

CAREER AND COLLEGE READINESS:  
WHAT IS THE COMMUNITY'S ROLE IN RURAL AREAS?

by

LORIANNE MARIE ELLIS

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Lorianne Marie Ellis

Title: Career and College Readiness: What Is the Community's Role in Rural Areas?

This dissertation has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in the Department of Educational Methodology, Policy, and Leadership by:

David Conley, Ph.D.	Chairperson
Joanna Smith, Ph.D.	Core Member
Laura Lien, Ph.D.	Core Member
Kent McIntosh, Ph.D.	Institutional Representative

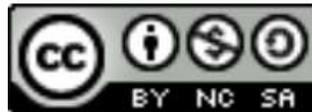
and

Sara Hodges	Interim Vice Provost & Dean of the Graduate School
-------------	--

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2018

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## DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Lorianne Marie Ellis

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Title: Career and College Readiness: What Is the Community's Role in Rural Areas?

Historically, school counselors have been the primary facilitators in supporting the career and college transition process for students, but many school counselors do not have the knowledge, resources, or materials to support students in this transition (Belasco, 2013). One way to help support career and college readiness is to develop comprehensive career and college readiness plans that involve more stakeholders than just the counselor and engage the community in supporting students to define and prepare for their paths for after high school (Alleman & Holly, 2013). This convergent parallel mixed methods study investigated what educators, students, and community partners in rural Oregon think is important to include in a career and college readiness plan that supports all students. I used Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological Model of Human Development to inform my data collection activities, casting a wide net to identify the stakeholder groups that have a potential impact on supporting students in their pursuit of a career or college education beyond high school. The qualitative data came from interviews with five Douglas County high school career and college readiness teams ( $n=8$  participants), three student focus groups ( $n=24$ ), and two partner meetings ( $n=15$ ). The quantitative data was gathered through a career and college readiness survey administered to the staff and faculty at 14 Douglas County high schools ( $n=74$

respondents). I used Farrell & Coburn's (2016) Absorptive Capacity Theory as the lens through which to analyze the data, coding for the theory's constructs around how prior knowledge, communication pathways, strategic knowledge leadership, and resources for partnering can be shared and leveraged between high schools and external partners.

Findings from this study provide lessons learned about what should be included in a rural high schools' career and college readiness plan that will help rural communities better support students in their transitions beyond high school.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Lorianne Marie Ellis

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene  
Northwest Christian University, Eugene, Oregon

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Doctor of Education, Educational Methodology, Policy, and Leadership, 2018,  
University of Oregon  
Master of Business Administration, 2007, Northwest Christian University  
Bachelor of Arts, English and Business, 1997, University of Oregon

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Career and College Readiness  
Education Policy and Leadership  
Equity and Inclusion  
Community Partnerships  
Rural Education

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Career and College Readiness Specialist, Higher Education Coordinating  
Commission, 2016 – current

ASPIRE and Outreach Administrator, Office of Student Access and Completion,  
2007 – 2016

AmeriCorps Supervisor, Office of Student Access and Completion, 2004 – 2007

### PUBLICATIONS:

Ellis, L. (2007). *The organizational culture of ASPIRE and its effect on helping students prepare for life beyond high school* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from PRIMO. (814611325527)

### PRESENTATIONS:

*Poster - Career and College Readiness: What is the community's role in rural areas.* University of Oregon Graduate School's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Student Research Forum, 2018

*An examination of Oregon initiatives focused on improving career and college readiness.* Oregon Mentoring Symposium, 2017

*Coming Together Through the C3: Career, College, Collaborative,* Oregon Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, 2017

*New College and Career Readiness Action Group,* Student Success Conference, 2016

*Empowering Educators and Counselors in Career and College Readiness.* Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016

*C3: Career, College, Collaborative,* Reach Higher Summer Summit, 2016

*The implementation and evaluation of Oregon's FAFSA Plus+ Program,* White House National Reach Higher, 2015

*AmeriCorps Members Make a Difference!* AmeriCorps 50 Year Celebration, 2014

*Career and College Readiness through Collaboration,* OrCAN Conference, 2013

*Paving the way to 40-40-20,* Lane County's Path to 40-40-20, 2012

*Sharing Oregon's Best Practices for a Successful Program,* National College Goal Oregon, Annually 2010-2013

*Funding College through Grants, Scholarships, and 529 Plans,* in Oregon, Annually 2011-2016

*Finding Funds for Oregon Students,* Lane Community College, annually 2007-2015

*Helping Foster Youth Search, Apply, Compete, and Enroll in College,* Foster Youth Education Convening, annually 2007-2013

*Welcome and What's New,* ASPIRE Fall Conference, in Oregon, annually 2004-2016

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my younger self who knew from a very young age that I wanted to be just like the Tootsie Roll professor owl. His persona complete with glasses, mortarboard, and pompous, but intelligent tone of voice caught my attention right away. It wasn't about how many licks it would take to get to the center of the Tootsie Roll pop; it was how he **confidently** knew the answer to the question no one else could answer. He must have been an Ellis!

There was a girl from Turkey  
Who really was quite perky  
She liked to attend school  
Which was very cool  
Just call me Dr. she said **sternly**

*-Rich Ellis*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	6
Search Procedures.....	7
Results.....	9
Type of Research Design.....	9
Subjects.....	11
Settings.....	12
Measures and Instruments.....	13
Analyses and Results.....	14
Recommendations.....	16
Summary.....	17
III. METHODS.....	20
Action Research.....	20
Theoretical Frameworks.....	21
Ecological Model of Human Development.....	21
Absorptive Capacity Theory.....	23
Research Design.....	25
Qualitative Portion of the Study.....	26
Quantitative Portion of the Study.....	27
Units of Analysis.....	27
Time Aspect.....	28
Study Procedures.....	28

Chapter	Page
High Schools.....	28
Selection Process .....	29
Instruments and Data Collection.....	30
Instruments.....	30
Career and College Readiness Survey .....	34
Interviews.....	35
Focus Groups .....	37
Data Collection Procedures.....	38
Partner Meetings .....	38
Initial Email .....	38
Career and College Readiness Survey .....	38
Interviews.....	39
Focus Groups .....	39
Data Analysis and Interpretation .....	40
Qualitative Data .....	40
Quantitative Data .....	44
IV. FINDINGS.....	45
Profile of Participants .....	46
Key Themes from the Data .....	50
Infrastructure.....	51
Time .....	52
Funding and Transportation.....	53

Chapter	Page
Culture.....	54
Staffing.....	55
Lack of Dedicated CCR Staff.....	55
Teacher Mindset and Accountability.....	56
Inconsistent Staffing and Professional Development.....	56
Curriculum.....	58
Career and College Readiness Access.....	60
Career and College Readiness Activities.....	60
Classroom Activities.....	60
Episodic Activities.....	61
College.....	61
Accelerated Learning/Dual Credit.....	62
Career Services.....	62
Career and College Options.....	63
Career and College Access Programs.....	65
Tracking Tools and Using Data.....	67
Career Information System.....	69
Education Plan and Profile.....	69
Students and Families.....	70
Students Not Being Served Through Career and College Readiness Plans.....	70
Relationships with Staff.....	71
Attitude.....	71

Chapter	Page
Family Influence .....	73
Family Culture and Attitude .....	73
Communication with Students and Families .....	74
Partnerships .....	74
Interactions Between School and Partners.....	75
Qualities of External Partners .....	75
V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS .....	77
Summary of Findings.....	77
RQ1: What do educators and students in rural Oregon think is important to include when developing and supporting a career and college readiness plan? .....	77
RQ1a: What services, activities, and work practices are utilized in CCR plans in rural Oregon? .....	78
RQ1b: What types of positions and/or external partners are important to include when developing a CCR plan in rural Oregon? .....	79
RQ1c: What resources, routines, and tools have played a critical role in the work and/or development of the existing CCR plan at a high school in rural Oregon? .....	80
Contributions to Literature.....	81
Validity.....	82
Generalizability.....	82
Researcher Bias.....	83
Response Bias .....	83
Triangulation.....	84
Implications.....	80

Chapter	Page
Implications for Future Research.....	84
Implications for Practice.....	85
Create Systemic Approaches in Career and College Readiness Plans .....	85
Foster Personal Relationships.....	86
Increase Communications with Families .....	87
Build Community Partnerships.....	87
Implications for Policy.....	88
New Policy Implications.....	89
Existing Policy Implications.....	89
Dissemination of Study Findings.....	91
APPENDICES .....	95
A: RESEARCH ARTICLES IN LITERATURE REVIEW .....	95
B: SUMMARY OF TYPES OF RESEARCH DESIGNS.....	98
C: SUMMARY OF SUBJECTS.....	99
D: SUMMARY OF SETTINGS.....	100
E: SUMMARY OF MEASUREMENTS AND INSTRUMENTS.....	101
F: SUMMARY OF PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS .....	102
G: SUMMARY OF ANALYSES AND RESULTS.....	103
H: DOUGLAS COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS 2015-16 .....	104
I: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS 2015-16.....	105
J: INITIAL EMAIL COMMUNICATION WITH HIGH SCHOOLS.....	106
K: HIGH SCHOOL INTERVIEW EMAILS .....	108

Chapter	Page
L: DOUGLAS COUNTY CCR SURVEY .....	109
M: SCHOOL INTERVIEWS PROTOCOL .....	116
N: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL .....	120
O: GRADE LEVELS SERVED BY HIGH SCHOOLS.....	123
P: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND VENUE .....	125
Q: STUDENTS AND CCR .....	126
P: PARTNERS AND PARTNER NEEDS.....	127
REFERENCES CITED.....	128

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Ecological Model of Human Development .....	22
2. Absorptive Capacity Theory .....	24

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Generalizability of Douglas County .....	29
2. Survey Questions by Topic and Research Questions .....	31
3. Interview Questions by Section and Research Questions.....	32
4. Focus Group Questions by Section and Research Questions .....	33
5. Summary of Qualitative Findings.....	43
6. Profile of Participants per CCR Survey .....	49
7. ANOVA Results for Schools.....	52
8. ANOVA Results for Professional Development .....	58
9. ANOVA Results for Curriculum and Programs .....	59
10. ANOVA Results for Career and College Options .....	64
11. CCR Programs and Tracking Tools.....	67
12. ANOVA Results for Tracking Tools and Using Data .....	68
13. ANOVA Results for Student Readiness .....	73
14. Triangulation of CCR Across Data Sets .....	84

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Historically, school counselors have been the primary facilitators in supporting the career and college transition process for students, but many school counselors do not have the knowledge, resources, or materials to support students in this transition (Belasco, 2013). The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) stated that a school counselor's primary goal is to promote academic achievement (Brown & Trusty, 2005), and the National Office of School Counselor Advocacy stated that college readiness and access are equally important in a counselor's role (Engberg & Gilbert, 2014). These two different statements help define the expected role of counselors in supporting students' plans for education beyond high school. However, students often need more from a counselor than someone who supports academic achievement or helps identify potential colleges to apply to: without a comprehensive career and college readiness plan, students are not always going to receive the supports needed to be career and college ready (Murphy, Bluestein, Bohlig, & Platt, 2010; Foley, 2001).

Additionally, school counselors often lack the time to help students with their transition plans for after high school (Dahir, Burnham, Stone, & Cobb, 2010; Foley, 2001). For example, the Access to Student Assistance Programs in Reach of Everyone (ASPIRE) originated in 1998 with the intent to extend and enhance the role of the school counselor through volunteers. ASPIRE is often the primary source for students to learn about career and college options (Ellis, 2007). Further complicating this situation is that the ASCA recommends a student to school counselor ratio of 1:250; in Oregon the ratio is 1:602 (American School Counselor Association, 2016). With this high student to

counselor ratio in Oregon, it is difficult for counselors to adequately meet the needs of all students as career and college readiness is just one aspect of a counselor's job in addition to helping students with social and emotional needs, scheduling classes, and proctoring tests (American School Counselor Association, 2016).

In 2011, Oregon's Legislature adopted Senate Bill 253, which became Oregon's 40-40-20 goal focused on preparing students for a career or college, with the aspiration that by 2025, "40% of adult Oregonians will hold a bachelor's or an advanced degree, 40% will have an associate's degree or a meaningful postsecondary certificate, and all adult Oregonians will hold a high school diploma" (Oregon Learns, 2017). Oregon's Governor, Kate Brown, has provided additional state funding aimed at meeting the 40-40-20 goals, including student grants and CCR resources, as well as hiring staff to focus on new strategies to keep students engaged and on track to graduation (Kate Brown Committee, 2017). On a national level, former President Obama requested that educators "create a 'new vision' that would help students build capacity for successful postsecondary opportunities" (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012, p. 51).

In response to the call to action from both the state and national levels, Oregon's Regional Achievement Collaborative (RAC) initiative was developed in 2013 by the Oregon Education Investment Board to work toward improving educational outcomes outside of the classroom (Chief Education Office, 2015). One such RAC, the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS), began in 2014 with an initial partnership between the Douglas United Way, The Partnership for Economic Development in Douglas County, The Ford Family Foundation, the Douglas Educational Service District, and Umpqua Community College. The purpose of this RAC is to ensure that "each child

in Douglas County will receive effective and meaningful support to achieve economic and social success by graduating high school, completing postsecondary education and/or entering a career” (Douglas County Partners for Student Success, 2017). DCPSS is working with the community to define goals, actions, outcomes, and shared accountability to serve the district’s students.

In 2016, another Oregon initiative, The Career, College Collaborative (C3) was created to bring together statewide education and community leaders who represent K-12, higher education, business and industry, the nonprofit sector, and government. C3 is tasked with providing information to educators and college-access professionals to help Oregonians reach the goals set forth in 40-40-20. This working group recognized that in order for Oregon to build and sustain a vibrant economy and strong communities, stakeholder groups must work together (Career, College, Collaborative, 2017). As the C3 director, I have learned from Oregon school counselors that having a common career and college readiness definition and plan helps build a framework and a common message around career and college readiness (CCR) to help students, parents, counselors, administrators, and community members understand what is needed for a student to be career and college ready.

In addition to needing a cohesive plan, Camara (2013) identified the many factors that help students become career and college ready including (a) taking college courses while in high school, (b) learning *soft skills* (e.g. time management, teamwork, communication, and adaptability), and (c) being academically prepared to succeed in college. Pulling these CCR factors together into a definition creates an environment that brings educators together with a common, shared vision (Michigan College Access

Network, 2013). For this dissertation, I used Conley's (2014) college and career readiness definition, which encompasses both the academic and soft skills needed for students to be successful after high school:

Students who are ready for college and career can qualify for and succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses leading to a baccalaureate degree, a certificate, or career pathway-oriented training programs without the need for remedial or developmental course work. They can complete such entry-level, credit-bearing courses at a level that enables them to continue in the major or program of study they have chosen (p. 51)

This definition helped guide my literature search and study methods so that my dissertation captures the range of supports a student needs to become career and college ready.

As discussed earlier, school counselors are often seen as the traditional source for students to receive career and college readiness information (Lapan, Tucker, Kim, & Kosciulek, 2003), but many are unable to fulfill this need because of the challenges they face in time, training, and resource management (Belasco, 2013; Foley, 2001). One way to help support career and college readiness is to develop comprehensive career and college readiness plans that involve more stakeholders than just the counselor and engage the community in supporting students to define their paths for after high school (Alleman & Holly, 2013). Support in CCR is especially needed in rural areas where resources are limited and often shared across schools in remote geographic locations. To better understand career and college readiness plans in rural areas, my work in C3 has suggested that it is important to understand (a) students' career and college transition

planning process after high school, (b) the perceived and actual role of the school counselor, (c) the superintendent and principal role in CCR, (d) how student participation can inform a CCR plan, and (e) what role the community can have in supporting career and college readiness.

In the next chapter, I will describe the process I used to select the articles synthesized in my literature review including (a) my search terms, (b) the databases that I used, and (c) how I narrowed down my search to the 17 peer-reviewed articles included in my review.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past 13 years, I have studied and worked in the area of career and college readiness (CCR). This literature review includes three peer-reviewed articles that I have found instrumental during my career in helping explain the perceived and actual roles of school counselors, the training that counselors receive around CCR, and a student's transition from high school to career or college (Murphy et al., 2010; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008; PÉrusse, Goodnough, & Noel, 2001). My literature review expanded on these initial articles by choosing search terms that would uncover research from the five areas of interest for my study: (a) college plan, high school, and rural; (b) career plan, high school, and rural; (c) community, collaboration, student success, rural, college, and career; and (d) rural, high school, community partnerships, college, and career. Throughout each phase of the search, I noticed that the student voice was imbedded throughout the documents I found, so I did not include a search term specific to students.

I used the University of Oregon's (UO) online library portal that provided access to ProQuest Educational Journals, SAGE Complete, Academic Search Premier, Academic OneFile, SpringerLink, ProQuest Social Science Journals, and Elsevier. These databases provided me with an abundance of articles that covered my five areas of interest, so I did not use other databases or search options such as Google Scholar. As career and college readiness (CCR) expectations have evolved in recent years as well as how the community plays a role in CCR, I used a date range of 2000 – 2017 in all of my

searches to ensure that I only included the most relevant research. Additionally, I only searched for peer-reviewed studies that took place in the United States.

### **Search Procedures**

I knew I needed to be both specific and comprehensive to capture research on my five topics of interest, so I conducted database searches with the following terms: (a) college plan, (b) career plan, (c) rural, (d) high school, (e) collaborative, (f) community, and (g) community partnerships. Throughout each phase of the search, I noticed that the student voice was imbedded throughout the documents I found, so I did not include a search term specific to students.

My first search used the following key words (a) college plan, (b) high school, and (c) rural, which produced 17 articles. I eliminated 12 articles that focused on specific student populations, were outside of the United States, and those that were set in urban areas. For the remaining five documents, I reviewed the title and abstract of each document and eliminated four articles that were focused on settings other than high schools, which left me with one article from this search. My second search used the key words (a) career plan, (b) high school, and (c) rural, which produced 81 articles. I eliminated 49 articles that focused on specific student populations, were outside of the United States, were set in urban areas, and were repeated from the initial search. For the remaining 32 articles, I reviewed the title and abstract of each document and eliminated 31 articles that were focused on settings other than high schools or were not based on empirical research, which left me with one article from this search.

At this point, I revised my search terms to be targeted to my areas of interest. My third search used the key words (a) community, (b) collaboration, (c) student success, (d)

rural, (e) college, and (f) career, which produced 327 results. I looked at the title and short description for each article and eliminated 318 articles that were repeated from a previous search, outside of the United States, related to community college, included student success related to academics or extracurricular activities, or that targeted specific populations. For the remaining nine articles, I reviewed the title and abstract of each document and eliminated six articles that were focused on settings other than high schools or were not based on empirical research, which left me with three articles from this search. This search lacked articles related to community and collaboration, so I decided to add community partnerships to my final search.

My final search proved to be the most successful as I had learned which terms produced the best results from my prior searches. For this search, I used the key terms (a) rural, (b) high school, (c) community partnerships, (d) college, and (e) career, which produced 255 results. I read the titles and short descriptions of the articles and eliminated 203 articles that were repeated from previous searches, focused on specific populations or fields, focused only on the voice of the parents, or only included community colleges. For the remaining 52 articles, I read the abstracts and eliminated 32 that were not focused on career and college, the general community or collective impact, focused on specific populations, or focused on community college. For the remaining 20 articles, I skimmed through the article to see if it was relevant to my research questions, and if so, if it was based on empirical research. This last step allowed me to eliminate 11 articles leaving me with nine from this search.

This multi-step article search and selection process resulted in the inclusion of 17 peer-reviewed articles. Based on the criterion I used for each phase, all articles focused

on at least one of the five areas of interest: (a) students' career and college transitions after high school, (b) the perceived and actual role of the school counselor, (c) the superintendent and principal role in CCR, (d) how student participation can inform a CCR plan, and (e) what role the community has in supporting career and college readiness. All of the 17 articles focused on the transition after high school and many addressed more than one of the areas of interest outlined above: two on counselor role, four on student voice, three on community involvement, partnerships, and collaboration, and eight on the role that school districts, high schools, principals, and counselors, have in connecting with business and community partners.

## **Results**

In this section, I summarize the following characteristics of the research I included in this review: (a) type of research design, (b) subjects, (c) settings, (d) measures and instruments, (e) analyses and results, and (f) recommendations.

**Type of research design.** Appendix B summarizes the research designs for the 17 studies included in this literature review. Out of the 17 studies, two employed a longitudinal, quantitative design; one employed a longitudinal qualitative design; five employed a cross-sectional, mixed-methods design; three employed a cross-sectional, qualitative design; and six employed a cross-sectional, quantitative design. A longitudinal study permits observations over an extended period of time (Babbie, 2013). In this way, the cross-sectional studies included in my research pool of these studies provide a snapshot of CCR at a specific time, while the longitudinal studies examine change in CCR over time related to a specific program or policy. For example, Lapan, Aoyagi and Kayson's (2007) longitudinal quantitative study examined the impact of school-to-work

coordinators' interventions on career and college outcomes over a three-year period and Woods and Domina (2014) used a longitudinal database to evaluate the relationship between access to school counselors and students transition after high school. In the other longitudinal study, Murphy, Blustein, Bohlig, and Platt (2010) used a qualitative design that looked at recent college graduates.

The cross-sectional studies covered a range of topics and approaches including the role of how community partners can support career and college readiness and how those partnerships provide multiple points of contacts for students (Alleman & Holly, 2013; Bennett & Thompson, 2011; Kaufman, 2015; Sanders & Lewis, 2005). Zuckerman (2016) and Lapan, Osana, Tucker, and Kosciulek (2002) conducted cross-sectional, qualitative studies to learn about the challenges that both practitioners and community partners experience when attempting to develop and implement collaborative partnerships. To better understand what types of professional development principals needed to support partnerships with community members, Foley (2001) used interviews and surveys in a cross-sectional, mixed-methods design.

The six cross-sectional, quantitative design studies focused on three different areas: (a) transitions after high school, (b) the perceived and actual role of the school counselor, and (c) what role the community has in supporting career and college readiness. For example, to understand how to prepare rural adolescents for post-high school transitions, Lapan, Tucker, Kim, and Kosciulek (2003) surveyed rural students to find out if their level of involvement with career development, curriculum strategies, and support from stakeholders made a difference in their post-high school plans. Hutchins, Meece, Byun, and Farmer (2012) also surveyed rural students to explore their career and

college aspirations. The other four studies examined the perceived and actual role of school counselors, training that counselors receive, and the role that the community can play in career and college readiness at the high school level (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008; Pérusse et al., 2001; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Bryan & Griffin, 2010).

The research designs covered in these 17 studies provided a range of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches. Additionally, the studies represented each of the areas of interest outlined in this literature review. Next, I summarize the subject for these studies.

### **Subjects**

Appendix C summarizes the characteristics of the subjects included in the studies examined in this literature review. As the Appendix demonstrates, the sample sizes of the studies varied from one study of 16 community partners to a study that included 7,945 middle and high school students. The variety of subjects used in these studies presented a cross-section of stakeholders and organizations involved in career and college readiness. The subjects included four sectors: (a) schools and related staff and stakeholders (e.g., school district personnel, high school staff, administrators, and middle and high school students), (b) college counselor education programs and college students, (c) school-to-work coordinators, and (d) community partners.

All 17 studies discussed the perceived and actual role that school counselors play in helping students become career and college ready from examining the training received during their counselor education programs to surveying counselors, teachers, students, parents, and school board members. For example, Pérusse, Goodnough, and Noel (2001) investigated how well 189 counselor education programs prepared school

counseling students to meet future job requirements. Dahir, Burnham, Stone, and Cobb (2010) study of 999 counselors found that principals determine the role that the counselor plays in a school, which often conflicts with what the counselor believes their role to be.

Four of the studies explored high school students' experiences around career and college readiness. For example, Murphy et al. (2010) surveyed ten recent high school graduates - five males and five females - ranging in age from 22-25 from an urban, northeastern part of the United States to learn about the barriers they faced during their transition to college and what they felt would have helped them be more successful. Lapan et al.'s (2003) study assessed what is needed to help students transition to a postsecondary education after high school by surveying 884 rural students from a large midwestern state. These students were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with their school's support on providing information and guidance around their post-high school plan.

The subjects of the 17 studies included in my review of prior research varied from counselors to students to community partners to school and district staff and provide good representation across all five areas of interest for my dissertation study. The next section synthesizes the settings for these studies.

### **Settings**

Appendix D summarizes the settings in which the studies comprising the literature pool were conducted. All of the studies were conducted in the United States per my inclusion criteria and took place in the following settings: (a) urban only, (b) rural only, (c) a mix of urban/suburban/rural, (d) multi-city, and (e) multi-state. As shown in

the Appendix, the studies included ten middle/high schools, two school districts, three colleges, and four community organizations.

Bryan & Griffin (2010) surveyed 450 schools from rural, suburban, and urban areas across the United States to study the school counselor's role in building partnerships between the school and community. The authors received 217 completed surveys, which are deemed representative of the school counselor population in the United States. In nine of the studies, the researchers either focused solely on rural areas or emphasized the necessity of serving students in rural areas. For example, Alleman and Holly (2013) studied the needs of rural students in Virginia. In this study, rural was defined as school districts with fewer than 2,000 students as well as factoring in the relative population density and proximity to urban and metropolitan areas.

The next section summarizes the various measures employed by the researchers throughout the 17 studies.

### **Measures and Instruments**

Appendix E summarizes the measures and instruments used in the articles included in the literature pool: (a) focus groups, interviews, and observations (b) surveys and questionnaires, (c) student outcomes, and (d) a needs assessment. The most common measures and instruments used across the studies were surveys and interviews.

Surveys and questionnaires were used in ten of the studies and included responses from those who are involved in, influenced by, or concerned about career and college readiness: school counselors, superintendents and principals, and students. For example, in a cross-sectional, mixed methods study, Foley (2001) surveyed school principals about their perception of their ability to provide educational services through collaboration,

such as conflict resolution, empowering and supporting teachers, and professional development. Hutchins et al. (2012) surveyed students in grades 9-12 to learn about the career and college aspirations of rural youth. In three studies, counselors were surveyed to analyze their role related to community partnerships (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Bryan & Holcolm-McCoy, 2007; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). In another study, interviews and focus groups with students, partners, teachers, and counselors were conducted to compare how their perceptions were the same or different from the other groups (Murphy et al., 2010).

The next section provides a synthesis of the analyses and results grouped into three common areas. I also provide summaries of key studies for each of the five topics included in this literature review.

### **Analyses and Results**

Appendix G summarizes the analyses and results from the studies included in this literature review. The three overarching findings that emerged throughout the 17 studies are that (a) community partnerships are important in supporting students' as they make their transitions after high school; (b) it is important to have clear policies and expectations for implementing, supporting, expanding, and sustaining these community partnerships, and (c) school administrators, principals, and counselors have a role in developing community partnerships to support career and college readiness.

A common perception throughout the participants included in the studies in this literature review is that school counselors are providing CCR support to students (Scarborough and Culbreth, 2008; Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Dahir et al., 2010; Woods & Domina, 2014; Pérusse et al., 2001), but the reality is

that students are receiving this support from community organizations, after school programs, and college access programs (Alleman & Holly, 2013; Bennett & Thompson, 2011; Foley, 2001; Hutchins et al., 2012; Murphy & et al., 2010). Alleman and Holly (2013) found that multiple points of contact from members of a high school and the community significantly aided rural students in developing and believing in their plans for after high school.

In the research reviewed, superintendents and community partners acknowledged that working collaboratively to support students in CCR is beneficial for the community, but it is important to be strategic about how the partnerships operate. Bennett and Thompson (2011) found that the professional development of the superintendent and the capacity of the school district both enabled and constrained partnership development, implementation, and capacity for institutionalizing and creating policies with community partners. Similarly, Bryan and Griffin's (2010) study found there are additional factors that play into the school counselors' role in supporting partnerships including the school culture, expectations of the administration, time constraints, and professional development opportunities and knowledge.

The studies summarized in this section provide relevant information that addressed the five areas of interest in this literature review. Overall, the studies showed that career and college readiness is beneficial for students; school counselors, principals and superintendents need to work together to develop a plan that will support students; and community partnerships create ways to provide multiple avenues for students to receive support during their transition. The next section summarizes the recommendations from the 17 studies.

## **Recommendations**

The vast majority (88%) of the studies in my research pool included specific recommendations for improving CCR outcomes, as displayed in Appendix F. These recommendations included clarifying the role of school counselors related to community partnerships, strengthening career and college readiness policies in middle and high schools, prioritizing community partnerships, and strategically thinking about the best way to develop, expand, and sustain these partnerships.

A recurring theme throughout these studies was the need for policies related to career and college readiness to help strengthen CCR planning in schools. Schaefer and Rivera (2012) argued that “the call for college readiness is clear. What is not as clear is how the call should be taken up in schools to best meet the developmental college and career needs and desires of students” (p. 52). The recommendations included in these studies support this call and the need to strengthen policies and expectations, specifically: (a) improving school district policies including how students are being served, the role of the school counselor, the expectation of the principals and superintendents’ ability to lead this work, and how the school partners with the community (Alleman & Holly, 2013; Hutchin et. al, 2012; Lapan et. al, 2007; Lapan et. al, 2002; Woods & Domina, 2014), (b) developing a better understanding of the role of the school counselor (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Murphy et. al, 2010; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008), (c) increasing professional development for principals and superintendents in order to strengthen schools’ career and college readiness culture (Foley, 2001), and (d) prioritizing community partnerships and strategic collaboration (Bennett & Thompson, 2011; Kaufman, 2015; Lapan et. al, 2003; Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Zuckerman, 2016).

## Summary

As described above, five topics were explored throughout the literature review: (a) students' career and college transitions after high school, (b) the perceived and actual role of the school counselor, (c) the superintendent and principal role in CCR, (d) how student participation can inform a CCR plan, and (e) what role the community has in supporting career and college readiness. The theme that lacked the most research was related to community involvement in career and college readiness. This gap is important, because prior research found that counselors struggle to support all students (Dahir et al., 2010; Pérusse et al., 2001; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008; Woods & Domina, 2014) and that community collaboration can help build capacity and leverage community resources around career and college readiness (Alleman & Holly, 2013; Bennett & Thompson, 2011; Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Bryan & Holcomb, 2007; Lapan et al., 2003)

The first topic—*transitions after high school*—included a national movement initiated by former President Obama to increase access to career and college readiness activities to help create a *new vision* around career and college readiness (Schaefer & Rivera, 2012). The second topic—*the perceived and actual role of the school counselor*—focused on the fact that counselors are often not trained to support students in career and college readiness, they do not have adequate time to devote to career and college readiness, and that there is confusion about the role of counselors in high schools (Bryan & Griffin, 2010; Bryan & Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Dahir et al., 2010; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008; Woods & Domina, 2014). The third topic—*principal and superintendent role*—showed that while principals and superintendents are interested in community partnerships, they often do not have the professional development and

knowledge to start partnerships and support them (Bennett & Thompson, 2011; Foley, 2001; Kaufman, 2015). The fourth topic—*how student participation can inform a CCR plan*—illuminated the need for students to receive more support and services, but found that schools lack the capacity to serve them. The studies included in this literature review found that schools need support in building capacity so that all students, not just those in college access programs, benefit from the social support that a community can provide (Hutchin et al., 2012; Lapan et al., 2007; Lapan et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2010; Sanders & Lewis, 2005; Woods & Domina, 2014). And, the final topic—*what role the community has in supporting career and college readiness*— showed that there is a need and welcoming space for the community to support career and college readiness in schools (Bennet & Thompson, 2011; Alleman & Holly; 2013; Lapan et al., 2002).

Based on the findings of this review, I conducted a mixed-methods action research study to dive deeper into how high schools and community partners can work together to strengthen career and college readiness supports for students. The methods used in my study are described in the next chapter. My research question was:

1. What do educators and students in rural Oregon think is important to include when developing and supporting a career and college readiness plan?
  - a. What services, activities, and work practices are utilized in CCR plans in rural Oregon?
  - b. What types of positions and/or external partners are important to include when developing a CCR plan in rural Oregon?

- c. What resources, routines, and tools have played a critical role in the work and/or development of the existing CCR plan at a high school in rural Oregon?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

My literature review examined five main topics: (a) students' career and college transitions after high school, (b) the perceived and actual role of the school counselor, (c) the superintendent and principal role in career and college readiness (CCR), (d) how student participation can inform a CCR plan, and (e) what role the community has in supporting career and college readiness. My research question emerged from these topics and led me to design a mixed-methods study that examined what educators and students in rural Oregon think is important to include in high schools' career and college readiness plans.

#### **Action Research**

McNiff (2017) defines action research as “the capacity of people who come together to find ways of creating better futures” (p. 31) and to “observe – reflect – act – evaluate – modify – move in new directions” (p. 12). As Oregon's Career, College, Collaborative (C3) director, I engage in action research with educators, school districts, and community organizations to determine ways to develop solutions to problems that can be integrated into a school's existing infrastructure quickly and efficiently. This action research study took place in Douglas County and included participants from their 14 high schools. In my C3 director role, I led the CCR team that was comprised of the Douglas County Educational Service District, the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS), and Umpqua Community College. These organizations worked in collaboration to collect the data used in this study: as action research, the findings are being used by the study participants to improve their ongoing CCR work.

In the next section, I describe the two theoretical frameworks that I used for my study: Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological Model of Human Development framework and Farrell and Coburn's (2016) Absorptive Capacity Theory.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

A theoretical framework provides the structure and vision for a study in supporting “the things we observe in the field, the questions we ask of our participants, and the documents we attend to” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 88). Grant and Osanloo (2014) stated that the theoretical framework “provides a grounding base, or an anchor, for the lit review, and most importantly, the methods and analysis” (p. 12). I relied on two theoretical frameworks to structure my study design: Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological Model of Human Development, which helped identify study participants by determining who in the high schools and communities have a potential impact on supporting students in their pursuit of a career or college education beyond high school, and Farrell & Coburn's (2016) Absorptive Capacity Theory, which helped determine the high school and community participants for this study and provided support in how I developed the instruments.

**Ecological model of human development.** Bronfenbrenner's (1994) Ecological Model of Human Development is divided into five levels: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (see Figure 1). These levels are increasingly distal to the student and are defined as: (a) the microsystem is the student's immediate environment and includes the school; (b) the mesosystem is where the student interacts between two or more microsystems (e.g., when the family and school interact on behalf of the student); (c) the exosystem includes a space for other entities (e.g., in my study, the

RAC, the media, government agencies, and social services) that may or may not directly affect the student; (d) the macrosystem includes how the institutional patterns of culture and values, beliefs and ideas, and political and economic systems may impact the student, or as, Onquegbuzie, Collins, & Frels (2013) put it, the largest cultural context surrounding the person that includes...polices, or laws that indirectly influence a person” (p. 5).; and (e) the chronosystem is how environmental changes that occur over time can influence a student (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

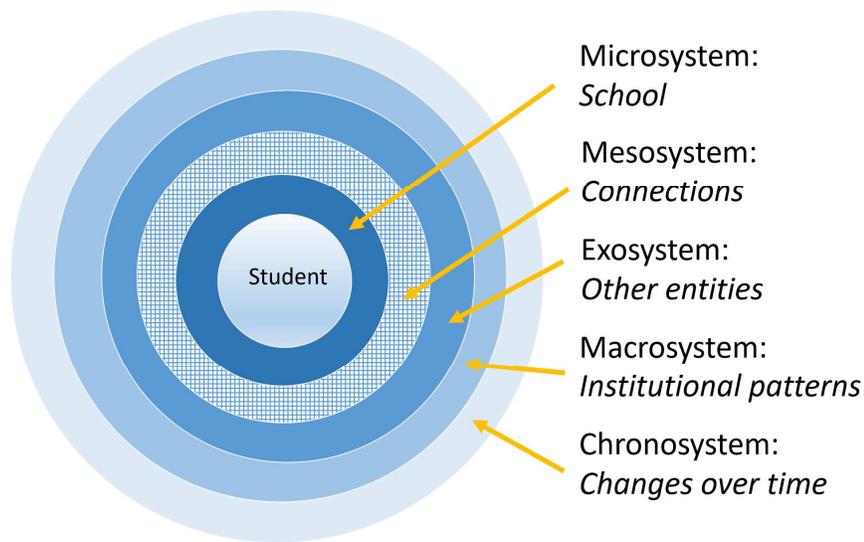


Figure 1: Ecological Model of Human Development theoretical framework depicting how this study was designed to include high school staff and faculty as well as community members to better understand the potential impact of different levels that influence students in their planning for a career or college education beyond high school (Bronfenbrenner, 2014).

The interaction of high schools and communities is inherently complex in that they include those who can make decisions and those who can inform decisions including, but not limited to, the administration and staff in school districts and high school, parents and students, community members, businesses, and in the case of my study context, members from the Regional Achievement Collaborative. Additionally, this

framework has:

Important implications for generalization (e.g., policy, practice), because it helps the researcher bound the inquiry or conceptual/theoretical framework with respect to the generalizability of the findings, concept, model, or theory...Accordingly, researchers can make within-level generalization and/or across-level generalization...which occurs in mixed research studies (Onquegbuzie et al, 2013, p. 6)

**Absorptive capacity theory.** Farrell & Coburn's (2016) Absorptive Capacity Theory has four "organizational features that contribute to an organization's ability to make use of new knowledge from an external partner" (p. 141): (a) prior knowledge, defined as the ability to accept the value of new information from external partners, absorb it, and then use this knowledge for problem solving; (b) both formal and informal communication pathways to share knowledge and engage in joint problem solving; (c) strategic knowledge leadership to identify and assess current and new knowledge and then summarize the knowledge to use for the greater good; and (d) resources in the form of funding, time set aside for the work, and purchased services and materials (Farrell & Coburn, 2016).

Each of the organizational constructs in Absorptive Capacity Theory connects to areas of my study. For example, the external partners (e.g. Regional Achievement Collaborative) bring their expertise and knowledge to provide guidance and support to the high schools. When the guidance and knowledge from the external partners complements the prior knowledge from within the high school, value is added to the learning and growth of the work. Open communication is key for the interactions to be

productive and requires flexibility, adaptability, and an understanding of norms and work practices. Further, communication can be both formal and informal, and is essential in ensuring both parties understand the *give and take* of the existing and new-shared knowledge. Through these interactions, the high schools and external partners can create collective knowledge, policies, and routines that contribute to the overall absorptive capacity of the schools and districts (Farrell & Coburn, 2016).

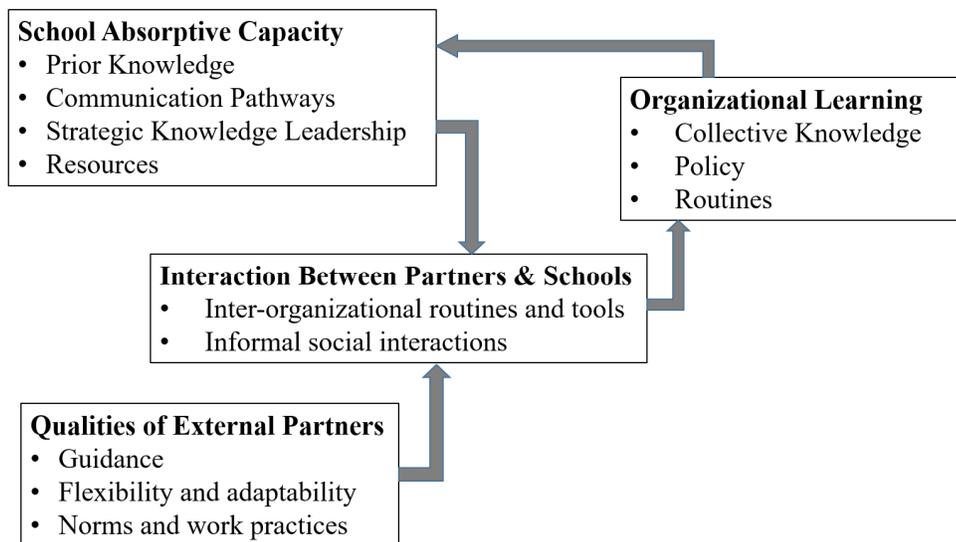


Figure 2: Absorptive Capacity Theory provides a visual map of the ways in which schools and external partners identify ways to learn from one another to access new information, integrate this information, and work together to incorporate this information into organizational learning, policies, and procedures (Farrell & Coburn, 2016).

I used Farrell & Coburn’s (2016) Absorptive Capacity Theory to “serve as a tool for understanding how a district central office [high school] can learn from an external partner for educational improvement efforts” (p. 135). Figure 2 illustrates how the relationship between a high school’s absorptive capacity and the qualities of the external partners can produce organizational learning outcomes through their interactions. The organizational constructs from this theory informed the study design and data collection activities for this study, from specific questions included in the interview protocols with

the CCR teams from five schools to the development of the CCR survey instrument and student focus group protocols.

For example, the interviews with the high school CCR teams provided information on whether any person on the CCR team had prior knowledge related to work done in career and college readiness within a high school. Staff who have prior knowledge on the topic are more likely to engage in new suggestions from community partners (Farrell & Coburn, 2016). The interviews included questions about communication pathways that may exist within a school and how they communicate or plan to communicate with external partners. Learning what makes up the CCR team's strategic knowledge leadership provided information on how well school leaders visualize the big picture and can synthesize and apply new knowledge with existing knowledge (Farrell & Coburn, 2016). The final organizational feature plays an important role in a school's absorptive capacity. Without resources for partnering, or a shared budget between high schools and external partners, the project could be difficult to sustain. The interviews helped address these four absorptive capacity constructs that are essential in helping a school adopt and integrate new knowledge from their external partners.

In the next sections, I describe my research design, setting and participants, instruments and data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

### **Research Design**

I conducted a convergent parallel mixed methods study to investigate what educators, students, and community members in rural Oregon think is important to include in a career and college readiness plan that supports all students. As a convergent

parallel study, the qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed separately and then used together for the interpretation of the final results of the study (Creswell, 2014). I anticipated that my sample sizes would be different for the various data collection types, so this type of design allowed me to use both qualitative and quantitative data that helped me “gain an in-depth perspective...generalize to a population...and that [together] provide an adequate count” (p. 222). In the data analysis phase of this type of design, a researcher can use a “side-by-side approach” (Creswell, 2014, p.222) by starting with the qualitative findings and comparing the main themes that emerge to the quantitative findings or by starting with the quantitative results and comparing the main findings to the qualitative findings. Using this latter side-by-side approach, I present the quantitative findings first followed by the qualitative findings within each section.

**Qualitative portion of the study.** A strength of qualitative research is that it is a “form of research in which the researcher or a designated co-researcher collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 4). Using qualitative methods as part of my study enabled me to include insights from educators and students on what they would like to see as part of a high school’s career and college readiness (CCR) plan. Further, as action research, the findings from the educator interviews helped inform their CCR plans going forward, as they were able to identify successes, challenges, and gaps within their existing CCR plans. Similarly, the student focus groups helped me learn about what services were available to students at their high school, what

they wished had been available to them, and whether they had received CCR information outside of their school environment, all of which helped C3 focus its CCR work.

**Quantitative portion of the study.** A strength of quantitative survey research is that it uses numbers to “‘measure’ opinions and attitudes through ranked responses” (Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 215). All staff and faculty were invited to complete the CCR survey at the 14 Douglas County high schools. The survey provided information about the career and college readiness activities, resources, professional development, and curriculum that were available in these 14 high schools. While not a random sample of schools, some generalizable findings emerged, and will be discussed in Chapter Four.

**Units of analysis.** The units of analysis for this study were the participating high schools in Douglas County whose staff were interested in working on a career and college readiness plan. As each high school is unique, it was important to think of the school as a unit instead of focusing on a specific stakeholder group across the schools. For example, a smaller school district like High School 2, the superintendent is also the principal of the high school as compared to a larger school district, like High School 11, that has both a superintendent and high school principals. Another example of ways in which the high schools differ is that a smaller school like High School 1 might not have a school counselor, while a larger school like High School 12 may have one or two counselors serving students. A final example of the variety across the sample is that some of the schools serve students from kindergarten through eighth grade, while others serve seventh through twelfth grade, or ninth through twelfth grade. Given these differences, I focused on the schools as the units of analysis.

**Time aspect.** As Babbie (2013) notes, a cross-sectional study “involves observations of a sample, or cross section, of a population or phenomenon that are made at one point in time” (p. 105). My study utilized a cross-sectional design that covered a six-month period that included administering a survey to high school teachers, counselors, and administrators, conducting interviews with high school CCR teams, and holding student focus groups. Employing a cross-sectional study design aligned with the action research nature of my study, allowing me to understand what was happening in Douglas County schools related to CCR during the course of this study and provide areas for improved practice as well as future research implications.

### **Study Procedures**

The following sections describe the setting and participants as well as the data collection instruments and activities.

**High schools.** My study took place in Douglas County, Oregon, an area in the south west region of the state with a population of 108,457.92.9 percent of the residents are white and 7.1 percent identify as minorities. Between 2011-2015, 15.7 percent of county residents aged 25 and above had a Bachelor’s degree or higher; 88.7 percent of people aged 25 and above were high school graduates. The median household income between 2001-2015 was \$41,312. There are 14 public high schools - that include four charter schools - serving 4,969 students with an average student:teacher ratio of 18:1. The current data for Douglas County shows that for every 100 students, 67 students will graduate high school and of those, 39 will enroll in college (Douglas County Partners for Student Success, 2017).

As shown in Table 1, Douglas County is not fully generalizable to other counties in the state, but the findings and recommendations from this study are generalizable to similar rural districts in Oregon, such as Umatilla County, and potentially to similar counties across the nation. Other factors to take into consideration when thinking about generalizability are the types of industries within a county or region, commitment of administration and staff, availability of community partners for collaboration, and funding targeted for CCR. The Douglas County high school demographics and student demographics are shown in Appendix H and Appendix I.

Table 1  
*Generalizability of Douglas County*

Site	High School Seniors (2016-17)*	Graduation Rate**	College Enrollment***
Douglas County	1,146	0.67	0.39
Umatilla County	1,049	0.72	0.4
Oregon State	47,459	0.74	0.61
Total	49,654	2.13	1.4

\*(Oregon Department of Education, 2016)

\*\**(The Oregonian, 2016)*

\*\*\**(The Oregonian, 2013)*

**Selection process.** As a member of the Douglas County CCR team, I invited all of the administrators, staff, and faculty from the 14 high schools in Douglas County to participate in the CCR survey. For the interviews and focus groups, I recruited participants from the county’s high schools that were a part of a Meyer Memorial grant

that the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS) and Umpqua Community College had been awarded to continue the county's work in Douglas County.

As shown in Appendix H and Appendix I: (a) two of the schools were in the northern region, three from the central region, and two from the southern region; (b) the student population ranges from 98-1,692 students; and (c) two of the schools include both middle and high schools in one location and four of the high schools have at least one feeder middle school from a different location. The regions of Douglas County are distinctly different, so the selection process intentionally included schools located in northern, central, and southern parts of the county.

### **Instruments and Data Collection Procedures**

In these next two sections, I describe the instruments and data collection processes for this study. For the interviews, career and college readiness survey, and focus groups, I worked with a group of CCR professionals that included the Executive Director from Douglas County Partners for Student Success, Student Services Coordinator from Umpqua Community College, and CCR specialist from the Douglas County Educational Service District to develop the instruments as part of C3's ongoing CCR work. This group of CCR professionals communicated with high school administrators, helped collect data, participated in the high school interviews, and assisted with the focus groups. I provided consultation and feedback to this group throughout each phase of the study.

**Instruments.** To ensure that my survey (Appendix L), interviews (Appendix M), and focus group (Appendix N) instruments addressed my research questions, I mapped the instruments to my research questions, as illustrated in Tables 2-4 below.

Table 2

*Survey Questions by Topic and Research Questions*

Item Category	Survey					
	Student Readiness	Career & College Options	Curriculum & Programs	Using Data	CCR Programs & Tools	Professional Development
RQ1. What do educators and students in rural Oregon think is important to include when developing and supporting a career and college readiness plan?	8		18	19, 20	23	28
RQ1a. What services, activities, and work practices are utilized in CCR plans in rural Oregon?	7	14	15, 16, 17, 18		23, 24	26, 28, 29
RQ1b. What types of positions and/or external partners are important to include when developing a CCR plan in rural Oregon?	8	9, 14	17, 18		23, 24	
RQ1c. What resources, routines, and tools have played a critical role in the work and/or development of the existing CCR plan at a high school in rural Oregon?	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8	9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14	17, 18	19, 20, 21, 22	23, 24	25, 26, 27, 28

Table 3

*Interview Questions by Section and Research Questions*

Item Category	Interviews with High School CCR Teams							
	CCR Overview	Students & Families	College Access Programs	Creating a CCR Culture	Workforce & Community Partners	CCR Coordinator	Tracking Progress	Challenges & Next Steps
RQ1. What do educators and students in rural Oregon think is important to include when developing and supporting a career and college readiness plan?	A	A/B, E, F	A, B, C, D	A, B	A, B, C, D	A, B	D, E, F	A
RQ1a. What services, activities, and work practices are utilized in CCR plans in rural Oregon?	A	A/B, C, D, F	A, C	A, B, C	A, B, C, D	A	A, B, C, E, F	A
RQ1b. What types of positions and/or external partners are important to include when developing a CCR plan in rural Oregon?	A	A/B, E	A, B, C, D	A	A, B, C, D	A, B	F	A
RQ1c. What resources, routines, and tools have played a critical role in the work and/or development of the existing CCR plan at a high school in rural Oregon?	A	A/B, C, D, E, F	A, B, C, D	A, B, C, D	A, B, C, D	A, B	A, B, C, D, E, F	A

Table 4

*Focus Group Questions by Section and Research Questions*

Item Category	Focus Groups with Students							
	CCR by Grade Level	School Personnel Support	Confidence Pursuing Career/College	Skills & Knowledge Preparation	Wish More Info	Parent Involve	Community Support	Goal Tracking
RQ1. What do educators and students in rural Oregon think is important to include when developing and supporting a career and college readiness plan?	X		X	X		X		
RQ1a. What services, activities, and work practices are utilized in CCR plans in rural Oregon?	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
RQ1b. What types of positions and/or external partners are important to include when developing a CCR plan in rural Oregon?	X	X	X			X	X	
RQ1c. What resources, routines, and tools have played a critical role in the work and/or development of the existing CCR plan at a high school in rural Oregon?	X	X	X	X	X	X		X

***Career and college readiness survey.*** To better understand CCR in rural Oregon schools, I created a survey to administer to the administration and faculty employed at the high schools, which the DCPSS director chose to use in her county. To accommodate the needs of Douglas County, the CCR advisory team and I worked to adapt the survey to fit their specific needs. A quantitative survey provides an opportunity to collect data from a larger sample to complement data collected from fewer participants through interviews and focus groups related to the same topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The CCR survey was the first component of this study and was sent to all of the staff and faculty at the 14 Douglas County High Schools as part of my work with C3. The survey included seven sections that were developed based on topics that came up during the DCPSS partner meeting that took place during the 2016-17 school year (see below), my literature review, and my work as the C3 director.

The survey (Appendix L) sections included (a) *your school* with two questions about how the school was able to support career and college readiness activities and programs, (b) *student readiness* that asked six questions on respondents' knowledge of setting career and college readiness goals and successfully completing those goals, (c) *career and college options* that asked six questions on how well they understood the career and college options that were available to their students (d) *curriculum and programs* that asked four questions on how well the career and college readiness curriculum and programs supported their students in pursuing education after high school, (e) *using data* that had four questions that covered whether the school set appropriate goals around career and college readiness and whether they used data to help make decisions, (f) *career and college readiness programs and tools* that asked three

questions on what types of program the school used for students to learn about CCR and to track their activities and progress, and (g) *professional development* that asked four questions on whether the school offered professional development opportunities and what types of professional development were needed.

The survey used a four-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree that gauged respondents' experiences and how well they thought their school was prepared to support students in career and college readiness. There were two questions that included a list of options to choose from related to professional development topics and delivery. One of the questions included a list of items for respondents to choose from to identify what types of professional development opportunities they would have liked to have available to them; this question also included an open-ended item that asked for professional development topics that were not included in the list. The other question asked how they would like to receive professional development opportunities also with an open-ended item. The final question was an open-ended question that asked if they would be willing to share a CCR best practice and if so, to provide their contact information for follow up. If they selected no, they received a message thanking them for their participation. If they selected yes, they were redirected to a Google form to provide their best practice and contact information.

***Interviews.*** I conducted semi-structured interviews with five of the fourteen high school career and college readiness (CCR) teams to learn about their CCR plans. Semi-structured interviews include a guided list of questions or issues that have both structured and unstructured questions, the questions can be used flexibly, and the questions have no predetermined wording or order (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One of the primary ways to

explore an educational organization, institution, or process is by learning from the individuals who are actually *on the ground* doing the work; many studies about schools are conducted without including the student, counselor, teacher, and administrator perspective who bring their individual voices to inform the collective (Seidman, 2013). I therefore included a range of stakeholders and semi-structured questions to capture their varied perspectives and experiences.

I created the interview guide *Career and College Readiness Mapping* for C3 in Fall 2017. Based on my action research approach, it was important that the interview protocol be used in a way that could be adapted if participants brought up unforeseen topics during the interview (Corbin and Strauss, 2015). The interview protocol included nine sections that could be discussed in any order (see Appendix M): (a) overview, (b) school statistics, (c) students and families, (d) college access programs – opportunities, (e) creating a career and college readiness culture, (f) workforce and community partnerships, (g) CCR coordinator, (h) tracking progress, and (i) challenges and next steps. As with the career and college readiness survey, I shared the interview guide with the DCPSS director who decided to use it for Douglas County. I then adapted the interview guide using the absorptive capacity theory so that it “provided guidance for educational leaders—in school districts...to think strategically about when and under what conditions a partnership is likely to be productive” (Farrell & Coburn, 2016, p. 137). This theory helped determine what changes needed to be made to best meet the specific needs of the county. For example, many of the high schools do not have a school counselor, so I added additional school roles to the list of staff who help students with CCR.

***Focus groups.*** Observing the way that a group interacts, the patterns that emerge, and being open to what emerges from the group are key component for conducting focus groups (Holton & Walsh, 2017). Focus groups are a way to explore an idea that allows the researcher to hear different perspectives at one time (Holton & Walsh, 2017) so that the participants can share their views, hear from others, and potentially think of new insights based on what they hear from others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To hear directly from the students, the CCR team and I conducted three focus groups consisting of incoming freshman and current high school students. Through the focus groups, students provided their insights on what information, materials, and resources their high schools did or did not provide them for their post-high school journey. To ensure representation that met the diversity of the Douglas County students, I worked with the DCPSS director to determine the locations for the focus groups. I worked with the CCR advisory team to recruit students from the high schools; the focus groups included students from across the county.

Data collection was aided by two AmeriCorps members hired by the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS) to provide general support to students throughout Douglas County high schools. The AmeriCorps members have direct contact with the schools and students and helped recruit students that represented their respective high schools. Leaders from the 14 high schools were invited to help recruit students through an initial email and then through direct conversations with the DCPSS director and myself. One common issue in rural areas is transportation for students (EdSource, 2015), so in addition to providing food for each student to incentivize participation, we held the focus groups during the school day to accommodate the students.

**Data collection procedures.** In this next section, I will discuss the procedures used to collect the data included in this study.

**Partner meetings.** During the 2016-17 academic school year, DCPSS conducted meetings that focused on building partnerships between the community and the high schools in the district's effort to create a stronger career and college readiness culture. As the C3 Director, I helped plan and facilitate these meetings. The first meeting included 16 representatives from the community; the second meeting included 12 representatives from the local high schools. As part of this study, I analyzed the data to help inform the other data collection procedures for the study as well as using this extant data as findings themselves that will contribute to the recommendations for this study.

**Initial email.** Before this action research study began and as part of ongoing C3 work, the DCPSS director sent out an initial email to the administration at each of the 14 high schools explaining the scope and purpose of the study and that there are three ways for them to be involved: (a) career and college readiness survey, (b) interviews with their CCR teams, and (c) student focus groups. The initial email reminded administrators that this action research builds off of the partner meetings that were held during the 2016-17 school year, and provided a brief description of the interviews and student focus groups to help them select the activities of interest to participate in.

**Career and college readiness survey.** In partnership with DCPSS, I invited administrators, faculty, and staff from the 14 Douglas County High Schools to complete the CCR survey. The DCPSS director sent out an initial email invitation that included an overview of the study, explanation of each of the phases, and a link to the survey. After one week, the DCPSS director sent out a reminder email to all of the members. As an

incentive, the DCPSS director offered funds to be used for CCR activities to the three high schools with the highest response rate. Respondents were from 10 high schools (71% of schools' response rate) with a total of 81 responses. There were seven surveys started, but not finished, for a total of 74 completed surveys.

***Interviews.*** The DCPSS director and I conducted interviews in the fall of 2017 with five of the high school CCR teams that are receiving Meyer Memorial grant funds to discover the challenges, barriers, and successes they face in providing CCR services, programs, and activities to their students. The interviews followed the interview guide as well as soliciting participants' feedback on any assistance they may have received or would like to receive from the community or the DCPSS. I decided to take notes instead of recording the interviews to increase the respondents' comfort level (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

***Focus groups.*** The two AmeriCorps members conducted two focus groups, and I conducted one focus group. We used a specific process, script, and list of questions that I provided. Prior to the first focus group, I provided training to the team on how to conduct focus groups including the goals of the focus groups, moderating discussions, recording responses, the role each person plays, how to encourage all students to speak and not have one or two students dominate the conversation, and to address any concerns or questions from the facilitators. In addition to writing down student responses, the facilitators also documented how participants reacted to one another, the overall tone of the group, and the non-verbal communications that were happening within the group. At the beginning of the focus groups, the two AmeriCorps members and I introduced ourselves to the students and explained the purpose of the focus groups. After the

students introduced themselves, we asked the eight questions that focused on supports that students receive related to CCR from their school, what supports they would like to receive, and if they received support from others outside of their school.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest the optimal range of focus group participants ranges between “six to ten participants, preferably people who are strangers to each other” (p. 114). The only focus group that consisted of more than 10 students was at The Boys and Girls Club, which consisted of 11 students. The students who are in The Boys and Girls Club participate in age-level activities, and the number of students in each grade level varies by day, so it was hard to know how many students would be at the Club that particular day. Additionally, I did not want to turn any of the students away, because they were excited to participate. I conducted one focus group, and the two AmeriCorps members conducted two focus groups. The first focus group included 11 students, grades 8-12, and was held at The Boys and Girls Club on January 18, 2018. The second focus group included seven students, grades 11-12, and was held at High School 12 on March 5, 2018. The third focus group included six students, grades 11-12, and was held at High School 9 on March 6, 2018.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

In this section, I will discuss how I analyzed the qualitative and quantitative data included in this study and will then present the main themes that emerged from the data.

**Qualitative data.** This action research study involves multiple sources of qualitative data from the partner meetings, interviews, focus groups, and open-ended survey items. To make sense of these various data sources, and identify which portions of the data to include in my dissertation since the data were collection as part of ongoing

CCR work in Douglas County, I followed Creswell's (2014) iterative process for analyzing qualitative data: (a) typing up notes from the interviews and focus groups; (b) organizing and preparing the data for analysis by categorizing it into the different themes that emerge, (c) reading through all of the data to obtain an overall sense of the information; (d) coding the data and beginning to develop general topics for eventual categorization; (e) generating a description of the settings, people, and themes; (f) interpreting the findings, and (g) writing a narrative to report on what has been learned.

The process of analyzing the qualitative data included multiple steps. First I imported the transcripts into the qualitative computer software program MAXQDA:2018 to begin to identify themes. As I read through a few of the transcripts from the partner meetings, I began to create general codes that included "notes, comments, observations, and queries" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This exercise provided me with an idea of the types of categories and themes that might arise within the other transcripts. After I became more familiar with the coding process and the software, I reread the partner meeting transcripts I had already coded and recoded them to be more specific so that I could group similar data. For example, the first time I coded a partner meeting transcript, I included "more students wanting to enter workforce, but lack skills and desire to gain skills" as the whole code; when I redid the coding, I coded this same comment as "career services."

I used this coding process for the data collected from the partner meetings, interviews, and the focus groups. After categorizing the data into themes, I looked for similarities and differences between the themes. For example, one theme was that high school staff and faculty want professional development related to career and college

readiness. The data revealed that administrators may perceive professional development differently from the staff and faculty, so it was important to use additional levels of coding (e.g., PD\_staff, PD\_admin) to help distinguish different perspectives on the same concept (Babbie, 2013). My initial iteration of coding resulted in 612 codes that I then categorized into seven themes and 25 sub-themes and tallied the number of times the theme was mentioned in the partner meetings, interviews, and student focus groups (see Table 5).

Table 5  
*Summary of Qualitative Findings*

System Infrastructure Themes	Partner Meetings	School Interviews	Student Focus Groups
Infrastructure	23	5	9
Time	4	5	3
Funding and Transportation	14	5	
Culture	5	5	6
Staffing	12	5	23
CCR Staff	4	5	14
Teacher Mindset & Accountability	1	5	9
Inconsistent Staffing & Professional Development	7	5	
Curriculum	15	5	12
Career and College Readiness Access	104	5	96
CCR Activities	52	5	39
Classroom Activities	4	5	5
Episodic Activities	2	5	4
College Visits & Other Activities	9	5	19
Accelerated Learning/Dual Credit	11	5	9
Career Services	26	5	2
Career and College Access Programs	19	5	18
Tracking Tools & Using Data		5	7
Types of Students and Families	61	5	40
Students Not Being Served Through CCR	24	5	
Relationships with Staff		5	3
Culture & Attitude	14	5	
Families	12	5	20
Culture & Attitude	6	5	17
Communication	5	5	
Partnerships	66	5	2
School Absorptive Capacity			
Interaction Between Schools and Partners	9	5	2
Qualities of External Partners		5	
Organizational Learning	21	5	

**Quantitative data.** My literature review highlighted that there is often a discrepancy between the perceptions of administrators, faculty, and staff related to career and college readiness as well as where responsibility lies to provide services and structure for students. To compare responses for various subgroups such as administrators, teachers, and other staff and faculty, I used SPSS software to analyze the career and college readiness survey data through descriptive statistics and six one-way ANOVAs. The descriptive statistics allowed me to describe and understand the data set for each group (e.g. administrators, teachers, and other staff and faculty) through the mean and standard deviation (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). I used one-way ANOVAs to compare the outcomes of two groups (Creswell, 2014) related to the six areas from the survey: (a) student readiness, (b) career and college options, (c) curriculum and programs, (d) using data, (e) career and college readiness programs and tools, and (f) professional development.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

In this chapter, I begin with a short sketch of the schools included in this study as well as a summary of the school's staff and faculty who engage in career and college readiness (CCR) work to provide context for the findings. Then I discuss the seven major themes that emerged from the data: the CCR survey, partner meetings, school interviews, and student focus groups. The first theme is how infrastructure, or lack of infrastructure, within a school can support or hinder career and college readiness activities and programs. Culture is the second theme, which resonated throughout many of the findings including infrastructure, staffing, students and families, and partners. The third theme focuses on how staffing across the sample plays a role in CCR. The fourth theme examines what role, if any, CCR has in the curriculum. The fifth theme concerns CCR access and the sixth theme was about how CCR affects different student groups differently, the level of parental engagement in CCR, and CCR interactions with staff and faculty. The seventh theme focuses on community partnerships and how they connect with CCR in the high schools. My research question was:

RQ1: What do educators and students in rural Oregon think is important to include when developing and supporting a career and college readiness plan?

- a. What services, activities, and work practices are utilized in CCR plans in rural Oregon?
- b. What types of positions and/or external partners are important to include when developing a CCR plan in rural Oregon?

- c. What resources, routines, and tools have played a critical role in the work and/or development of the existing CCR plan at a high school in rural Oregon?

### **Profile of Participants**

In partnership with the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS) executive director, I conducted interviews with career and college readiness (CCR) high school teams (n=5). There were very few commonalities on the topics that were discussed across the interviews as each of the CCR teams consisted of different roles within the schools. I intentionally did not request specific roles of the people that I wanted to meet with; rather, I asked to meet with the school's CCR team to see who the administrators thought should be a part of the CCR conversation for their high school.

- At High School 4, the interview started with the administrator who is both the superintendent and principal at the middle school and high school. The ASPIRE coordinator oversees the CCR hub and joined us for the last part of the interview. The administrator focused most of his comments on the *House* program he is hoping to expand to include all of their middle and high school students. The House program combines academics and CCR for student learning.
- At High School 1, the interview was with the assistant principal who often referred me to speak to the CCR staff to better answer the questions that I was asking. At first this concerned me, because if he was not knowledgeable about CCR at the school, then who was “in charge?” After talking to a member of the CCR staff, I learned that this assistant principal's management style is to trust his staff to do their jobs, thus delegating authority. For example, one of the teachers

has made her classroom into the *college center*. The *career center* is under a different teacher's domain.

- At High School 8, we met with the high school counselor. She shares her CCR role with the librarian and school secretary. The secretary helps with paperwork, registrar duties, credit recovery, and knows the academic status for each student in the high school. The librarian is learning about scholarships, so she can help the students and alleviate some of the counselor's work. These three people have divided the senior class to each work with a group on CCR and share the CCR materials and resources between the counseling office and the library.
- At High School 2, the administrator originally suggested we meet online because they are in a very small, rural district, and he is the main person overseeing CCR. I said that I would like to come out and meet him face-to-face, to not only establish rapport with him, but to also see the high school. The student services coordinator shares some of the CCR duties with the administrator and joined the interview, adding details about their CCR work. High School 2 does not have a specific physical space for CCR, but they do have materials and resources throughout the school.
- At High School 9, I met with the current executive director, the incoming executive director, and the school principal. As a charter school, High School 9 works with students who were not a good fit at their previous schools. The CCR team supports many programs and opportunities that are unique to their school. For example, the school's ASPIRE program houses college materials and resources; career readiness is shared throughout classes and curricula.

Table 6 provides a profile of the 10 high schools and 74 participants who completed the CCR survey. The table shows the role the respondents have in their school and their race and ethnicity. Most of the respondents (77%) have a graduate degree, which is common for high school educators in Oregon as they earn their master's degree concurrently with their teaching certificate. One of the administrators reported earning a doctorate degree. Most of the high schools did not have a high school counselor, so the group *Other* includes counselors and positions as varied as garden coordinator, career and college advisor, dropout prevention specialist, student services coordinator, librarian, media assistant, and registrar.

Table 6  
 Profile of Participants per CCR Survey

High School	N	School Role			Ethnic/Racial Heritage			
		Admin	Teacher	Other	White (non- hispanic)	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian	Choose not to Answer
High School 1	4	2	2		4			
High School 2	4	1	3		3			1
High School 4	7		6	1	6			1
High School 7	5		5		3			2
High School 8	12	1	7	4	12	1		
High School 9	4	1	2	1	3			1
High School 10	2	1	1		2			
High School 11	24		18	6	21		1	2
High School 12	8	1	6	1	6			2
High School 14	4		3	1	3			1
Total	74	7	53	14	63	1	1	10

*Note:* Both Hispanic and African American were included as an option, but were not selected by respondents.

## **Key Themes from the Data**

My analysis of the qualitative data uncovered seven themes: (a) ways in which the infrastructure, or lack of infrastructure, within a school can support or hinder career and college readiness activities and programs; (b) the importance of culture in a school; (c) the role of staffing in CCR; (d) the role of CCR in the curriculum; (e) student access to CCR activities and resources; (f) differences across student groups, the level of parent engagement in CCR, and the understanding of CCR for staff and faculty; and (g) community partnerships connected with CCR in high schools.

In order to analyze the quantitative data, I ran six one-way ANOVAs (Tables 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, and 13) to measure if there were differences among administrators, teachers, and other staff and faculty on their thoughts about the following: (a) whether or not their high school supported career and college readiness activities and programs; (b) whether or not the students were career and college ready; (c) how well staff and faculty understood the career and college options that are available to their students; (d) how well their career and college readiness curriculum supports their students; (e) how comfortable they are using data; and (f) what professional development they would like access to. The ANOVA tables are interspersed throughout the findings section to align with the themes uncovered in the qualitative data.

System infrastructure encompasses the seven themes I describe below. This overall theme and sub-themes can be mapped onto both of my theoretical frameworks. As Bronfenbrenner's (1994) model suggests, students' surrounding environment has an effect on their personal development in each layer of the framework: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. The themes and

sub-themes connect with at least one of the layers of this framework. Farrell & Coburn's (2016) Absorptive Capacity Theory embodies the infrastructure of a school and how school personnel are able to work with and benefit from external partners; findings from this study use this theory to describe how the high school personnel are engaging with students in CCR as well as how they are interacting with external partners.

The first theme is how the infrastructure, or lack of infrastructure, within a school can support career and college readiness activities and programs.

### **Infrastructure**

Infrastructure was mentioned in all five interviews and 19 times during the partner meetings; the sub-theme *time*, or the lack of time and funding and transportation emerged throughout the interviews and focus groups.

A one-way ANOVA (Table 7) on the CCR survey section *your school* was conducted to determine whether a high school is able to support CCR activities and programs. The ANOVA resulted in the following means and standard deviations: administrators ( $n = 7, M = 5.71, SD = 0.951$ ); teachers ( $n = 53, M = 6.15, SD = 1.215$ ); and other staff and faculty ( $n = 14, M = 6.93, SD = 1.269$ ). There were no outliers, as assessed by a boxplot; there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .521$ ); and the differences between these groups is statistically significant,  $F(2, 71) = 3.0881, p = .05$ . These results support the qualitative findings that there was a difference of opinion in how well the high school is able to support CCR activities and programs dependent on school role.

Table 7  
ANOVA Results for Schools

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Between Groups	2	8.972	4.486	3.088	.05	.80
Within Groups	71	103.150	1.453			
Total	73	112.122				

**Time.** This sub-theme resonated throughout the five interviews, the three focus groups, and was mentioned four times during the partner meetings. The staff and faculty mentioned that lack of time during the school day had an impact on how often they were able to talk with their students about CCR. During the interview at High School 2, for example, the principal told me that he and the student services coordinator “take on everything extra beyond academics and are being spread thinner and thinner.” All of their staff already wear multiple hats and do not have time to take on additional duties. This was made clear at High School 8 where the counselor had to divide her time between helping students with their scholarship and college applications (in the room next door) and our scheduled interview. The principal at High School 4 is combatting the time issue by thinking about integrating *houses* into his school that incorporate academics and career and college readiness; he comes from a school that implemented a similar structure, so he has knowledge of how to implement and expand the program. In these three examples, the high schools are creative in how they integrate CCR activities into

their schools, so that the activities are not an additional piece that they need to find time for in the school day.

During the focus groups, the students also commented on the lack of time that was dedicated to CCR activities. In response to the question of how well the school provides all grade levels information about CCR, one student said that “students don’t know this stuff [career and college readiness], so they haven’t prepared themselves and then it’s too late senior year.” When asked if the school helps develop skills and knowledge for preparing for after high school, a student said, “Yes, but not consistently, you have to ask for help.” Another student answered this same question by stating that “teachers will tell students what they need and where to get it, sometimes, but you have to ask.” This same student suggested that there should be a “college readiness class” with dedicated time to support students.

**Funding and transportation.** This sub-theme was mentioned in each of the five interviews and nine times during the partner meetings. The superintendent at High School 2 said that “money is one of the biggest gaps in being able to provide CCR activities to students.” The vice principal at High School 1 said that “lack of funding creates barriers for transportation to CCR events and gets in the way of providing Career Technical Education (CTE) opportunities for students.” In reference to grants, a participant at the partner meeting reported that “grants are hard to write, hard to get, and hard to find someone with the time and expertise to write them.” For rural schools, grants can help supplement funding issues, but the lack of staff to administer grants also makes them a hindrance.

The lack of transportation for students to attend CCR events was mentioned in each of the five interviews and six times during the partner meetings. This challenge was also evident in how I set up the data collection: it was difficult to schedule the focus groups for after school, because most students did not have their own transportation to and from the school to participate. Lack of transportation makes it hard for students to visit college campuses, attend CCR events in their communities, and participate in internships or other on-the-job opportunities that are off of the school campus. In addition, career preparation through providing a range of CTE options was noted by study participants as difficult due to lack of funding. One school, lacking the funds for equipment for CTE classes, had an opportunity to partner with a neighboring school for CTE but did not have a way to transport the students to participate.

## **Culture**

Culture was mentioned in all five interviews, six times in the focus groups, and five times during the partner meetings. I created three main sub-themes to capture the data on culture: communication, student relationships, and developing a culture of career and college readiness.

One staff member mentioned that “having open communication in meetings” is an asset for building a system that would support career and college readiness, noting that trust needed to be established first to ensure open communication. Communication was also mentioned in the interviews as an important prerequisite to identify gaps and how to fill them. In addition to open communication, staff and faculty mentioned that student relationships are especially important in rural areas, because the school population is typically small, so knowing their students and families is more common than not. For

example, when asked how she tracks career and college readiness goals, the counselor at High School 8 said, “By memory.” She knows what each student at the high school plans on doing after high school. High School 1 is such a small community that they invite the homeschooled students in to participate in their CCR programs and join their sports teams.

In each of the interviews, we discussed how to create a career- and college-going culture. Some of the ideas were to integrate a CCR curriculum into their advisory and study hall classes, taking advantage of professional development opportunities to learn about CCR topics, strategizing on how to work with each grade level whether individually or with groups, and using community partners to support their efforts.

### **Staffing**

Staffing was mentioned in all five interviews, 12 times during the partner meetings, and 23 times during the focus groups. I included CCR staff, teacher mindset and accountability, and inconsistent staffing and professional development in this sub-theme.

**Lack of dedicated CCR staff.** The lack of staff dedicated to CCR was mentioned in each of the five interviews, 14 times in the focus groups, and four times in the partner meetings. High School 4 does not have a school counselor but does have a staff member dedicated to CCR through the ASPIRE program. ASPIRE is a volunteer, mentoring program that provides a small stipend to schools who hire an ASPIRE coordinator to manage the program (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2018). The principal at High School 4 noted he hopes to “bolster the guidance side” with his ASPIRE coordinator – who would split her time between CCR and providing guidance to students

separate from CCR. High School 8 does have a school counselor and part of her work is focused on CCR. However, she is unable to serve all of the students, so a CCR team was created to serve more students. The CCR team includes the librarian, school secretary, and the high school counselor who share the senior class in CCR. High School 1 has two teachers who share CCR—one teacher for college and one teacher for career.

**Teacher mindset and accountability.** Teacher mindset and accountability for integrating CCR into their classrooms was noted in each of the five interviews, nine times during the focus groups, and once in the partner meetings. Each of the five administrators interviewed reported they are willing to ask teachers and staff to add CCR activities to their already busy schedules as long as the activities are easily integrated into existing curriculum and classes. One principal reported:

It's important to provide teachers with a purpose to get them on board. The proof is in the pudding and when they see the system work, they will get on board. If they aren't willing to get on board, they at least need to meet halfway or go somewhere else. We need to prepare our kids better and it will take all of us.

**Inconsistent staffing and professional development.** Inconsistent staff and professional development was mentioned in each of the five interviews and seven times in the partner meetings. Teacher and staff inexperience was reported as an issue in these rural schools mainly because staff have many roles within a school and it is hard to replace staff with the requisite variety of skills when they retire. For example, at High School 8, a long-time English teacher, who was also the main career readiness contact for students, retired. The new English teacher does not have the same experience, so now there is a gap for career readiness within the school. The school also lost their

Educational Talent Search grant and staff, hired a new librarian and secretary, and started a Youth Transition Program grant in one year. With a small staff, they are struggling to continue the CCR services that they have previously provided. In the focus groups, students identified specific teachers who they counted on to help with CCR but said most teachers “get more invested in students who they think will succeed. Teachers have more expectations for certain kids, and I don’t always fit.” Another student said that “you’re on your own and the teachers only know about Umpqua Community College.”

The High School 9 teachers “connect the importance that English and math will have in their [students’] lives” during class, said one administrator. Teachers also take their students into the community to provide service to family development centers earning money for scholarships through their work. The High School 9 is a charter school and is able to provide alternate ways for student learning and CCR that traditional public schools are not always able to do. The staff and faculty across the sample reported being interested in professional development opportunities to expand their knowledge and offerings in CCR as shown in Table 8.

A one-way ANOVA on the CCR survey section *professional development* was conducted to determine if the response to whether the school offered professional development opportunities was different for different groups. The ANOVA resulted in the following means and standard deviation: administrators ( $n = 7$ ,  $M = 5.14$ ,  $SD = 1.464$ ); teachers ( $n = 53$ ,  $M = 5.06$ ,  $SD = 1.420$ ); and other staff and faculty ( $n = 14$ ,  $M = 5.29$ ,  $SD = 2.016$ ). There were no outliers, as assessed by a boxplot; there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .440$ ); and the differences between these groups was statistically significant,  $F(2, 71) =$

.123,  $p = .884$ . These results align with the qualitative data showing a difference of opinion in whether the school offers professional development opportunities dependent on school role.

Table 8

*ANOVA Results for Professional Development*

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Between Groups	2	.591	.295	.123	.884	.003
Within Groups	71	170.544	2.402			
Total	73	171.135				

### **Curriculum**

Data related to curriculum included a broad range of topics and levels of integration within the schools discussed below. Curriculum was mentioned in all five interviews, twelve times in the focus groups, and 15 times during the partner meetings.

A one-way ANOVA (Table 9) on the CCR survey section *curriculum and programs* was conducted to determine how the different groups perceive how well career and college readiness curriculum and programs supported their students in pursuing education after high school. The ANOVA resulted in the following means and standard deviation: administrators ( $n = 7, M = 11.86, SD = 1.464$ ); teachers ( $n = 53, M = 12.08, SD = 1.567$ ); and other staff and faculty ( $n = 14, M = 13.21, SD = 1.188$ ). There were no outliers, as assessed by a boxplot; there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by

Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .716$ ); and the differences between these groups was not statistically significant,  $F(2, 71) = 3.503, p = .035$ . Based on these findings, there was not enough evidence to conclude that there is any difference in opinions based on school role; the qualitative data help elucidate this topic.

Table 9

*ANOVA Results for Curriculum and Programs*

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Between Groups	2	15.682	7.841	3.503	.035	.090
Within Groups	71	158.912	2.238			
Total	73	174.595				

The qualitative data relating to curriculum focused on moving toward implementing and integrating CCR into their curriculum. The themes in this section ranged from a school that is starting with the “bare basics” to the schools *wishing* for the following: time to have personal face-to-face conversation with students, adding CCR curriculum to study hall, offering college classes throughout the day, creating a careers club, and working with students sooner than in their junior and senior years. For example, High School 1 provides a senior class in CCR and wants to figure out how to provide a class in the other grade levels too; the principal reported being open to offering a CCR curriculum in study hall if he had access to a curriculum. In a focus group, a student gave

credit to the Early College Program for providing information about CCR but wanted more support around scholarship deadlines and opportunities.

### **Career and College Readiness Access**

Career and college readiness access was mentioned in all five interviews, 96 times in the focus groups, and 104 times during the partner meetings. Within this theme, I included the following sub-themes: CCR activities, career and college options, and tracking tools and data.

**Career and college readiness activities.** This sub-theme was mentioned in each of the five interviews, 39 times in the focus groups, and 52 times in the partner meetings. The CCR activities were vastly different across the sample. Very few schools were doing similar activities and there was little collaboration among them. Schools ranged from doing some basic activities like college fairs, career fairs, and a senior project to a school that had college access programs and was doing mentoring, classroom presentations, and some CCR integration within the classroom. Regardless of where a school falls on this spectrum, all of the CCR teams and survey respondents reported wanting to do more and knowing that they need to be doing more.

**Classroom activities.** Providing CCR curriculum in the classroom was mentioned in each of the five interviews, five times in the focus groups, and four times in the partner meetings. Two students in the focus groups mentioned that they used Career Information System (CIS) in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and in a technology class. High School 4, High School 9, and High School 2 reporting using class time for students to work on college and scholarship essays. High School 8 provides a senior scholarship class, and High School 1 has a year-long CCR class for seniors. Some other examples from the partner meetings include a 7<sup>th</sup>

grade college and career class, pathways class, a high school college and careers class, and the Lancer Academy to help students reduce credit deficiency and plan for their futures.

***Episodic activities.*** Episodic activities were mentioned in each of the five interviews, four times in the focus groups, and twice in the partner meetings. Each of the schools were doing various CCR activities that they conduct on an episodic basis including college fairs, visits to college campuses, financial aid nights, senior project/portfolio, junior and senior parent night, job shadows, and classroom-based activities. The counselor at High School 8 reported she would like to see these activities under one staff person to focus on CCR and have a “hub for consistency.” She said that it is challenging to train new staff, because of the “lack of a system and information in one place.”

***College.*** College was mentioned in each of the five interviews, 19 times in the focus groups, and nine times in the partner meetings. In a focus group, six of the seven students said that the only college they hear about is Umpqua Community College, and one student said “I have gone to UCC way too many times for fieldtrips.” Another student said “I found out about Western Oregon University on my own and then asked questions about it.” In the partner meetings, a common comment was that they take the students on field trips to UCC and would like to “increase the number of UCC mentors connecting to students in high school.” The principal at High School 4 reported a desire to “decrease the gap with other community colleges and universities and build relationships with them.” Overall, participants in the interviews, partner meetings, and

focus groups stated that students mainly visit UCC, have limited interaction with other colleges, and that they want more interaction to learn about other opportunities.

***Accelerated learning/dual-credit.*** Accelerated learning and dual-credit were mentioned in each of the five interviews, nine times in the focus groups, and eleven times in the partner meetings. A student at the High School 9 mentioned that “I asked about taking more challenging classes, so my teacher helped me enroll in Umpqua Community College part-time.” A student at High School 12 “took college classes while in high school, so I don’t have to take so many after I graduate.” These students reported that there are some dual-credit options at their high schools, but during the interviews and partner meetings, the staff and faculty noted that they wished that they could offer more options for their students, especially classes related to career-technical education (CTE). The vice-principal at High School 1 mentioned that “High School 13, about 20 miles away, has a CTE program that I am trying to partner with.” Through a partnership with another school, he would need to figure out transportation back and forth between the schools for the students. High School 1 is able to offer dual credit classes for college-level Math but not for writing, because his English teacher is not certified at the college level. During the partner meeting, a participant mentioned that “expanded options are not available in every district,” which is a big barrier for them to try and overcome.

***Career services.*** Career services are a main issue for the schools in Douglas County and was mentioned in each of the five interviews, twice in the focus groups, and 26 times in the partner meetings. These rural areas lack career experiences which help students develop *soft skills* including jobs, internships, on-the-job training, and even job shadowing opportunities. The vice principal at High School 1 said “there are not many

businesses in the area, but the ones we have are happy to provide opportunities for students. There just aren't enough to go around.” High School 2 is part of an agriculture advisory group and the superintendent/principal noted that the school has some connections to “local ranchers and some construction people” and “many of my families are employed by the Cow Creek Tribe, which provides tutoring and some funding for students.” One common strategy mentioned in the interviews, focus groups, and partner meetings was that all of the schools provided opportunities for their students to attend the various career fairs in the county.

In the partner meetings, the group discussed the various barriers to providing more career services such as transportation, the distance from the school to a town, having enough positions to share between multiple schools, and the lack of a comprehensive system in which the schools could work together to develop and share opportunities. One suggestion to help eliminate some of these barriers was for the Douglas County Students for Partners Success to help coordinate efforts to create more career services and experiences across the county for students.

**Career and college options.** A one-way ANOVA (Table 10) on the CCR survey section *career and college options* was conducted to determine if *how well the staff understood the career and college options that were available to their students* was different for different groups. The ANOVA resulted in the following means and standard deviation: administrators ( $n = 7, M = 17.71, SD = 1.799$ ); teachers ( $n = 53, M = 17.42, 2.663$ ); and other staff and faculty ( $n = 14, M = 19.36, SD = 3.225$ ). There were no outliers, as assessed by a boxplot; there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .128$ ); and the differences between these

groups was statistically significant,  $F(2, 71) = 2.837, p = .065$ . Based on these findings, there was a difference of opinion in how well the staff understands the career and college options available to their students dependent on school role.

Table 10

*ANOVA Results for Career and College Options*

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Between Groups	2	41.841	20.920	2.837	.065	.074
Within Groups	71	523.511	7.373			
Total	73	565.351				

As mentioned earlier, the data show that staff and faculty work to find creative ways to integrate career and college readiness within their schools. For example, The High School 9 provides their students with project-based learning opportunities that create a teamwork atmosphere and the development of practical work products that could be used for a job interview. Students participate in food services, computer technology, natural resources, and health technology. Not only do these opportunities provide the soft skills students need to be successful, but they also provide an academic side, incorporating English and math skills. Other CCR teams talked about leveraging current grants and college access programs, designed for certain populations, for the rest of their students.

During the partner meetings and interviews, the need for a systemic approach to CCR was frequently mentioned in the guise of another topic. A counselor from High School 8 reported that she wants career and college readiness “to be a part of the system” and in the partner meetings, a participant stated that “structured career counseling and guidance [should be available] for all levels, not just highly motivated [students].” One school is putting an “emphasis system wide on making positive connections with students.” And, finally, High School 8 wants “systems that don’t have to be recreated.” During a focus group, a student said that in “my first year I was offered ASPIRE” and suggested that “maybe a sophomore prep class should be created.” Another student said that he “gets help and support from home but not at school” and “wished I could have got something before my senior year” to help him understand his CCR options.

*Career and college access programs.* Career and college access programs was mentioned in each of the five interviews, 18 times in the focus groups, and 19 times in the partner meetings. A component of all of these programs is that part of the support they provide to students are mentoring and tutoring. Mentoring and tutoring activities include peer mentoring, teen homework night, tutoring during and after school, grade-level advisors, and a tutorial period built into the school day. Respondents noted that increasing the number of mentors that help students would provide additional support for these activities. The most common career and college access program used across the sample was the Youth Transition Program (YTP). YTP is funded by a federal grant “to prepare students with disabilities for employment or career related postsecondary education or training through the provision of a comprehensive array of pre-employment transition services and supports (University of Oregon, 2018). Like the YTP, other career

and college access programs - ASPIRE, GEAR UP, and the Early College Program - only serve a subset of the student population: (See Table 11 CCR Programs and Tracking Tools).

The ASPIRE program is a volunteer mentoring program that “matches trained and supportive adult volunteer mentors with middle and high school students to develop a plan to help them meet their career and education goals beyond high school” (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2018). Oregon’s Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) goal is to “increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary programs” (Oregon State University, 2018). One student mentioned “getting help with scholarships in the GEAR UP class.” Oregon GEAR UP’s goal is to “increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary programs” (Oregon State University, 2018). The Early College Program at the High School 9 “provides an opportunity for academically qualified seniors to get a head start on their college careers while concurrently completing their high school graduation requirements” (Phoenix Charter School, 2018). A student in the focus groups stated that “the Early College Program helped me develop skills for college classes.” While many students are served through the programs, study participants noted that they do not currently have the capacity to serve all students.

Table 11

*CCR Programs and Tracking Tools*

High School	Tracking Tools			CCR Programs			
	Career Info. System	Education Plan and Profile	Career Cruisin	ASPIRE	GEAR UP	YTP*	Early College Program
High School 1	X	X				X	
High School 2	X						
High School 4	X	X		X		X	
High School 7	X	X					
High School 8	X	X				X	
High School 9	X	X	X				X
High School 10	X						
High School 11	X	X	X				
High School 12	X	X			X		
High School 14	X	X					
Total	10	8	2	1	1	3	1

\*Youth Transition Program

**Tracking tools and using data.** Tracking tools and using data was mentioned in each of the five interviews and seven times in the focus groups. A one-way ANOVA (Table 12) on the CCR survey section *tracking tools and using data* was conducted to determine whether the school set appropriate goals around career and college readiness and whether they used data to help make decisions was different for different groups. The ANOVA resulted in the following means and standard deviation: administrators ( $n = 7$ ,  $M = 10.71$ ,  $SD = 1.496$ ); teachers ( $n = 53$ ,  $M = 11.04$ ,  $SD = 1.732$ ); and other staff and

faculty ( $n = 14$ ,  $M = 12.07$ ,  $SD = 2.336$ ). There were no outliers, as assessed by a boxplot; there was homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .137$ ); and the differences between these groups was statistically significant,  $F(2, 71) = 2.021$ ,  $p = .140$ . Based on these findings, there is a difference of opinion in whether the school sets appropriate goals around CCR and whether they used data to help make decisions dependent on school role.

Table 12

*ANOVA Results for Tracking Tools and Using Data*

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Between Groups	2	13.678	6.839	2.021	.140	.054
Within Groups	71	240.282	3.384			
Total	73	253.959				

Table 11 shows the variety of tracking tools and college access programs that the schools included in this study use. For example, the 10 participating schools in this study use the Career Information System (CIS), which is a web-based system of career and educational information that helps students create accurate and actionable career and education plans (Oregon Career Information System, 2018). Another tool that is frequently used (and is a mandate from the Oregon Department of Education) is the Education Plan and Profile, which assists students in pursuing their personal, educational, and career interests and post-high school goals (Oregon Department of Education, 2018).

Based on the CCR survey results, the CIS and the Education Plan and Profile are the primary tracking tools for the majority of the schools. However, data from the interviews revealed that neither were frequently used and there was not a systemic process for infusing these within the curriculum and grade level that would support the consistent use of these tools.

*Career information system.* When asked about how frequently CIS is used in the school, the administrator from High School 4 stated “not frequently, because we have to take them [students] out of class.” High School 2 starts CIS in 8<sup>th</sup> grade mainly in English class, but study participants reported that they only have a basic-level understanding of CIS and need training to better support their students. High School 8 uses “CIS mainly to reach younger student with the middle school modules.” Study participants from both High School 1 and High School 9 mentioned that they license CIS, but neither school provided any details on its use. In the focus groups four students mentioned using CIS in “6<sup>th</sup> grade,” “tech class,” and “for portfolios.”

*Education plan and profile.* The Education Plan and Profile (the Plan) was not mentioned in the partner meetings nor by any of the students in the focus groups. None of the five schools interviewed use the Plan. When asked about the use of the Plan, High School 9 said “we aren’t really using it and need to bring something like this back into structure.” Based on these findings, the staff and faculty across the sample want to incorporate more tools and CCR into the school day for their students, but without a systemic process, the use is inconsistent.

## **Students and Families**

The importance of student and family interactions with school personnel were mentioned in all five interviews, 61 times during the partner meetings, and 40 during the focus groups. I included students served, students not being served through CCR, relationships with staff, culture and attitude, student readiness, and families and communication in this sub-theme. As shown in Appendix O, it is difficult to discern which grade levels are being served within the school as responses varied across the study participants.

**Students not being served through CCR.** This sub-theme was mentioned in each of the five interviews and 24 times in the partner meetings. The students not being served through CCR by the high school was easier for the staff and faculty to list out and included, but was not limited to: credit-deficient students; youth with barriers (no Oregon Driver's License, criminal history); students lacking drive/motivation; students with indicators of past trauma; students without family support; students in special education; and disengaged youth. To try and engage these students, the High School 9 employs a "half-time trauma-informed counselor to work with students" and attempts to use restorative justice as a model, because "building relationships with their student is essential when working with students with barriers." In the focus group, students reported feeling this exclusion of not being talked to about CCR because "teachers have their favorites of who they want to support." Another student said, "Teachers get more invested in students who they think will succeed, teachers have more expectations for certain kids" or "they think I am a delinquent because of my haircut and how I dress."

**Relationships with staff.** Relationships with staff was mentioned throughout the five interviews and three focus groups. A consistent finding that came up in the data was that being in a rural school, staff get to know the students personally. Unfortunately, study participants felt that staff do not have the time, resources, or personnel to work with the students effectively in relation to CCR. The principal at High School 4 said that “even though we can think outside of the box, as a charter school, we still have a capacity issue, because our people are not trained as counselors.” The High School 2 principal said that “in our small school, teachers can have a more personal relationship with their students...but we have gaps in CCR – not enough people, training, coaching, or funding.” Many students talked about a specific teacher that will either seek them out to discuss their future plans or that the students feel comfortable reaching out to. Students also talked about The Freshman House program at High School 11 and how useful it was to hear about paying for college, hearing from guest speakers, and making a connection with the teacher.

**Attitude.** This sub-theme was mentioned in each of the five interviews and 14 times during the partner meetings. Participants in the interviews, focus groups, and partner meetings all mentioned culture and attitude in some context throughout the overall qualitative sample. The principal at High School 2 said “it’s important to expose the students to CCR on a regular basis –monthly or every other week—if you make it something worthwhile and different from going to class, they [students] will likely participate.” An administrator from High School 4 noted, “meetings between students and a volunteer need to be done face-to-face. An online meeting won’t work, the students won’t show up.” When pushed, he said, “If a relationship is built first, in person, the

students might show up for an online meeting.” A student stated that “a lot of teachers here seem to genuinely care about your future and the atmosphere is good.” Another student “pushes myself a lot to get more support...no one tells me to take challenging courses...I just know I need to take them to be ready for college.” When discussing biggest barriers to student success, partners said that “student drive and lack of motivation,” “students who think college isn’t for them,” and “students who lack direction and support” are their biggest challenges.

A one-way ANOVA (Table 13) on the CCR survey section *student readiness* was conducted to *determine the level of knowledge of staff and students for setting career and college readiness goals and meeting and successfully completing those goals* was different for groups. The ANOVA resulted in the following means and standard deviation: administrators ( $n = 7, M = 17.86, SD = 3.436$ ); teachers ( $n = 53, M = 17.64, SD = 2.379$ ); and other staff and faculty ( $n = 14, M = 18.14, SD = 1.292$ ). There were no outliers, as assessed by a boxplot; there was not homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene's test of homogeneity of variances ( $p = .003$ ); and the differences between these groups was statistically significant,  $F(2, 71) = .263, p = .770$ . These results aligned with the qualitative findings that there was a difference of opinion on the level of knowledge for staff and students in setting and achieving goals dependent on school role.

For this ANOVA, the mean is high for each group meaning that the group believes that student readiness is high and the staff and students have the knowledge for setting and meeting goals. However, the means of the other five ANOVAs were mid-range, which seems to contradict this student readiness finding. These results for student

readiness show that the groups believe in student readiness but not necessarily believe in the adequacy of the supports that are being offered to students.

Table 13

*ANOVA Results for Student Readiness*

	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	$\eta_p^2$
Between Groups	2	2.862	1.431	.263	.770	.007
Within Groups	71	386.760	5.447			
Total	73	389.622				

**Family influence.** Family influence was mentioned in each of the five interviews, 20 times in the focus groups, and twelve times in the partner meetings. Many students in Douglas County would be first-generation college students and do not have a lot of exposure to conversations about their plans for after high school from their families. In these next sections, I examine the culture and attitude related to families and how the schools communicate with them.

**Family culture and attitude.** Family culture and attitude was mentioned in each of the five interviews, 17 times during the focus groups, and six times in the partner meetings. During the focus groups, many students talked about the support, or lack thereof, that they receive from their families. For example, one student said, “My parents push me, in a good way, to leave our town, because there aren’t jobs for me here after graduation” and another student reported that “my parents don’t give me support at home

and are really hard on me.” Further sentiments around family influence included a student who said that “my mom supports me wanting to get a job after high school and not go to college” and another noted, “I am going into forestry like my dad.... He shows me carpentry at home.” The participants at the partner meetings said that the students who receive the most positive impacts from CCR are the “students with stable, supportive families.”

*Communication with students and families.* Communication with students and families was mentioned in each of the five interviews and five times in the partner meetings. Students hear about career and college-related activities during their school day through announcements notifying them of upcoming events, college visits, guest speakers, and financial aid nights. To ascertain how families were receiving information about CCR, I asked the CCR teams during the interviews about their communication with parents. At the High School 9, a participant from the CCR team wished they “were more proactive, had structures in place, were more reactive to needs, and had better communication with the students.” A participant from High School 2 reported using “Facebook, Instagram, and their auto call system” and a participant from High School 8 uses “Facebook, email, a blog that hasn’t had many visitors, remind.com, and personal conversation at school events.” None of the schools provide any information about CCR in their registration packets.

### **Partnerships**

Partnerships were mentioned in all five interviews, twice in the focus groups, and 66 times during the partner meetings. While coding this section, I used constructs from Farrell and Coburn’s (2016) Absorptive Capacity Theory framework as sub-themes.

Interactions between schools and partners and qualities of external partners emerged from the data; the schools' absorptive capacity and organizational learning were not explicitly mentioned, showing the growth needed in these schools to have effective CCR planning processes. Appendix R is a list of the Douglas County partners reported by study respondents.

**Interaction between school and partners.** Interaction between school and partners was mentioned in each of the five interviews, twice in the focus groups, and nine times in the partner meetings. Specific examples of interaction included inter-organizational routines and tools and informal social interactions. The vice principal at High School 1 shared how they provide opportunities for their students through partnerships including “the fire department, search and rescue, forestry camp through OSU, and community service.” As High School 1 does not have a lot of businesses in the area, the vice principal reported that he reaches out to the local churches, drilling business, restaurant, and mini mart to create opportunities for his students. His wish is that there was a “centralized connection with businesses for internships and other career-related opportunities. It is hard for me to focus on this along with everything else.” Each of the CCR teams interviewed has similar stories that supported the desire for a centralized connection for career-related opportunities with Douglas County businesses.

**Qualities of external partners.** The qualities of external partners were a large part of each conversation during the five interviews and included guidance, flexibility, and norms and work practices, but with reservations about implementing such partnerships. When asked if he would be willing to work with the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS), the principal at High School 4 said, “Yes, but it

can't be a train wreck, there must be follow through and a focus to get adults in front of the kids." The superintendent at High School 2 was also open to working with partners as long as "everyone knows what their responsibilities are." The executive director at High School 9 suggested that "DCPSS develop a position that will connect the community to the schools... [as a way to] collaborate for collective impact." The counselor at High School 8 reported being willing to entertain working with partners to "create that sweet spot between having enough choices across the schools that are vetted enough for commonalities. Partners are doing the same thing locally, so bring people together to have these conversations." The executive director at High School 9 wants to "build community capacity and you can't do this in isolation. We need to work more collectively."

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I first present a summary of my study findings and discuss how my findings contribute to the literature on career and college readiness planning. I then discuss the specific practice and policy implications of my findings for the CCR work of rural schools, districts, and community partnerships. I will then discuss limitations of both the mixed methods research design that I chose as well as the limitations of this study and how the limitations inform areas for future research. Finally, I will discuss my plan for dissemination of findings from this action research study aimed at improving CCR planning in rural districts in Oregon and across the state.

#### **Summary of Findings**

In the findings chapter, I presented the results of the study by key themes. For this section, I organize my summary of findings around the components of my research question.

#### **RQ1: What do educators and students in rural Oregon think is important to include when developing and supporting a career and college readiness plan?**

Developing a systemic infrastructure that includes CCR as a key component and not as an add-on to other activities or classes was a main theme that was consistently mentioned during data collection across educators, community members, and students. Having a systemic infrastructure was also a consistent finding within the literature I reviewed. For example, Lapan et al.'s (2003) study found the importance of having a systemic plan that defines CCR planning activities, involves stakeholders and the community, and provides a structure that is more inclusive to students. Adequate CCR

staffing was also frequently mentioned in my data collection as a necessity from both CCR teams and students; study participants reported that the lack of staffing created gaps in providing CCR seamlessly and effectively. Another key component to an effective CCR plan identified by my study participants was having a set CCR curriculum that was easy for staff to learn and use, whether in a classroom, a college access program, or as part of a CCR center that students could learn from and engage in.

The specific components of an effective CCR plan most frequently cited by study participants included having purposeful access to career and college readiness that met the needs of the current student body and provided a variety of activities over the four years of high school. Study participants reported that a lack of resources often led high school staff to repeat the same CCR activities year after year, which the students did not find useful. Student and family engagement is another component that both educators and students reported as important. Educators noted that they want to learn how to better engage parents in CCR and get them involved, and students reported the influence of their parents on their CCR planning and therefore wanted their parents to have more access to CCR information. The final component of an effective CCR plan that resonated across the sample was the need for partnerships to help provide career services and opportunities, especially in the rural context of my study, which often made sharing resources difficult due to the vast distances among schools and the lack of transportation.

**RQ1a: What services, activities, and work practices are utilized in CCR plans in rural Oregon?**

This question was mainly answered by what educators and students wished was in place. All of the interview participants discussed services, activities, and work practices

they would like to have as a part of their CCR plan. These wish lists included having CCR activities for grades 9-12, increased career opportunities, and additional staff who were trained in CCR to support students. Students wanted more contact with CCR starting at an earlier age. I heard from many students that grades 11 and 12 were too late to take advantage of multiple college-level classes or to explore colleges and potential career opportunities. These findings aligned with the studies included in my literature review, for example, Sanders and Lewis's (2005) study of three high schools and their community partnerships found that prioritizing process, permitting time, and promoting community ownership helped create a variety of community activities and partnerships that became a part of the school. The community and high school partnership is slowly developing in Douglas County with the support of DCPSS. Currently, CCR services, activities, and work practices are interspersed sporadically within the schools with lack of an overall plan for pulling all of the pieces together to create a seamless system for students.

**RQ1b: What types of positions and/or external partners are important to include when developing a CCR plan in rural Oregon?**

During every interview and focus group, the importance of having dedicated CCR staff was mentioned. Many students shared that specific teachers played a major role in helping them figure out their plan for after high school. The CCR teams recognized that having CCR staff would provide more streamlined services for their students, and they understood the importance of having staff available for CCR. However, the lack of funding made it hard to hire staff that are solely dedicated to CCR. Further, training existing staff was not a ready solution to staffing needs; the counselor at High School 8

noted that it was challenging to provide the necessary level of professional development that would help integrate CCR into the school and curriculum. The CCR teams also stressed the importance of partnering with local businesses to provide career opportunities for their students in the form of job shadows, internships, and on-the-job training.

**RQ1c: What resources, routines, and tools have played a critical role in the work and/or development of the existing CCR plan at a high school in rural Oregon?**

The importance of the relationships that staff have with students in the smaller, rural schools in contributing to effective CCR plans resonated across the study participants. The High School 2 principal said, “In our small school, teachers can have a more personal relationship with their students...but we have gaps in CCR – not enough people, training, coaching, or funding.” The staff are familiar with the students’ families, their academic careers and abilities, their attitudes, and most importantly, what the students want to do after high school. The students also reported that having staff who know them and seek them out to discuss future plans plays a key role in not only their aspirations but also the choices they make during high school.

Some of the other critical factors related to having an effective CCR plan that were mentioned across the sample included (a) administrators stepping in to coordinate CCR activities; (b) classroom activities around scholarship and college essay writing and college applications; (c) episodic events that support a CCR culture such as college fairs, financial aid nights, career fairs, and job shadows; and (d) college access programs (see RQ1b) for expanding the reach of school staff and faculty. These college access programs can be from external partners as well as programs the schools create, like the Early

College Program and Freshman House; and (e) the role parents play in supporting CCR. These resources, routines, and tools are not only critical for developing a CCR plan, they are also important to support and sustain a plan (Foley, 2001). It will take leadership from the schools and the community to come together to discuss how to support these factors and integrate them more permanently and with purpose into the system infrastructure (Alleman & Holly, 2013).

### **Contributions to the Literature**

This study contributes to the research on career and college readiness in several ways. My literature review identified a lack of research that included multiple voices, informing my decision to include a variety of stakeholders in my study to capture the perspectives of partner organizations, administrators, staff and faculty, and students. By using a mixed-methods design, and multiple data collection activities—(a) partner meetings, (b) CCR survey, (c) school interviews, and (d) student focus groups—I captured both qualitative and quantitative data to more fully explore what components are needed to develop, support, and sustain a systematic and systemic CCR plan.

The rural context of my study provides an additional contribution to the CCR research base. One study included in my literature review attempted to capture rural experiences, but only one of the three schools recruited had the time to participate, so the researchers ended up with partial findings (Sanders & Lewis, 2005). My study involved administrators, faculty, and staff from 14 high schools in rural Oregon, multiple community partners, and 24 students. The breadth of my study provides more comprehensive findings that contribute to the research on CCR and helps identify the

essential components for developing, implementing, supporting, and, eventually, sustaining a CCR plan within rural high schools and counties.

Finally, none of the studies in my pool of prior research made suggestions for the range of essential components needed for a CCR plan. Rather, the studies on CCR activities focused on how one specific college access program or activity was serving specific populations or grades of students; none of the studies examined systemic approaches for integrating CCR into schools using community partners to help build and strengthen infrastructure. The studies from the literature review helped shape my study by describing individual pieces of a CCR plan as well as extending the prior research by discussing the multiple components needed for a CCR plan to be effective, seamless, and sustainable.

### **Validity**

It is important to address threats to validity in study design decisions, as well as to identify the validity constraints beyond control for a given study (Creswell, 2014). My convergent mixed-methods action research study has several validity constraints, as well as several ways I reduced validity threats, including generalizability, researcher bias, response bias, and triangulation.

### **Generalizability**

In action research, “practitioners would not claim that their work is ‘generalisable’ in that it can be applied to all like situations, they would agree it is generalisable in that others can learn with and from stories of practice and adopt or adapt these to their own practices as deemed appropriate” (McNiff, 2017, p. 31). Although my study focused on one rural county in Oregon, there are likely similar districts in Oregon

and other states that could learn from the findings of my study. Yin (2009) asserted that generalization in qualitative studies occurs when researchers use previous studies to generalize findings to new studies; as such, my study built upon the studies included in my literature review. Further, Creswell (2014) defined the value of qualitative research not as generalizability but as the description and themes that are developed for a specific purpose, in this case to improve CCR in Douglas County and the state.

### **Researcher Bias**

Researcher bias poses a threat to the reliability of my study. (Babbie, 2012) Since I was the main researcher and engage in career and college readiness as part of my role with The Career, College, Collaborative (C3), this needed to be carefully accounted for by bracketing my assumptions prior to data collection and analysis. Compounding my potential researcher bias, the CCR team that conducted the study with me is comprised of staff from the Educational Service District, Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS), and Umpqua Community College. This CCR team has a vested interest in the success of Douglas County students and their community. To ensure that the data collection was the same across the study, I provided scripts for both the interviews and student focus groups (Merriam, 2016).

### **Response Bias**

Another threat to reliability is response bias on the high school survey; high school staff and faculty might feel uncomfortable answering the questions honestly. To counteract this threat, I informed the respondents that the data would be reported on an aggregate level and would provide anonymity to their responses when used publicly (Creswell, 2014).

## Triangulation

For this study, I used multiple data sources of information including data from partner meetings; school interviews with administrators, counselors, and CCR staff; student focus groups; and the CCR survey to triangulate the study findings. I wanted to ensure justification for the themes that emerged from the data by including these multiple sources and methods. In this way, I was able to show that the convergence of data sources and methods either supported or discounted a single source or method.

Triangulation supported my findings in that when “themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

As shown in Table 14, triangulation across the data set was a strength of my study, adds voice as well as validity.

Table 14  
*Triangulation of Findings Across Data Sources*

CCR Data Triangulation					
	Literature Review	Partner Groups	CCR Survey	Interviews	Student Focus Groups
Infrastructure	X	X	X	X	X
Staffing	X	X	X	X	X
Curriculum, Programs, & Tools	X	X	X	X	X
Career & College Options	X	X	X	X	X
Using Data	X		X	X	X
Professional Development	X	X	X	X	
Culture	X	X	X	X	X
Student Readiness	X		X	X	X

## Implications

This section presents implications for future research, implications for practice, and implications for policy.

## **Implications for Future Research**

This dissertation focused solely on Douglas County, presenting limitations noted above. One area for future research would be to conduct this same study in different counties in Oregon. Conducting this study in different regions of the state would identify context-specific findings (e.g., in rural compared to urban areas) as well as findings that are generalizable statewide. Another area for future research would be to conduct a purely quantitative study that focuses on college-going rates and tracks students into a career field, which could build upon the existing foundation of this study to continue to build knowledge around CCR practices and needs from multiple perspectives. And, finally, future research could be conducted in a community that already has implemented findings from this study to learn what makes a good CCR plan that will lead to strong, sustainable, and positive outcomes.

## **Implications for Practice**

My study provides findings that have implications for the essential next steps for the Douglas County high schools to begin working together, along with their local and state partners, to move their CCR plans forward. The implications for practice in Douglas County include creating systemic approaches to CCR plans, fostering personal relationships, increasing communication with families, and building community partnerships. In partnership with the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS), they schools can work together with the community to define goals, actions, outcomes, and shared accountability to serve the district's students.

**Create systemic approaches in career and college readiness plans.** Throughout the data collection and analysis, a key theme arose – there is a lack of consistency in both

CCR activities and planning for CCR across the sample. Douglas County high schools and partners are at a juncture where they can make some major changes in how they prepare students to be career and college ready as a county. All of the county high schools, along with the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS), are actively participating in a conversation about CCR and show a willingness to think differently about the way they serve their students when preparing for life beyond high school. Through their partnership with the DCPSS, the high schools have an opportunity to learn from their community partners to build on their absorptive capacity (Farrell & Coburn, 2016). The schools can gain knowledge from community partners, develop new systems to streamline their CCR procedures and process, and build routines in partnership with DCPSS, which can act as the local hub for communication pathways and social interactions (Farrell & Coburn, 2016). Borrowing organizational structures, work norms, and routines from local businesses, high schools can learn new strategies and intentionally integrate CCR into the school day, provide professional development on CCR to additional staff and faculty that will create a seamless system for students, and integrate their current practices into new organizational structures created in partnership with DCPSS.

**Foster personal relationships.** As discussed earlier, the staff at rural schools are in a unique position to support their students, because the staff are able to develop personal relationships with many, if not all, of the students. These pre-existing relationships can serve as a key mechanism in CCR plans, because the staff and faculty already know students well enough to tailor activities to meet students' needs and goals in ways urban schools struggle to do. With a streamlined CCR infrastructure, staff would

be able to walk students step-by-step through the career and college process and track the students' progress using a tracking tool. Not only would tracking students' progress capture aspirations, goals, academic achievements, but these formalized databases would minimize disruptions when staff leave the school as well as providing data for other staff and faculty in the school to better support the students' progress toward their goals.

**Increase communications with families.** Douglas County high schools have an opportunity to change the way they engage and connect with students and their families. Just as school personnel know the students personally, they also often know the parents. Administrators can create a more creative plan to communicate with parents to keep them updated on their student's progress. Many of the CCR teams mentioned that they wanted to bring families into the schools to engage more in what students are learning. One way to do this would be to provide General Education Development (GED) classes or Adult Basic Education classes in partnership with Umpqua Community College. Not only would this provide valuable opportunities for these families, but it would also help create and foster a career- and college-going culture.

**Build community partnerships.** The high schools and community organizations that participate in DCPSS are already in conversation about how they can best serve Douglas County students and provide them with opportunities to prepare them to become career and college ready. With additional partnership, the organizations and high schools in Douglas County can create a successful cross-sector collaboration that could become a model for other counties.

DCPSS can become the local hub for facilitating career opportunities and coordinating these efforts to create more career services and experiences across the

county for students. Local organizations can share with DCPSS what types of career experiences they can provide or whether they have funding or grant opportunities for high schools, and DCPSS can communicate back to the schools on how to connect with the opportunities. The main benefit of partnering with DCPSS is that each school will not have to individually contact businesses, and the businesses will not be contacted repeatedly with similar requests from multiple high schools.

In addition to the work DCPSS is engaged in, the Career, College, Collaborative (C3) is working towards being known as the one-stop shop for career and college readiness in Oregon. C3 is poised to address the counselor's wish from High School 8 to have one place to find information on CCR:

There is so much out there, what do you pick from and focus on? [We] need a sweet spot between having not enough information to just enough information to have some choices, based on school needs, but vetted enough for commonalities. Partners are doing the same thing locally, so bring people together [to] have these conversations using the same language.

While DCPSS can be the hub for Douglas County, C3, can provide information statewide. The C3 website can be a resource for high school staff and faculty to go to when they need information, curriculum, materials, professional development training, and resources on CCR. School staff will know that the content has been vetted for Oregon and is specific to the policies mandated by the state. Additionally, school staff can request specific professional development to meet their specific school needs.

### **Implications for Policy**

Implications for policy include implications for new policy as well as implications for existing policy.

**New policy implications.** According to Fowler (2014), issue definition is a “political process that involves transforming a *problem* into an *issue* that the government can address” (p. 107). The study findings can help the state define the issues faced by rural districts in creating and implementing effective CCR plans. The next step in the policy process is to define a policy agenda. For this study, CCR fits Fowler’s (2014) definition of a systemic agenda in that it is “broad, consisting of all the issues people outside government are currently discussing” (p. 118). CCR is a topic that is being discussed across the nation and is gaining increasing momentum in Oregon. There are many ways that the state education agencies can help support a consistent message around CCR as well as provide support and services. For example, C3 was recently adopted as a cross-agency initiative of the Chief Education Office, The Higher Education Coordinating Commission, and The Oregon Department of Education.

These three agencies have decided to support C3 as a method to create common messaging and language around CCR. These agencies have committed to supporting C3 in developing and maintain a one-stop shop that is available to educators, the public, and community organizations. Other projects C3 is engaged in include mapping career and college readiness in Oregon and then using that model to map CCR within a school to help them develop, integrate, support, and sustain a CCR plan that covers key transitions of a student’s K-12 to postsecondary or career journey.

**Existing policy implications.** In terms of implications for existing policy, the High School Graduation and College and Career Readiness Act of 2016, now called High

School Success, provides high schools with funds to “improve students’ progress toward graduation beginning with grade 9, increase the graduation rates of high schools and improve high school graduates’ readiness for college or career” (Oregon Department of Education, 2018). The law focuses on programmatic changes in: (a) career and technical education, (b) college-level opportunities, and (c) dropout prevention. It is important to note that implementation of programs in these areas is not the goal of the bill but are means to the end of improving high school completion rates and career and college readiness.

To support CCR teams across the state develop, support, and sustain their High School Success Act plans (the implementation stage of the policy), CCR teams are going to need support from the state in the form of assessment, resources, materials, tools, and infrastructure. When superintendents and district leaders work with businesses, school leadership can both enable and constrain partnership development, implementation, and capacity for institutionalizing new practices (Bennett & Thompson, 2011). An intermediary, such as C3, can provide support to high schools. I recommend that each school receiving High School Success Plan funds complete the CCR survey from this study as well as participate in school interviews and hold student focus groups. The collected data will allow C3 and partners to have a comprehensive overview of each school and their plans for moving forward and to ensure success. C3 can help with the revision and refinement to support schools receiving High School Success Funds. Schools can be scored and assigned a tier that provides detailed steps on how the State can help the schools be successful. For example, a school in Tier 1 (the highest level) would not need the same level of support that a school in Tier 5 (the lowest level) would

need. Once the schools are assessed and assigned to a Tier, the State would be able to provide a customized plan and technical support to the school. As I have learned from this study, high school staff and faculty want to support their students, they just need direction and support to maximize their absorptive capacity within their complex ecological systems.

### **Dissemination of Study Findings**

This study has the potential to inform local, regional, and state best practices on the topic of career and college readiness, specifically in rural communities. As described earlier, action research includes observing, reflecting, acting, evaluating, and modifying what is learned to move in new directions (McNiff, 2017). The results of this study and the implications discussed above support the call to action (see Chapter 1) from state legislation, Governor Kate Brown, and former President Obama. Additionally, Lewin (2009) proposed “three goals for action research: to advance knowledge; to improve a concrete situation; and to improve behavioral science methodology” (p. 227), and these goals must be met with multiple modes of dissemination. I have observed, reflected, and evaluated the data for this study from the high schools in Douglas County, and now move to act and modify what I have found to move in a new direction. My hope is that by disseminating and presenting my study’s findings, the following agencies and organizations will work together, through C3, to better support Oregon’s rural schools in developing sustainable career and college readiness plans. I plan to disseminate the findings from this study to the following stakeholder groups as each believes in collaboration and has a mission or vision that supports students in pursuing higher education and/or a career:

- The Chief Education Office vision is to:

Build and coordinate a seamless system of education... ensuring that each and every Oregon student graduates high school, college and career ready with the support and opportunities they need to thrive. Specifically, we are focused on ensuring every student in the state graduates from high school and that Oregon reaches its 40-40-20 goal (Chief Education Office, 2018)

- The Higher Education Coordinating Commission envisions “a future in which all Oregonians—and especially those whom our systems have underserved and marginalized—benefit from the transformational power of high-quality postsecondary education and training (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2018).
- The Oregon Department of Education “fosters equity and excellence for every learner through collaboration with educators, partners, and communities” (Oregon Department of Education, 2018).
- The Career, College, Collaborative (C3) “works to mobilize educators to accelerate Oregon's progress 100% high school graduation and 80% postsecondary completion” (Career, College, Collaborative, 2018).
- Regional Achievement Collaboratives were created to build “connections between schools, community organizations, businesses, and local leaders to drive communities to actively support improving education outcomes” (Chief Education Office, 2015).

- The Douglas County Partners for Student Success executive team and its members whose mission is that “each child in Douglas County will receive effective and meaningful support to achieve economic and social success by graduating high school, completing postsecondary education and/or entering a career” (Douglas County Partners for Student Success, 2017).

In addition to sharing my findings with the above organizations, I will also share them with the Douglas County high schools to help support their conversations and actions as they begin to develop, implement, support, and sustain their career and college readiness plans to serve their students. I also submitted a proposal to present my findings at the Pacific Northwest Association for College Admission Counseling (PNACAC) GEAR UP West 2018 conference under the track “Cross-sector collaboration, partnerships, and collective impact.” This conference will be held in October in Boise and is a:

Collaborative, regional conference for college access practitioners from the western states. The conference draws approximately 500 participants from ten western states: AZ, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NM, NV, OR, UT, WA, & WY.

Attendees include GEAR UP and other college access program staff, evaluators, higher education professionals, and middle and high school teachers, counselors, and administrators. All those working to help low-income and underrepresented students prepare for and succeed in college (GEAR UP West, 2018)

I will present my study findings to Oregon educators, both high school and postsecondary, who work in career and college readiness at the 2018 Reach Higher

Summer Summit that includes 375+ educators, college-access professionals, K-12 and postsecondary practitioners, business and industry professionals, and community-based organizational professionals (Career, College, Collaborative, 2018).

In addition to disseminating the findings from this action research, I hope to bring awareness to state educational agencies about potential opportunities to impact practice and policy. There is an opportunity for the state to adopt the implications of my study as policy to help support current policy or to create new policy around CCR. Working through C3, I am prepared to use the CCR surveys, interviews, and student focus groups to learn more about the high schools in Oregon and how they are supporting CCR. With that information, the state educational agencies can move supports for CCR forward from aspirations to actions.

## APPENDIX A

### RESEARCH ARTICLES IN LITERATURE REVIEW

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15. Scarborough, J. L., Culbreth, J. R. (2008). Examining discrepancies between actual and preferred practice of school counselors. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 86*, 446-459.
16. Woods, C. S., & Domina, T. (2014). The school counselor caseload and the high school-to-college pipeline. *Teachers College Record, 116*, 1-30.
17. Zuckerman, S. J. (2016). Mobilization and adaptation of a rural cradle-to-career network. *Educational Administration, 6*, 1-22.

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF TYPES OF RESEARCH DESIGN

*Summary of Types of Research Designs*

Citation	Study		Design		
	Longitudinal	Cross-sectional*	Qualitative	Quantitative	Mixed Methods
1		X			X
2		X			X
3		X		X	
4		X		X	
5		X	X		
6		X			X
7		X		X	
8		X			X
9	X			X	
10		X	X		
11		X		X	
12	X		X		
13		X		X	
14		X			X
15		X		X	
16	X			X	
17		X	X		
Total	3	14	4	8	5

\*A *cross-section study* involves observations of a sample, or cross section, of a population or phenomenon that are made at one point in time (Babbie, 2013, p. 105)

APPENDIX C  
SUMMARY OF SUBJECTS

*Summary of Subjects*

Study	<i>N</i>	MS/HS Students	College Student	High School	School District	Counselor Education Programs	School Counselors	Superintendent & Principals	Community Partners	School-to-Work Coord.	School Officials
1	6				X						
2	16							X	X		X
3	217						X				
4	235						X				
5	999						X				
6	13							X			
7	7,945	X									
8	92							X			
9	17	X									
10	75									X	
11	884	X									
12	10		X								
13	189					X					
14	3			X							
15	361						X				
16*	23,250	X					X				
17	1								X		
Total	34,313	4	1	1	1	1	5	3	2	1	1

\*22,500 students; 750 counselors

APPENDIX D  
SUMMARY OF SETTINGS

*Summary of Settings*

Citation	Location					Organization/Institution			
	Urban	Rural	Urban, Suburban, Rural	Multi- city	Multi- state	Middle/High Schools	School Districts	College	Community Organization
1			X	X			X		
2	X					X			X
3			X		X	X			X
4					X	X			
5					X	X			
6					X	X			
7		X			X	X			
8			X	X		X			
9		X			X			X	
10					X				X
11		X		X		X			
12	X							X	
13			X		X			X	
14			X	X		X			
15				X			X		
16					X	X			
17		X							X
Total	2	4	5	5	9	10	2	3	4

APPENDIX E  
SUMMARY OF MEASUREMENTS AND INSTRUMENTS

*Summary of Measurements and Instruments*

Citation	Needs Assessment	Student Outcome Data	Surveys/ Questionnaires	Interviews	Observations	Focus Groups	Scales**
1			X	X			
2				X	X		
3			X				
4			X				
5	X						
6			X	X			
7			X				
8			X	X			
9			X				
10						X	
11			X				
12				X			
13			X				
14				X			
15			X				X
16		X					
17				X	X		
Total	1	1	10	7	2	1	1

APPENDIX F  
SUMMARY OF PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

*Summary of Proposed Recommendations*

Citation	Counselor Role*	Professional Development for Principals & Superintendents	Build/Strengthen CCR Policies in Middle and High Schools	Strategic Collaboration	Prioritize Community Partnerships
1			X		
2				X	
3	X				
4	X				
5**					
6		X			
7			X		
8					X
9			X		
10			X		
11					X
12	X				
13**					
14					X
15	X				
16			X		
17				X	
Total	4	1	5	2	3

\*Redefine, make more consistent, better understanding

\*\*No proposed recommendation

APPENDIX G  
SUMMARY OF ANALYSES AND RESULTS

*Summary of Analyses and Results*

Citation	Community Partnerships					
	Counselor Role	Principal & Superintendent Role	Principal & Counselor Relationship	Multiple Points of Contact & Resources	Clear Policies	Early Access to CCR Information
1				X		
2		X				
3	X					
4	X					
5			X			
6					X	
7				X		
8				X		
9						X
10				X		
11				X		
12				X		
13	X					
14				X		
15	X					
16	X					
17				X		
Total	5	1	1	8	1	1

APPENDIX H

DOUGLAS COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS 2015-16

High School Name	Region of County	Type of School
High School 1*	Southern	Charter
High School 2*	Southern	Charter
High School 3	Central	Regular
High School 4	Northern	Charter
High School 5	Southern	Charter
High School 6	Central	Regular
High School 7*	Northern	Regular
High School 8	Central	Regular
High School 9*	Central	Regular
High School 10	Southern	Regular
High School 11*	Central	Regular
High School 12*	Southern	Regular
High School 13	Central	Regular
High School 14*	Northern	Regular
Total		14

\*(National Center for Education Statistics, 2017)

\*standard diploma within four years (Oregon Department of Education, 2017)

APPENDIX I

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS 2015-16\*

High School Name	Student Population	Free & Reduced Lunch Rate	Grade 9-12	Graduation Rate**	College Going Rate***	White	POC	% POC
High School 1	203	0.66	72	76.5	38.5	172	31	0.18
High School 2	165	0.63	68	68.2	56	125	40	0.32
High School 3	424	0.41	424	NA	NA	376	48	0.13
High School 4	256	0.18	61	76	59.1	210	46	0.22
High School 5	99	0.8	99	66.7	40.9	81	18	0.22
High School 6	226	0.52	226	80.8	72.7	206	20	0.1
High School 7	98	0.45	98	87.5	57.7	85	13	0.15
High School 8	183	0.45	183	100	66	157	26	0.17
High School 9	166	0.85	166	NA	NA	138	28	0.2
High School 10	180	0.9	120	73.5	50	144	36	0.25
High School 11	1,692	0.52	1,692	65.6	59.5	1,301	391	0.3
High School 12	427	0.55	427	78.1	54.7	345	82	0.24
High School 13	412	0.51	412	68.7	49.4	322	90	0.28
High School 14	134	0.4	90	75	63.2	96	38	0.4
Total	4,698	9	4,171	987.5	722.9	3,788	910	3

\*(National Center for Education Statistics, 2017)

\*\*standard diploma within four years (Oregon Department of Education, 2017)

\*\*\*Students who enroll in a community college or university within 16 months of graduation (Oregon Department of Education, 2013)

\*\*\*\*NA = Not available

## APPENDIX J

### INITIAL EMAIL COMMUNICATION WITH DOUGLAS COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS

Dear Administrator,

I have some exciting news to share! Douglas County Partners for Student Success and Umpqua Community College have been awarded a \$250,000 grant from the Meyer Memorial Trust to support work across Douglas County to continue building our Career Connected Learning opportunities for our youth. A couple of other grants are pending, so along with STEAM Hub, CTE and Measure 98 funding, we are well positioned to make a major impact on youth and their future here in the Umpqua Valley.

As part of the Career Connected Learning initiative, we need to begin the process of collecting baseline information about current College/Career preparation work here in the county. An email following this one will explain the data collection process and provide a link to a survey.

Please pass the survey on to all staff members who work with students in any way related to college and career preparation and planning. We need to be able to tell our story of success to both our investors and our community.

Thanks for all that you do!

Gwen

***Please pass this email on to all staff involved in Career and College Readiness efforts in your school.***

Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS) and the Umpqua Valley STEAM Hub have been working with multiple community partners including our schools to provide a variety of supports to enhance the career and college readiness of our students when they graduate high school. These supports include mentoring, career camps, supporting partner programs such as robotics, “Be Great By Eighth, Alder Creek Community Forest, Brightworks and much more.

We have just recently been awarded a two year Education to Career grant from the Meyer Memorial grant that will be used to build on current efforts and bring new supports that will be matched to your needs. The long term outcomes of the Education to Career project are:

- All youth in Douglas County have opportunities for direct career-related experiences leading to graduation with purposeful plans for their future.
- All youth leave high school with a plan for their future including career options and post-high school education plans.

As with all grants and projects, it is important that we lead with a strong statement of impact. This includes having accurate baseline data and then setting benchmarks that are appropriate to each school and community context leading to our outcomes. We are fortunate to have a statewide leader in Career and College planning joining our work to help us with data collection and analysis.

Lori Ellis is a doctoral student in the University of Oregon's Educational Methodology, Policy, and Leadership Program. Her dissertation is focused on the work we are doing in Douglas County around career and college readiness. As part of our work and her dissertation study, we will have three phases for collecting information described below. We will roll out these phases individually and ask you to participate:

1. A career and college readiness survey is open to all Douglas County High Schools and is a follow up to the partner meetings that the Douglas County Partners for Student Success (DCPSS) held during the 2016-17 school year. **As an incentive for participation, 3 schools with the highest rate of participation will receive a \$250 monetary award to be used for career and college readiness activities.**  
[https://oregon.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6s3dTg9RayX2Dvn](https://oregon.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6s3dTg9RayX2Dvn)
2. In phase 2, Lori and I will meet with a select group of high schools of various sizes to learn about your career and college readiness activities.
3. Finally, we will hold 3-4 student focus groups throughout the county to hear directly from your students on their experiences in career and college readiness.

To jumpstart this study, we ask that you complete this survey. **Remember – the schools with the highest response rate will receive an award to help support your CCR activities.** Please complete the survey by November 30, 2017.

[https://oregon.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_6s3dTg9RayX2Dvn](https://oregon.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6s3dTg9RayX2Dvn)

We will be in touch soon regarding the next two phases of this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

## APPENDIX K

### HIGH SCHOOL INTERVIEW EMAILS

Hello, my name is Lori Ellis and I am a doctoral student at the University of Oregon. As you likely know, I am working with Gwen Soderberg-Chase to learn more about Douglas County's career and college readiness activities. My dissertation is comprised of three areas:

1. Career and College Survey – this has been completed
2. Student Focus Groups – in process
3. **Interviews with High School Career and College Readiness Teams**

I would like to schedule an interview with your Career and College Readiness (CCR) Team to meet with Gwen and me. I anticipate the interview taking no longer than 2 hours.

Please bring the members of your staff/faculty that are instrumental in developing and implementing a CCR plan for your school. Once we have the date/time confirmed, I will send out the interview questions for your team to review.

Here are the dates/times we have available:

January 31 from 8:00 am - 12:00 pm  
February 7 from 8:00 am - 12:00 pm  
February 13 from 8:00 am - 12:00 pm  
February 14 from 8:00 am - 11:30 pm and 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm  
February 15 from 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

Please let me know if you have any questions and if any of these dates work for you.

## APPENDIX L

### DOUGLAS COUNTY CAREER AND COLLEGE READINESS SURVEY

Thank you for participating in this survey to assess career and college readiness in Douglas County. Your participation is greatly valued, and we will not share individual survey results.

Career and college readiness means that a student has the knowledge and skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in an entry-level career or postsecondary program for their chosen career (i.e., community college, university, apprenticeship, technical/vocational, or significant on-the-job training).

In this survey, you are asked questions about your experience and how well you think your school is prepared to support students with career and college readiness. For most of the questions, we ask how much you agree with each statement. This survey will take between 15-20 minutes to complete.

For each statement, mark the response that most closely represents how you feel. These response options are used throughout this survey:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Agree

#### ***SCHOOL DEMOGRAPHICS***

***What is the name of your school?***

***What is your role within the school? We realize that high school staff often have more than one role in a school, especially in rural districts. Please select the role that you most closely identify with:***

*Superintendent*  
*Principal*  
*Vice Principal*  
*Curriculum Administrator*  
*Counselor*  
*Teacher*  
*Career and College Advisor*  
*Other (please describe)*

#### ***YOUR SCHOOL***

***This section asks you questions about how well you think your school is able to support career and college readiness activities and programs. For each question, mark the***

response option that most closely shows how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please mark only one response per question.

1. **My school prepares our students well for career and college success.**

Strongly Agree       Agree  Disagree       Strongly Disagree

2. **My school delivers effective career and college readiness instruction and support programs.**

Strongly Agree       Agree  Disagree       Strongly Disagree

### ***STUDENT READINESS***

*This section asks questions about how well you think you and your students understand how to set career and college readiness goals, meet these goals, and successfully complete these goals. For each question, mark the response option that most closely shows how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please mark only one response per question.*

3. **I know which of my students are struggling toward meeting their goals, and I know how I can help them.**

Strongly Agree       Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

4. **Our students know what their education and career goals are.**

Strongly Agree       Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

5. **Our students know if they are on track to meet their education and career goals.**

Strongly Agree       Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

6. **Our students know what do to ensure that they are on track with their career and college goals.**

Strongly Agree       Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

7. **Our students have access to college prep courses**

Strongly Agree       Agree    Disagree    Strongly Disagree

8. **How are students identified for specific pathways (e.g. AP classes, college prep classes, etc.)? Who participates in making this decision?**

- School Counselor**
- Teacher**
- Test Scores**
- Student Self-identifies**
- I Don't Know**

## **CAREER AND COLLEGE OPTIONS**

*This section asks you questions about how well you think you and your school understands the career and college options that are available to your students, specifically in your region of the state. For each question, mark the response option that most closely shows how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please mark only one response per question.*

**9. My school understands the employment trends in my region.**

Strongly Agree       Agree  Disagree       Strongly Disagree

**10. My school has a plan in place to know which employment fields students are planning to pursue after high school.**

Strongly Agree       Agree  Disagree       Strongly Disagree

**11. I know what types of certificates or programs my students could qualify for after graduation.**

Strongly Agree       Agree  Disagree       Strongly Disagree

**12. I know which types of postsecondary opportunities exist for my students.**

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

**13. I know how to help my students pursue their postsecondary educational opportunities based on their specific goals.**

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

**14. My school provides quality career experiences for our students (examples: field trips, job shadows, internships).**

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

### ***CURRICULUM AND PROGRAMS***

*This section asks you questions about how well the career and college readiness curriculum and programs support your students in pursuing their goals for after high school. For each question, mark the response option that most closely shows how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please mark only one response per question.*

**15. My students learn critical knowledge and skills needed to be career and college ready.**

Strongly Agree       Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**16. Our career curriculum is relevant to my students based on their long-term goals and interests.**

Strongly Agree       Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**17. The Career and College Readiness support programs in my school is effective in helping students with their goals.**

Strongly Agree       Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**18. My school needs additional supports and resources to improve the career and college readiness of our students.**

Strongly Agree       Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

### ***USING DATA***

*This section asks you questions about the goals set by your school around career and college readiness and whether your school uses data to help make decisions. For each question, mark the response option that most closely shows how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. Please mark only one response per question.*

**19. My school has created career and college readiness goals.**

Strongly Agree       Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**20. My school knows the career and college readiness state trends in student interests, related requirements, and other key metrics.**

Strongly Agree       Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**21. My school tracks the Free Application Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion.**

Strongly Agree       Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**22. I know how to use data to show if my school is on track for meeting its career and college readiness goals.**

Strongly Agree       Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**CAREER AND COLLEGE READINESS PROGRAMS AND TOOLS**

*This section asks you questions about the programs and/or tools that your school provides to your students to help track their career and college readiness activities and progress toward their transition goals for after high school.*

***What programs or tools does your school use to track career and college readiness activities and progress? (please check all that apply)***

- CIS*
- Naviance*
- Career Cruising*
- Education Plan and Profile*
- We do not use a tool to track progress*
- Other (please describe)*

***In what grade levels do you use these career and college readiness tools? (please check all that apply)***

- 6<sup>th</sup>*
- 7<sup>th</sup>*
- 8<sup>th</sup>*
- 9<sup>th</sup>*
- 10<sup>th</sup>*
- 11<sup>th</sup>*
- 12<sup>th</sup>*

***How do you use these career and college readiness tools?***

- One-on-one with Students*
- In the classroom*
- Advisory Class*
- We do not use career and college readiness tools*
- Other (please describe)*

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

*This section asks you questions about professional development opportunities available in your school and what professional development you would like to be available on career and college readiness.*

**23. I know what types of resources, information, or tools I could use to expose my students to different career areas that match their interests.**

- Strongly Agree     Agree     Disagree     Strongly Disagree

**24. My school provides me with professional development on career and college readiness.**

- Strongly Agree     Agree  Disagree     Strongly Disagree

*For this question, please mark which types of professional development opportunities you would be interested in. Please mark all that apply to you.*

**25. I would like professional development on the following:**

- Finding information about career interests and the education they require
- Setting long-term education and career goals and making plans to achieve them
- Searching for colleges or technical programs that fit students' needs and interests
- Understanding admissions requirement for colleges or technical programs
- Selecting colleges or technical programs
- Preparing for a college visitation, including developing a list of questions to ask
- Preparing for college admissions and/or scholarship interviews
- Filling out applications for colleges or technical programs
- Options for paying for college or technical programs
- Completing the FAFSA
- Other trainings; please specify:

**26. I would like to receive professional development training through the following ways:**

- Reach Higher Summer Summit
- Regional Trainings
- Annual Conferences
- Webinars
- Videos
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, listserv, newsletters, blogs)
- Website
- None
- Other, please specify

27. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- High School Diploma
- GED
- Technical/Vocation Certification
- Some College
- Associate's Degree
- Baccalaureate Degree
- Graduate Degree
- Other, please describe

28. How would you describe your ethnic/racial heritage? (check all that apply)

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black or African
- Hispanic
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific
- White (non-Hispanic)
- Multi-ethnic
- Choose not to answer
- Other, please describe

29. Does your school have a career and college readiness best practice that you would like to share?

- Yes
- No

Please use this form to share your best practice with us:  
<https://goo.gl/forms/r8BQx0vP1P3YtRYw1>

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX M

SCHOOL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: CAREER AND COLLEGE

READINESS MAPPING

<b>District/School:</b>			<b>Date:</b>		
<b>Meeting with:</b>					
<b>Contact Info:</b>					
<b>CCR Team:</b>					
<b>I. Overview</b>					
General Description:					
Where are your gaps in CCR? What supports would you like?					
<b>II. School Statistics</b>			<b>OSAA:</b>		
Current Student Population:	Increase/Decrease:	Free/Reduced %:	Current Senior Class Size:		
Graduation Rate:	College-Going Rate %:	Counselor: Student Ratio:	FAFSA Filing %:		
Have there been any recent, significant changes at your school – administrative, counseling, or teaching staff reductions, program cuts, etc.?					
<b>III. Students &amp; Families</b>					
A. What is your goal for the number and/or grades of students who will participate in CCR services this year?					
B. What grade levels will you serve?		1-5	6th	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>
		9th	10th	11th	12 <sup>th</sup>
C. How will you recruit students?					
D. How will you work to reach younger students?					

E. How do you get your counselors on board? If you don't have counselors, how will you get your staff/faculty on board?		
F. Do you share CCR info in registration packets?	Yes	No
<b>IV. College Access Programs – Opportunities</b>		
<b>How many programs:</b>	<b>Total Students Served:</b>	
A. What CCR programs do you have in your schools?		
B. How are you leveraging program(s)?		
C. How do you infuse programs into other areas of your schools (AVID, GEAR Up, ASPIRE, etc)?		
D. Are you interested in bringing in other programs?		

**V. Creating a College and Career Readiness Culture**

<b>What types of CCR activities are planned for this year?</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> College fairs <input type="checkbox"/> College visits to your school <input type="checkbox"/> Financial aid night (PSU, Mt Hood, local bank) <input type="checkbox"/> FAFSA+ Plus <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom presentations/workshops (packets) <input type="checkbox"/> Career Fairs (Portland workforce alliance) <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom-based CCR activities (scholarship/college essays, activities chart, etc.) (pockets)	<input type="checkbox"/> Partnership with community colleges/universities <input type="checkbox"/> Student field trips to colleges (pockets) <input type="checkbox"/> Senior and/or junior parent night <input type="checkbox"/> Job shadowing / Internships (pockets) <input type="checkbox"/> College Goal Oregon <input type="checkbox"/> Decision Day <input type="checkbox"/> College Application Week <input type="checkbox"/> Other Activities/Events: SAT school day, PSAT school day

A. What types of communication do you use with parents/students (Facebook, Twitter, Newsletter, Remind.com, etc.)?		
B. In what other ways do you engage parents around career and college readiness?		
C. What resources/systems do you have available for students/families for CCR?		
<b>VI. Workforce and Community Partnerships</b>		
A. Do you partner with the businesses in your community? Other organizations? The RAC? What types of activities?		
B. What will help strengthen the bond between the business and education communities, and result in students being better prepared to meet employers' needs?		
C. How can your relationship with partnerships between community (colleges, businesses, non-profits, others) and schools be strengthened?		
D. What can your RAC of the state do to encourage and support these types of partnerships?		
<b>VII. CCR Coordinator</b>		
A. Do you have a CCR center? Computers, resources, scholarships, materials, etc.	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
B. Do you have staff dedicated to CCR?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>VIII. Tracking Progress</b>		
A. How do you track college going rates?		
B. Education Plan and Profile	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
C. CCR Activity Tracking for grades 1-12? Other?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
D. College-bound? Career-bound? Other?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
E. How do you assess college/career readiness? Frequency?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>

F. Naviance? CIS? Other?	Yes	No
<b>IX. Challenges &amp; Next Steps</b>		
Have you thought about where your gaps are? How can we better support your program?		

APPENDIX N  
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL: DOUGLAS COUNTY STUDENT FOCUS  
GROUPS 2018

**Facilitator Introductions**

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group to talk about career and college readiness. This focus group is help us learn what your teachers, counselors, administrators, and you think about the career and college readiness services you have received from your school or from other entities. This information will inform your schools and Gwen with the Regional Achievement Collaborative how to better meet the needs of you, our students. Now, the rest of the team will introduce themselves to you and why they are working on this project. Gwen, Erik, Nicole, HS staff person.

This focus group is made up of high school students from XXX high schools. You were asked to participate in this group, because your advisor or administrator thought you would provide us with useful information about your experiences with career and college readiness within your high school as well as within your community. We want to hear from you about the ways your school or community has met your needs, the challenges you have faced, and also suggestions on how things could be better.

During this focus group we will ask you questions about your plans for after high school, what supports you have received in creating your plans, what information you wish you would have known, and more.

Important! There are no “right” or “wrong” answers. This is your time to express your thoughts about how “perfect” your school is or to provide input on how to make the student support services better. We want this to be a conversation that may inspire you to think about things differently, maybe learn something, help us think differently, and basically have your voice heard. Our hope is that you feel comfortable talking with this group and sharing your ideas with us. My hope is to have a little fun!

After the group session, after your warmed up, we have a questionnaire with a few additional questions for you to answer.

Please note that this session will be recorded and/or your name may be connected to your comments during the focus group to ensure we adequately capture your ideas during the conversation. However, the comments from the focus group will remain confidential, and your name will not be attached to any comments you make. Do you have any questions before we begin?

## Focus Group Questions

1. Ask participants to introduce themselves
  - a. First name, what grade are you in, what school do you attend, and what are your plans after graduation?
  
2. Begin the discussion
  - a. How does your school provide information at all grade levels about pursuing a career or college?
    - i. What does this look like in grade 9?
    - ii. Grade 10?
    - iii. Grade 11?
    - iv. Grade 12?
  
  - b. In what ways does your school make you feel confident about pursuing a career or college?
    - i. In what ways do you feel encouraged to pursue a career or college?
    - ii. Who provides you with support and information?
    - iii. Who do you seek out to talk to about what you want to do after high school?
    - iv. How do you get the CCR help you need when you need it?
  
  - c. Has your school helped you develop the skills and knowledge you need to prepare for career or college? Why or why not
    - i. In what ways do you feel like you are prepared for college-level classes or training?
    - ii. How much do you know about what is expected of you when you get to college or career?
    - iii. What types of supports you can receive while in college?
    - iv. How will you pursue your interests?

- v. Have you attended any CCR event or programs?
- d. How do you track your goals and progress toward career and college?
  - i. Classroom
  - ii. CIS/Naviance/Other Program
  - iii. Education Plan and Profile
  - iv. With counselor/teacher
  - v. With parent
  - vi. Other
- e. Does anyone have any final thoughts they would like to share?

APPENDIX O

GRADE LEVELS SERVED BY HIGH SCHOOL

School	Grade Levels	Respondent
<b>High School 1</b>	8th,9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Superintendent
	11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9th,10 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
<b>High School 2</b>	6th,7th,8th,9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Superintendent
	7th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	6th,7th,8th,9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	12th	Vice Principal
	10 <sup>th</sup>	Registrar/Office Manager
<b>High School 4</b>	6th,7th,8th,9th,10th,11th,12th	Career and College Advisor
	12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9th,11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher X 2
<b>High School 7</b>	8th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher X 2
<b>High School 8</b>	10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Counseling/Secretary Aid
	9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Counselor, Teacher, YTP Coord.
	10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Librarian
	7th,8th,9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Principal
	11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher X 3
	7th,8th,9th,10th,11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	7th,8th,10th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
9th,11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher	
<b>High School 9</b>	10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Counselor
	8th,9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Principal
	9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher X 2

<b>High School 10</b>	6th,7th,8th,9th,10th,11th,12th	Principal
	7th,8th,9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
<b>High School 11</b>	9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Administrative Assistant
	9th,10 <sup>th</sup>	Dropout Prevention
	9 <sup>th</sup>	Instructional Assistant
	11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	10 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9th,10th,11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	7th,10th,11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	11 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Assistant, Counselor, Teacher X 7
	9 <sup>th</sup>	Counselor, Teacher X 3
	12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	<b>High School 12</b>	11th,12 <sup>th</sup>
9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>		Principal
12 <sup>th</sup>		Teacher X 2
8th,9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>		Teacher
12 <sup>th</sup>		Teacher
6 <sup>th</sup>		Teacher
10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>		Teacher
<b>High School 14</b>	7th,8th,9th,10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher
	10 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher X 2
	10th,11th,12 <sup>th</sup>	Teacher

APPENDIX P

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS AND VENUE

Needs/Venue	Topic/Venue	# of Responses
<b>CCR Topics Needed for Professional Development</b>	Finding Information about career interests and the education they require	33
	Setting Long-term education and career goals and making plans to achieve them	32
	Searching for colleges or technical programs that fit students' needs and interests	29
	Understanding admissions requirement for colleges or technical programs	18
	Selecting colleges or technical programs	12
	Preparing for a college visitation, including develop a list of questions to ask	17
	Preparing for college admissions and/or scholarship interviews	15
	Filling out applications for colleges or technical programs	14
	Options for paying for college or technical programs	27
	Completing the FAFSA	17
	None	17
<b>Total CCR Topics Needed for Professional Development</b>		<b>231</b>
<b>Preferred Venue</b>	Reach Higher Summit	10
	Regional Trainings	34
	Annual Conferences	25
	Webinars	18
	Videos	13
	Social Media	12
	Website	26
	None	19
	<b>Total Preferred Venue</b>	

APPENDIX Q

STUDENTS AND CCR

<b>Students Being Impacted &amp; Served</b>	<b>Students Not Being Reached</b>
Highly Motivated Students	Students in Rural Areas w/o Transportation
Certain Non-traditional Students	Males
Out-of-school youth, students with GED/Internship, specific programs with DHS/WCJC/ foster youth & corrections	Students w/o Family Support
Females	Generational “Work” Families
Middle and Low income	Students Planning on Working After Graduation
ETS- College bound students 7-12th grade	Students with high incidents of transition in the home
1st Generation to college	Student who Lack Direction/Support
Credit Deficient Students	Students with Past Trauma Indicators
College Freshman	At-risk Students
LGBTQ	Students in Poverty
Academic Tutoring (peers & counselors)	Special Education
Priority Students (GEAR UP grant)	Students with Learning Disabilities/Mental Health Problems
Students unsure of capability for college	Disengaged youth/out of the system
Middle School Students	Students who “Think” College isn’t for Them
Advanced Sophomores	
Students with Stable Supportive Families	
“In Risk” Youth	
High School Students	
CTE Students	

## APPENDIX R

### PARTNERS AND PARTNER NEEDS

#### **State Agencies & Statewide Networks**

Community College & Workforce Development  
Higher Education Coordinating Commission  
Oregon Department of Education  
Oregon Employment Department  
Oregon Department of Transportation  
GEAR UP  
Bureau of Land Management

#### **Umpqua Community College**

Advisors  
College Fair  
Distance Learning

#### **Student Needs Organizations**

Casa de Belen  
Corrections-Parole & Probation  
Douglas Cares  
Umpqua Valley Disabilities Network  
Roseburg Vocational Rehabilitation

#### **Local Businesses & Needs**

CTE Industry Advisory Panels  
Survey of local-industry job needs & job shadows  
Local Businesses  
The Partnership

#### **Community Organizations**

Mercy Medical Center  
Mercy Foundation  
Bright Works Oregon  
Douglas County Partners for Student Success  
NeighborWorks Umpqua  
The Ford Family Foundation  
County Public Transportation

#### **Miscellaneous**

Douglas County Schools  
AmeriCorps  
Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians  
Parents  
Future Business Leaders of America

Career Pathways & Dual Credit  
Job Corps  
Department of Human Resources  
Bureau of Labor and Industries  
Higher Education Institutions  
U.S. Forest Service  
Oregon Fish and Wildlife

GED (General Education Development)  
TRiO  
Community Education

Juvenile Services  
Law Enforcement  
ADAPT  
Community Health Alliance (CHA)  
Battered Persons Advocacy

Career and Technical Student Organizations  
Douglas County Business Development Board  
Roseburg Chamber of Commerce  
Trade Organizations

STEAM Hub  
Umpqua Community Health Center  
Boys & Girls Club  
Area Health Education Center  
Consumer Credit Counseling  
Alder Creek  
Umpqua Training & Employment

Educational Services Advisory Committee (ESAC)  
Mentors  
Education Talent Search/Upward Bound  
Douglas Education Service District  
HOSA - Future Health Professionals

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