioned by respondents.

**Support practice: Love for one another.** Respondents mentioned that the spiritual identity of the school allowed for St. Benedict’s Catholic High School to be “a space that you can be, that you can thrive in, and that you are loved and cared for.” Seventeen times participants acknowledged the intentional focus on helping students feel loved, to feel accepted,

to feel safe within the school community. One teacher stated, “I mean, it's a much more family atmosphere than any school I've been a part of that's for sure.” The assistant principal stated, “They [the students] always say that they like the school, that it feels more like a community, I like the faith component because we can be ourselves, we feel safe.” The volunteer within campus ministry explained that his role is to come alongside students. He explained that faith is lived out in an intentional way. One of those practices is helping all students feel a sense of belonging.

What I'm trying to say is how, how to make everyone feel welcome here. I think that's living out the faith here at this school. With so many different kinds of people how do, how do we all feel that we belong here? And how do we all work together? How do we eat at the same table? How do we all support one another? And how does everyone feel a part of this community? I think that whatever we're doing to do that, I see that as faith lived out.

The assistant principal concluded his interview by suggesting that student success “comes down to communication, interaction, trust, and, we can say this here because we're a religious school, we can say love.”

**Support practice: Service.** A spiritual practice that was referenced by participants is the requirement for students to serve within the school and/or their community. One dean commented that “Another thing we do which really keeps our students focused not only on themselves but on others is that we do require from students service hours.” The dean suggested that the service in which students participate benefits the students because it “focuses outside of themselves, they focus on what they can do for others—and there is some reflection time in that.” Students at St. Benedict’s Catholic High School are required to perform 60 hours of

service while enrolled in the school. That service may be performed within the school, such as helping at parent-teacher conferences by setting up or taking down chairs, or serving as a translator. Or, the students can serve in their own parishes or communities. As the dean further explained, “We try to get the juniors and seniors to think in terms of something they could do regularly.”

**Support practice: Shared values.** Respondents mentioned the importance of shared values seven times throughout the discussions. These values, as one teacher explained, can be a “grounding, cultural experience for our students.” Included in these shared values is a commitment to social justice. One teacher observed that “the acknowledgement and engagement with social justice issues that our students are dealing with and are passionate about, are thinking about, also makes a difference.”

#### **Secondary Research Question 4: How Does Student Validation Intersect with the Academic, Cultural, and Spiritual Practices of This School?**

Research within St. Benedict’s Catholic High School suggested that the *cura personalis* (whole student) approach is the overarching reason for the success of this student population. Within the *cura personalis* approach is an emphasis on student validation. The practice of student validation was mentioned seventy-one times throughout the focus groups and interviews. The faculty and staff at St. Benedict’s intentionally practice student validation in a number of ways, most notably through their approach to discipline and their focus on student recognition.

- Approach to Discipline: This code was used when a respondent discussed the discipline approach within the school.
- Student Recognition: This code was employed when a respondent mentioned the intentional practice of positive student recognition.

**Support practice: Approach to discipline.** Twenty-four times throughout the focus groups and interviews, the approach to discipline employed by the school was mentioned. Rather than a punitive approach, St. Benedict's Catholic School affirms students by focusing on the positive. The assistant principal informed the researcher that "we try to stay away as much as we can from being punitive." He also mentioned, "I like our system, although it's not the most efficient, I think it's the most effective." A dean concurred by saying that the positive system is "restorative and transformative." Another teacher commented that the positive approach helps to "develop trust in a relationship with the adults in the school and your peers in the school."

The main components of the discipline approach include a high-trust system that includes re-training, reflection, and reinforcing the positive. One teacher stated that,

We show them [the students] love and we show them unconditional positive regard. We demonstrate that we truly believe in the goodness of them, and by doing so believe that they will start to, you know, develop that same trust for us. So 'I respect you, I trust you.' And they'll return that.

The discipline approach involves a re-teaching element rather than a detention or punitive element. As one teacher shared, "When they [the students] aren't doing the right thing, you're re-teaching those skills, because you don't learn anything if you just sit in detention from 4pm to 5pm after school. So, we have concrete trainings." These "trainings" include a reflective piece that asks questions such as, "What happened? How can we grow? How can you get better?" As they work with students, faculty and staff of St. Benedict's focus on progress with students rather than perfection. Faculty and staff acknowledged that serious violations such as bringing a weapon onto campus would be handled immediately and with serious consequences. For the more day-to-day disciplinary issues, however, a positive, re-training approach is employed. This

re-training approach is specific to the student and to the situation. It may be undertaken by the teacher in the moment, or it may be handled by the dean, the social worker, or the assistant principal as a scheduled meeting(s) during the day. As one of the grade level deans noted, “We always say what we're looking for is progress. ... Because we're not looking for 100% of everybody. For example, ‘So your homework completion has been 31%. Let's get it up to 50%. How can we move in the right direction?’ ... We’ll find all the ways to keep it positive, but maintain high expectations.” The positive approach to discipline is intended to teach and build trust. As many acknowledged, however, it takes time. A social worker also stated that “a lot of these kids - *trust* - They don't experience that before coming here.” The desire to build trust among the students is one form of student validation. By focusing on the positive while taking time to teach, to re-train, and to work toward progress, a message of “you’re worth it” is communicated to students. As the assistant principal stated, it tells students that “we're going to stick with you and we're going to, together, we're going to do this.”

**Support practice: Student recognition.** Faculty and staff at St. Benedict’s Catholic High School are intentional about validating students through their student recognition practices. These methods include student awards, in-class recognition, and positive messages being sent home to parents.

Student awards are presented to numerous students. For example, high achieving students receive awards such as the Student of the Session award. These high achieving students are acknowledged on a quarterly basis in front of their classmates. In addition, the *Glorium* award recognizes students who have overcome challenges. As one teacher explained, “the *Glorium* award is for students who seem like they're persevering. It's, you know, for some reason they're sticking out as like, we know they're struggling, but they're really working hard.” Other students



will receive recognition from social workers. “I will do little things like, if they've improved their attendance significantly and we've set a goal, I might go out to coffee with them or get them lunch from McDonald's or do things that recognize their achievements.”

In-class recognition is also a common practice among teachers. One participant stated, “I know people here frequently try to make in-class recognition for just little things.” The researcher noticed this practice during an in-class observation. Students in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade religion class were invited to read aloud character parts from a play that the class was reading together. Following the recitations by the student volunteers, the teacher thanked the students, complimented their wonderful reading, and asked the other students to give them a round of applause for their efforts. Positive messages going home to families is also practiced with frequency and intention. As one teacher said, “We're not waiting till a student failed to make contact with parents.”

One reason for the success of the student validation implementation is the “buy-in” of the faculty and staff. Repeatedly respondents mentioned that the faculty truly believe in the mission of the school and strive to live it out. One participant stated, “I think everyone genuinely wants to be here and cares.” The assistant principal said,

I think it's fantastic when you have a diverse staff. ... But I think more important is that you need to have people who don't just look like you [diverse student population], but who genuinely care about you, and will put in that effort, whether they're your race or another race. And that, I think, is at the hands of our faculty or staff and our admins who just give themselves completely to this place.

A grade level dean stated, “It is deep collaboration without any competition. In terms of, I think, our staff is made up of some really highly motivated, incredibly hard-working people. But we

want each other to succeed. More than anything, because we're here for the kids. And we trust that the others are too.”

Signage found prominently displayed throughout the school is another way faculty and staff intentionally try to affirm and recognize students. Figure 9 provides examples of some of this school-wide signage.

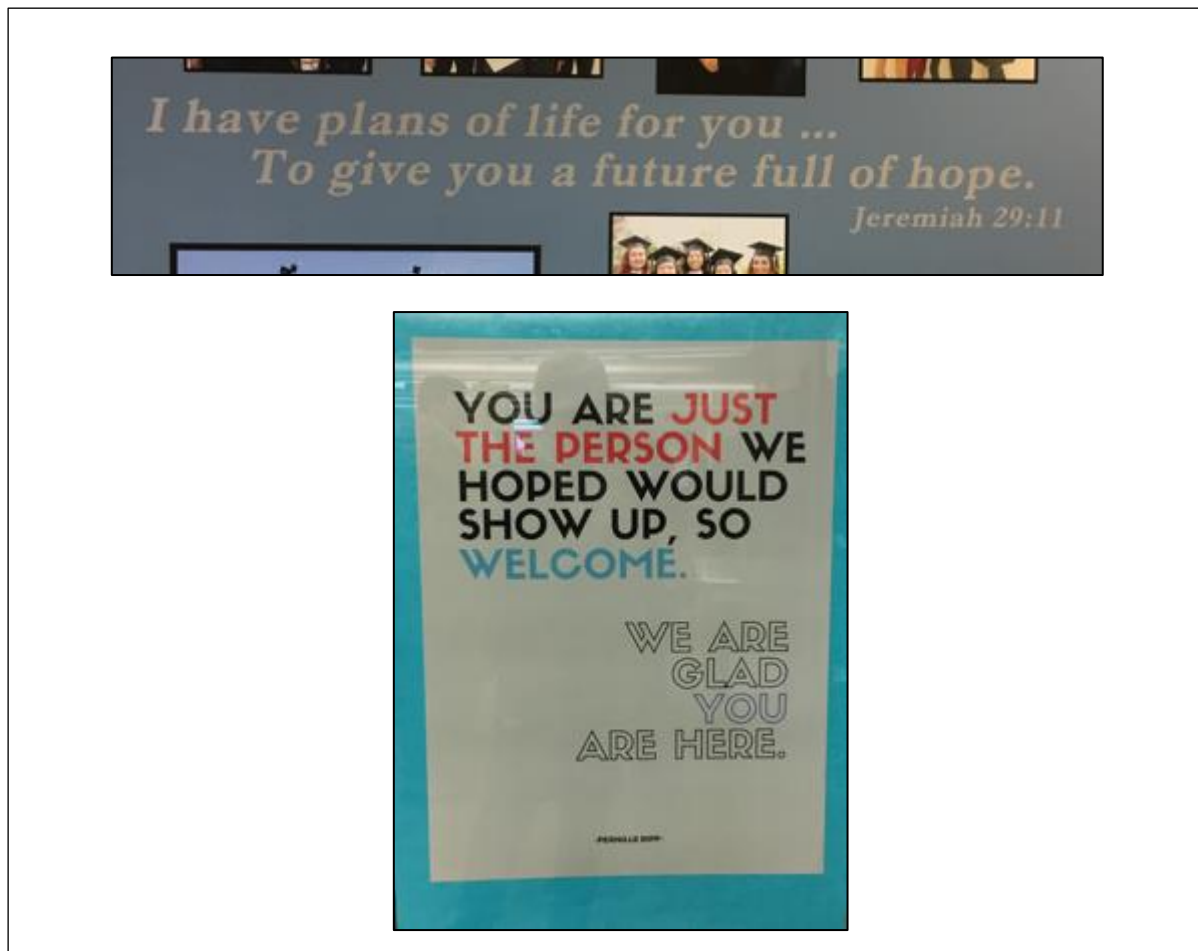


Figure 9. Photographs of signage displayed throughout the school that validates students.

### College and Career Readiness Supports

The dedication of the St. Benedict’s Catholic High School faculty and staff to support the whole person was evidenced in practical structures that did not neatly fit into the aforementioned categories. These supports assist the Hispanic/Latino students in attaining on-time graduation

and acceptance to college. Respondents mentioned the Corporate Work Study Program and the school's role in the college process as significant factors in both the care for the whole person and the success of students. Mentioned more than a dozen times each throughout the focus groups and interviews, these College and Career Readiness supports include:

- Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP): This code was used whenever a participant mentioned the work-study program in which all students participate.
- School-Driven College Process: This code was utilized when respondents mentioned the actions that the school takes to facilitate the college selection, application, and entrance process.

**Support practice: Corporate Work Study Program.** According to school documentation, St. Benedict Catholic High School partners with 120 corporate work sponsors. All students at the school participate in the Corporate Work Study Program (CWSP). According to school documents, in 2018-2019, students earned 41% of tuition dollars through their participation in the program (Annual Report). Common responsibilities that students hold at their places of employment (sometimes referred to as their “internship”) include processing invoices, completing mailings, filing, scanning, procedure documentation, administrative support, record keeping, data entry, billing support, meeting and conference room set up, inventory and restocking materials, research and writing, document conversion, and operations assistant (“Academic Year,” 2019-2020).

Students dedicate one full day each week to the CWSP. For example, 9<sup>th</sup> graders will work an eight-hour shift at their dedicated place of employment every Monday. Sophomores will work on Tuesdays. Juniors will work on Wednesdays while Seniors work every Thursday. Fridays are covered by grades on a rotating schedule, with each grade working one Friday per

month. Employers, as a result of this schedule, gain the work of one full time employee—work that is divided among different people who cover the position each day.

Respondents noted numerous benefits to the CWSP. Twenty-one times during the focus groups and interviews, mention of the CWSP was made. Some of the most common benefits to students that participants acknowledged include the acquisition of professional skills (both hard and soft skills), more caring adults in the lives of students, and exposure to the professional world.

Regarding the acquisition of professional skills, respondents noted that incoming freshmen participate in a two-week summer Bridge Program that prepares students for the CWSP. Every afternoon throughout the two-week program, students prepare for their professional work by learning practical skills related to the work they will do or technology that they will use. In addition, students learn professional communication skills through presentations by corporate supervisors and through role playing. One teacher stated, “We actually bring in supervisors for Bridge and they do practice work with kids including mock interviews.” The teacher also mentioned that corporate supervisors participate in a training program that prepares them to mentor inner-city, high school youth.

A benefit to the CWSP noted by respondents includes the addition of caring adults into the lives of the students. As one dean noted, “We also have the advantage with the internship, they're just more caring adults in our students' lives.” Another teacher observed, “I think that, actually, the internship is an extra added layer of support and opportunity. It also means that they have more adults that care about them, and that check in on them too.” In addition, the CWSP gives students “another opportunity to show skills that maybe the classroom doesn't highlight as well.” From these circumstances that allow students to demonstrate professional skills, students

also have another opportunity to receive validation—which can include both self-validation and validation by the supervisor toward the student. As one participant noted, “students are affirmed for their CWSP successes also.” Moreover, a teacher suggested that students will say to themselves while working in a professional environment, “I can do this, I can see myself in this place.” This teacher speculated that, “[This] might increase the buy-in here at school.”

Exposure to professional environments is a benefit that students gain from participation in the CWSP. Participants observed that through the CWSP, students are “also getting a workplace culture” while gaining access to “networks of socio-economic success” that they can learn from and tap into during their college years and beyond. Respondents suggested that participation in the CWSP “really helps them [students] to define their professional career.” The assistant principal expounded upon this point,

When you ask our kids, what do you want to be when you're older? When they come in as 9th graders, especially Latino kids, the two [responses] you hear the most, you might be able to guess their answers: pediatrician, immigration attorney. Why? It's what they know. ...It's those two things—and some do go that route, but it's what they know. But then they get out into these other places [through the CWSP] and are exposed to jobs and careers. They need to know that there are many jobs and careers, and that [these jobs and careers] can be very good at supporting families ... and this is an important piece to a lot of our kids, it's very important to want to support their parents.

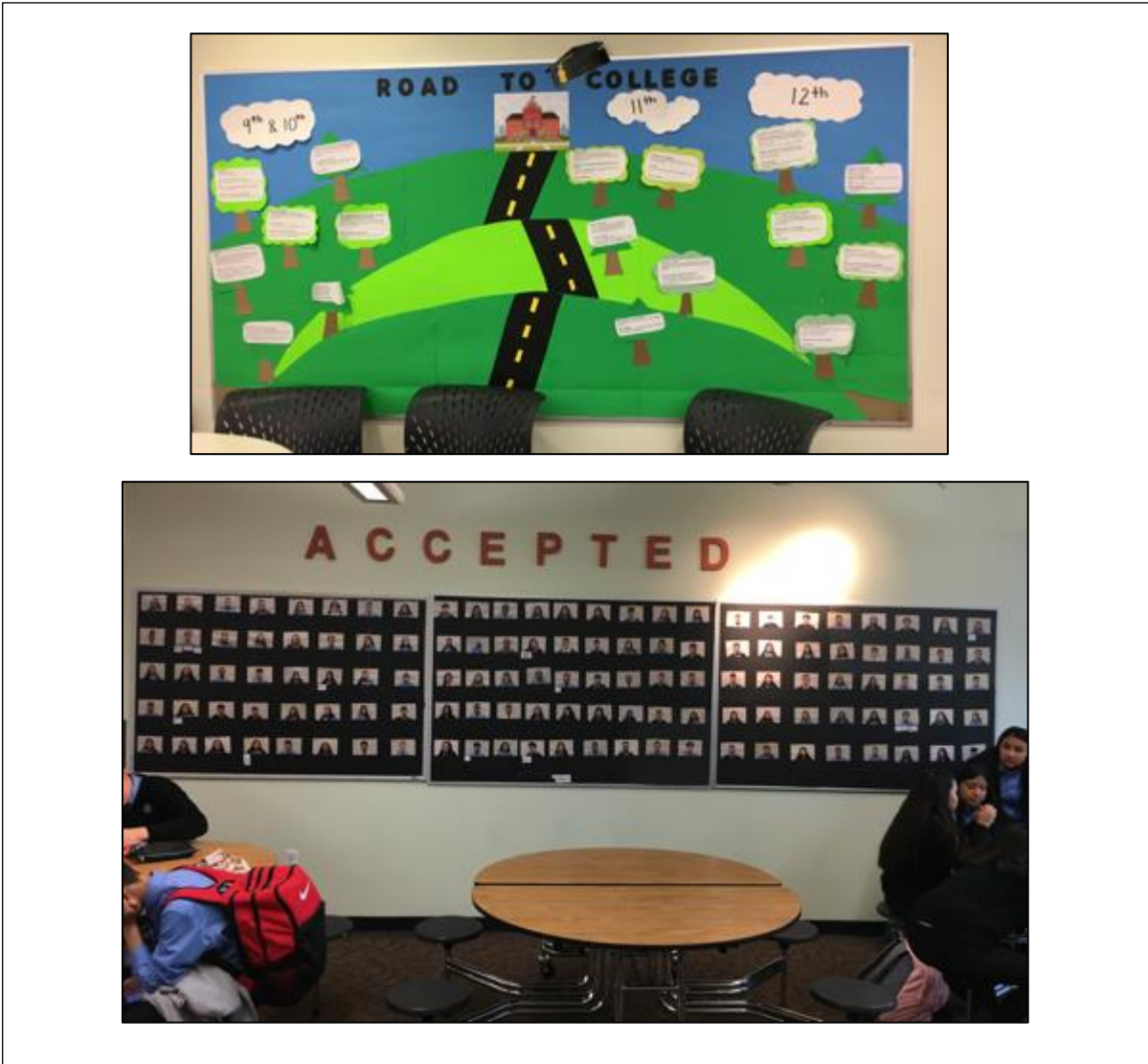
**Support practice: School-driven college process.** St. Benedict Catholic High School provides college-preparation assistance to all students and families. Faculty and staff have college planning nights for parents beginning freshmen year. During these evening workshops, parents are instructed about the college planning process and steps that need to be taken each

year of high school. These evenings serve as a glimpse for parents as to what is on the horizon. One respondent stated, “Many of our parents are limited by language and by time and economics that they cannot lead the college search, and so we really drive the entire process with the students.” FAFSA nights are scheduled in which parents come to the school to complete the FAFSA documentation with translators and college counselors on-hand to help. As one teacher mentioned, “Senior nights are where all Senior parents have to come in and fill out the FAFSA form. We have tons of volunteers to sit down with families, bilingual volunteers, to help make the application accessible to them.” The school takes Juniors to a college fair and arranges college visits for students and parents. The admissions coordinator shared a comment from a parent who exclaimed, “I’m glad they’re getting their support, because I would not know how to help my child because I didn’t go through that process. And by our school doing that, you know, they’re supporting my child and making sure that he or she is going to graduate from college.”

St. Benedict Catholic High School employs college counselors who work with graduates of the high school. These counselors help the new graduates navigate college life once they begin. This effort is intended to help the students stay in college and graduate. Because most of the graduates of St. Benedict’s are first generation college students, having counselors to guide them in dorm life, in navigating the financial aid and scholarship programs, and in understanding how to register for classes, even how to meet with an advisor, is a valuable resource for students. Respondents stated, “We also have two staff who work with our alumni who are in college in hopes that they will stay in college. We are still involved with our students even during the college years.”

A college-bound culture is promoted at St. Benedict’s, not only in the planning, parent nights, college visits, and college counselors, St. Benedict’s also has visual representations of the

college-bound culture. Figure 10 demonstrates the visual representations of the college-bound culture found throughout the school.



*Figure 10.* Photographs of signage displayed throughout the school that encourages a college-bound culture.

Finally, alumni are invited back to the school to work and/or to meet with students and share their experiences. One respondent commented on the value of alumni returning to the school by stating, “Current students see the returning alumni and think to themselves, ‘I want to

make it happen too.’ And being able to see that and point to people, they feel they are a part of something.”

### **Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices as well as the role of student validation within a Catholic high school that lead to on-time graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students. Participants in focus groups and interviews included faculty and staff members of St. Benedict Catholic High Schools in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Participants represented staff members, administrative positions, teachers of different subjects and grade levels, representatives of counseling services, and males and females. Respondents met on the campus of St. Benedict Catholic High School.

Data from the research yielded an overarching theme that was identified as the main reason for success among the Hispanic/Latino students at St. Benedict Catholic High School. That overarching theme was identified as *cura personalis* (care for the whole person). This overarching theme is consistent with Catholic teaching which states, “The school must begin from the principle that its educational programme is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person” (Garrone, 1977, para. 29).

Participant responses elicited secondary themes that assist in caring for the whole person. Those secondary themes included the pillars of *practical support structures* and *relationship building*. Finally, subcategories that uphold the pillars of support structures and relationship building were identified as *academic supports*, *cultural practices*, *spiritual supports*, *student validation*, and *college and career readiness supports*. Table 3 summarizes the overarching theme and its supports.

<sup>5</sup> Pseudonym for the school



Table 3

*Practices that Lead to On-Time Graduation of Hispanic/Latino Students*

**Overarching Theme**

*Cura personalis* (Care for the Whole Person)

**Secondary Themes**

- Practical Support Structures
- Relationship Building

**Subcategories of Support**

Academic	Cultural	Spiritual	Student Validation	College and Career Readiness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured Time During School Day</li> <li>• Tutoring Program</li> <li>• Standards-based Grading</li> <li>• Professional Development and/or Coaching of Faculty</li> <li>• High Academic Standards with Supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation of the Hispanic/Latino Culture</li> <li>• Spanish Language Use</li> <li>• Clubs, Classes, and Activities</li> <li>• Support Personnel Within School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Daily Examen</li> <li>• Love for One Another</li> <li>• Service</li> <li>• Shared Values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach to Discipline</li> <li>• Student Recognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Work Study Program</li> <li>• School-driven College Process</li> </ul>

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

### **Overview of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the potential role that student validation plays within the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices that lead to Hispanic/Latino ELL student academic achievement.

The researcher performed on-site observations, document analysis, as well as interviews and focus groups. Nineteen respondents participated in the study. All respondents met with the researcher at St. Benedict Catholic High School.<sup>6</sup> Focus groups and interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for themes. After numerous reviews of the transcripts and feedback from an independent advisor, one overarching theme was identified. This overarching theme was upheld by two secondary themes and five practical supports.

### **Research Questions**

In order to understand the role of student validation in successful graduation rates of Hispanic/Latino ELL students, this study explored the question, “What practices at a high performing, culturally diverse Catholic school do educators perceive are most essential in helping the Hispanic/Latino ELL student feel validated and graduate on time?” Secondary questions included the following:

1. What academic practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
2. What cultural practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?

<sup>6</sup> St. Benedict’s Catholic High School is a pseudonym.

3. What spiritual practices of this school do educators perceive are most beneficial in helping students graduate on time?
4. How does student validation intersect with the academic, cultural, and spiritual practices of this school?

## **Conclusions**

Attaining on-time graduation among the Hispanic/Latino ELL student population is a complicated process involving numerous factors. Hispanic/Latino ELL students are at risk for academic failure, and, according to the United States Department of Education, the State of Minnesota has ranked among the worst in the nation for Hispanic/Latino graduation rates (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Huerta, Tong, Irby, & Lara-Alecio, 2016; Lager, 2016). Despite these dismal statistics, Catholic schools have had a history of success with the Hispanic/Latino student population (DeFiore, 2006). St. Benedict Catholic High School is an example of this success. For nine consecutive years, St. Benedict Catholic High School has achieved a 100% graduation rate and a 100% acceptance rate to college or the military (St. Benedict's Catholic High School, 2019-2020).

The researcher wondered what role student validation plays in the attainment of academic success within the Hispanic/Latino ELL student population. Rendón's (1993) research demonstrated that validation practices led to students believing they could accomplish their goals. Previous research at Catholic high schools noted an increase in graduation rates and college acceptance rates when schools had a "college-going" culture which supported students and expressed the belief both collectively and individually that *all* students were capable of achieving the goals of graduation and college or military acceptance (Aldana, 2014; Malewitz & Pacheco, 2016).

Although respondents in this study mentioned the importance of student validation, the practice of validation emerged as a practical support rather than a theme. Every participant in the study mentioned the importance of caring for the whole person (*cura personalis*) as the main reason that students within their school achieve success. Respondents noted that this overarching theme was not simply a “buzz-word” or philosophy that is discussed. Rather, respondents stressed that *cura personalis* is achieved through the intentionally developed practical support structures that are in place within the school and the purposeful role of relationship building with which each faculty and staff member is tasked.

***Cura personalis* is the key to attaining success.** *Cura personalis* is the Latin phrase meaning *care for the whole person* which is consistent with Catholic teaching. According to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education’s (1977) *The Catholic School*, “The school must begin from the principle that its educational programme is intentionally directed to the growth of the whole person” (Garrone, 1977). Throughout the interviews and focus groups, all of the participants mentioned the theme of *cura personalis* as the reason that their Catholic school realizes success with students. *Cura personalis* includes the intentional commitment to providing practical support structures while forming relationships and building community.

Through participant responses, the researcher observed a crucial distinction between individual learning and individual needs. In caring for the whole person, St. Benedict’s Catholic High School focuses on the individual *needs* of each student. Although some students might require individualized learning programs, the faculty and staff of St. Benedict’s Catholic High School begin by looking at the *overall needs* of a student, rather than specific categories of help. One grade level dean explained that the starting point is to look at *all* of the needs of a student, needs that may include emotional, social, spiritual, familial, mental health, physical health,

academic, socioeconomic and more. Once the overall needs are identified, a comprehensive plan is put in place which can include the use of faculty, staff, home-school liaisons, tutors, social workers, spiritual directors, and more. It is this whole student approach that leads to the overall success of the Hispanic/Latino ELL students.

**Practical support structures are in place to support *cura personalis* (care for the whole person).** All of the respondents at St. Benedict’s Catholic High School identified *cura personalis* as a reason for student success. Practical support structures are in place in order to care for the whole student. The structures which emerged as practical supports included academic support, cultural practices, spiritual support, student validation, and college and career readiness practices. The first task of faculty, staff, and administrators was to focus on the needs of the whole student. Once those needs were identified, a comprehensive plan was put in place to meet the needs of the student.

**Intentional relationship building to support *cura personalis* (care for the whole person).** The secondary theme of relationship building emerged as both the intentional practice of caring for the whole person, as well as the fruit of doing so. Faculty and staff of the school were intentional about building relationships with students and one another. The focus on relationships led to a greater sense of belonging and community. Teachers at St. Benedict Catholic High School expressed a general belief that “education comes through relationships” and they explained that relationship building is a key part of their jobs. Faculty and staff at St. Benedict Catholic High School see caring for the whole person as their mission. In order to succeed at this mission, participants identified the need to build relationships with students and one another.

## **Implications**

Stakeholders have an interest in improving graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students. Current dropout rates across the nation can reach as high as 50% or greater in certain communities (MDE, 2018). High school dropouts are more at risk to be unemployed, in poor health, and in prison (Civic Enterprises, 2006). The number of Hispanic/Latino ELL students is growing quickly suggesting that this is a population of students in need of attention (Corpora, 2016; Dees, Lichon, & Roach, 2017; Elliott & Parks, 2018).

**Implications for practice.** Catholic schools have implemented marketing efforts to increase enrollment among Hispanic/Latino students (Corpora, 2016; Lichon & Dees, 2017). Knowing how to best serve this growing population of students will benefit the teachers and administrators of Catholic schools within the United States (NCEA, 2019). Catholic schools have seen higher levels of graduation rates and higher levels of college acceptance among Hispanic/Latino students than public schools have achieved. Yet, there are few who can explain the overall reason for this achievement. The findings from this study can give Catholic educators and administrators a possible explanation of past accomplishments, as well as suggested practices for continued success among the Hispanic/Latino ELL student population.

*Focus on the whole student.* Many fads, agendas, and initiatives come and go within the world of education. G.K. Chesterton noted that “public education can be comparatively narrow. [Yet], the mother dealing with her own daughters in her own home does literally have to deal with all sides of a single, human soul” (Chesterton, 1923, p.196). The discovery of the importance of focusing on the whole person (*cura personalis*) is a reminder to Catholic educators to keep the larger goal before their eyes. It can be easy to get lost in the details of programs, processes, and professional development. However, keeping the whole person in mind, while

having support structures and relationship building in place, appears to be a critical factor in helping Hispanic/Latino ELL students achieve success. Although qualitative research seeks understanding over generalizability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), all Catholic educators are called to educate the whole child (Garrone, 1977). To achieve this mandate, Catholic administrators should consider reviewing this overarching goal while identifying the practical structures and relationship building practices that they have in place to achieve the goal.

*Practical support structures.* Respondents articulated numerous times throughout the focus groups that the *cura personalis* approach at St. Benedict Catholic High School is not just a buzz-word. The intentional focus on the whole person directs every program and interaction at the school. This whole person approach is bolstered by carefully implemented support structures that serve as a “net” for the students, preventing anyone from falling through and not graduating.

The support structures that St. Benedict’s has in place are numerous and comprehensive. Each support structure works together with the others in an effort to care for the whole student and help him/her attain on-time graduation and acceptance into college or the military. Of note are the extended school calendar and the extended school day which allow St. Benedict Catholic School to provide necessary supports to students during school hours without disrupting students’ class schedules or removing them from class. It is also noteworthy that St. Benedict’s maintains Christian faith practices. Signage around the school, the daily Jesuit practice of the *examen*, religion classes, and a focus on service suggest that St. Benedict Catholic School has not abandoned their Catholic identity, which, research suggests, might be an important reason for their ongoing achievements.

The continued success of St. Benedict’s Catholic High School in graduating 100% of their Hispanic/Latino ELL students, and helping them attain college and/or military acceptance is

reason for other Catholic educators to review the support structures implemented at St. Benedict's and compare them to the support structures established at one's own school. Creating a checklist of options based upon this research can serve as a starting point as other Catholic high schools consider programs and plans to help their Hispanic/Latino students attain success, while creating a "safety net" that assures no student falls through the cracks.

It is important to recognize that all of the support structures at St. Benedict Catholic High School, and the people who lead the efforts, work together to achieve the greater goal of educating the whole person. Notably, at St. Benedict's, regular team meetings among faculty and staff members, grade level meetings, subject area meetings, and mentors assigned to each teacher, allow for communication to occur smoothly and regularly between all faculty and staff. K-12 Catholic educators and administrators should review their organizational chart and scheduled meetings to assure that all faculty and staff are able to work together with communication flowing freely.

Professional development within St. Benedict's is a collaborative effort that focuses on one initiative and goes deeply into that topic. The professional development process at St. Benedict's illustrates the collaboration of the faculty, the commitment to long-term improvement, and a sincere focus on the whole student and all of the necessary pieces that work together to achieve *cura personalis*. The success of this approach challenges Catholic schools to review their plan for professional development and look for ways to make improvements.

Research of Catholic schools revealed that those who have a "college-going" culture realize success in both high school graduation rates among their Hispanic/Latino ELL students as well as a high percentage of college or military acceptance rates among these graduates (Aldana, 2014; Thielman, 2012). St. Benedict Catholic High School achieves a college-bound culture



through the signage it displays around campus, through the college fairs and visits it arranges for students, through the help it provides students in completing college applications, and through the help it provides families in navigating the college process from start to finish. St. Benedict's assists graduates who are in college to help them remain in college. These practices could benefit Hispanic/Latino ELL students at all schools (both Catholic and public).

*Relationship building.* Respondents explained that the building of relationships between faculty, staff, students, and families is a purposeful practice undertaken by faculty and staff of the school. Participants acknowledged that students learn better when they feel loved, cared for, and safe. Faculty and staff intentionally strive to build positive relationships with each other, with students, and with families. Practices to build relationships can be found within the academic, cultural, spiritual, and college and career readiness support structures within the school. Student validation is intentionally practiced, in particular, through the positive approach to discipline employed by the faculty and staff which further enhances the relationship building that is fostered within the school. The examples of relationship building practices shared by respondents can serve other Catholic educators and administrators who strive to increase graduation rates while building a greater sense of community within their schools.

One consideration for Catholic educators is to review faculty and staff job descriptions and consider adding relationship building with co-workers, students, and families as an annual performance measure. Regularly, the principal of St. Benedict's reminded faculty and staff of this objective, and routinely was the practice of it reviewed. Moreover, because this is a priority that is intentionally practiced, school leadership carefully considers the number of faculty, staff, and volunteers that it employs to keep teacher expectations realistic and doable. St. Benedict's has creatively sought ways to increase the number of adults working with students (either as

employees or volunteers) through partnerships with Catholic Charities, local corporations, and diocesan parishes. Other Catholic educators could also consider these unique partnership opportunities to improve teacher-student ratios.

Secondly, Catholic education may benefit from an examination of the intentional student validation practices within schools. These practices include a school's approach to validation, discipline, and the use of signage displayed throughout the school. St. Benedict's employs a school-wide positive approach. Staff meetings begin with a discussion of the positive, in-class and out-of-class student validation is a regular practice, and student correction begins with a review of the positive. At St. Benedict's, re-training is incorporated. An intentional and regular practice of student validation is supported by Rendón's 1993 research, and is one that aligns with Catholic teaching which supports the dignity and value of each individual. A purposeful practice of student validation, coupled with a review of Catholic educational teaching, is recommended for all Catholic educators.

Communication modes and frequency between faculty and staff, faculty and students, and faculty and families are worth reviewing. Communication between faculty and staff at St. Benedict's is fostered both professionally through regular meetings and daily conversations as well as socially through Friday Happy Hour. Communication with students is encouraged at St. Benedict's through job performance reviews and a culture of community building within the school. Moreover, numerous personnel within the school are encouraged to reach out to students to ensure that the whole student is being cared for. These faculty and staff members include the principal and assistant principal, the deans, the teachers, social workers, the school chaplain(s), campus ministry personnel, corporate work study mentors, and coaches—all of whom can develop a unique and special relationship with the students. St. Benedict's performs regular

communication with families. Communication with parents includes regular updates on student progress, newsletters, and invitations to meetings and events. These communications occur in the families’ home language and through a communication tool (telephone call, text message, or e-mail) that families prefer. Catholic educators are encouraged to review the intentional communication practices within their schools and look for opportunities to improve communication between faculty, staff, students, and families. A summary of recommendations for K-12 Catholic educators can be found in Table 4.

Table 4  
*Summary of Recommendations for Catholic High School Educators*

<b>1. Examine one’s school plan for helping the whole student.</b>	
Review church documents including the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education’s (1977) <i>The Catholic School</i> and The Cardinal Newman Society’s Catholic Education Report (2015) <i>The Call to Teach: Expectations for the Catholic Educator in Magisterial Teaching</i> .	Comments:
Identify all of the support structures available for Hispanic/Latino students at one’s school and compare them to those identified at St. Benedict Catholic High School. Consider which supports are missing at one’s school and how they could be added.	Comments:
Consider the mission and vision statement of one’s school to determine if the whole student approach is an identified goal within the school.	Comments:
<b>2. Study one’s academic, cultural, spiritual, validation, and college readiness practices compared to those of St. Benedict Catholic High School.</b>	
Prepare a list of the support practices of one’s school. Compare that list to the supports offered at St. Benedict Catholic High School.	Comments:
Identify when the support practices occur at one’s school. Consider ways to offer all supports during the school day. St. Benedict’s has a longer school day and a longer calendar year. Consider if those practices would be of value to one’s own students.	Comments:
Determine if partnerships between one’s school and local Catholic organizations, schools, businesses, and parishes would help provide resources and opportunities for one’s students.	Comments:

Table 4 continued

*Summary of Recommendations for Catholic High School Educators*

<p>Prayerfully review one’s Catholic identity and how it is lived out within the school through regular spiritual practices and service opportunities. Consider if more should be done to live out one’s Catholic identity.</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Review the college support provided to Hispanic/Latino students and parents at one’s school compared with the support offered at St. Benedict Catholic High School. Can one’s school provide more guidance to students and parents, especially first-generation college students with non-English speaking parents?</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p><b>3. Review the relationship building practices within one’s school.</b></p>	
<p>Analyze one’s channels of communication between faculty and staff; faculty and students; and faculty, staff, and families. Is the current communication structure strengthening relationships with faculty, staff, students, and families? What modes and frequency of communication are employed, and is this current plan working well for all parties? Does the school communicate with families in a language that families can understand and a mode that families utilize?</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Consider faculty and staff job descriptions and the role that relationship building should play in performance measures.</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Review one’s discipline policy. Does the school strive to validate students while implementing safe practices? How are corrections handled within one’s school compared with the practices of St. Benedict Catholic High School? Consider making necessary changes that include validation, re-training, goal setting, and recognition for making gains.</p>	<p>Comments:</p>
<p>Examine one’s professional development program. Does the school offer professional development? If so, how does the school determine what type of professional development is offered? Is the determining process collaborative? Is the professional development specifically related to the practical support challenges and relationship building issues faced at one’s school? What improvements can be made?</p>	<p>Comments:</p>

**Recommendations for future research.** Research has noted that the reasons for the high level of Hispanic/Latino ELL high school dropouts are manifold (Aldana, 2016; Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010; Elliott & Parks, 2018; Valenzuela, Garcia, Romo, & Perez, 2012; Wilkins & Kuperminc, 2010; Zwiers, 2008). Although research has explored the academic and cultural barriers to graduation among this population, (Huerta, et al., 2016; Iyitoglu & Aydin, 2015; Nguyen, 2012; Tous, Tahriri, & Haghghi, 2015; Zweirs, 2008), few of these studies have been conducted with high school age students within Catholic schools. Little research has sought to uncover the role of spirituality and/or student validation, and their connection to academic outcomes among high school Hispanic/Latino students (Aldana, 2014; Drew, Cortt, & Bec, 2019). This study contributes voices to the body of research exploring Hispanic/Latino ELL student achievement within Catholic high schools.

This study also exposes the important “whole person” approach, and the need for more research in this area. Frey, Pedrotti, Edwards, and McDermott (2004) identified some of the challenging questions that arise when considering the *cura personalis* approach.

The goal of producing a whole person places a hefty mandate on Catholic educators.

What does a whole person look like? How does a whole person think? How can this objective be measured? (p. 480)

Other researchers concur, noting that Catholic schools claim to educate the whole person, and numerous families, including many underserved, urban families, desire a whole person approach to education (Manning, 2014; Palomino-Bach & Fisher, 2017). “Families in these urban contexts look toward Catholic high schools as offering the necessary holistic support and guidance needed to achieve academic, collegiate, and moral success and stability” (Palomino-Bach & Fisher, 2017, p. 208)). Yet, defining exactly what this means and how to accomplish it is more

challenging to articulate (Manning, 2014; Palomino-Bach & Fisher, 2017). In addition, comparing the whole student approach within Catholic schools who purposefully implement faith practices compared to Catholic schools who have abandoned their faith practices could uncover interesting results. Therefore, additional qualitative research should explore the whole student approach within Catholic schools.

Research may consider exploring the whole student approach within public schools. Comparing and contrasting student outcomes between Catholic schools who employ a whole student approach and public schools who also use a whole student approach may yield important data.

Additional qualitative research that listens to the voices of current Hispanic/Latino ELL students within Catholic high schools, Hispanic/Latino ELL Catholic high school graduates, and parents of Hispanic/Latino ELL Catholic high school students would also produce informative data. Finally, research that explores the whole student approach with other student populations including African American students, special needs students, males versus females, and others could provide important insights for all educators.

### **Concluding Comments**

Hispanic/Latino ELL students represent a rapidly growing student population. Catholic schools are marketing their schools to this population. Hispanic/Latino ELL students are among the most at-risk for academic failure nationwide. Minnesota has ranked at the bottom of the nation with regards to Hispanic/Latino graduation rates. However, in Minnesota, St. Benedict Catholic High School has achieved a 100% graduation rate and 100% college admittance rate for nine consecutive years. Listening to the voices of those who work at the school provides valuable insights into the complexities of the Hispanic/Latino ELL students' lives and educational needs.

Most notably, the whole student approach that provides support to students during the school day is a practice that other Catholic educators should consider. In addition, attention to communication practices within schools, the role of spirituality, and college and career supports that assist both parents and students should be examined. Finally, Catholic educators are challenged to find new pathways to success when roadblocks emerge. These pathways can include establishing partnerships with local Catholic organizations, local businesses, and diocesan parishes. Careful observers will discover important information that can promote positive change within schools, helping to lead to a greater level of Hispanic/Latino ELL success.

## References

- “Academic Year”. (2019-2020). *2019-2020: St. Benedict Catholic High School Academic Year Brochure*.
- Aldana, U. S. (2014). Moving beyond the college-preparatory high school model to a college-going culture in urban Catholic high schools. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, *17*(2), 131-153. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol17/iss2/9>
- Aldana, U. S. (2016). Brotherhood, social justice, and persistent deficit ideologies: Latino students’ experiences in an all-male Catholic high school. *Journal of Catholic Education*, *19*(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1902092016>.
- Alfaro, C., & Bartolomé, L. (2017). Preparing ideologically clear bilingual teachers honoring working-class non-standard language use in the bilingual education classroom. *Issues in Teacher Education*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1148247.pdf>
- Allen, W. R., Kimura-Walsh, E., & Griffin, K. A. (2009). *Towards a brighter tomorrow: College barriers, hopes and plans for Black, Latino/a, and Asian American students in California*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Arthur, J. (2015). The call to teach: Expectations for the Catholic educator in Magisterial teaching. *The Cardinal Newman Society’s Catholic Education Report*. Retrieved from <https://newmansociety.org/call-teach-expectations-catholic-educator-magisterial-teaching/>
- Arevalo, M., So, D., & McNaughton-Cassill, I. (2016). The role of collectivism among Latino American college students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, *15*(1), 173-179.

<sup>7</sup> St. Benedict Catholic High School is a pseudonym



- Behnke, A. O., Gonzalez, L. M., Cox, R. B. (2010). Latino students in new arrival states: Factors and services to prevent youth dropping out. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 32(3), 385-409.
- Bempechat, Kenny, Blustein, & Seltzer. (n.d.). Fostering positive youth development through work-based learning: The Cristo Rey Model. *National Society for the Study of Education*, 113(1), 232-252.
- Blackett, M. E. (2001). Recommendations for Catholic school administrators in facilitating special education services. *Journal of Catholic Education*. 4(4).  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.0404052013>.
- Bogdan, R. C., Bilken, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Bradford, A. (2017). Deductive reasoning vs. inductive reasoning. *LiveScience*. Retrieved from <https://www.livescience.com/21569-deduction-vs-induction.html>.
- Breen, R. L. (2006). A practical guide to focus group research. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 30(3), 463-475. doi: 10.1080/03098260600927575.
- Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA). (n.d.) *Frequently requested church statistics*. Retrieved from <https://cara.georgetown.edu/frequently-requested-church-statistics/>
- Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation. (2019). *What are learning outcomes?*  
 Retrieved from <https://teaching.utoronto.ca/teaching-support/course-design/developing-learning-outcomes/what-are-learning-outcomes/>
- Chesterton, G.K. (1923). *Fancies versus fads*. London, England: Methuen.
- Chesterton, G.K. (1933). *All I survey*. London, England: Methuen.

- Civic Enterprises. (2006). The silent epidemic: Perspectives of high school dropouts. Retrieved from <https://docs.gatesfoundation.org/documents/thesilentepidemic3-06final.pdf>
- Civic Enterprises. (2019). Building a grad nation: 2019 annual report. Retrieved from <https://www.civilllc.com/education>
- Contreras, F. (2016). Latino students in Catholic postsecondary institutions. *Journal of Catholic Education* 19(2), 81-110. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1902052016>.
- Copora, F.V. (2016). ¿Es su escuela nuestra escuela? Latino access to Catholic schools. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 19 (2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1902062016>.
- Corry, M., Dardick, W., & Stella, J. (2016, August). An examination of dropout rates for Hispanic or Latino students enrolled in online K-12 schools. *Educational Information Technology*, 22. doi: 10.1007/s10639-016-9530-9
- Corson, D. (1988). *Oral language across the curriculum*. Philadelphia, PA: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Corwin, Z. B., & Tracy, W. G. (2007). *Getting there and beyond. Building a culture of college-going in high schools*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED498731.pdf>
- Creswell, J.W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dees, J., Lichon, K., & Roach, C. (2017). *Our legacy and our future: A framework for serving English Learners in Catholic schools*. Arlington, VA: National Catholic Education Association.
- DeFiore, L. (2006, June 1). The state of special education in Catholic schools. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 9(4), 453-465. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.0904062013>

- Del Rio-Roberts, M. (2011). How I learned to conduct focus groups. *The Qualitative Report*, 16(1), 312-315.
- Drew, J., Kortt, M. A., & Bec, A. (2019). Administering faith: Does the religious institution administering a school influence educational achievement? *Journal of Sociology*, 55(2), 342-365
- Ekwoye, A. U., & DeLauer, V. (2019). Exploring individual and interpersonal level factors associated with academic success of college students at a women's, faith-based high institution. *Higher Education Studies*, 9(1), 86-99
- Elliott, J. D., & Parks, R. (2018). Latino students and degree attainment. *College and University*, 93(1), 10-18 retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.bethel.edu/docview/2032394844/fulltext/D33F8ECAD7CE46CFPQ/1?accountid=8593>
- Francis, D. J., Rivera, M., Lesaux, N., Kieffer, M., & Rivera, H. (2006). *Practical guidelines for the education of English language learners: Research-based recommendations for instruction and academic interventions*. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED517790.pdf>
- Frey, B. B., Pedrotti, J. T., Edwards, L. M., and McDermott, D. (2004). Cognitive spirituality and hope in Catholic high school students. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 7(4), 479-491.
- Gardner, H.E. (2006). *Multiple intelligences: New horizons in theory and practice*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

- Garrone, G. M. (1977). The Catholic school. *The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education*. Retrieved from [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc\\_con\\_ccatheduc\\_doc\\_19770319\\_catholic-school\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_19770319_catholic-school_en.html)
- Gleeson, J., & O'Neill, M. (2018). Student-teachers' perspectives on the purposes and characteristics of faith-based schools: An Australian view. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 40(1).
- Grasparil, T. A., & Hernandez, D. A. (2015). Predictors of English language learners' reading comprehension proficiency. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 5(1), 35-57. doi: 10.5590/JERAP.2015.05.1.03
- Graves, P. (2016). 7 tips to integrate English language learners into mainstream classrooms. *UTP High Schools*. Retrieved from <https://nceatalk.org/2016/10/7-tips-to-integrate-english-language-learners-into-mainstream-classrooms/>
- Green, R.L. (2017). *Practicing the art of leadership: A problem-based approach to implementing the professional standards for educational leaders*. New York, NY: Pearson.
- Gutierrez, K. D., & Rogoff, B. (2003). *Cultural ways of learning: Individual traits or repertoires of practice*. *Educational Researcher*, 32(5), 19-25.
- Heineke, A., & Neugebauer, S.R. (2018). The complexity of language and learning: Deconstructing teachers' conceptions of academic language. *Issues in Teacher Education*, 27(2) 73-89. Retrieved from <http://www.itejournal.org/index.html>
- Howard, T.C. (2010). *Why race and culture matters in schools: Closing the achievement gap in America's classrooms*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

- Huerta, M, Tong, F., Irby, B.J., & Lara-Alecio, R. (2016). Measuring and comparing academic language development and conceptual understanding via science notebooks. *The Journal of Educational Research, 109*(5), 503-517. doi:  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2014.992582>.
- Instituto Cervantes. (2017). *El español: Una lengua viva – Informe 2017*. Retrieved from  
[https://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/espanol\\_lengua\\_viva/pdf/espanol\\_lengua\\_viva\\_2017.pdf](https://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/espanol_lengua_viva/pdf/espanol_lengua_viva_2017.pdf)
- Jackson, C.J. & Taylor, G.R. (2007). *Demystifying research: A primer for novice researchers*. Rotterdam, Amsterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Iyitoglu, O., & Aydin, H. (2015). The relationship between multiple intelligence profiles and reading strategy use of successful English as a Foreign Language (EFL) readers. *South African Journal of Education, 35*(2), 1-11. doi: 10.15700/saje.v35n2a980.
- Kangas, S.E. (2017). “That’s where the rubber meets the road”: The intersection of special education and dual language education. *Teachers College Record, 119*(070306), 1-36.
- Kweldju, S. (2015). Neurobiology research findings: How the brain works during reading. *PASAA, 50*, (July-December), 125-141.
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2015). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Lager, W. (2016). “Minnesota’s graduation gap: Sources.” *MPR News Staff*. Retrieved from  
<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2016/03/07/graduation-gap-sources>
- Lichon, K., & Dees, J. (May 18, 2017). English learners in Catholic schools. *NCEATALK*. Retrieved from <https://nceatalk.org/2017/05/english-learners-in-catholic-schools/>.
- López, F. A. (2016). Culturally responsive pedagogies in Arizona and Latino students’ achievement. *Teachers College Record, 118*(5), 1-42.

- Malewitz, T., & Pacheco, B. (2016). Living solidarity: Helping students with learning differences develop dignity for all humanity. *Journal of Catholic Education*, 20(1), 324-332. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2001162016>.
- Manning, P. R. (2014). Forming the whole disciple: A guide to crafting a truly holistic Catholic religious education. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 17(2). Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/ce/vol17/iss2/5>
- Marzano, R.J. (2020). Tips from Dr. Marzano: A school leader's guide to standards-based grading. *Marzano Resources*. Retrieved from [https://www.marzanoresources.com/resources/tips/slgtsgbg\\_tips\\_archive#tip7](https://www.marzanoresources.com/resources/tips/slgtsgbg_tips_archive#tip7)
- Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam-Webster. (2019a). "Academic." Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/academic>
- Merriam-Webster. (2019b). "Cultural." Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cultural>
- Merriam-Webster. (2019c). "Spiritual." Merriam-Webster, Incorporated. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spiritual>
- Minnesota Department of Education. (2018). *English learner education in Minnesota*. Retrieved from <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/Search/index.htm?query=english+language+learner&searchbutton=Search&v%3Asources=mn-mde-live&qp=mn-mde-live>

- Minnesota Department of Education. (2018). Report card. Retrieved from [http://rc.education.state.mn.us/#demographics/orgId--30001000000\\_\\_groupType--district\\_\\_p--5](http://rc.education.state.mn.us/#demographics/orgId--30001000000__groupType--district__p--5)
- National Catholic Education Association. (2019). *United States Catholic elementary and secondary schools 2018-2019: Annual statistical report on schools, enrollment, and staffing*. Retrieved from [https://www.ncea.org/ncea/proclaim/catholic\\_school\\_data/catholic\\_school\\_data.aspx](https://www.ncea.org/ncea/proclaim/catholic_school_data/catholic_school_data.aspx)
- National Reading Panel. (n.d.). Retrieved from [http://www.learninglandscape.com/National\\_Reading\\_Panel\\_Reading\\_Instruction\\_FAQ.pdf](http://www.learninglandscape.com/National_Reading_Panel_Reading_Instruction_FAQ.pdf)
- Notre Dame Task Force. (2009). *To nurture the soul of a nation: Latino families, Catholic schools, and educational opportunity*. Retrieved from <https://ace.nd.edu/catholic-school-advantage/task-force-final-report>.
- Nguyen, H.T. (2012, Spring). Innovative practices: General education and special education teachers collaborate to support English language learners with learning disabilities. *Issues in Teacher Education* 21(1), 127-152.
- Oakes, J. (2003). *Critical conditions for equity and diversity in college access: Information policy and monitoring results*. Retrieved from University of California/ACCORD <https://ucaccord.gseis.ucla.edu/publications/pdf/criticalconditions.pdf>
- Orcher, L.T. (2014). *Conducting research: Social and behavioral science methods*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Glendale, CA: Pyrczak Publishing.

- Palomino-Bach, M., & Fisher, J. (2017). The case for a socio-cultural approach to literacy and student support services. *Journal of Catholic Education, 20*(2). Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.2002102017>
- Park, Y., & Thomas, R. (2012). Educating English-language learners with special needs: Beyond cultural and linguistic considerations. *Journal of Education and Practice, 3*(9), 52-58.
- Patten, M. L. (2014). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials*. (9<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Prater, S., Lichon, K., Dees, J.& Roach, C. (2018). *Serving English learners: A diocesan handbook for K-12*. Arlington, VA: National Catholic Education Association.
- Pope Paul VI. (1965). Declaration on Christian education. *Gravissimum Educationis*. Retrieved from [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651028\\_gravissimum-educationis\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html)
- Pudewa, A. (2013a). On listening. *Institute for Excellence in Writing*. Podcast.
- Pudewa, A. (2013b). On speaking. *Institute for Excellence in Writing*. Podcast.
- Reid, G., Strnadova, I., & Cumming, T. (2013). Expanding horizons for students with dyslexia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: universal design and mobile technology. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 13*(3), 175-181. Doi: 10.1111/1471-3802.12013.
- Rendón, L.I. (1993). Validating culturally diverse students: Toward a new model of learning and student development. *National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment*. University Park, PA. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED371672.pdf>





- Roderick, M., Kelley-Kemple, T., Johnson, D. W., & Beechum, N. W. (2014). Chicago's ninth-grade focus triggers climb in high school graduation rates. *The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research*. Retrieved from <https://uei.uchicago.edu/news/article/chicagos-focus-ninth-grade-track-triggers-climb-high-school-graduation-rates>
- Scanlan, M., & Zehrbach, G. (2010). Improving bilingual service delivery in Catholic schools through two-way immersion. *Marquette University: Education Faculty Research Publication, 14*(1), 67-93.
- Schachter, R. (2013). Reclaiming the future for students at risk: New approaches to dropout prevention. Retrieved from <https://web-b-ebshost.com.ezproxy.bethel.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=8fec8790-66ac-4837-9509-f72fd121185c%40sessionmgr103>
- Setari, A. P., & Setari, R. R. (2016). Trends in Catholic school minority enrollment and higher education entrance over the recession. *Journal of Catholic Education, 19*(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.15365/joce.1903022016>
- Snow, C. E. (2018). Simple and not-so-simple views of reading. *Remedial and Special Education, 39*(5) 313-316 doi: 10.1177/0741932518770288
- St. Benedict Catholic High Schools. (2019, July). Student demographics. *2018-2019: St. Benedict High School Brochure*. Retrieved from <https://4.files.edl.io/af36/11/13/18/192327-31dd2242-cf19-4af9-a0bd-95c9cf75856e.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> St. Benedict Catholic High School is a pseudonym

- Stewart, M. A., Walker, K., & Revelle, C. (2018). Learning from students: What, why, and how adolescent English learners want to read and write. *Texas Journal of Literacy Education*, 6(1) 23-40. Retrieved from <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.bethel.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=8&sid=8141bb54-7b76-42ae-87f7-496950fd985d%40sessionmgr4010&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#AN=EJ1183970&db=eric>
- Thielman, J. (2012). School turnaround: Cristo Rey Boston high school case study. *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice*, 16(1), 115-147.
- Tous, M.D., Tahriri, A., & Haghghi, S. (2015). The effect of instructing critical thinking through debate on male and female EFL learners' reading comprehension. *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 15(4), 21-40. doi: 10.14434/josotl.v15i4.13191.
- Tran, Y. K. (2015, March 16). Professional development and teacher efficacy: Contexts of what, when, and how in serving ELLs. *Multicultural Education Review*, 6(2), 81-116. doi: 10.1080/2005615X.2014.11102913
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (2002). *Welcome and justice to parishioners with disabilities: A framework for access and inclusion*. Washington, DC: Author
- United States Department of Health and Human Services. (1979). The Belmont Report. Retrieved from <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html>
- Virtus. (2019). Virtus online. *A Program and Service of the National Catholic Risk Retention Group, Inc*. Retrieved from <https://www.virtusonline.org/virtus/productsandservices.cfm#training>

- Walker Tileston, D., & Darling, S.K. (2008). *Why culture counts: Teaching children of poverty*.  
Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Wilkins, N. J., & Kuperminc, G. P. (2010). Why try? Achievement motivation and perceived  
academic climate among Latino youth. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 30(2). Doi:  
10.1177/02724316093333303.
- Willens, M. (2013). Ninth grade: The most important year in high school. *The Atlantic*.  
Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2013/11/ninth-grade-the-most-important-year-in-high-school/281056/>
- Zimmerman, L. W. (2008, August-October). Teaching bilingual students with special needs: A  
teacher training issue. *i-manager's Journal on Educational Psychology*, 2(2) 21-25.
- Zwiers, J. (2008). *Building academic language: Essential practices for content classrooms*.  
Newark, DE: Jossey-Bass.

Appendix A: CITI Certification of Completion



Completion Date: 03-Jan-2019  
Expiration Date: 02-Jan-2021  
Record ID: 29876641

This is to certify that:


**Pamela Patnode**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

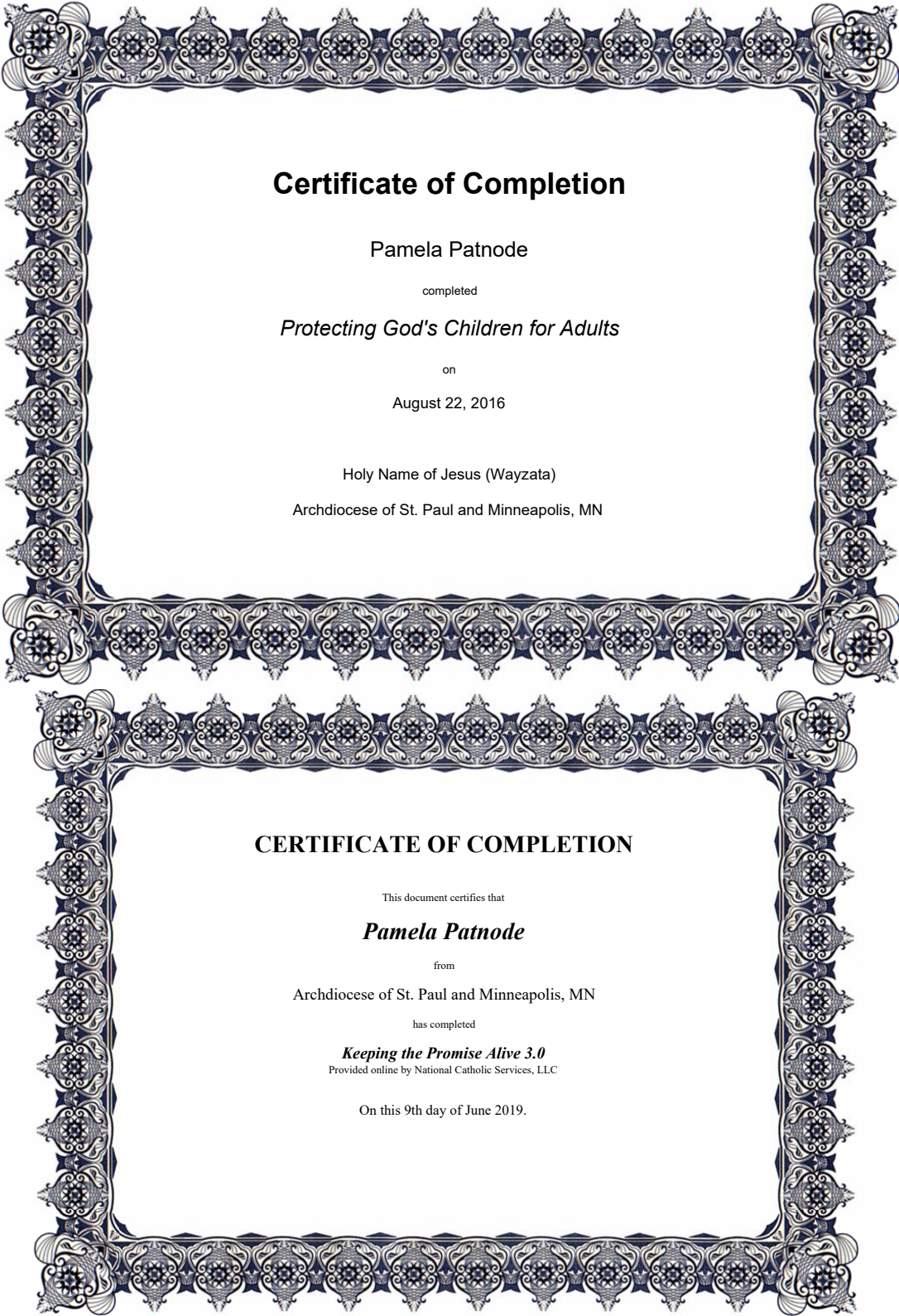
**Doctoral students - Basic/Refresher** (Curriculum Group)  
**Doctoral students - Basic/Refresher** (Course Learner Group)  
**1 - Basic Course** (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

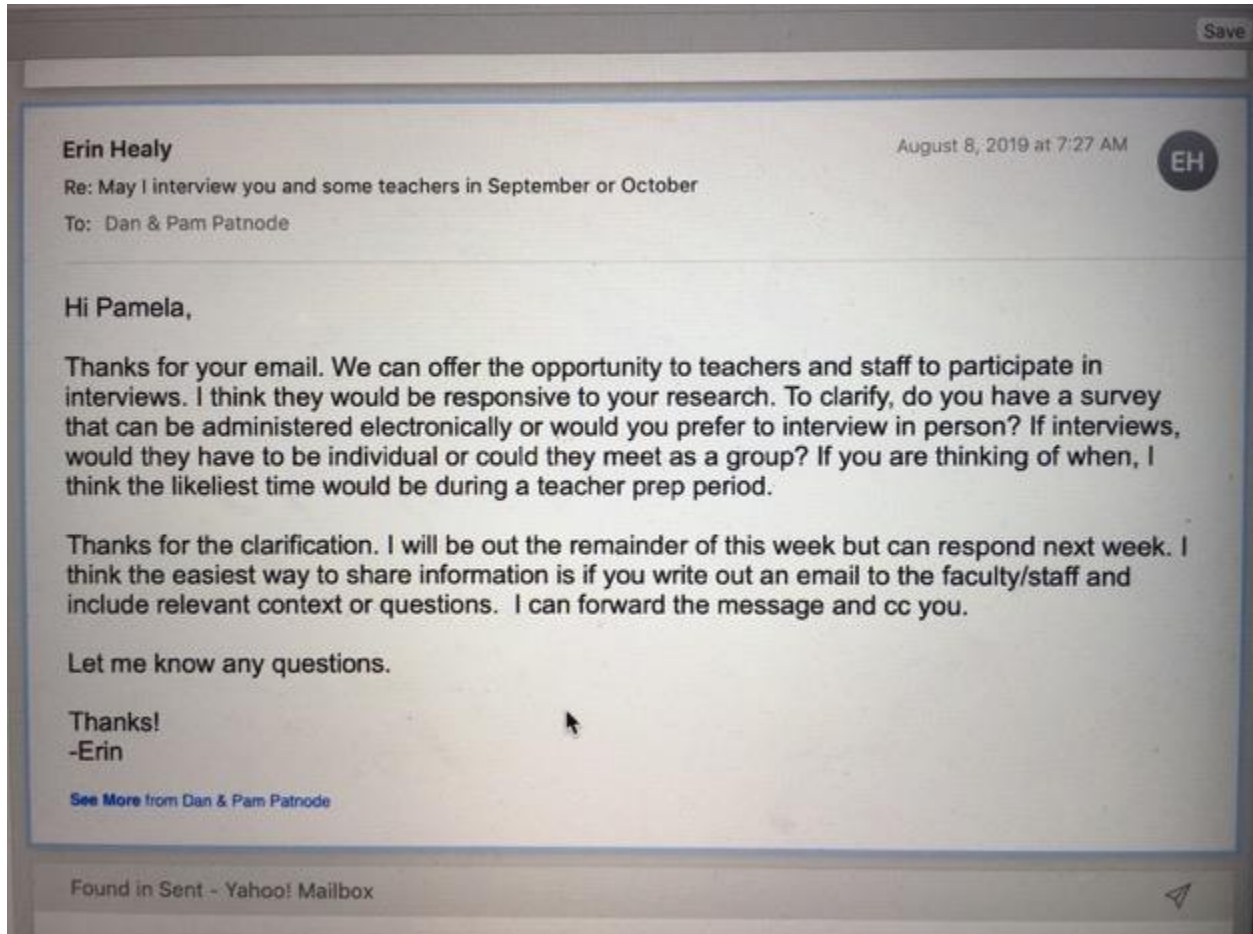
**Bethel University**



Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w02a6fd4e-f233-466f-a2a6-41f7423ff4b7-29876641](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w02a6fd4e-f233-466f-a2a6-41f7423ff4b7-29876641)



Appendix C: E-mail Letter of Permission for Access to Potential Respondents



## Appendix D: E-mail Letter Requesting Participation in the Study

Hello! My name is Pamela Patnode. I am a doctoral student at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. I am also an educator at a Catholic high school in the Twin Cities. I would like to invite you to participate in a study about on-time graduation among Hispanic/Latino ELL students.

You were selected to participate in this study because of the remarkable and continued success your school has demonstrated in achieving on-time graduation among your students. In addition, your experience places you in a unique position to share valuable information about Hispanic/Latino students and the role of Catholic education in their graduation success. Learning from you could help other Catholic schools working with Hispanic/Latino students.

If you are willing to participate in this study, we will schedule a time that is convenient for you to meet at St. Benedict's High School<sup>9</sup> as part of a focus group with other teachers from your school. The focus group should take approximately one hour. Focus groups will be digitally recorded for transcription purposes, and you will receive a copy of the transcription that you can check for accuracy.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. If you do participate in the study, you will receive a \$20 Target gift card. You will receive the gift card even if you choose to withdraw from answering some of the questions. Likewise, declining to participate in the study or choosing to withdraw will not affect your relationship with Bethel University.

Please be assured of the high value placed on confidentiality in this study. All participant names and identifiers will be deleted from transcripts. In addition, transcripts will be stored in a password protected computer to which only I have access. No participants will be identifiable in any written report or publication.

If you agree to participate, I will send you an informed consent letter to sign, and we will schedule a time for the focus group. Please reply to this e-mail to let me know if you are willing to participate. I appreciate your consideration!

Sincerely,

***Pamela Patnode***

Thepatnodes@yahoo.com

<sup>9</sup> This is a pseudonym for the school

## Appendix E: Informed Consent Letter

### CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH WITH HUMANS

You are invited to participate in a study about the role of student validation in Catholic high schools and Hispanic/Latino ELL graduation rates. You were selected to participate in this study because of the success your Catholic high school has demonstrated in achieving on-time graduation among your students.

This research is being conducted by Pamela Patnode, a Catholic high school educator and a doctoral student at Bethel University in Minnesota. The research is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. A \$20 Target gift card incentive for participation is being offered with this study.

If you are willing to participate in this study, I will contact you to schedule a time that is convenient for you to meet at St. Benedict's Catholic school.<sup>10</sup> The focus group should take an hour and will be recorded for transcription purposes. I will share a copy of the transcription with you so that you can check it for accuracy.

There are no anticipated discomforts related to participation in this study other than the possible discomforts that may be associated with being recorded during an interview. All identifiable information will be withheld and there are no risks expected. Possible benefits to participation include the receipt of the gift card and the knowledge that, by sharing your experience, you may be helping other Catholic educators better serve the Hispanic/Latino ELL population.

Any identifiable information will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. All participant names and identifiers will be deleted from transcripts. In addition, transcripts will be stored in a password protected computer to which only I have access. No participants will be identifiable in any written report or publication, only aggregate information will be presented.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw at any time. Your decision to participate in the study will not affect your relationship with me or with Bethel University. Your decision to withdraw from the study at any time will not affect these relationships.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights

<sup>10</sup> This is a pseudonym for the school



or wish to report a research-related injury, please call Pamela Patnode (612) 751-7200 or my Bethel faculty advisor, Dr. Tracy Reimer (651) 635-8502. You will be offered a form of this copy to keep.

---

You are deciding whether or not to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without penalty, even after signing this form.

---

Signature

---

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

## Appendix F: Focus Group Questions

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,  
(Insert name here)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of Hispanic/Latino ELL students who attend a Catholic high school and graduate on-time. During the one-hour focus group, I will be asking a series of questions. In order to allow you to review the questions ahead of time, I am sending them to you in this e-mail.

If you have any questions prior to our meeting, please don't hesitate to e-mail me or call. Again, thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

### *Interview Questions*

---

1. Tell me a little bit about your experience teaching Hispanic/Latino ELL students at St. Benedict Catholic High School.<sup>11</sup>
2. Nationally and here in the Twin Cities, Hispanic/Latino ELL students have a low on-time graduation rate. Yet, St. Benedict's has a 100% graduation rate. Why do you think that is?
3. Are there academic practices of this school that lead to high on-time graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino students? If so, please describe those practices.

*Academic practices* are defined as those actions that relate to the attainment of learning outcomes among students (Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation, 2019; Merriam-Webster, 2019).

4. Are there cultural practices of this school that lead to on-time graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students? If so, please describe them.

*Cultural practices* are defined as those actions that relate to the habits, traditions, and social interactions of a particular group of students (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

5. Are there spiritual practices of this school that lead to on-time graduation rates among Hispanic/Latino ELL students? If so, please describe them.

<sup>11</sup> This is a pseudonym for the school

*Spiritual practices*, in this study, are defined as those actions that relate to the Catholic faith and its expressions (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

6. Research has found that affirming and supporting students both in and out of class leads to greater academic and interpersonal growth. Is this happening at St. Benedict's? If so, how do educators at St. Benedict Catholic High School validate students? Does validation occur through academic, cultural, and spiritual practices? If so, how?

*Student validation* is defined as enabling, confirming, and supporting students both in- and out-of-class leading to academic and interpersonal growth (Rendón, 1993).

7. Are there other practices that we have not discussed but are important to on-time student graduation?

8. Is there anything that you would like to add that I have not asked?

Appendix G: Codes Used by Researcher and Analyst

**Overarching theme**

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, 100% of the participants mentioned the Jesuit Ignatian theme of “*cura personalis*” as the reason that their Catholic school realizes success with their students. *Cura personalis* means “care for the whole person”. *Cura personalis* is upheld through two subthemes (practical support structures and relationship building), which are supported by five subcategories.

---

**Secondary Themes**

- Support structures
- Relationship Building

---

**Subcategories of Support**

Academic	Cultural	Spiritual	Student Validation	College and Career Readiness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured Time During School Day</li> <li>• Tutoring Program</li> <li>• Standards-based Grading</li> <li>• Professional Development and/or Coaching of Faculty</li> <li>• High Academic Standards with Supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validation of the Hispanic/Latino Culture</li> <li>• Spanish Language Use</li> <li>• Clubs, Classes, and Activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Daily Examen</li> <li>• Love for One Another</li> <li>• Service</li> <li>• Shared Values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approach to Discipline</li> <li>• Student Recognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corporate Work Study Program</li> <li>• School-driven College Process</li> <li>• Support Personnel Within School</li> </ul>

Appendix H: The Spiritual Practice of the Daily *Examen*

Student's notes (front side and back side) used for her participation in the daily *examen*. This student led the *examen* and mentioned her gratefulness to God for the community and acceptance found at her school. The name of the school and student were removed from the document to protect confidentiality.

**Guide Sheet for Leading the Examen: OPTION ONE**

Please complete and return to \_\_\_\_\_ 2 days before your scheduled Examen.

- Greeting**
  - Good afternoon.
  - Good afternoon, name of school
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Intro**

Names crossed out for confidentiality We are

  - This is \_\_\_\_\_ for confidentiality \_\_\_\_\_ I am going to lead you in the Examen today. Please compose yourselves for prayer. (count to 10)
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Call to Prayer:**

**Let us remember that we are in the Holy Presence of God.** (count to 10)  
**Ad majorem.....Dei gloriam.**  
**We study, we work, we play.....for the greater glory of God.**
- Pause (count to 5)**
- Topic: Community**

What experience or understanding of God do you want to share? Choose a quote, a story, a poem, a scripture verse to center your reflection. This should only be 75-100 words.
- Silent Reflection**
  - Take a moment to silently reflect on why you came to name of school?  
Question to ponder: where do you see yourself
  - Pause (90-120 seconds) getting more involved here (15)  
at name of school?
- Closing**
  - Glory be to the Father, to Jesus the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.....**as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.
  - Scripture verse:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Amen? Amen.**
  - Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.** Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Have a good day students!

Appendix H: The Spiritual Practice of the Daily *Examen* (continued)

The topic for today is Community. One reason we love (school name) is because it brings people together. <sup>For example,</sup> Even though you <sup>just</sup> met someone ~~four months ago~~ you are able to call them your best friend. (school name) lets you come without the worry of being perfect Christian. Not. You don't have to have your faith figured out, everyone is loved (school name) is a community that welcomes everyone, no matter your religion, race or where you come from. We love this community because you don't have to worry about the way you look, the way you dress or anybody judging you based on the color of your skin. No matter who you are (school name) welcomes you. And we thank God for it

Appendix I: Permission to Use Copyrighted Graphic

December 29, 2019

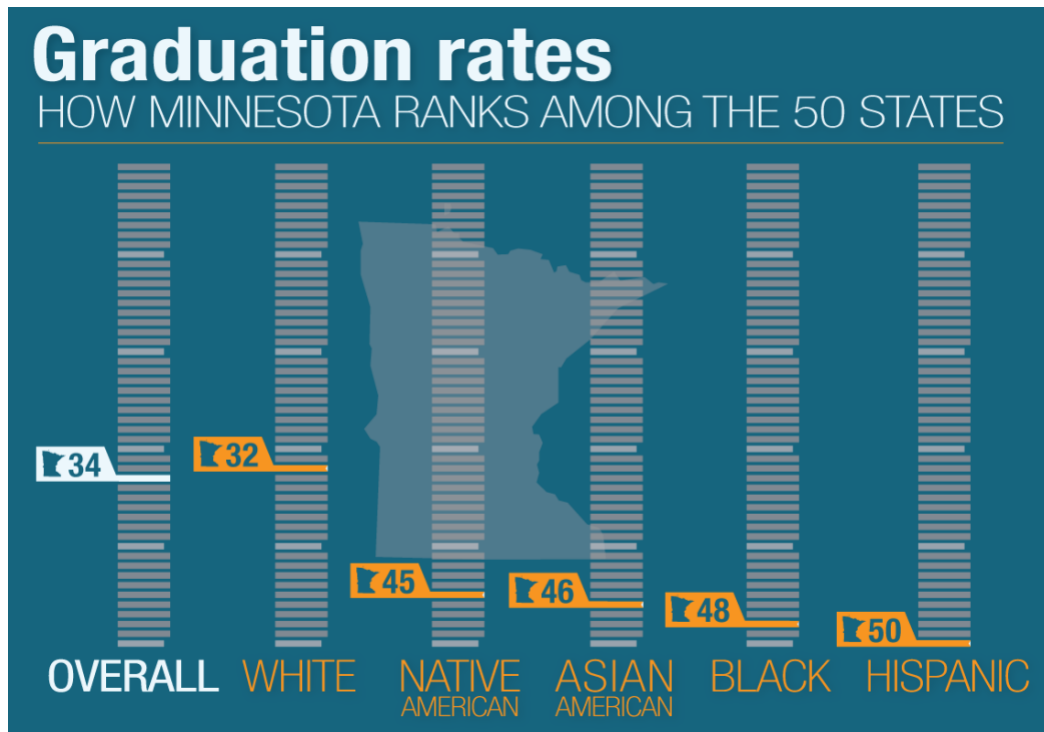
Ms. Patnode:

Thank you for your reply. As you have accepted terms and conditions, permission is granted for the use of the below described graphic.

Attached is the best copy we have available.

Best regards,  
Rocky Rothrock  
Senior Paralegal  
Minnesota Public Radio|American Public Media  
Southern California Public Radio  
480 Cedar Street  
St. Paul, MN 55101  
651.290.1199 fax 651.290.1188

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE: This e-mail transmission and any attachments hereto may contain confidential information that is legally privileged. If you are not the intended recipient, any disclosure, copying, distribution or use of any of the information contained in or attached to this transmission is strictly prohibited. If you have received this transmission in error, please immediately notify the sender and destroy the transmission and its attachments without reading or saving in any manner. Thank you.



Appendix J: Samples of Researcher Memos

Page 4 of handwritten notes

Skills in curriculum

Religion = no writing assignment

until writing assignment skills  
have been taught  
uniform language

Schedule allows for students to  
meet the standards = 9th hour.

Standards completion day = only kids  
who need ~~student~~

Saturday school for 12th graders  
who are falling behind

Summer school

Academic dean for each grade

meets w/students and meets

w/ teachers weekly

Built in time in the regular  
school day



## Contracts

each student case by case is  
more helpful than a blanket  
black and white

Re-teaching skills

Positive affirmation

Set realistic goals to move in the  
right direction

Game of gotcha = counter-productive

Validate their culture - learn

English but don't ~~lose~~<sup>lose</sup> your  
own language

Live in both w

More adults in our students' lives

Gives them opp'ty to show skills