

ABSTRACT

Rodney L. McNeill, **EVALUATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED EARLY COLLEGE STUDENTS TO DETERMINE WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES** (Under the direction of Dr. Marjorie Ringler). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2021.

Nationally, undocumented Latinx students face challenges in k-12 education leading to lower graduation rates. This marginalized group of students in rural Greene County, North Carolina has been defying the odds academically, with a district-wide graduation rate routinely above 90%. Greene County schools has a student population of just under 3,000 students with a third of these students identifying as Latinx. Many of these students are the first in their families to attend school in the United States and have acquired English as their second language. Greene County has one traditional high school and an early college high school. The work featured in this study focused on undocumented Latinx students attending Greene Early College High School (GEC).

In this qualitative study, the researcher worked with undocumented early college high school students in an effort to increase their access to college and careers. This study includes an in-depth literature review to document the plight of undocumented students in the United States. Also included in this work is a case study that involves interviews with seven undocumented students affiliated with GEC. Information gleaned from the literature review, along with case study analysis, and observation data assisted the researcher in reshaping the advising of undocumented students at GEC. This information was also utilized to develop and deliver professional development to the staff of the school, and the creation of a tool to be used for the advocacy for undocumented students, all with the goal of increasing access to higher education and careers. Final assertions are presented, as well as next steps for researchers looking to continue this work.

EVALUATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF UNDOCUMENTED EARLY COLLEGE
STUDENTS TO DETERMINE WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION
AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

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by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to undocumented students in Greene County and beyond fighting for an opportunity to contribute to society.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE.....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
SIGNATURE.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Problem.....	3
Problem Statement.....	7
Purpose of the Study.....	9
Study Design.....	10
Definition of Key Terms.....	12
Study Questions.....	13
Theoretical Foundation.....	14
Assumptions.....	16
Scope and Delimitations.....	17
Limitations.....	18
Significance of Study.....	19
Advancing Equity in Educational and Career Attainment.....	20
Advances in Practice.....	21
Filling a Gap in the Literature.....	23

Summary.....	23
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	24
The Latinx Achievement Gap.....	24
Peer Influence.....	26
Family Support.....	27
School Culture and Climate.....	28
History of Early Colleges.....	29
Impact of Early Colleges.....	31
Acculturation.....	32
Dissonant Acculturation.....	33
Consonant Acculturation.....	33
Selective Acculturation.....	33
Impact of Acculturation.....	34
Prejudice and Discrimination.....	35
Poverty.....	37
Financial Limitations.....	38
Legal Limitations.....	39
Self-Affirmation Theory.....	41
Summary.....	44
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	46
Research Design and Rationale.....	47
Phase 1.....	48
Phase 2.....	50

Phase 3.....	52
Instrumentation.....	52
Phase 1 – Inform the Researcher.....	52
Phase 2 – Self and Stakeholder Understanding.....	54
Phase 3 – Advocacy.....	57
Procedures.....	57
Data Collection and Analysis.....	59
Phase 1.....	59
Phase 2.....	61
Phase 3.....	62
Methodological Assumptions and Limitations.....	63
Ethical Considerations.....	64
Role of the Researcher.....	66
Summary.....	67
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	68
Demographics.....	70
Phase One Pilot Study.....	72
Impact of Being Undocumented.....	72
The Role of GEC.....	73
What Schools Can Do.....	74
The Importance of Family.....	75
Fear and Limitations.....	76
Self-Affirmation.....	77

Pilot Interview Summary.....	77
Phase Two Study Individual Analysis.....	78
Camila.....	78
Paloma.....	81
Patricia.....	83
Gabriel.....	86
Alexandria.....	89
Cross-Case Analysis.....	94
Impact of Being Undocumented.....	95
Fear and Stress.....	95
What Schools Can Do.....	97
Phase Three Study Impact.....	99
Summary.....	106
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	108
Summary of the Findings.....	109
Interpretation of the Findings.....	114
Limitations of the Study.....	118
Implications of the Findings for Practice.....	119
Recommendations.....	122
Study Impact on the Researcher.....	124
Conclusions.....	126
REFERENCES.....	128
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER.....	134

APPENDIX B: PILOT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH STUDY.....	135
APPENDIX C: PILOT INTERVIEW #1: *MALUMA.....	136
APPENDIX D: PILOT INTERVIEW #2: *JESSIE.....	139
APPENDIX E: CASE STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH STUDY.....	143
APPENDIX F: TWITTER POST AND REPLY.....	144
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW #1: *CAMILA.....	145
APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW #2: *PALOMA.....	148
APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW #3: *PATRICIA.....	151
APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW #4: *GABRIEL.....	155
APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW #5: *ALEXANDRIA.....	159
APPENDIX L: PIRATE GRAD TALK PRESENTATION.....	168

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Research study phases.....	49
2. Alignment of interview questions to study questions.....	51
3. The steps required for conducting high quality research interviews.....	56
4. Participant demographics.....	71
5. Impacts of being undocumented.....	96
6. What participants need from schools.....	98
7. Common words and themes.....	107

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A nationally marginalized group of students in rural Greene County, North Carolina has been defying the odds academically. In a time when an estimated five to ten percent of undocumented students attend college, all of the undocumented students attending Greene Early College (GEC) receive at least some community college education. With a 100% graduation rate for five of the past six years, these students are also outperforming national high school graduation trends. These students come to this country, often times separating from their families in the process. Many of the students encountered by the researcher have moved numerous times and nearly all have acquired English as a second language. Undocumented students come to school facing fears of arrest or deportation just by nature of their existence. Despite these circumstances, the undocumented students presented in this study continue to strive to better themselves through educational attainment.

Greene County Schools has a student population of just under 3,000, with approximately one-third of those students identifying as Latinx. Many of these students are the first in their families to attend school in the United States and acquired English as their second language. Greene County is a rural agricultural community with many of its Latinx residents being lured by farming jobs. Popular crops grown in the county include sweet potatoes, tobacco, and soybeans. In fact, many of the students themselves work in the “fields” during the summers to earn extra income to help support their families.

Greene County has one traditional high school and an early college high school. For many undocumented students, from an academic standpoint, high school marks the end of their educational journey. Greene Early College (GEC) provides free access to higher education for all of its students. The early college initiative was developed with funding from Bill and Melinda

Gates. The initiative is designed to serve students from economically disadvantaged communities, are underrepresented in colleges and universities, at-risk of dropping out of high school, or are the first in their families to attend college (DiMaria, 2013; Heitin, 2016; Hoffman Senior Advisor, 2015). Early college affords its students the opportunity to take college courses and high school courses concurrently and graduate with their high school diploma and up to two years college at no cost to the student (Haxton et al., 2016). Entrance to four-year institutions remains out-of-reach for most undocumented Latinx students. These students face exclusion because of their undocumented status and are not eligible to receive most scholarships (Perez et al., 2009). They also do not qualify for any state or federal assistance with paying for college, leaving the price of attending college out of reach for these families (Perez et al., 2009). With limitations posed by their immigration status, these students are also unable to attain gainful employment to pay for their education. These limitations include an inability to attain a driver's license and the risk of deportation (Perez et al., 2009). These facts precipitate the need to conduct this study. The researcher has worked with students completing their high school education with limited options for advancement due to their undocumented status. This work will help schools advise students more intentionally as they prepare to graduate high school.

The researcher in this study evaluated the lived experiences of undocumented Latinx early college students in Greene County, North Carolina. Students have disclosed tales of relatives being detained and deported while working on farms. Another student disclosed to the researcher a story of her uncle who died attempting to cross the border after being deported multiple times. The researcher was also aware of students who left everything they knew in their home country to come to a land where everything was unknown. Students have expressed

anxiety over not knowing if their parents will be there when they arrive home from school in the afternoon.

The purpose of this study is to determine ways to improve college and career access for undocumented Latinx students that graduate from GEC. Many of these students have disclosed an interest in continuing their education beyond high school and to become contributing members of the community in which they live in Greene County. In the two pilot interviews conducted for this study, the students interviewed aspire to become an immigration lawyer and a forensic investigator. Both of these careers will require education beyond high school. In the United States, it is estimated that as many as 98,000 undocumented students who have lived in this country for five or more years, graduate high school (Camacho, 2020). Yet, only 5-10% of these students actually attend college (Pérez, 2012). Many of these students have the academic ability to pursue a postsecondary education; however, their social mobility is often times limited by their undocumented status (Gonzalez, 2009).

In this chapter, the researcher provides background information necessary to understand the problem being studied. The researcher also expounds upon the purpose of the study, as well as outlines research questions to be answered throughout this work. Theoretical foundation of self-affirmation theory will be utilized to frame this study. This chapter will conclude by defining how this study fills a gap in the literature that currently exists on this subject.

Background of the Problem

GEC High School currently has 163 students, of which 68 (41.7%) are identified as Latinx. The 1982 Supreme Court decision in *Plyler v. Doe* granted these students access to an education from kindergarten through high school graduation (Pérez, 2012). As a result of the *Plyler* ruling, public schools may not require students or parents to disclose or document their

immigration status (Montecel, 2017). There is not a concrete way to identify exactly how many of the 68 Latinx students at GEC are undocumented; however, the researcher has had four current students and six recent graduates of the school self-disclose their immigration status. Some of these students have indicated that access to college is limited due to financial reasons. If they enroll in university programs, they are expected to pay out-of-state or international student tuition. They are not able to receive government or state issued financial aid because they do not have United States' resident status. These students, many of whom have attended schools in this country their entire academic careers, have been told they can go to college and receive scholarships if they excel academically (Gonzales et al., 2013). For undocumented students this is simply not true in the majority of cases. Many undocumented Latinx students identify more with the culture of the United States than that of their home countries (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Based on current statistics, if all of the Latinx students attending GEC were undocumented, it would mean only about seven of the 68 students currently enrolled would go on to attend a four-year college or university (Pérez, 2012; Pérez et al., 2010).

Public education across the country has invested time, money, and resources into educating undocumented students through high school graduation as a result of *Plyler v. Doe* (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Upon graduating high school, there are not many opportunities for advancement for these students due to the financial limitations posed by their undocumented status. Poverty is rampant amongst undocumented Latinx families. Nationally, nearly 40% of undocumented children reside in homes that live below the poverty threshold (Pérez, 2012). This level of poverty, coupled with other marginalizing factors, such as not being able to obtain a driver's license or having a social security number, condemns these students to the same fate as their undocumented parents. Like many of their undocumented parents, high achieving students,

graduating high school, with honors in some cases, are working as landscapers, hotel maids, farmers, and construction workers (Pérez, 2012). The nation is failing to capitalize on the resources that have been invested in educating these students. This study's aim is to identify ways this can be changed.

The researcher in this study chronicled the lived experiences of several current and former students of GEC. Stories like that of Miriam, a graduate of the high school in which the researcher works, led the researcher to this work. During Miriam's last year of attendance at GEC, she was accepted to a public university in North Carolina and was also awarded a full-scholarship that was created for early college students. The scholarship was intended for graduates of early colleges who excelled academically and demonstrated a financial need. After being awarded the scholarship, it was discovered by the university that she was undocumented. This made her ineligible for state funded financial-aid and, as a result, her scholarship was stripped away from her just weeks before she was set to attend.

The researcher was also aware of the story of three sisters who have either attended or still attend GEC High School. Two of the sisters have already graduated and the third is in her junior year. Cheyenne the eldest sister, graduated with honors from high school. She was the salutatorian of the class. School leadership and counselors realized she was undocumented during her final year as they began working to secure admission to a four-year college or university. Students are not required to disclose this information and the school is not permitted to ask. Cheyenne went on to attend a private University in Virginia. However, after just one year, she was back in Snow Hill, North Carolina, due to the cost of attendance and lack of financial resources.

The second of these sisters, Esmeralda, graduated last year. She was the student-body president of the school. She was accepted to numerous colleges and universities and failed to enroll at any of them, due largely to an inability to finance her education. This is a student that excelled academically and displayed leadership consistently throughout her years in high school but is unable to use her strengths to continue her formal education or attain meaningful employment.

The last of the sisters is a current junior at the school. She has a grade point average above a 4.0 and is the junior class president. She is a leader in the school and respected amongst the staff and students. The idea that her academic fate will be the same as her sisters was unsettling to the researcher. It is the imminent need to determine ways to improve the chances for students like these that has led the researcher to pursue this work.

Lalani is a sophomore at the school. She is full of energy and attitude. To the surprise of the researcher and others, Lalani is very open about her undocumented status. She can be heard talking about it in classes and sometimes, even jokes about it. Lalani has helped recruit other students to share their stories with the researcher. The researcher looked at the experiences of Lalani and other students like her to better understand her willingness to discuss her status so freely.

Then there is Armando, who is graduating this year. He shared that he has dreamt of becoming a state-trooper in North Carolina for as long as he can remember. He even studied it as part of his senior project. He participated in multiple ride along opportunities with law enforcement to get a feel for the job. Armando is undocumented. Armando cannot obtain a driver's license. Armando will likely never be able to serve the state of North Carolina as a state-trooper; the same state that has invested in Armando's education for the past twelve years. The

researcher was with Armando when this reality hit him. He currently works full-time installing tile for a construction company while completing his associate's degree. He gets paid in cash weekly "under the table" as he calls it. He has accepted that this will likely be his fate unless something changes that will allow him to live as a contributing member of society.

These stories, and others like them, are what led the researcher to embark upon this work. Getting to know these students and their stories tugs at the hearts of the professionals charged with educating them. These students are representatives of a small sampling of the undocumented Latinx students attending schools across this country. Their stories are not unique to them. With the number of undocumented students increasing all over the country, solutions need to be identified that will allow these students to become contributing members of society.

Problem Statement

Since 1973, the percentage of students of color nationally, has risen from 22% to over 45% (Pérez, 2012). According to Pérez (2012), if this trend continues, students of color will exceed white students in the next 20 years. In the 2007-2008 school year, this was already the case in 11 states. In 2009, students with undocumented parents compiled nearly 7% of students in grades kindergarten through 12 in the United States. As of fall of 2018, there are over 56 million students in public school. This means there are as many as 3.5 million undocumented students currently being educated in America's public-school system.

The specific problem the researcher in this study addressed is access to college and careers for undocumented Latinx students upon graduating from GEC High School. Researchers have studied the implications of being undocumented (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Pérez et al., 2010; Stebleton & Aleixo, 2015). Studies have been conducted on the mental health of these students and their persistence once they enroll in college. Pérez et al. (2010) identified increased

feelings of shame, anger, despair and uncertainty faced by undocumented Latinx college students. These feelings often arise from experiences with discrimination, systematic barriers, and anti-immigrant sentiment (Pérez et al., 2010). As a result, only 9% of all four-year degrees are awarded to Latina/o students (Crisp et al., 2014).

Researchers have also identified strategies to increase the academic success of undocumented students in the United States (DeLaCroix & Dillard, 2018; Enriquez, 2011; Pérez et al., 2009; Storlie & Jach, 2012). The strategies include providing emotional support and education to adults as well as students themselves. Students receive most of their emotional resilience from their families' academic expectations of them (Enriquez, 2011). If schools can bolster the knowledge of the family, they help the student. Encouraging students to join or create community organizations that promote positive youth development is another strategy that has had positive impacts on student achievement (Pérez et al., 2009). Schools should provide professional development to staff centered on multicultural sensitivity and provide information about how to support undocumented students to all stakeholders (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Ensuring school publications and school and media outlets provide documents written in all languages of the student body it serves is another strategy that assists in immigrant student achievement (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Furthermore, school support staff can educate themselves and teach immigrant rights, let undocumented students know you stand with them, offer financial support to organizations supporting immigrant communities, and advocate for district policies that safeguard students (DeLaCroix & Dillard, 2018).

This study will focus on increasing access to higher education and gainful employment for undocumented Latinx students graduating from GEC. The researcher utilized strategies previously listed, along with research, and the experiences shared by students in the study, to

reshape the advising of undocumented Latinx students at GEC. This work will lead to the creation of an advising guide for use by staff and students of GEC, professional development for staff, and a platform for advocacy for those working with undocumented students. Failure to address this gap in access will lead to further marginalization of undocumented students in Greene County and will create a permanent underclass within this community.

Purpose of the Study

Undocumented Latinx students aspire to achieve the American Dream. In many ways, they have lived it throughout their public-school years. They have repeatedly been told that if they work hard, they can be anything they want to be. At some point, usually during middle or high school, undocumented students begin to realize that for them, this is not the case (Pérez, 2012). In this study, the researcher studied the lived experiences of undocumented Latinx students in an attempt to better serve them while attending GEC. The researcher utilized information gained to advocate for these students, and others like them, and to determine ways to increase access to higher education and career opportunities.

In this work, the researcher chronicled the life experiences of three current undocumented Latinx students that attend GEC High School, as well as four graduates of the school. Interviews were conducted and transcribed to provide an accurate depiction of the lives and challenges faced by these students daily. The purpose of this study is to provide a tool that will serve as a catalyst in bringing awareness to issues faced by these students, while simultaneously increasing college and career opportunities beyond high school. It is estimated that less than half of undocumented immigrants, aged 18 to 24 and who have graduated high school, are in college or have attended college (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010).

Study Design

The research in this study was conducted in three phases. During the initial phase of the study, the researcher worked to evaluate the most effective way to accomplish the task of gathering input from the students in which the study aimed to assist. Utilizing a case study during the research was decided as the best way to gather data from student participants. This allowed the undocumented Latinx students to tell their stories that will be used to guide change at GEC. These students are representative of a larger group, living within a real-life contemporary setting, currently in progress (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once the study design was chosen, the process of developing the interview questions and protocol began. During this phase, the researcher developed a set of open-ended interview questions with input from more seasoned researchers, as well as students familiar with undocumented life in Greene County (see Appendix B for initial interview questions). Once the questions for the interview were developed, the researcher chose to utilize a semi-structured format for interviews to allow for follow-up questions if responses dictated. The researcher was advised to pilot the interview questions. This was completed and transcribed with two participants (see Appendix C and D). The results of these interviews were compared and analyzed to ensure quality of the questions asked and to develop nodes to be used in the analysis of actual interview questions. Interviews were also analyzed to ensure alignment to the study questions and goals of the research.

In the second phase of the study, the researcher conducted five semi-structured interviews with undocumented students that currently attend or have recently graduated from GEC. Once all interviews had been transcribed, they were uploaded into NVivo for analysis, both for single-case analysis and cross-case analysis. The information derived from these interviews were

compiled and final assertions were prepared. These assertions along with information gathered from the literature review guided several changes at GEC implemented as a result of this study.

The researcher utilized the data collected and analyzed throughout this study to implement professional development for all staff at GEC. This professional development included strategies that have been shown to have success with undocumented students. These strategies include sharing information on the rights of undocumented students with them and sending home parent communications in both English and Spanish.

Also included in this training were findings from the students served by the school. In one of the pilot interviews, when asked what schools could do to support undocumented students, one of the participants responded, "Make us feel protected." The researcher used the results of this study to advocate for undocumented students beyond GEC.

In phase three of the research, the researcher began formally advocating for undocumented students using information learned in this study. The researcher planned to share information with Greene County Schools (GCS) leadership at the GCS administrative retreat in the summer of 2020. These plans were postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on planning for the ensuing school year. The researcher shared strategies and lessons learned as a result of this work with peers and other educational leaders within GCS. The researcher made the connection between undocumented students, their limited access to college, and the role GEC can play in that access. All early college students are guaranteed some college education at no cost to families. Students can earn up to two years of college while in high school. The researcher worked with other Greene County School staff to share this information and ensure that it got out to the undocumented community. If all undocumented students in Greene County made the choice to pursue the early college for high school, college access would then be

improved. Once students are enrolled at GEC, new strategic advising, and a more inclusive, knowledgeable staff are now better equipped to help prepare undocumented Latinx students for life after high school graduation as a result of this study.

Definition of Key Terms

Acculturation - Defined as a complex process of change in which individuals or groups assimilate into the traits, customs, and values of the host country (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013).

American Dream - The belief that one can achieve success, assist their families financially, and provide leadership in the community within the United States (Pérez, 2012).

Coming Out - Defined as revealing one's undocumented status to trusted individuals or organizations (Stebbleton & Aleixo, 2015).

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) - This was a temporary executive order which provided a 2-year relief from deportation, as well as, work permits for undocumented immigrants that entered the US before the age of 16 (Gamez et al., 2017).

Early College - An initiative that combines high school with the first two years of college, with the intent of students graduating from high school with both their high school diploma and two-years of college credit, tuition free (DiMaria, 2013; Heitin, 2016; Hoffman Senior Advisor, 2015).

Glass-Ceiling Effect - The belief that educational effort and hard work will not lead to occupational rewards (Steinberg et al., 1992).

Hispanic - Originating from a predominantly Spanish speaking country.

Hispanophobia - A fear, distrust or discrimination of Latinx people usually derived from anti-immigrant rhetoric or other destructive stereotypes (Storlie & Jach, 2012).

Homophily - Defined as the tendency of people to prefer social ties with those that are similar over those that are dissimilar (Valant & Newark, 2016).

Self-Affirmation Theory - The presumption that people are motivated to preserve a positive, moral, and adaptive self-image and to maintain self-integrity (Armitage & Rowe, 2017). This belief proposes that individuals possess a flexible self-system, such that they can respond to threats in one domain of life by affirming self-worth in other domains (Sherman, 2013).

Under the table - A term used to describe the process of compensating individuals, usually in cash, without providing any tax information.

Undocumented - Including any student who does not hold legal residency in the United States (Stebbleton & Aleixo, 2015).

Study Questions

There are two overarching research questions the researcher aims to answer in this study. The first is: How has the undocumented status of these students impacted their lives and ability to achieve academic and career success after high school? The second study question the researcher worked to answer is: What can school leaders and school staff do to impact the dream for undocumented students to attain higher education and/or career opportunities?

The first study question is geared towards students that have graduated from GEC. The researcher analyzed the information gained through interviews with four GEC graduates. These study questions helped the researcher better understand how GEC can better prepare undocumented students for life beyond high school.

This study serves to document the lived experiences of undocumented Latinx students that have attended GEC. This is done with the intent of providing a better understanding of the

issues facing them in their day-to-day lives, in order to educate stakeholders and provide stronger supports and advocacy for undocumented students.

Theoretical Foundation

Undocumented students in America face a multitude of challenges daily. These challenges range from the illegality of their existence in this country, to poverty and discrimination. Many of these students have lived in the United States longer than any other country, and in most ways, they feel American. They grow up with the same dreams and goals as many of their documented or natural born peers. Yet, in almost all cases, there comes a time when these students are forced to accept the reality that they are different from others. In search for a theoretical framework to assist the researcher in making sense of the tenacity and resilience exhibited by these students, self-affirmation theory stood out.

Self-affirmation theory was developed by the social psychologist Claude M. Steele in the 1980s. It is the belief that people are motivated to maintain high levels of self-integrity (Steele, 1988). Self-affirmation theory posits that people strive to uphold an image of being morally adequate and overall good people. Those who study self-affirmation theory believe people overcome perceived attacks on self-identity by affirming other aspects of self that are of equal importance to the individual being attacked (Armitage & Rowe, 2017; Cohen & Sherman, 2007; Steele, 1988).

To demonstrate the impact of self-affirmation theory, Steele (1988) conducted a study in which stay-at-home moms were called by individuals posing as pollsters. During the phone calls, some of the mothers were called negative names during the phone calls. Some of the women were called uncooperative. The women, part of the heavily Mormon city of Salt Lake, prided themselves on being cooperative. Another group of women received similar phone calls, but

were praised for being cooperative. A third group was called and they were told they were bad drivers during the phone call. During a second round of calls to the same women, they were asked to participate in a real food co-op. As predicted by Steele, the women that had been called negative names participated nearly double the rate of those who were called positive names. Steele believed this was because the women had added motivation to not be seen by the negative names they were called.

Cohen and Sherman (2014) studied self-affirmations in three middle schools. The schools were racially diverse: half the students were African American or Latino American and the other half were white. Students were assigned self-affirmation exercises between two and five times per year lasting no more than 10 minutes each. The exercises began during the fourth week of school and were initiated just before the first major exam of the school year. Students in the study were tracked over the course of one to three years. The grade point averages of the African American students significantly improved in one school and the same was true for Latino American students in two others in the core courses of English, math, social studies and science. The self-affirmation exercises were credited with cutting the number of African American students receiving a D or F in the courses by half (Cohen & Sherman, 2014).

Self-Affirmation theory helped the researcher understand the resilience seen by the students at GEC High School as they strived to maintain the integrity of the self and portray and positive self-image (Steele, 1988). It provided a research-based understanding as to how these students come to school and perform well academically and socially in spite of all they face outside of school. Students disclosed fear of deportation of their parents and family members to the researcher. Fear of arrest has been expressed to the researcher from undocumented parents who drove illegally and faced the threat of arrest every time they drove when called to pick up a

sick child from school or attend a school function. The researcher has witnessed students sign out of school to go interpret for a parent who did not speak English. Through these challenges and more, GEC has graduated every Latinx student it served for each of the past five years.

Self-affirmations can take many forms ranging from positive self-feedback, or even making purchases of status goods which create the impression of equality to those around them and has been attributed to academic success (Harris et al., 2017). Although there is evidence that supports self-affirmation actions having positive effects on motivation and positive changes in behavior, more research needs to be conducted on the long-term implications of the theory to undocumented high school students in Greene County. The theory itself is relatively new and more comprehensive research needs to be conducted to establish long-term validity.

Assumptions

In this study, the researcher assumed that all undocumented Latinx students at GEC aspired to continue their education at a four-year institution. The researcher in this study is a high school principal at GEC. GEC is an early college high school in which students apply to attend and work towards completing their associate's degree and high school diploma, in four or five years, free of charge to the students and their families. The students highlighted in this study pursued this educational endeavor as eighth graders and continued with it through graduation. The researcher assumed the students did so with the intent on continuing their education beyond high school and pursued the early college as a vehicle to reduce the cost of attendance at a four-year institution. This assumption was based on anecdotal accounts provided by students who self-disclosed their undocumented status to the researcher.

The same assumption has been made in perceiving undocumented Latinx students desire a well-paying middle-class profession. There are multiple reasons that could have led students to

attend GEC. Students could have chosen to attend because it was smaller than the traditional high school. Students also could have applied because of family pressure or peer influence. It could be that students are satisfied with earning their high school diploma and having the option to earn their associate's degree, concurrently. Students could be content with the seemingly limited options they have. Students can use their education to improve their current living conditions. These are the assumptions the researcher entered this study with.

Scope and Delimitations

The researcher in this study chose to limit the participants to undocumented Latinx students affiliated with GEC. This choice had been made partly due to the nature of the course of study in the Problem of Practice dissertation. In this method of study, researchers are advised to focus on areas in which they have some influence. The researcher in this case was the principal of GEC and thus chose to limit the study to this school. The strategies implemented as a result of this study were instituted once all research and data collection had been gathered and analyzed. Thus, the impact of any changes or interventions have not be evaluated during the course of this study.

The researcher in this study also decided to not interview parents or other family members. Aside from receiving consent from parents to have their children participate in this study, the perspectives the researcher was looking to capture were those of the students. The researcher was looking to evaluate the lived experiences of the students to determine ways to increase access for them. Conducting case study interviews with undocumented students whom currently attend GEC as well as students that have graduated from the school afforded the researcher multiple perspectives and allowed students' experiences to be recorded in their own words, in real time.

The researcher in this study also chose to take all necessary precautions to protect the identities of the students depicted in this study. The researcher has a professional connection with these students and felt a personal responsibility for their success. With the current political climate being hostile towards immigrants and the constant fear of deportation or arrest faced by these students, it was incumbent upon the researcher to protect the identity of the participants.

The researcher made the decision to conduct interviews on school grounds during student study hall periods or during lunch. This decision was made consciously in an effort to not interfere with the personal lives or responsibilities of the participants. Also, the students knew the researcher from school, so this setting was deemed the most appropriate place to conduct meetings or interviews. Students were not rewarded or compensated in any way for their participation. Students also had the ability to end any interview or request their information not be used at any point during the study.

Limitations

One limitation facing the researcher in this study was the ability to identify exactly who the undocumented Latinx students were within the school. There was no way to clearly identify these students. The researcher was aware of several current and former students' illegal status due to their willingness to disclose this information. Due to this limitation, the researcher relied on word-of-mouth to get the information out to potential participants in this study. The goal of the study was to interview two current students and two graduates of GEC that represent the larger student population of undocumented Latinx students.

The researcher was limited to only interviewing students that had attended GEC. This is where the researcher had influence and the ability to affect change. Because GEC is an early college, students are guaranteed some post-secondary education once they are accepted. Student

perceptions could be altered because of this, thus affecting the data collected. Chapter two of this study goes into detail about the current percentages of undocumented students that attend college. All of the participants in this study have defied the odds against them by virtue of attending GEC.

Significance of the Study

All across America, public schools are educating undocumented students in their classrooms. These students are part of a fast-growing population, making up nearly 21% of United States' public-school students (Ramirez, 2014). The majority of these students place a high value on education and feel it is important, yet only about 26% of undocumented students enroll in college (Pérez, 2012). Undocumented students come to school daily, often times from impoverished homes, facing fears of deportation and discrimination (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Due to this and other factors, as many as 40% of undocumented students in the United States fail to complete high school (Lauby, 2016).

The 1982 Supreme Court Decision in *Plyler v. Doe* guaranteed undocumented students would have access to a public education regardless of legal status (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). The high court ruled that children could not be held accountable for the actions of their parents. The Supreme Court went on to add that denying these students an education would only serve to further marginalize a group and create a lifetime of hardship (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Pérez et al., 2010). What this decision did not do, however, was speak to the educational attainment of undocumented students after high school graduation.

Some states have realized this is problematic and have taken steps to address the issue of limited access to college for undocumented students. Texas, for example, became the first state to allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition (Pérez, 2012). California adopted

Assembly Bill 540, which allowed in-state tuition for some of California's undocumented high school graduates. This has led to an increase in undocumented students' college enrollment in California (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Although these states, and others, have adopted measures to allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates, many undocumented families live below the poverty line and cannot afford tuition. Because undocumented students are not eligible to receive state or federal financial aid, they have to figure out how to pay for college (Gamez et al., 2017).

There has been little progress made to help remedy these issues. Schools all across the United States are looking for ways to help its undocumented students navigate the uncertainty of college and career attainment after high school graduation.

Advancing Equity in Educational and Career Attainment

It is the goal of the researcher that this study will serve as a catalyst to help advance the cause of college attainment and access to gainful career opportunities of undocumented students. The fact that an estimated 40% of undocumented children live below the poverty threshold in the United States is both a cause and an effect of ineffective policies and systemic failures to address the needs of this population.

This study evaluated stories of current and former Greene Early College High School students. Some of these students have been successful after graduating high school. Some have earned college degrees, and some are still trying to achieve that goal. Current students shared their stories. The researcher hopes to utilize this study as a platform that can be used to help other readers and future researchers that take up this cause, better advocate for undocumented students. Before true advocacy can take place, individuals must first be made aware of the situation and provided with details for how that situation impacts the community as a whole.

That is what this study serves to provide. This study serves as a foundation for the uninformed about the issues facing undocumented students. It also provides secondhand accounts of what it means to be undocumented in America. The stories shared within this study are not isolated or contained solely to the undocumented students of Greene County, North Carolina.

Undocumented students are being educated in schools all across the United States. Teachers, administrators, and school counselors are working with these students each day. These stories are being shared with trusted individuals that need help in trying to advise undocumented students. Too many talented students are graduating from high schools in the United States only to be maligned to low-skilled, manual labor occupations with low pay and little chance for rising above to poverty line (Pérez, 2012). Students that could be serving our country as teachers or nurses are more often working as construction workers and housekeepers (Passel & Cohn, 2009).

Advances in Practice

The researcher outlined in the study several factors that impacts the achievement of undocumented students. Key factors such as peer influence, family support, school culture and climate, and the impact of early colleges are examined in this study.

Undocumented students frequently rely on their peers for emotional support and financial resources (Enriquez, 2011). This is true whether the peers are documented or not. Understanding this, it is imperative that schools take steps to educate their faculty and student bodies about the conditions affecting undocumented students and provide all with current, accurate information and resources that can assist these students. Because family support is key, schools must take the lead in educating families about the importance of educational attainment and resources.

Undocumented students that come from families that understand the importance of education perform better in school (Storlie & Jach, 2012). It is known that immigrant parents have high

aspirations for their children's educations, which is one reason families migrate to the United States legally or otherwise (Pérez, 2012).

With college education out of reach for many undocumented students, largely due to finances, community colleges have become a viable option. With the reasonable tuition prices and often-times close proximity to student's homes, more students have taken this route to gaining a college education (Pérez, 2012). The early college high school, a reform initiative that began in 2002, has combined community college with high school at no cost to its students (DiMaria, 2013). In communities where this is an option, undocumented students with college aspirations would benefit from the opportunity to complete two years of college while in high school at no cost. This, in essence, cuts the price of a four-year college education in half for those students looking to go that route. The opportunity to gain an associate's degree or career certification could be beneficial to those students looking to enter the workforce promptly after high school. With limited paths to higher education and employment for undocumented students, it is a program that undocumented students should be educated on (Storlie & Jach, 2012).

Because schools often provide the first meaningful relationships for students outside of the home, it is important they provide information and serve as role models for undocumented students (Pérez, 2012). From this study, it is known that school personnel can play either a positive or negative role in the lives of undocumented students. Positive interactions with school faculty and staff have been cited by undocumented students as one of the most important factors of environmental satisfaction (Stebbleton & Aleixo, 2015). This information presents powerful evidence for the importance of schools in the lives of undocumented students.

Schools also need to promote inclusiveness and assignments should be culturally sensitive (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Schools need to provide undocumented students with

information directly as it relates to them and share stories of successful undocumented students (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Schools can also use their privilege to speak up for its undocumented students and share their stories within the communities they serve.

Filling a Gap in the Literature

The researcher in the study aimed to provide a research-based document that chronicled the lives and experiences of undocumented Latinx students in rural Greene County, North Carolina; provide background and history of undocumented immigrants in the United States; and provide strategies for improving the condition of these students. The strategies identified come both from research provided through the review of literature, as well as, the first-hand accounts of students interviewed for this study. Any strategies found as a result of this case study will hopefully be utilized to advance the cause of undocumented students anywhere, regardless of their country of origin.

Summary

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study. The researcher has explained the problem of practice being addressed, its significance throughout the country, as well as the purpose for the study. The researcher has outlined research questions to be addressed, as well as, documented the limitations and assumptions of the study. Chapter 2 will include a review of the literature related to undocumented students in the United States. Chapter 3 will provide an explanation of the methods and procedures used in this study. In Chapter 4, cases will be chronicled and analyzed. Lastly, Chapter 5 will reveal the findings related to the research questions outlined in this chapter. It will also provide a summary detailing the findings along with implications and conclusions developed as a result of the research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review is comprised of seven main sections. Those sections include: Latinx achievement gap, acculturation, poverty, early college history, early college impact, legal limitations, and Self-Affirmation Theory. Self-Affirmation Theory is the framework the researcher will analyze in this review to provide further insight into the plight and resilience of undocumented Latinx students in their pursuits of academic and social value. The references utilized in this review were gathered using East Carolina University's Joyner library search engine, Google Scholar, along with suggestions from professors and fellow researchers. Some of the terms entered in the search for these articles included, "*achievement gap*," "*early college high schools*," "*Latinx achievement gap*," "*impact of early college*," and "*self-affirmation theory*."

The researcher discovered other factors that contributed to the success, or lack thereof, of undocumented Latinx students, which include parental support, peer influence, school culture and climate, prejudice and discrimination, and financial limitations. The references presented in this review have utilized various forms of data collection ranging from longitudinal studies, student surveys, individual and focus group interviews, and case studies. The researcher identified gaps in the literature reviewed, as well as, next steps for study.

The Latinx Achievement Gap

When surveyed, undocumented Latinx students overwhelmingly felt it was important to do well in school (Pérez, 2012). In a study conducted by William Perez, of 110 undocumented Latino high school students, 78% agreed or strongly agreed with feeling that strong academic performance was important (Pérez, 2012). Eighty-two percent of students in the same study placed a high value on schooling, with female students feeling more strongly than males at 86%

to 74%, respectively. Yet, even with placing such high value on education, only about 26% of undocumented students enroll in college (Pérez, 2012). The achievement gap or the large differences in average test scores between minority students and white students or between poor and wealthy students have been studied for decades (Ramirez, 2014; Valant & Newark, 2016). Studies have revealed that although some progress in closing the gaps has been made, there is still a way to go (Ramirez, 2014).

Over the past three decades, the Latinx population in this country has nearly doubled and grown to make up nearly 21% of United States' students (Ramirez, 2014). During that same timeframe, the percentage of Latinx students completing college degrees has remained relatively unchanged (Ramirez, 2014). Valant and Newark (2016) varied in their approach to framing the achievement gap in their 2016 article, whose title is included in this paragraph because it articulates the argument *The Politics of Achievement Gaps: U.S Public Opinion on Race-Based and Wealth-Based Differences in Test Scores*. In it, they briefly chronicled the history of achievement gaps in this country, looking back to the enslavement of African Americans and through the United States Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954.

Today, most black and Latinx students still attend schools that are mostly black and Latinx (Valant & Newark, 2016). Although many minority families live below the poverty line and their academic struggles are connected to socioeconomic status, the public's urgency, which ultimately drives policy, does not view them in the same light (Valant & Newark, 2016). Valant and Newark's study, which aimed to measure the opinion of the general public on race-based disparities in academic performance compared to wealth-based differences, identified the term "homophily" as a possible explanation for why the public more readily identified with wealth-based initiatives. Homophily is the tendency of people to prefer social ties with those that are

similar over those that are dissimilar (Valant & Newark, 2016). Since the majority of people can identify with being poor over being of a different race, they support initiatives that aim to close wealth-based gaps more often than race-based gaps. This revelation was identified in Valant and Newark's 2016 research to be a primary reason for why the race-based achievement gap is still prevalent in America's schools today.

Steinburg et al. (1992) took a different approach to identifying reasons for disparities in academic achievement amongst students with different ethnic backgrounds. Their study included surveys and interviews with students from various places across the United States, including Milwaukee, Wisconsin which served primarily black students, to San Jose, California, which was mostly Latinx. Their study identified several contributing factors to minority achievement. They identified parenting styles, as well as peer and parent influences, as factors that shaped student performance in school. The Glass-Ceiling Effect, or the belief that no matter how students performed, it would not benefit them after high school, was also identified as a contributing factor. One of the most innovative facets of the Steinburg et al. (1992) study was that it began with a primary focus on parenting styles of minority students compared to white students and concluded by identifying peer influence as the leading contributor to student achievement amongst those examined in the study (Steinburg et al., 1992). On April 3rd, 2014, former ECU football coach, Ruffin McNeill delivered a speech to a group of young men where he told them, "Show me your friends and I will show you your future." This speaks to the importance of peer relationships in the lives of students.

Peer Influence

Undocumented students undergo seemingly insurmountable obstacles in their quest for educational attainment (Pérez et al., 2010). Undocumented students frequently rely on their

peers, both documented and undocumented, for emotional, financial, and informational resources (Enriquez, 2011; Pérez et al., 2010). Enriquez (2011) noted in her study of 54 undocumented college students that while many students came from supportive families, their families were not at school with them. Friends were the people they credited with providing social capital in school (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Students in the study acknowledged that most often it was friends helping them work through their K-12 academic experience and uncover paths to college. Associating with academically successful peers who were also undocumented has been proven to be a contributing factor in the success of these students (Enriquez, 2011; Pérez et al., 2010; Steinburg et al., 1992). Many students reported wanting to do well in school because their peers also placed a high level of importance on education (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Pérez, 2012). With as many as 40% of undocumented students failing to graduate from high school, many students identify not wanting to experience this same fate as a reason for continuing their educational pursuits (Lauby, 2016; Pérez, 2012).

Family Support

Many successful undocumented Latinx students attribute their strong will to succeed to the sacrifices made by their parents and other family members in bringing them to the United States (Enriquez, 2011; Pérez et al., 2010). Latinx cultures often originate from collectivistic cultures or those that place a high level of importance on the family (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Undocumented Latinx students that come from families that understand the importance of an education and how it will benefit the entire family, tend to perform better in school (Pérez, 2012; Storlie & Jach, 2012). Many immigrant parents hold high academic aspirations for their children even though they themselves did not receive a formal education in their home countries or in the US (Pérez, 2012). Parents hold these values, even as most are unable to help their children with

their school work or navigate the educational system in this country. Students with lower levels of academic success reported not having strong protective factors like supportive parents and friends (Pérez, 2012).

The home lives of undocumented students can hinder their educational pursuits as it can with anyone. In her 2006 qualitative research study with ten Latino undocumented students, Paz Maya Oliveréz highlighted this. Sixty percent of the students reported living in homes with six or more people; nine of the students lived in homes where everyone slept in the same room (Olivérez, 2006). None of these students had a quiet space in the home where they could go to study and thus ended up doing their work away from home. The study also found that in addition to crowded living environments, many of the students were also responsible for caring for younger siblings (Olivérez, 2006).

School Culture and Climate

Twenty-four percent of school-aged children come from homes with immigrant parents; 23% of these students are first-generation immigrants, born outside of the United States (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013). Undocumented Latinx students come to school with difficulties unique to their situation. These students are faced with fears of deportation, limited paths to higher education and gainful employment, and discrimination (Storlie & Jach, 2012).

Often, it is the school that provides the first meaningful relationships for students outside of the home (Pérez, 2012). Undocumented Latinx students depend on school personnel to serve as role models, as well as to establish high expectations and instill confidence (Pérez, 2012). Latinx students have noted the important roles that schools, teachers, and other personnel play in their academic lives both positively and negatively (Pérez, 2012). Students routinely describe

relationships with teachers and counselors and credit them with being valuable sources of information and guidance (Perez et al., 2009).

In a study conducted with undocumented Mexican college students, positive student-faculty interactions were positively associated with student persistence and their overall levels of satisfaction with their environment (Stebbleton & Aleixo, 2015). Stebleton and Aleixo (2015) also discussed “coming out” or revealing one’s undocumented status to faculty members. They noted that students tended to share their secret with others who had some level of shared experience whether it be race, cultural background, or native language (Stebbleton & Aleixo, 2015).

At the K-12 classroom level, certain processes and procedures utilized by teachers and counselors can have a profound impact on undocumented students’ success (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Assignments in schools should promote inclusiveness, as well as be culturally sensitive (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Since schools are often integral parts of the community, educators are uniquely situated to offer support to undocumented students (DeLaCroix & Dillard, 2018). School professionals should provide undocumented students with information directly and provide examples of other successful undocumented students (Storlie & Jach, 2012). In addition, schools should also assist students with securing financial resources, social/emotional supports, and utilize their privilege to speak up for undocumented students (DeLaCroix & Dillard, 2018; Storlie & Jach, 2012).

History of Early Colleges

With the opportunity for higher education seemingly out of reach for many undocumented students, there is one path that is becoming more and more popular across the country: the early college high school. The early college high school model is a high school reform initiative that began with the ideas and funding of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

(Haxton et al., 2016; Ongaga, 2010; Sparks, 2013). The first early college high schools opened in 2002, with the first schools located in the state of Texas (DiMaria, 2013; Locke et al., 2014). Since that time, the concept has spread to over 280 schools in 28 states and the District of Columbia (DiMaria, 2013; Hoffman Senior Advisor, 2015; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Met with skepticism in the beginning, the early college initiative combines high school with the first two years of college, with the intent of students graduating from high school with both their high school diploma and two-year college degree, tuition free (DiMaria 2013; Heitin, 2016; Hoffman Senior Advisor, 2015).

Community colleges have already been the most traveled path to a college degree for undocumented students, mostly due to their convenient location, open-admissions, and significantly lower costs (Teranishi et al., 2011). What truly makes the early college initiative innovative and separates it from other reform efforts is its targeted student demographic. The early college concept aims to serve students that are identified as being at-risk of dropping out of high school, historically underrepresented in college, or first-generation college goers, all of which typically apply to undocumented students (DiMaria, 2013; Heitin, 2016; Locke et al., 2014; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). To that end, over 40% of all early college high school students identify as Latino and over 60% are from low-income families (Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Early colleges were founded on the principles of rigor, relevance, and relationships (DiMaria, 2013; Ongaga, 2010). In her study, Ongaga (2010) described the keys to early college student success as having caring teacher-student relationships, positive peer relationships, and effective student-parent relationships. She went on to identify the quest for an academic challenge and rigor as reasons students wanted to attend the early college (Ongaga, 2010).

Impact of Early Colleges

Initially met with skepticism, multiple studies have shown the effectiveness of the early college high school model (DiMaria, 2013; Haxton et al., 2016; Ongaga, 2010). DiMaria (2013) noted in his study that during the 2010-2011 school-year, early colleges boasted a 93% graduation rate compared to 76% for the traditional schools in the same districts. Trini Garza High School, which was highlighted in DiMaria's 2013 study, had a 100% graduation rate in a district that had a 76% graduation rate, with a student population that was 86% free and reduced lunch, and 84% Latinx.

When citing results of a study conducted on 2,458 students, Sparks (2013) reported that while students showed no significant differences in math achievement or grade average, the 1,044 students that attended an early college posted a graduation rate that was five percentage points higher than the 1,414 students who did not (86% to 81%). Sparks (2013) also writes that early college students were more likely than their peers to earn a high school diploma and later a college degree according to a study of ten early college high schools. Jobs for the Future reported in a 2014 study of several thousand early college graduates that more than one-third finished high school with an associate degree and the average early college graduate finished with 38 college credits (Hoffman Senior Advisor, 2015).

Furthermore, Haxton et al. (2016) reported in their study of ten early colleges that 63.5% of early college students had enrolled in college by their fourth year after ninth grade, compared to 24.3% of control students. In this study, 53% of students were minorities and 47% were from low income families. Early college students also earn college degrees at a higher rate than traditional high school students (Haxton et al., 2016; Webb & Gerwin, 2014). Haxton et al. (2016) found that minority early college students in their control group were almost ten times as

likely as white students to obtain their degree at 29.4% compared to 3.0% respectively. These numbers show exciting promise for undocumented Latinx students when you consider that Latinos will make up 25% of all public-school students in the next 20 years and that Latinx students dropped out of high school at a rate of 18.3% in 2010 (Locke et al., 2014). Although the data from these studies and others have limitations on application to the entire population, it does show tremendous promise for undocumented Latinx students as a path to higher education.

Acculturation

In looking into the meaning of acculturation and attempting to envision what the process must feel like for undocumented students, Ellis and Chen (2013) describe it in this way.

At one point, all participants crossed the border to enter the United States. However, experiences and transitions since that initial border crossing have led to additional metaphorical ‘crossings’ at various stages throughout their lives. Experiences of exclusion from opportunities available to their documented counterparts began in junior high and high school as peers began applying for jobs, obtaining driver’s licenses, traveling, and researching college opportunities. For the participants, it seemed as though once a hurdle is successfully navigated, another is waiting behind it.

Acculturation is a complex process of change in which individuals or groups assimilate into the traits, customs, and values of the host country (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013). For many, the process of acculturation can be a stressful experience and is often referred to as *acculturative stress*; a term used in reference to the unique stressors of acculturation (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013). This stress usually arises when individuals embrace the values of the host country while simultaneously retaining aspects of their home culture (Ellis & Chen, 2013). Rogers-Sirin et al. (2013) identify numerous factors that contribute to acculturative stress, including the conditions

in which one lived before immigrating and separating from family members, which is especially stressful for children. Entering the country without documentation is another source of great stress. For the undocumented, the elusiveness of certain opportunities often creates discouragement. When coupled with the economic stress routinely linked to undocumented status, stress levels rise (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013). In their work to link acculturation to mental health risks, Rogers-Sirin et al. (2013) identified three types of acculturation: dissonant, consonant, and selective.

Dissonant Acculturation

Dissonant acculturation happens when children master the language and norms of the host culture and disassociate with their ethnic culture at a faster rate than their parents. Dissonant acculturation decreases the ability for parents to serve as protectors and to an extent, authority figures in the lives of their children (Ellis & Chen, 2013). This type of acculturation is linked to high stress and mental health risks (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013).

Consonant Acculturation

Consonant acculturation takes place when both parents and children assimilate into the culture of the host country and at the same rate. This type of acculturation comes with its own levels of stress. It can often strain relationships between families that have moved to another country and their family members that have remained in the country of origin, or their family members that assimilate into the host country at a slower pace (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013).

Selective Acculturation

Selective acculturation is linked to the most positive outcomes in relation to mental health and stress. In selective acculturation, the parents and the children can successfully maintain healthy attachments to both their ethnic culture and that of the host country. Positive

outcomes for this type of acculturation were linked to families' ability to cope better with the difficulty of assimilation by maintaining support with their families and ethnic communities. Maintaining a strong bicultural identity, in which immigrants feel connected to their home country and their adoptive country, was closely linked to more positive self-esteem, greater optimism, and better mental health outcomes with many immigrant groups (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013).

Impact of Acculturation

For immigrant children, the acculturation process usually manifests itself in schools where the host country's influence comes from interactions with peers (Ellis & Chen, 2013). Although schools can serve as a protector for immigrant students, it is often where many students first encounter the reality of their undocumented status. Many students learn of their undocumented status in high school (Pérez, 2012). Students in Perez' (2012) study reported that it was in high school when students realized certain field trips were off-limits, as were other activities that required state or government-issued identification. Students also discussed feeling embarrassed when they had to explain why they could not get a driver's license, apply for a job, or even vote. For undocumented students, getting a cell phone, or even a library card, all come with the risk of embarrassment and fear (Pérez, 2012).

Schools can also add other stressors with undocumented families. Often, the views of immigrant families towards schools and education vary from that of schools in the United States. These differences in views, also referred to as *cultural discontinuity*, *cultural mismatch*, and *cultural incongruence*, occur when there are significant differences between the school culture and the home culture (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013). Teachers and other school personnel have all too often misunderstood the intelligence, intent, and abilities of immigrant students and their

families because of language differences and patterns of interaction (Pérez, 2012; Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013). Studies have shown that teachers exhibit higher levels of comfortability with students whom they perceive to have similar beliefs about education as their own (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013).

Undocumented Latinx students have also reported positive benefits of navigating the cultures of multiple countries. Students have identified an increased ability to understand different points of view and exhibit a sense of connection with other marginalized groups or individuals and their quest for legitimacy (Ellis & Chen, 2013). Many of these students have taken up additional causes from homelessness to supporting the LGBT communities as a result of this newfound connection to struggles (Ellis & Chen, 2013).

Undocumented students are important members of U.S. society, albeit at the lower levels of the economy (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010). Many undocumented Latinx students identify more with the individualistic culture and value system of the US, than with their often more collectivistic home cultures (Storlie & Jach, 2012). These students have been educated in American schools and often speak English with more fluency than they do Spanish (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Williams, 2015). They envision their futures here in the US and embrace the expectations of merit-based attainment (Williams, 2015). Students grow up believing that if they work hard, college and career opportunities will follow. Often however, these students end up in the same low-level, service-sector jobs as their parents, faced with the same restrictions and limitations due to their undocumented status (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010; Pérez, 2012).

Prejudice and Discrimination

No amount of acculturation or assimilation can completely help undocumented students escape prejudice and discrimination. Undocumented immigrants are often referred to as *illegal*

immigrants (Storlie & Jach, 2012). This type of anti-immigrant rhetoric frames the undocumented as law-breakers and criminals (Pérez, 2012; Storlie & Jach, 2012). This language has resulted in dehumanizing behaviors and “Hispanophobia” (Storlie & Jach, 2012). The media frequently perpetuates this image through its use of stereotypical language and images (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Faced with this label, undocumented students are forced to cope with the public’s perception and still try to become a part of the American culture (Pérez, 2012).

Undocumented individuals also face discrimination in the workplace. These workers are often subjected to overt intimidation from supervisors and rarely, if ever, pursue pay raises or better working conditions for fear of losing their jobs. They grow to accept harsh working conditions and endure them quietly (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Undocumented workers routinely see less qualified or less skilled employees promoted to management positions. They are forced to accept that their immigration status makes them unworthy of promotion (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012).

Undocumented students refuse to define themselves by their immigration status. These students believe they can accomplish the same things as other students, even if they must do it in diverse ways (Pérez, 2012). Some students learn to avoid serious conversations about their undocumented status through the use of humor or sarcasm (Pérez, 2012). Students become adept at hiding their immigration status due to fears of rejection, social isolation, and deportation (Williams, 2015). These students also face racism and language stigmas throughout their K-12 educational experience (Crisp et al., 2014). Compared with their white counterparts, Latinx students are more likely to be placed into vocational or lower ability courses, ultimately providing a less rigorous education (Crisp et al., 2014). Those students lucky enough to make it to college also report discriminatory experiences. Students felt that negative interactions with

faculty, unfair grading practices, derogatory remarks by students and staff, and isolation were barriers to their academic success (Crisp et al., 2014).

Poverty

As of January 2018, the United States Department of Health and Human Services set the poverty threshold for a family of four in the contiguous United States at \$25,100. It is estimated that nearly 40% of undocumented children reside in homes that are below this threshold (Pérez, 2012). The reasoning for this may appear to be obvious. With lower levels of education, undocumented immigrants are maligned to low-skilled manual labor occupations with lower pay (Pérez, 2012). Industries such as agriculture (24%), landscaping (19%), construction workers (15%) are occupations in which immigrant workers are often overrepresented (Passel & Cohn, 2009; Passel & Cohn, 2018). At 15%, undocumented workers account for more than triple their share of construction workers (Passel & Cohn, 2018). Other low-wage occupations in which undocumented immigrants' makeup an unusually large percentage are brick masons (40%), drywall installers (37%), as well as maids and housekeepers (27%) (Passel & Cohn, 2009). It is estimated that 47% of undocumented immigrants have less than a high school education (Pérez, 2012; Williams, 2015).

In 2007, the average household income for all undocumented households was \$36,000 compared to \$50,000 for those born in the US (Passel & Cohn, 2009; Pérez, 2012). For undocumented Mexican households, the average was \$32,000 (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Even with this figure, it must be noted that undocumented households, on average, have more workers (1.75) than do U.S. born households (1.23) (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Also notable, undocumented immigrant's incomes rarely increase, even after a decade of work in the US. In comparison, legal immigrants see their incomes rise by an average of 33% in that same time frame (Passel & Cohn,

2009). With definitive poverty guidelines calculated to include levels of income deprivation, relative poverty is defined in terms of lack of adequate resources and an inability to participate in social and political processes (Williams, 2015).

Being poor and undocumented means these families will not benefit from political, social, or economic institutions (Williams, 2015). Economic and physical insecurity too often become the norm for this demographic. Even though impoverished undocumented families qualify financially for certain services and benefits, their immigration status prevents them from accessing resources such as food stamps, unemployment insurance or public housing (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). These limitations further marginalize and restrict the potential for upward mobility for many of these families (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012).

Financial Limitations

The percentage of uninsured undocumented adults in 2007 stood at 59%. Forty-five percent of the children of undocumented immigrants did not have health insurance during the same year (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Only 25% of U.S. born children of undocumented immigrants were uninsured in 2007 (Passel & Cohn, 2009). These statistics represented 17% of the entire uninsured population in the US. Another telling statistic, which highlights the financial limitations of the undocumented, is home ownership. Only 35% of undocumented immigrants of all nationalities are homeowners (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Undocumented immigrants are also more likely to relocate, than U.S. residents or legal immigrants, within the same city (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Of the undocumented Latinx students that make it to college, many face a multitude of obstacles when they arrive. The largest of these obstacles is the lack of financial support (Pérez, 2012). Lack of finances and the rising costs of college often result in poor retention rates for these students (Zarate & Burciaga, 2009). Limited access to government-

sponsored scholarships and financial aid due to undocumented status and lack of a social security number further exacerbate this issue (Pérez, 2012; Zarate & Burciaga, 2009). These students must find creative ways to finance their education and all too often are left with unused talents and aspirations that will go unfulfilled (Williams, 2015; Zarate & Burciaga, 2009). In states where the "trinity" of forcing unauthorized immigrants to pay out-of-state tuition, combined with the high cost of education, and being ineligible for financial aid contributed to immigrant college enrollment dropping by 8.4% (Villarraga-Orjuela & Kerr, 2017).

Legal Limitations

Numerous court decisions and other legislation have played pivotal roles in the quest for educational equality for undocumented immigrants of all nationalities. The most prominent of them all is the 1982 Supreme Court decision in *Plyler v. Doe*. The *Plyler* decision ruled that children are “persons” under the 14th Amendment, and as such, states may not deny them access to public education regardless of their illegal status (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Pérez, 2012; Pérez et al., 2010). The court ruled that children could not be held accountable for the actions of their parents and to deny them an education would only serve to further marginalize a group, and create a “lifetime of hardship” and a permanent “underclass” (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Pérez et al., 2010). This decision however, only protects students through high school graduation (Pérez et al., 2010).

In June of 2012, President Barack Obama signed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program, referred to from this point as DACA (Gamez et al., 2017). This was a temporary, executive order, which provided a 2-year relief from deportation, as well as work permits for undocumented immigrants that entered the US before the age of 16 (Gamez et al., 2017). Applicants for this program had to be in school, have graduated from high school or its

equivalent, and must be under the age of 31. Although DACA is a temporary order, it provided some access for social and economic mobility for undocumented immigrants (Gamez et al., 2017). DACA provided social-security numbers for many recipients, although it was mainly used for work purposes. Several states, led by California and Texas, began offering in-state tuition to DACA recipients (Gamez et al., 2017). DACA does not make students eligible for federal financial aid, leaving college still out-of-reach for most undocumented students (Gamez et al., 2017). The future of DACA is in an indeterminate state as the current president has vowed to end the program.

The Trump administration filed to end the DACA program and during the summer of 2020 the case was heard. In a 5-4 ruling, the Supreme Court ruled that the Trump administration did not follow procedure in attempting to legally end the program. The court did not, however, rule that DACA recipients have a permanent right to reside in the United States (Barros, 2020). The opinion of the court is that presidents have the legal authority to override the executive orders of previous administrations but recognized that the Trump administration did follow procedure in attempting to do so. This is significant because it does not stop the Trump administration from further attempts to end DACA (Barros, 2020). For now, the Supreme Court's decision serves to reinstate DACA under the original terms from 2012 and the more 700,000 recipients of the program can rest a little easier (Barros, 2020). For his part, President Trump tweeted after the decision that his administration was looking for a "legal solution not a political one, so now we have to start all over again" (Barros, 2020). With a presidential election nearing, it appears unlikely that the president will attempt to end the DACA program before November 2020.

Texas became the first state to allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition almost 20 years after the *Plyler* decision (Pérez, 2012). Undocumented adolescents account for 16% of the undocumented population (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). In an attempt to address this, the state of California adopted Assembly Bill 540, referred to as AB540. AB540 exempted undocumented students from paying out-of-state tuition if they met certain criteria (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). Passed in 2001, the law afforded in-state tuition for students that attended a California high school for at least three years, or graduated from a California high school, or enrolled at an accredited college or university, and signs an affidavit confirming their intentions to apply for legal residency as soon as possible (Pérez et al., 2010). This allowance has led to an increase in college enrollment for undocumented students in California and has provided a less stigmatizing label (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012). As of 2014, 21 states had similar legislation (Villarraga-Orjuela & Kerr, 2017).

Self-Affirmation Theory

Undocumented Latinx students face a multitude of obstacles in the quest for academic and social equality yet continue to persevere in spite of the barriers. In an attempt to better understand the resilience and determination these students exhibit the researcher has turned to theory to help frame these phenomena. Throughout the literature reviewed for this study, several theoretical frameworks have been examined, including self-efficacy theory, self-determination theory, critical-race theory, and identity-based motivation theory. Yet, self-affirmation theory, made popular by social psychologist Claude M. Steele is the theoretical framework that will be used to provide the context necessary to analyze the resilience to problems faced by undocumented Latinx students (Cohen & Sherman, 2007; Sherman, 2013).

Self-affirmation theory is the belief that people are motivated to maintain high levels of self-integrity (Pérez, 2012; Steele, 1988). It is the notion that people will strive to uphold an image of being morally adequate, stable, competent, and overall good people. Researchers that have studied self-affirmation theory assert that people can overcome or compensate for perceived attacks on self-identity, by affirming other aspects of self. That is, as long as the aspect being affirmed is of equal importance to the individual as that of which is being attacked (Armitage & Rowe, 2017; Cohen & Sherman, 2007; Croizet et al., 2000; Harris et al., 2017; Pérez, 2012; Sherman, 2013; Steele, 1988). What began as an alternative method of explaining cognitive dissonance, or the state of having inconsistent thoughts and attitudes, has morphed into a theory to inform interventions in multiple settings from education to personal health (Sherman, 2013).

In terms of undocumented Latinx students, Pérez (2012) uses self-affirmation theory to explain how the affirmation of doing well in school, or being engaged civically, may help cope with the inability to change their legal status. Resilience for these students is achieved through affirmation of other valued self-concepts and makes the threat of being undocumented more tolerable (Pérez, 2012). Pérez (2012) explains that people respond to threats of self-integrity in three ways: by attempting to eliminate the threat, diminish the perception of the threat, or by diminishing the belief that the threat harms self-integrity. These adaptations to attacks on self-integrity provide undocumented students with an added degree of coping and resilience in the school setting (Pérez, 2012).

Harris et al. (2017) states that self-integrity can be maintained when individuals remind themselves of important self-aspects through conscious thoughts or actions. Thus, self-affirmation has been associated with increased academic achievement in school and in college and closely tied to better problem-solving skills (Harris et al., 2017). Self-affirmations can take

many forms. They are acts designed to demonstrate a person's feelings of adequacy (Sherman, 2013). These affirmations can come in the forms of positive feedback, updating a social media post to reflect positive self-images, or even the purchasing of status goods like expensive clothing or jewelry (Sherman, 2013). These value-affirming activities invite people to reflect on important aspects of self; they boost the psychological resources that people use to cope with threats (Cohen & Sherman, 2007; Sherman, 2013). Self-affirmation activities also serve to separate the person from the threat thus, reducing the impact the threat has on self-identity or self-image (Sherman, 2013). They remind individuals of the whole self (good student, nice person, hard worker) and not just part of the self that is perceived to be under attack (immigration status) to provide a more holistic view (Sherman, 2013).

There is an expanding body of evidence validating that self-affirming actions lead to improvements in how threats are processed, increases in motivation, and positive changes in behavior (Armitage & Rowe, 2017; Croizet et al., 2000). "Self-affirmation theory provides a framework for understanding the origins of these problems and an optimistic perspective for their resolution" (Cohen & Sherman, 2007).

In this literature review, the researcher has examined research on many issues facing undocumented Latinx students, from the disparities in academic achievement, to legal and financial limitations, in an attempt to not simply uncover what other researchers have identified, but also to unearth strategies that work to mitigate these factors. Self-affirmation theory has served to provide insight into the value of trusting and supporting relationships with school personnel, family, and peers. It is these support networks that aid in providing affirmation to undocumented Latinx students. This theory will aid those looking to help this demographic of students be more intentional about their actions and behaviors towards them.

In terms of theory, self-affirmation theory is relatively new, only studied for the past 30 years. The research on the long-term implications of self-affirming behavior has not been studied expansively. Also, studies performed on self-affirmation theory have focused on targeted areas such as education, personal health, and stereotype threats (Sherman, 2013). Understanding that different threats may have different mediators, it is necessary for more work to be done to perform more comprehensive research over an extended period of time (Sherman, 2013). Even with that being said, the research that is available shows tremendous promise for addressing the needs of undocumented Latinx students.

Summary

The literature reviewed here has provided a foundation for analyzing the plight of undocumented Latinx students in the US. The researcher has designed this review in a manner that captures the totality of the life experiences of undocumented Latinx immigrants. The researcher has garnered articles and books from some of the most seminal figures in this field of study. Throughout the research for this review, there were several themes that emerged for the researcher. First, undocumented students are faced with a paradox of issues throughout their lives. For example, these students are granted an education under law through high school graduation but beyond that, their futures are uncertain. Also, due to their immigration status, upward mobility is often out of reach, thus, subjecting them to live a life of poverty. Another theme that emerged throughout the research was relationships. Self-affirming behaviors and the support of family and trusted loved ones help these families cope with the day-to-day stressors that their undocumented status presents. Although there are some states that have attempted to change laws and regulations to allow undocumented students access to college at in-state tuition

prices, the cost of attendance is still too high for most families without the ability to receive government issued financial aid or scholarships.

With seemingly insurmountable obstacles facing these students, there were also several potential strategies that emerged for assisting these students. Utilizing self-affirming strategies in schools have shown to positively impact academic achievement for these students. The long-term impacts need further study. Concurrent enrollment at community colleges can also serve to bridge the gap between high school and adulthood for these students. The early college high school model is a successful school model, reviewed in this study, which allows students to get a college education while still in high school. Adults working with these students can also use their voices to advocate for these students and families and share positive stories of undocumented immigrants that have succeeded in spite of the obstacles. This review has served to provide a narrative that not only reports the issues these students face, but also serves as a point of optimism. This literature review shows what can be for these students if conscientious efforts are made to assist them in becoming contributing members of society, even if they're not American citizens.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher provides the details for the methodology utilized in this study. The purpose of this study is to utilize data gathered through semi-structured interviews with undocumented students, as well as information learned from reviewing literature on undocumented students to create and implement a more effective advising program at GEC for undocumented students. The school's mission statement reads that it will "prepare each student for college, careers, and life." It is the goal of the researcher that the outcome of this work will assist GEC in better preparing their undocumented students for life after high school graduation. How has being undocumented impacted the lives of the students in this study, and what can school leaders and school staff do to impact the dream for undocumented students to attain higher education and/or career opportunities are the two study questions the researcher worked to uncover answers for. Answers to these questions lead to changes in practice at GEC and will assist the researcher and staff of GEC in its advocacy for undocumented Latinx students.

Self-affirmation theory, or the belief that people are motivated to maintain high levels of self-integrity, is the theory that guides this research (Steele, 1988). It is the belief that people strive to uphold an image of being morally adequate, competent, and overall good people (Pérez 2012; Steele, 1988). Those who study self-affirmation theory believe that people can overcome attacks on their self-identity by affirming other aspects of the self that are of equal importance to that being attacked (Armitage & Rowe, 2017; Steele, 1988). This understanding of self-affirmation theory is what provided the researcher with the context to begin to understand how undocumented students at GEC continue to show up for school and produce at a high level in spite of the perceived attacks on their self-identity.

Over 40% of the school's population is Latinx. The school has received an "A" school report card grade for two of the last three years and has had a 100% graduation rate for five of the last six years. The goal of increasing access to college and careers for undocumented students is grounded in self-affirmation theory. It is the goal of the researcher to provide more effective advising at GEC for undocumented students so that they may be able to continue their education and affirm, that which is positive about their identity in an effort to counteract that, which is under attack. The researcher in this study utilized the results from the research to educate and inform stakeholders of GEC about the plight of undocumented students. This study has informed advocacy on behalf of undocumented Latinx students in Greene County and informed calls for change with community leaders and policy makers. The researcher will use the information gathered through research in this study and use his platform as an educational leader to help lead this change.

The sections included in this chapter contains information on the research design and rationale, ethical considerations, instrumentation, procedures to be followed, data collection and analysis, methodological assumptions, and the role of the researcher. This study will be conducted in three phases, which are explained in the instrumentation section of this chapter. Each section is presented in detail and provides information on all steps taken in conducting this study.

Research Design and Rationale

Undocumented Latinx students at Greene Early College High School (GEC), like their undocumented peers across the United States, have been guaranteed a free public education through high school graduation. However, there is much uncertainty for what awaits these students after high school. The researcher in this study sought to describe how the undocumented

status of these students impacted their lives and their ability to achieve academic and career success beyond high school. The researcher studied a total of seven cases from GEC in this study. The data gained through interviews with undocumented students, literature reviews, and observations lead to changes in practice at GEC to better prepare undocumented students for post graduate life. The changes include the development of an advising or resource guide for undocumented students, as well as professional development provided to the staff of GEC. This professional development was created and delivered by the researcher in this study, along with support of the school staff, and was based on the needs of students identified through the research. It also included strategies learned in the literature review conducted for this study.

Qualitative research enables researchers to study cases in their natural settings and interpret the meanings people bring to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, qualitative research affords the researcher an opportunity to present findings in the voice of the study participants that a quantitative approach simply does not (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final assertions prepared by the researcher in a qualitative study add further interpretation to a problem being studied and contributes to existing literature or serves to inform calls for change (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is another goal of this study for the final product to be used as a tool for education and advocacy on behalf of undocumented students at GEC by the stakeholders of the school. The research for this study took place in three phases (see Figure 1).

Phase 1

For the first phase of the study, the researcher designed a case study to perform this qualitative research. This study was developed and piloted in phase one. The researcher felt it necessary to pilot the studies to reveal any inadequacies in the case study design (Yin,

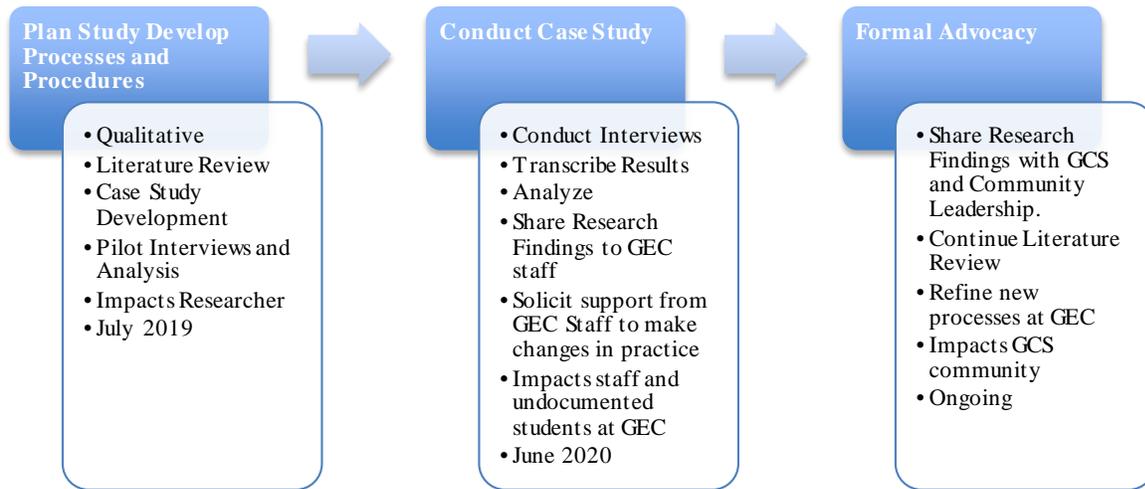


Figure 1. Research study phases.

1994). Piloting the case study also allowed the researcher to assess the alignment of interview questions with the study questions as well as intended outcomes for the research (see Figure 2). Defining the research or study questions is likely the most important piece to developing a research study and it is suggested that significant time and patience be applied to this portion of the study (Yin, 1994).

Yin (1994) describes the use of case study research when the study uses many variables of interest over data points, uses multiple sources of evidence, has data triangulating toward a conclusion, and benefits from prior development of theory to guide the data collection. Yin (1994) further explains that a case study lends itself toward determining “why” or “how” a situation came to be and cannot be quantified simply by frequency. Case studies are born out of a need to understand complex social phenomena and focus in-depth on cases to retain a holistic, real-world perspective (Yin, 2018). In the case of this study, the impact of being undocumented on early college students in Greene County is being studied. “It relies on direct observation and interviews” and seeks to describe phenomena that occur naturally within the environment (Yin, 2018). In this study, where the researcher looked to describe the plight of undocumented students at GEC and determine how GEC staff can better support them, the prerequisites for conducting a case study according to Yin, had been met.

Phase 2

The second phase of the research involved conducting actual case study interviews using the process outlined in Figure 1. Once the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes, the results were compared with information learned from reviewing literature related to this study. These findings were shared with the staff of GEC and used to impact change at the school moving forward.

Undocumented Impact	School Leader/Staff Impact	Advocacy	Self-Affirmation Theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •QUESTION 1 •QUESTION 2 •QUESTION 3 •QUESTION 4 •QUESTION 6 •QUESTION 10 •QUESTION 11 •QUESTION 12 •QUESTION 13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •QUESTION 3 •QUESTION 4 •QUESTION 5 •QUESTION 6 •QUESTION 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •QUESTION 1 •QUESTION 2 •QUESTION 3 •QUESTION 4 •QUESTION 5 •QUESTION 6 •QUESTION 7 •QUESTION 10 •QUESTION 11 •QUESTION 12 •QUESTION 13 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •QUESTION 6 •QUESTION 8 •QUESTION 9 •QUESTION 12 •QUESTION 13

Figure 2. Alignment of interview questions to study questions.

Phase 3

The overarching goal of the study is to increase access to college and career opportunities for undocumented students. In phase three, the researcher utilized the lessons learned in this study and the materials developed in conjunction with it, to advocate on behalf of undocumented students within GCS. The goal was to share the knowledge and lessons learned through this study to inform educational leadership within GCS, so that practices can be changed. As a result of this work, all GCS staff are better informed of the condition of the undocumented student in Greene County. Creating a sense of awareness, providing resources and strategies to individuals charged with educating undocumented students, has led to more inclusive learning environments. This advocacy began formally in the summer of 2020 and will continue throughout the career of the researcher.

Instrumentation

Phase 1 – Inform the Researcher

In Phase 1 of this study, the researcher conducted an extensive literature review to provide background research on the problem being studied here. This phase of the research provided the researcher with a broader understanding of the plight of undocumented students nationally. It was also during this phase of the study that the researcher decided to utilize a case study as the best way to gather the experiences of undocumented students at GEC in their own words.

Case study questions and interview protocols were developed in phase one of this study and piloted with two undocumented students. Reviewing the literature on a topic aids the researcher in developing sharper and more insightful questions about a topic (Yin, 1994). Phase one of this study was designed to inform the researcher. The data collected and analyzed from

pilot interviews were used to guide the case study in phase two. Phase one of the research is necessary to ensure the rigor of the study was present and that the study lacked bias (Yin, 1994).

For the pilot interviews conducted as part of an assignment for class, the researcher asked a total of eighteen questions. The first five questions were designed to provide the researcher with some basic background information. These questions were included to validate information contained within this study or to compare with research conducted in the literature review. For example, the first question asks the undocumented student, where did their family originate from? The researcher has referred to students in this study as undocumented Latinx students and this question simply serves to ensure this description is accurate. Other background questions are derived from the literature review performed for this study or to provide context for the reader. The researcher learned that undocumented families often come the United States separately and move frequently (Pérez, 2012). This was the basis for questions four and five of the background section.

The remaining thirteen questions were designed to provide data to support the study questions for this work, as well as to support advocacy for undocumented students. Several questions were also aimed at uncovering the role self-affirmation played in the experiences of these students without using the term explicitly. For example, question nine asks the undocumented student what they want people to see when they see them. This question was developed based on the idea that individuals strive to appear morally adequate and good and overcome perceived attacks on the self by focusing on more positive aspects of the self (Steele, 1988). Self-affirmation theory was supported in both pilot interviews as one student responded “I want them to see somebody who is successful” and the other replied “I want them to see the

effort; all of the work I have put in.” Neither student mentioned being undocumented when asked this question (see Appendix C and D).

Phase 2 – Self and Stakeholder Understanding

In the second phase of this study, the researcher conducted study interviews with five undocumented Latinx students. Case studies are designed to help researchers describe and analyze current, real-life issues that are in progress in order to collect accurate information not lost by time (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 1994). The key to identifying cases to be examined is to ensure the cases can be defined or described within certain parameters, otherwise referred to as bounded (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This understanding of case studies is what led the researcher to utilize this format as the primary source of data collection in the second phase of this study. The cases being studied here are a sampling of undocumented Latinx students that have graduated from, or currently attend, Greene Early College High School (GEC) in Snow Hill, North Carolina.

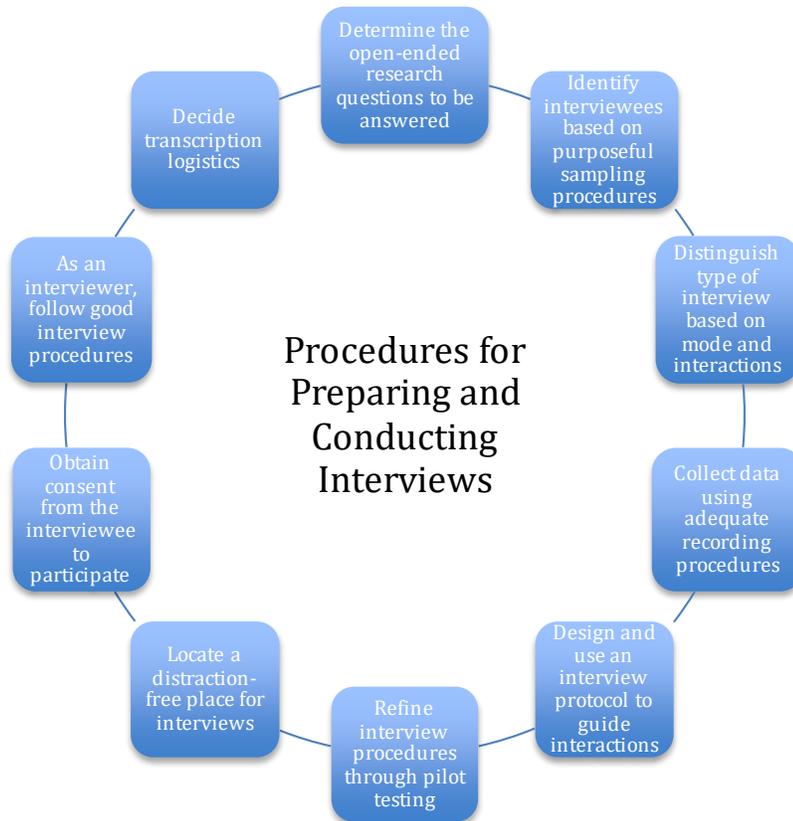
Nationally, as many as 40% of undocumented students fail to graduate from high school (Pérez, 2012). Undocumented students at GEC have consistently defied this national trend with the school having a 100% graduation rate for five of the past six years. The researcher in this study examined the impact that being undocumented had on the day-to-day lives of these students in general, and how it affected their prospects for future education and careers. This work provided understanding and supports advocacy for undocumented students with staff of GEC and other readers of this work. Furthermore, the researcher aimed to gather firsthand qualitative data on the role students attribute Greene Early College as playing in their success, or lack thereof, after high school graduation. Three of the participants have already graduated from the school. Information gathered was analyzed and used to develop a more intentional, culturally

sensitive school environment that is better equipped to serve and assist its undocumented population.

To gather the necessary information from undocumented students in the second phase of the study, the researcher chose to utilize a one-on-one semi structured interview protocol. This protocol was piloted in phase one of the study and follows the steps highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 166) (see Figure 3).

The researcher developed the interview questions used after the study questions and goals for the study had been established (see Appendix B). The questions were piloted in phase one of the study and have only been altered slightly as a result of the analysis of interview responses. In the final version of the interview questions, the researcher deleted the question that inquired if the undocumented student felt successful or not. The responses to this question did not yield valuable information and was poorly constructed. This question was replaced by asking the undocumented students their thoughts on the American Dream. This question was derived directly from the second study question for this research. This will inform stakeholders of the mentality of undocumented students and their beliefs that they can achieve the goals of getting a good education and a successful career. All participants were asked the same questions.

Questions were designed to elicit open-ended responses. These responses were audio recorded and transcribed using NVivo technology to ensure more reliable coding of the interviews. All interviews for phase two of the study were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed by December 31, 2019. The results from these interviews, as well as information from the literature review, were compiled and introduced to the staff of GEC at a staff meeting in February of 2020. Information was presented in an ethical manner, which protected the identities of students highlighted in the study.



Note. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Figure 3. The steps required for conducting high quality research interviews.

Phase 3 – Advocacy

In phase three of this study, the researcher utilized all of the data gathered to develop and implement professional development to the staff of GEC that will inform advocacy for undocumented students. Advising guides are being developed in collaboration with a fellow researcher and educational leader in Greene County who is studying a similar topic. This guide will include information on financial aid opportunities, employers that are willing to sponsor undocumented students, as well as civic organizations that work to support undocumented individuals in this area. Together, we have presented our findings to the leadership team of Greene County Schools as well as stakeholders at East Carolina University through its Graduate Pirate Talks series. Along with data learned in our respective studies, we also presented strategies that have proven to be effective in increasing access for undocumented students, such as, encouraging students to apply to the early college as a means to acquiring a free college education. There was no instrument used in phase three to measure the effectiveness of the strategies implemented as a result of this study.

Procedures

For this study, the researcher had identified five students who had agreed to serve as cases. These students were purposely sampled based on prior knowledge of the students' undocumented status. This information was gained through students self-disclosing this information in previous work through a student/principal connection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All students are affiliated with GEC where the researcher is the principal. The researcher presented the purpose of the study to the participants, along with the study questions being examined. The researcher then sought and received the verbal consent of each participant. Steps taken to protect the identity of the students were relayed to each participant. This was done to

ensure them that their identities would be protected and there would be minimal risk to them as a result of participating in this study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted at times and locations that were convenient and appropriate for participants. All interviews were completed and analyzed by December 31, 2019. Results were shared with the staff of GEC during the spring semester of 2020. Each participant was asked the same base questions. The researcher had the ability to ask further questions should responses dictate the need for further inquiry. Interviews were conducted one-on-one as opposed to meeting as a group. This was done to ensure that the thoughts and answers derived from interviews were those of the individual participant and not that of the group. Individual interviews assisted in the accuracy of the transcription and coding since there was one participant at a time being interviewed. It is the job of the researcher in a case study interview to follow the line of inquiry in the study and adhere to interview protocols (Yin, 2018). The researcher must verbalize questions in an unbiased manner that serves the line of questions pertinent to the study (Yin, 2018).

Prior to interviews beginning, participants were welcomed, thanked for participating, and reminded of the purpose of the interview and the study. The interviews were audio recorded using a digital recording device to aid in the accuracy of interview transcription unless the participant refused to be recorded (Yin, 2018). During the interview, the researcher also typed notes from the interview to record things like body language, time of day, start and end time of the interview, as well as the location. Interviews involved as little prompting or conversation as possible on the part of the researcher, as the goal was for the participant to do the talking. The researcher was simply there to record responses during this phase of the research (Mertler, 2019). Steps were taken to ensure minimal interruptions during the interview such as, scheduling ahead

of time, and making the necessary stakeholders aware of the unavailability of the researcher during scheduled interviews.

During interviews, the researcher utilized probing questions that sought open-ended responses, but avoided asking leading questions (Mertler, 2019; Yin, 2018). The researcher refrained from judging responses, views, or beliefs of the participants in the study (Mertler, 2019). At the conclusion of each interview, the researcher thanked participants for their responses in a polite and courteous manner. Respondents were not compensated in any way for their participation in this study.

Immediately after interviews are completed, the researcher tested the recording to ensure it was of good quality by playing back parts of it. Once interviews were tested, they were saved and immediately transcribed and uploaded into NVivo for analysis. This transcription was coded for validity and generalizability, or the extent to which the findings were applicable within the community being studied and can be applied to those not studied (Mertler, 2019).

Data Collection and Analysis

Phase 1

The researcher in this study analyzed the lives and experiences of undocumented Latinx students from GEC in rural Snow Hill, North Carolina. The purpose of this study was to uncover ways to better meet the needs of this student demographic, with a goal of increasing college and career access for undocumented students. There are two key study questions that the researcher was looking to better understand through this work. How has the undocumented status of these students impacted their lives and ability to achieve academic and career success? What can school leaders and school staff, do to impact the dream for undocumented students to attain higher education and/or career opportunities? In finding answers for these questions, the

researcher used the data collected through extensive literature reviews and student interviews to create a more effective advising program for undocumented students that will better equip them for college and careers after graduating from Greene Early College.

During the initial phase of data collection, the researcher began by collaborating with the dissertation chair and fellow student researchers to decide on the type of research to be conducted, as well as the method for data collection. Once the researcher refined the study questions, conducted a review of the literature related to the experiences of undocumented students, and decided that a case-study would be the most appropriate format to utilize; the researcher began designing interview questions for the study.

In developing the research questions for the interviews, the researcher submitted sample questions to a more seasoned researcher for critique. Once feedback was received, and questions were altered (two of the initial questions were not open-ended and allowed for one-word responses), the researcher met with a study participant to review the interview questions. During this phase of data collection, the participant was reminded of the goals for the study and read the research questions to provide the necessary context for the interview questions used. The researcher then read an initial list of seventeen interview questions. After receiving feedback from the participant, the researcher was able to combine some of the questions and eliminate one question that was very similar to another. The final list of open-ended, base questions was then tested in two pilot interviews.

The pilot interviews provided valuable information to the researcher. An initial analysis of the questions and responses revealed several themes, including the importance of family as a support group and the need to feel safe. Questions were also assessed for alignment with study questions. This analysis led to replacing one question from the pilot interview. Further analysis

was conducted using NVivo technology for codification, as well as identifying the presence of self-affirmation theory in responses.

Logistical data was also gathered from the pilot interviews. The researcher learned for example, that the principal's office was not conducive to research interviews due to the phone in the office ringing during the recording. Conducting the interviews during lunch was also somewhat problematic as the volume in the hallway was elevated at times during interviews. The use of NVivo was another source of data gathered from the pilot interviews. The researcher learned that transcription service provided by NVivo was inaccurate. The researcher discovered that transcribing the interviews manually was more accurate and NVivo could then be used in the analysis of the transcriptions.

Phase 2

Phase two of the research included interviewing an undocumented graduate of GEC. The researcher had chosen to interview this participant first, due to the knowledge of the student's success after completing high school. This participant graduated from high school with an associate's degree and high school diploma, received a full scholarship to a private college, and will graduate with a degree in education. The participant had also accepted a teaching position at a school in another county in the state upon program completion. This participant had defied the odds with their success as an undocumented student. The perspective provided by this participant will provide valuable insight into what helped the participant navigate the academic landscape as an undocumented student and provide insight into what GEC could do better to help prepare undocumented students for life after high school. After this interview, questions were altered slightly for the remaining interviews because the remaining students were currently enrolled in

high school and would not possess the perspective of a high-school graduate at the time of the interviews.

The remaining interviews consisted of two recent graduates of GEC and two current students. Once all interviews had taken place for the study, they were manually transcribed and uploaded into NVivo for analysis. At this stage, the researcher looked for common themes within the interviews conducted to understand the complexity of the cases studied within their individual context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The researcher provided a within-case analysis of each interview in which their individual cases and themes were analyzed (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). After that, a cross-case analysis was performed to present themes common across each of the cases presented (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is a categorical aggregation of the data, which is done to uncover themes by finding relationships, similarities and contradictions among the interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2019).

Once all data was collected and analyzed, the researcher shared the results with the staff of GEC and presented an overview of the study and its purpose. The findings were used to implement changes within the school structure, including but not limited to, informing hiring practices for new staff, professional development for staff, peer-networking opportunities for students, and the creation of a guide to advising undocumented students.

Phase 3

No formalized data was collected in the final phase of the study. Instead, the researcher sought to create and implement a plan based on the analysis of the prior phases. It was the desire of the researcher, that the data analysis and resulting plan for GEC be shared with GCS leaders in formal and informal settings. The researcher utilized the information learned in the study to advocate for the advancement of undocumented students. One of the goals of this study was to

advocate through education. The researcher desired to have this advocacy ignite change in practice that would advance the cause of undocumented students in Greene County and increase their access to higher education and career opportunities.

Methodological Assumptions and Limitations

Case studies present an in-depth analysis of a few cases within a bounded system (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2019; Yin, 1994). Although case study research is gaining in its acceptance by researchers over the past thirty years, there are some that still do not accept case study research as a true methodology, but rather a choice of who or what to study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2019). Researchers have also challenged the rigor of case studies as another concern about its use as a methodology for research (Mertler, 2019; Yin, 1994). Another frequent criticism of case study research is the idea of generalization (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertler, 2019). Many career researchers continue to dispute whether or not the intense, in-depth study of a small number of cases can be used to make broader generalizations across an entire demographic (Mertler, 2019).

There were multiple limitations present within this study. The first was there are only seven cases presented, including pilot study interviews. The researcher was limited by the inability to readily identify mass numbers of undocumented students due to there being no mechanism to do so. The researcher was also the principal of the school in which the participants are affiliated. This makes it illegal to ask students about their legal status and students are not required to report this information. Therefore, the researcher was limited to interviewing students that had self-disclosed their legal status to school personnel and whom have agreed to participate in this study.

Another limitation with this case study is time. Upon receiving approval from IRB to conduct the study, the researcher had one school year to conduct and transcribe all interviews, analyze the data contained within them, report findings, and implement changes for improvement. The researcher did not have the opportunity to measure the effectiveness of the changes implemented within this study due to time constraints.

Presenting such complex lived experiences of the participants in this study in a simplified manner is another limitation of case study research. Although each of the participants lives within the same bounded system of being undocumented, their stories are unique. Simplifying these experiences while remaining impartial was difficult, although critical, for the study to be effective.

The nature of a qualitative study does not produce numerical data. This makes measuring the impact of the study more complicated. Other limitations of this study, and case studies in general, are finding answers to questions such as: Who or what to study? How many cases? Where will the study take place? The researcher in a case study is also charged with determining the boundaries for the study, outlining the beginning and end points of the research, as well as the depths to which it will go (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 1994).

Ethical Considerations

To ensure that all methods and practices utilized within this study are ethical, the researcher applied for local Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from East Carolina University. The researcher successfully completed Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program trainings on the ethical principles of conducting research with children, as well as federal regulations, assessing risk, informed consent, and privacy and confidentiality. This was done prior to any research being conducted with the students to be presented in this study.

These measures were taken to ensure all precautionary steps had been taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants in this study. The researcher submitted the questions to be used in the interviews with participants to IRB for approval prior to utilizing them.

Furthermore, participants were informed of the purpose of the research being conducted and ensured by the researcher that both the probability and/or magnitude of harm for participating in this study would be minimal. To further ensure participant safety, the researcher conducted interviews in the school of the participants during non-instructional times of day, such as during lunch. This was done to increase the level of anonymity and confidentiality, being that both participants and the researcher are all affiliated with GEC. By the researcher in the study being the principal of GEC, it was not uncommon to have students participate in individual conferences on a routine basis. Conducting research in the work and school environment of the researcher and participants could present some bias and the appearance of a conflict of interest. The researcher worked closely with the dissertation chair to ensure all research conducted was credible and reliable.

To further protect the identities of the cases in this study, the researcher used pseudonyms in the place of actual names in all transcribed data and in all written reports pertaining to this study. All audio recordings for this study were made with the same digital recorder. Recordings were only accessible to the researcher and were stored in a locked, password protected safe in a location determined by the researcher. No video recordings were used for this study. All recordings and transcripts for this study will be permanently destroyed three years after the awarding of the degree for which this research is being conducted.

Participants of this study have been sampled by the researcher due to students self-disclosing their legal status in previous work or interactions with the researcher, not related to this study. They are “ordinary persons” that represent undocumented Latinx students within the school and in the United States (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Participants were made aware of their ability to withdraw from this study for any reason. Participants also had the right to request that their information not be used. At the conclusion of the study, all final reports were shared with the participants to ensure their comfort level with the protection of their identities and other sensitive information shared.

All measures stated above were also enforced during the sharing of information during phase two of the research. Although several staff members knew who some of the undocumented students at GEC were, they did not know all of them. They also were not aware of their participation in this study. For those reasons, it was incumbent upon the researcher to ensure all measures were taken to protect the identities of study participants during all phases of data sharing. This also held true for phase three of the study when data results were shared with school and community leaders as the researcher advocated on behalf of all undocumented students in GCS. Students self-disclosed their legal status with the researcher in trust. It was paramount that trust was protected in all phases of the work with this study and beyond.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in this study is also the principal of GEC. All of the participants in this study know the researcher as their current or former principal. The researcher received permission from the participants to use their interview responses and information for this study. Because the participants in this study had a professional relationship with the researcher, it was made clear to all participants that they would not be rewarded or compensated for participating

in this study. The researcher informed participants that they would not be punished in any way for refusing to participate in the study or ending participation at any point. The researcher in this study had a vested interest in the lives and success of the cases presented in this study. This interest presented an opening for bias. It was the responsibility of the researcher to take all steps possible to ensure that all interviews and findings were presented in a valid and reliable manner absent of any bias.

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed outline for the entire study. Issues were discussed pertaining to the design of the study and the rationale for using a case study design was also laid out. The researcher carefully presented the instrumentation to be used and also provided a research-based account for the assumptions and limitations of case studies. This chapter ended with a description of the role of the researcher in this study. In chapter four, the researcher will present each of the cases interviewed for this study, along with analysis and findings from data collection.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this work, the researcher chronicled the life experiences of three current undocumented Latinx students that attend GEC High School and four graduates of the school. Interviews were conducted and transcribed to provide an accurate depiction of the lives and challenges faced by these students daily. The purpose of this study is to provide a tool that will serve as a catalyst in bringing an awareness of the issues faced by these students while simultaneously increasing college and career opportunities beyond high school. It is estimated that fewer than half of the undocumented immigrants, aged 18 to 24 and who have graduated high school, are in college or have attended college (Abrego & Gonzales, 2010).

The researcher chose to utilize self-affirmation theory to shape this study. Self-affirmation theory is the belief that people are motivated to maintain high levels of self-integrity (Pérez, 2012; Steele, 1988). It is the notion that people will strive to uphold an image of being morally adequate, stable, competent, and overall good people. Researchers that have studied self-affirmation theory assert that people can overcome or compensate for perceived attacks on self-identity by affirming other aspects of self. This assertion holds as long as the aspect being affirmed is of equal importance to the individual as that which is being attacked (Armitage & Rowe, 2017; Cohen & Sherman, 2007; Croizet et al., 2000; Harris et al., 2017; Pérez, 2012; Sherman, 2013; Steele, 1988). What began as an alternative method of explaining cognitive dissonance, or the state of having inconsistent thoughts and attitudes, has morphed into a theory to inform interventions in multiple settings from education to personal health (Sherman, 2013). The researcher felt this theory most aligned with the individual determination to be successful exemplified by the undocumented students in this study.

A qualitative case study approach was used to examine undocumented students' perspectives about their lived experiences (Yin, 2018). The researcher interviewed seven cases to determine the following: (a) perceptions related to the impact of being undocumented, (b) strategies that schools can implement to better support undocumented students, and (c) the role of self-affirmation in their lives.

The researcher used a purposeful sampling strategy (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to identify the cases/participants using the following criterion: (a) undocumented status, (b) attended or attends GEC, and (c) was at least 18 years old at the time of participation?

In this qualitative case study, the researcher studied the following research questions. The first question was: How has the undocumented status of these students impacted their lives and ability to achieve academic and career success after high school? The second research question was: What can school leaders and school staff do to impact the dream for undocumented students to attain higher education and/or career opportunities?

To gain insight into these questions, the researcher conducted a total of seven semi-structured interviews with undocumented students affiliated with Greene Early College (GEC). Each of these students self-disclosed their illegal status to the researcher and agreed to be interviewed for this study. Two of the interviews were conducted in phase one of the study as a pilot for this research and to establish interview protocols. Although the initial study design called for interviewing four participants in phase two of this study, the researcher conducted a total of five interviews in phase two. Three of the participants were graduates of GEC and two were enrolled at the time of their interviews.

All of the interviews for this study were conducted in person. With the exception of Alexandria, all of the interviews were conducted on the campus of GEC. For Alexandria's

interview, the researcher traveled eighty-five miles to the central part of the state to speak with her at her workplace. All of the interviews conducted in phase two took place between October 2, 2019, and October 21, 2019.

Demographics

See Figure 4 for a summary of the study participant background and demographic information. The researcher began each interview by capturing some background information from each of the study participants. These questions were designed to provide additional perspective and insight into the frame of reference that each participant brought to the interviews.

Except for one of the pilot interviews, all of the participants emigrated from Mexico with one participant identifying El Salvador as their native country. The age of arrival of the participants in this study ranged from as young as two months to thirteen years old at the time they were brought to the United States. All of the participants in the study indicated in some form that their families came to the United States for an opportunity at a better and safer life. The results were mixed as to whether or not families arrived in the United States at the same or at different times. For instance, Patricia discussed how she was told by her parents that her dad would “kind of like come back [to Mexico], and then go back to the United States [for work] ... until we were all like we kind of got to go together. And that’s when we packed up and left.” Camila told of a similar experience when she explained how her mom came to the United States first “just to make sure everything was safe.” She added, “so my mom came with her brothers first, then the rest of us came.”

Results were mixed as to how many states participants have lived in. Pérez (2012) spoke to how immigrants to the United States often move multiple times either to avoid detection or to

Participant	Gender	Country of Origin	Reason for Leaving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maluma • Jessie • Paloma • Camila • Patricia • Gabriel • Alexandria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 Females • 1 Male 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • El Salvador • Mexico <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mexico City • Guatemala • Aguascalientes • Matamoros, Tamaulipas • Not disclosed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To find work • Better Life • Better life; financial stability • For a better life; financial stability; food security • Mother had children at an early age, father worked in US and sent money back home, mom decided they all needed to stay together and moved to US • Opportunities; work
Age of Arrival	Immigration Pattern	Number of States Lived In	Native Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 years old • 3 years old (x2) • Two and a half years old • One year old (x2) • 3 months old 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mom first, then remainder of family • Entire family together (x3) • Mom and uncles first, then rest of family • Dad first (back and forth for work), then rest of family • Couple cousins, then dad, myself and mom, then aunts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One state, multiple cities • Three states (x 3) • One state (x 3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanish (x7)

Figure 4. Participant demographics.

find work. Participants in this study reported living in as many as three states as reported by Camila, Jessie, and Paloma. Maluma told of how she has only lived in North Carolina but has “moved around several times from city to city.” All of the participants in this study reported Spanish being the first language they learned to speak, thus making English their second language.

Phase One Pilot Study

For the pilot interviews conducted during phase one of this study, the researcher conducted interviews with two participants: Maluma and Jessie. Both participants were asked thirteen interview questions (see Appendix B). The information gleaned from these interviews provided the researcher with a foundation for this study. After conducting the pilot interviews, the researcher was able to adjust the final interview questions.

Each of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed manually. The researcher analyzed data from the transcriptions in two phases. First, interview data were coded associated with (a) research question 1; (b) research question 2. Second, the researcher reviewed codes to develop higher inference codes related to self-affirmation to facilitate comparisons within and across the two lived experiences. Additional codes were developed inductively when certain actions, perceptions, or incidents did not fit within the categories of the framework. Through this analysis of the pilot interviews, several themes emerged, along with firsthand insight into the research questions for this study. The themes that emerged in the pilot interviews were identified as: *the importance of family, fear and limitations, and self-affirmation.*

Impact of Being Undocumented

There were several questions in the interview that were designed to provide insight into how being undocumented has impacted the lives of the participants. Participants were asked

directly, how being undocumented has impacted their life, and the most difficult part of being undocumented. When asked about the most difficult part of being undocumented, Maluma alluded to the fear of deportation when she stated, “probably the fear of like leaving the life I have grown up in and comforted in and adapted to.” When asked the same question, Jessie discussed the most difficult part for her “not being able to be open about it because I didn’t know how people would react to it.” She added, while answering the same question that she learned later how “everyone comes from different backgrounds, and it’s not that bad being an illegal immigrant.” Maluma also added that she “couldn’t go to college” because she “couldn’t afford it” when discussing the impact of being undocumented.

The Role of GEC

Participants in the pilot study were asked about the role that GEC has played in their lives thus far. When referring to GEC, Maluma stated, “It has helped me realize that I can get somewhere even if I am undocumented and I can get the help I need.” She also stated that she decided to attend GEC because it would help with the overall cost of college attendance. “If I do have to pay out-of-state tuition...I will have my associate degree when I graduate,” which she added, “will help push me out a little bit further than just having my normal high school diploma.” When students earn their associate degree, it reduces the cost of a four-year college or university by half. Because these students have earned their associate degree in high school, they will be able to complete their four-year degree often in less than two years.

Jessie gave an extremely poignant response to the role that GEC has played in her life when she told the researcher, “It’s played a big role because like it gave me the opportunity to have an extra step in life.” She said her brothers, who attended the local traditional high school, did not get that same opportunity. She went on to add, “It helped me to not worry about paying

for my associate's. It helped me emotionally when my peers and teachers have been there when I couldn't take certain situations." Ultimately, she felt like she "got more experience and actually learned more than I would have at an ordinary school." In a moment of reflection, she also admitted that she only applied to the early college to prove doubters wrong, stating that her family members told her she would "never get in." She said, "Once I got in and got accepted, I couldn't believe it myself. I really didn't think I was going to make it in here."

What Schools Can Do

During the pilot interviews, when asked what they felt schools in general could do better to help students like them, the responses given continued to provide valuable data to the researcher. Jessie responded to this question by adding that although she felt GEC has "strong connections" with students, schools in general, should work to build a "stronger personal connection with the student." She felt that was key to students' success because students will know there is a "bigger connection between the classroom and the student."

When answering this same question, Maluma gave arguably the most powerful answer of this entire study when she replied that schools could support the undocumented by finding ways to "Make them feel protected. Help them realize that even though they are undocumented, it doesn't mean they are bad people. It just means they are in a bad situation." The researcher utilized the semi-structured interview format at this stage and followed up by asking her what that looks like. She expanded on her answer by adding, "making sure they don't feel scared, that they aren't going to be ripped away from everything." She felt that undocumented students need to be assured that within the confines of the school that "nobody is going to just take them."

The Importance of Family

Another important theme that continued to emerge throughout the pilot interviews was the importance of family for both participants. Maluma referenced her family numerous times throughout her interview. The first time was when she was asked who she turns to for support, information, or guidance. Her answer to this question, with very little hesitation, “probably my mother and stepfather.” The researcher followed up by asking why these were the people she turned to. She added, “My mother because she has been here the longest out of my whole family and my stepfather because he knows a lot about the laws and things related to immigration.” This theme continued with Maluma when asked the question of what, if anything, she would change about her life, if she could? To that question, she replied, “making sure my parents are documented just because my biggest fear is coming home and not seeing them there and finding out they were taken from me.”

Jessie also referenced her parents at several points during her interview. When talking about the impact of being undocumented, she told the researcher, “My mom tells us that we have to take into consideration that if we mess up with anything, that it could affect us in a big way, as we are trying to get our papers.” The family was also a factor in her decision to apply for the early college program because she saw that her brothers did not get the opportunity to go to college. Her cousins told her she would not be accepted, which made her want to attend GEC even more. Jessie continued to speak about the importance of her parents in her life while addressing how the current political climate impacts her life. She told the researcher that her parents “are really up to date on the news and everything. And they tell us to watch the news with them.”

The final question of the interview was designed to allow the participants to cover anything they felt pertinent to the research. When answering this final question, Jessie continued to show appreciation for her mother and the sacrifices she made for their family. She told the story of how her mom, at a very young age raised herself, and (Jessie's) five aunts and uncles before having her own family. "That didn't stop her from like raising us and becoming the people we are today. So, I don't think nothing should be stopping me from achieving what I want."

Fear and Limitations

Although both of these participants showed strength and poise during their interviews, there were several references to the fears they face and the limitations they endure as a result of their undocumented status. Maluma mentioned the fear of being deported and "leaving the life I have grown up in." That same fear was discussed when she expressed her desire for schools to make students feel protected. Even her fear of how immigrants are sometimes stereotyped came through in her interview when she was asked what she would like readers of this study to know about her. To that question, her response was, "Not all immigrants are alike. Not everybody comes here to commit crimes." Her parents have talked to her about having to put their home in another family member's name for fear of it being taken away from them. Jessie told the researcher that "we have to go to lawyers to make sure this is straight and to make sure that we, as a whole, stay safe in general and don't get taken." She also talked about the fear of not being able to afford college because of the out-of-state tuition rates, which is both a fear and a limitation for a student that wants to one day become an immigration lawyer.

Jessie's fears are primarily centered around the fact that she and her family cannot "mess up" because they are trying to get their "papers." This was something she referenced at numerous points during the interview. She also expressed fears of her younger years when she did not want

others to know of her undocumented status for fear of how they would react to her. Jessie also spoke of refusing to live in constant fear when talking about how the current political climate impacts her life. When speaking about new policy recommendations, she told the researcher, "if I get scared of this happening, then that's the life that's going to be lived; being scared and not actually wanting to strive to get to my goal." Her goal is to one day have a career in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) or a career in forensics.

Self-Affirmation

Both participants in the pilot study articulated a will to succeed despite the obstacles they face in their lives. Self-affirmation theory is the belief that people are motivated to maintain high levels of self-integrity and the notion that people strive to uphold an image of being morally adequate and overall good people (Pérez, 2012; Steele, 1988). This theory was evident in the pilot interviews with both participants when they were asked plainly: what do you want people to see when they see you? To this question, Maluma responded, "I want them to see someone who is successful even though they went through a hard life and a hard time throughout their whole life." When asked the same question, Jessie replied, "I want them to see the effort." She elaborated, "Like to see that I have actually made it this far besides my circumstances." These statements serve as evidence of self-affirmation theory being applied in the lives of these students.

Pilot Interview Summary

The pilot interviews conducted for this study provided vast insight and qualitative data. The analysis of the interviews proved there was one question (As of right now, do you feel you are successful?) that provided little value to the research, and thus was eliminated in the final list of interview questions. There was also one background question (What was the first language

you learned to speak?) added to validate information learned in the literature review. The researcher included the remaining questions as they all provided valuable information as evidenced by pilot study results. The themes identified in the analysis of the pilot interviews served as a starting point for the analysis of the remaining interviews conducted for this study.

Phase Two Study Individual Interview Analysis

During the second phase of this study, the researcher conducted five semi-structured interviews with current and former undocumented students affiliated with GEC. The researcher will provide an individual analysis of each of the interviews conducted and concluded phase two with a cross-case analysis of the interviews.

Camila

Camila is an eighteen-year-old student who is passionate about life. She was eager to share her story with the researcher. Her answers were emotional and direct. Her interview lasted only eight minutes, as she was very measured throughout the conversation and answered questions succinctly. Camila's family is from Mexico. They arrived in the United States when she was just three years old. They came to the United States "for a better life because we couldn't make anything over there. It was hard to get food every single day." Her family did not arrive all at once. Her mother came first "to make sure everything was safe." She has lived in three states to date. She first learned to speak Spanish and acquired the English language when she started school in kindergarten. She added that her parents were not able to teach her English because they did not speak it themselves.

Camila is very much aware of the limitations surrounding her undocumented status. When discussing how being undocumented impacts her life daily, she told the researcher, "I can't go to work or continue education like other people can. I have to live a low life." She later

clarified that to her, a "low life" meant a "harder" life. She went on to add, "It's made it difficult to be who I am. I can't do everything that someone born here might can do." By that, she was referring to such things as being able to continue her education or buy a property. "I can't do that. I don't have the right documents for it."

For guidance or support, Camila mainly looks to her mom. "She tells me that we came here for a reason and we got to make something out of that." She reports first realizing her situation was different from others around her when she was in middle school. She talked of getting different forms to fill out and noticed that her parents would not fill out some of those. When the school would take certain field trips, her parents would tell her "no, it's better to stay here."

GEC has played a big part in Camila's life thus far. "Greene Early College has given me more opportunities than I thought I would have." She said the school has made her feel like she belongs there and "that I had a reason to be here." When she was asked why she decided to attend GEC, she said, "It has better opportunities. I heard that it is a great place, especially for Hispanics. And people here, they just made it seem like you are welcome, no matter who you are." Camila believes one thing schools can do to support undocumented students is to not single anyone out. She stated, "GEC has never done that. GEC has always made this place feel like a home." She also said schools could help undocumented students "make a change in what's going on. We can do everything right, but we can't get that [college education] just because we are illegal."

Camila would like the world to see her as the person she is and not just "the color of my skin or the other language I speak." She wants to be viewed as a person who has a good heart, and is a hard worker. "I want them to know that I didn't come here to hurt anybody. I came here

to work and do everything that I couldn't do over there." She would like people to know that she "wants a better life, and I don't want to grow up knowing that my life is constantly in danger." The only thing in her life that she would change is how much her family has suffered and been discriminated against. Camila told the researcher that she wanted to be a doctor but added, "I can't necessarily be a doctor because of the circumstances that I have right now."

This study was conducted during the Donald Trump presidency. Donald Trump was elected on a platform that primarily centered on building a wall to keep Latinx immigrants out of the United States. During his campaign and after his election, he frequently described Latinx immigrants in racist terms and described them as "rapists, thugs, and criminals." When Camila and the researcher began to talk about the current political climate in the United States right now and its impact on undocumented people, she did not hold back her feelings. "It's horrible," she said. "Everywhere that I walk, I always think of an exit because it is constantly Mexicans being targeted." She continued by adding "there's a lot of people that don't like us because we speak Spanish or because we are from Mexico." She concluded her response by saying, "The president [Trump] right now is making it a lot harder for us to have a dream to have a better life." Despite her feelings about the current political climate and atmosphere towards undocumented individuals, Camila remains undeterred from being successful. When asked about her thoughts on the American Dream, she concluded the interview by stating, "if you really want it, you can work for it and you can find a way." She went on to add, "I am going to make my parents proud and I am going to give them everything they gave me because they literally risked their lives for me."

Paloma

Paloma is a twenty-one-year-old graduate of Greene Early College. Her family came to the United States from Mexico, all together, when she was just a year old. Her interview took place at the early college and lasted just under ten minutes (9 minutes 54 seconds). Like all participants in this study, Paloma's first language is Spanish, and she acquired English as her second language. Her family lived in two other states before permanently residing in North Carolina. Paloma graduated second in her class and went on to attend college at a private university in a neighboring state before returning home because of the cost of attending college.

"The fact that I don't have the same playing field as everybody else" is how Paloma describes the most difficult part of being undocumented. "You kind of start at a disadvantage and there are doors closed to you right from the get-go." She recalls the first time this became evident to her when she wanted to get a government-issued identification card. She said she was not able to do that because "I didn't have the documentation to be here." She said this happened to her when she was in middle school. Paloma also identified other limitations that have been placed on her by being undocumented. She talked about the financial limitations and the lack of scholarship opportunities making life harder for her. She feels as though being undocumented takes away the ability for her to "have a place in society." "If you don't have papers, you can't work, even if it's an honest job."

Paloma credits GEC with playing a huge role in her life even after she has graduated. She identified several staff members with whom she still communicates and relies on for advice or guidance. She is thankful for the two-year degree she was able to earn and realizes that it "sets me apart from other people." She wanted to attend GEC because she understood at an early age that attending college would be difficult for her. When speaking about the potential to earn her

associate's degree while in high school, she added, "I knew that would help me out more than anything else because if I didn't have the financial support, then at least I would have that."

When she was asked what schools can do better to support students like her, she harkened back to her experiences while attempting to apply to colleges and universities. "I would say they could be more informed." She mentioned the frustrations she felt when other students appeared to be moving smoothly through the process, yet she was faced with "a lot of requirements" and stated that those charged with helping her "weren't really knowledgeable on those requirements."

Despite all that she has been through, Paloma remains positive and optimistic. She wants to be viewed as a hard worker "that is trying to make a difference in the community and people's lives." She believes that if she continues to work hard, "eventually things will work out." She told the researcher that she would not change anything about her life. She believes that "everything happens for a reason" and that her experiences have built her character. Paloma has two sisters that also attend GEC. They pushed her to succeed. She says they tell her all the time how they want to do better than she did, to which she replies, "go ahead, I want to see you do better than me. That's what I hope" she added.

In terms of the current political climate, Paloma stated the effects for her had been indirect. She told of how she has heard people "say stuff and bicker" about it. The biggest impact for her was the threat of ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. She said that stressed her out, but she was thankful to be allowed to keep it. She hopes that politicians can figure something out on immigration reform but adds that "whether they do it or not, people are still going to find a way to cross the border or figure something out." Paloma hopes to continue her education at a school that will help her out financially, to pursue a career in

the film industry. When Paloma was asked about her thoughts on the American Dream, she paused and responded by saying:

I think it's difficult to obtain it sometimes. Like I know at one point I became very discouraged after I graduated. And I was like, so all the years of hard work and striving to do something better. I was putting time in and time out and you know, trying to do the best I could. Essentially it doesn't matter that I graduated second in the class and class president, I did all that. And I'm working a 40-hour job not necessarily doing what I want to do. But I believe if you try, and you work for it, and keep that grit and determination to do it, it's very possible. But we...the immigrants, we aren't trying to take anybody's place. We are just trying to advance and make it within our own community something better that will benefit us all. We do make up a lot of people. We work in different areas. We are willing to do the work. We are just trying to make something better for our families.

These feelings outline the need to conduct this study. It highlights the need for improved access to college and career opportunities, and to advocate for students like Paloma.

Patricia

Patricia is an eighteen-year-old current GEC student in her final year at the school. Patricia and her family relocated to the United States when Patricia was just a year old. Her interview was conducted at GEC and lasted just over ten minutes (10 minutes 03 seconds). Her mom had given birth to her brother when she was 16, and just a year later, she was pregnant with Patricia, giving birth to her at age 18. "My dad would travel from the United States to Mexico all the time. He would go work over here in the United States and then send us money." After some time doing this, it was her mother that decided the family needed to remain together. At that

point, Patricia says, "we just got on a van and they brought us to the United States." Patricia and her family have been in North Carolina for as long as she can remember. She learned to speak Spanish in her home and learned English when she began school.

Patricia identifies the limited opportunities that she faces as the most difficult part of being undocumented. In explaining the difficulties she faces as she is trying to find a college or university, she explains, "There could be any other student that is not as smart as me but get more opportunities than me because of my undocumented status." Patricia also discussed how getting her driver's license is difficult because she must first apply for DACA. Another issue she has faced is racism and insensitivity. She said people "always throw little racist comments to you like thinking it is funny but it's not." An example she gave was when she was once having a conversation and was talking about how she feels southern because she was raised in North Carolina her whole life. Someone else in the conversation chimed in with "yeah, you're from south Mexico." The person, she said, told her they were just joking; however, she did not find it funny.

An interesting exchange in this interview came when the researcher asked Patricia who she turns to for support, guidance, or information. After a long pause, she replied, "nobody." After another pause, she added, "well like, my teachers can guide me. But like a lot of people here don't have the information." When the researcher inquired about the type of information she felt she needed and could not get, Patricia elaborated on her response. "Like, what scholarships to apply for. Teachers send me scholarships, but you have to be a U.S. citizen." She says that when she asks for help, "they don't know where to guide me because they just don't have the information."

She said she first realized her situation was different from others when she was in middle school. Her older brother had applied for DACA when he turned fifteen, and she realized then

that she would need to do the same. “I started my thing [DACA] when I was 14 so that when I turned 15, I could get it. But I don’t think I got it until I was almost about to turn 16 because the whole Trump thing put everything on pause.”

Patricia credits GEC with teaching her that people like her can do it. She mentioned knowing of other former students, with a similar background as her that have gone on to college and graduated. She stated that “if they can do it, then you can do it.” Later in that same response, almost as an afterthought, she mentioned, “also, we get free college.” She said she knew she wanted to attend the early college as far back as fourth or fifth grade. Patricia recalled telling her parents, “if I don’t get into early college, then I don’t know what I’m going to do because I am not going to the high school.” When asked what she had against the high school, she clarified she felt the early college had more opportunities. She identified the opportunities as “free college, I graduate with my diploma, my associates. It’s like I’m already building my future when I’m in high school.”

The biggest thing schools can do, according to Patricia, is provide information specific to undocumented students. Her answer to the question about what schools can do was simple, “have information.” When she was asked about the type of information she felt she needed, she said of the counselors and staff, “they don’t know where to guide us. They are kind of like just freelancing it.” When asked how she wanted to be viewed, she told the researcher, “I want people to see me as a student, not an undocumented student, just a student.” She also wants people to know that she is struggling right now so that she can help others in the future. Her dream is to major in criminal justice and become an immigration lawyer. She wants to start a nonprofit organization that “helps students like me so they know the information. So, they will

have lists to look at, what scholarships to apply, what colleges offer the most money.” She concluded by saying, “I want to help people that struggle like I do right now.”

The current political climate, according to Patricia, “puts fear in my heart.” When describing why she is fearful, she said, “I’m protected because of DACA but my family isn’t. So, my family can get taken away at any moment.” She also attributes a lot of the negative comments that people have made, like “speak English” when people hear her speaking Spanish, as a direct reflection of the current political climate. The interview ended with the final question that asked her thoughts on the American Dream, to which she arguably gave the most memorable line of this study: “Immigrants made the American Dream.”

Gabriel

Gabriel is now twenty-two years old and the lone male participant interviewed for this study. His interview lasted eleven minutes and thirty-three seconds and was conducted at GEC. Like the others, Gabriel’s family came to the United States from a small town in Mexico, just south of the Texas border. He says he was two years old when his family left Mexico in search of economic opportunity. Gabriel graduated from GEC a few years ago. It was not until he was visiting the school the year after he graduated that Gabriel told the researcher he was undocumented. Gabriel left Mexico with his mother and father. He has two younger brothers that were born in the United States, which gives him a somewhat different perspective than the other participants. Gabriel learned English after he started school.

Gabriel was asked about the most difficult part of being undocumented and after a deep sigh and pause of several seconds, he replied, “I guess my case would be not going to school like I wanted to.” Gabriel had hopes of going to college and becoming a nurse. His grades were above average in high school. He says he applied to “like five schools” and was accepted to each

of them but was unable to attend due to financial limitations. “Not only do you not get financial aid, but you get an out-of-state tuition rate.” He said the price of tuition for the schools that he applied to range between \$22,000 to \$28,000 per year. He said he had some scholarships, but they covered “not even half of it.” When asked where he wanted to go to college, he replied “anywhere really.” Another impact of being undocumented for Gabriel includes not having health insurance. He said that if it were not for his DACA, he would not be able to do "every day simple, basic life stuff" like work, open a bank account, or get a driver's license.

For advice, particularly regarding legal matters, Gabriel says he turns to his lawyer and family members that are citizens. He says he cannot turn to his parents "because they are illegal themselves" and added, "they don't even speak English." Somewhat contemptuous, he continued this line of thought "They have been here for about 20 years and they still don't know how to speak English." He also acknowledges that it is difficult for them to learn English as adults and that it was easier for him because he was a young kid when he learned.

Gabriel remembers first hearing about GEC when he was in middle school. He heard about the opportunity to get two years of free college and thought, “that will help my dad, help give him a little weight off his chest.” He admitted that he put school and saving money over his hobbies and his love of playing soccer (early college students in Greene County do not participate in school sports) when deciding to attend GEC. The two years of free college, he felt, set him up to continue his education because he would only have to find a way to pay for two more years. When prompted about what the school could have done to better prepare him for life after high school, Gabriel said, “maybe looking at scholarships that offer a full-ride for undocumented students.” He said he had found some and applied for them but was not fortunate

to receive one of those scholarships. Ultimately, however, he feels it is up to the student to take advantage of the opportunities provided to them.

Gabriel wishes to be viewed as someone who does not give up and works to make the most out of life. “If you get knocked down a couple times, just get back up.” He wishes for those reading this study to know that it has been hard for him. He says he often contemplates aspects of adult life that he did not consider when he was younger. He has thoughts of “What if I didn’t get my DACA?” He said had he not received it, that he would “have been working and getting paid under the table in harsh jobs, harsh conditions.” “It’s just two different worlds.” When he was asked what he would change about his life if anything, Gabriel responded, after a nervous chuckle “If I could have citizenship, dual citizenship, be a U.S. citizen. It would be nice.” He says he often jokes with his mom and asks her, “why wasn’t I born in the US, why I’m not a U.S. citizen, my brothers are?” One is left to wonder if that is a joke or Gabriel’s true frustrations coming through.

Gabriel’s interview concluded with his thoughts on the current political climate in the United States. This is what he shared:

Well, you have people, that support undocumented being deported and stuff and it is not a good feeling. Especially like going, for example, they are doing a license check down the road from your house, you don’t know if you are going to go home or not or be deported. If I get deported and go back to Mexico, I don’t know how it’s going to be like because I haven’t been to Mexico since I was two, I don’t know anybody. It would be a whole new life, starting from scratch. I’ve just been lucky, I guess.

Alexandria

Alexandria's interview was the last one conducted for this study. Talking to her last was intentional as the researcher felt she would have the most to say on the topic of being an undocumented student in the United States. Having graduated from GEC six years ago, Alexandria was able to secure a scholarship to a private college in North Carolina, where, as a DACA recipient, she earned her degree in math education and is now teaching middle school math in the Raleigh-Durham area. She has defied the odds. The other participants in this study know of her accomplishments and look to her as a source of inspiration. She has also become a vocal advocate for immigrant's rights and proudly shares her story whenever she gets the opportunity. Her interview took thirty-eight minutes and was conducted at the school where she teaches.

Like all of the participants interviewed for this study, Alexandria's family came to the United States from Mexico in search of "a better future for their kids." They risked it all when they packed up and entered the country when Alexandria was just three years old. Alexandria, her parents, and her three siblings all came together. They have been in North Carolina the entire time in the United States. Like all of the other participants, Alexandria acquired English as a second language, as Spanish was the language she learned to speak first.

Alexandria cites the lack of information the people and schools have about what it means to be undocumented as one of the most difficult aspects of being an undocumented student. "I think a lot of teachers and staff don't really understand what that means, what implications it comes along with." She described living in constant fear as an undocumented child "most likely if you are undocumented, your parents are too. So just like, having that fear of always something happening to your parents" as something you are forced to live with. She also stated how

frustrating the lack of information can be when “the people that you think might be able to help you also don’t have the information at hand.” Growing up undocumented has made her “more resilient.” Her inspiration comes directly from her parents. She spoke of kids whose parents have migrated to the United States as wanting “to do everything to make your parents proud.”

Alexandria acknowledged during the conversation that although she has achieved the dream her parents had for her, which was to graduate from college, she wants to continue to make her parents proud. “I’m still trying to continue making them proud and thinking of what I can do now to help them so that they can have a better job.”

When asked about who she looked to for support and guidance, Alexandria identified multiple people and her reasons for looking to them. The first person she looked to was her brother. He, too, was undocumented and had found a way to achieve his goal of going on to college. He was the valedictorian of his graduating class and earned a full scholarship to a prestigious university. He was the person she looked to when she was going through the process of applying to colleges. She also mentioned her husband, whom she had dated in high school and married just three days before this interview, as another source of support for her. She had a professor, whom she later clarified, was not a professor but a staff member in college that took an interest in advancing the rights of “people of color” that she confided in, that also became a source of motivation for her during some difficult times in her life. Lastly, she mentioned her principal during her junior year of high school as another instrumental figure in her life. She said his support “kind of happened out of nowhere.”

Alexandria told the story of how her older brother visited some colleges one summer. During one of the visits, he was told by an admissions counselor that he would have a better chance of going to college if he attended a traditional high school. At that point, Alexandria

thought it would be best if she transferred to the traditional high school based on that advice. When she went to discuss it with her then principal, he told her, "No, you can go to college even if you stay here [GEC]. I'll help you." Thinking back on that exchange moved her to tears talking about it. "I think it was the first time I met him." She said her mother was there for the meeting and that her principal's support made a difference "because she saw that he cared." This meant so much to Alexandria. She had doubted herself and her chances of attending college and stated, "He now knew this part of me and believed in me...and he just like became this person in my life that I could turn to."

When Alexandria was asked about when she first realized she was different from others around her, she provided an introspective response: "I think I always knew." She added later on that she felt it was because she was Latinx "I didn't have the vocabulary to say 'I'm undocumented.'" She said her parents would tell her things like "be careful, there's a police there, you don't want the police to stop you." As she got older, she began to feel the impact of being undocumented more directly, recalling the first time being when she was in high school and was unable to attain a driver's license. She is grateful for having DACA. "I have DACA so I can get a license." Alexandria said that although her parents were able to get a driver's license at one point, they are no longer able to get them. "I can do this. I can work at a school and have a career because I have this temporary work permit." She often wonders what she would be doing if she did not have it. She says she has friends that do not have it and she has seen their struggles up close. "I might not have citizenship, but I have this one thing that makes me feel somewhat safe for at least two years every time I renew it."

GEC helped Alexandria "gain a lot of confidence." Before attending the school, she admits she did not have a lot of confidence and constantly doubted herself. "I just came into a

space that made me feel that people cared about me.” The school enabled her to participate in many activities and establish “meaningful friendships in people that I felt always had good intentions for me.” Self-doubt is what propelled her to apply for the early college. She said her brother was really smart and was always in honors classes. She did not feel as smart as he was, so she saw the early college as her way to a college education and a way to get out of her brother’s shadow.

When asked what schools could do better to support undocumented students, Alexandria drew a striking parallel from talking to school staff about being undocumented to talking to the police. “I don’t think that I ever knew someone that discussed things related to immigrants or an immigrant’s status. So school was never a place where I thought you should talk about that.” “Like I can’t tell the police I’m undocumented, so I can’t tell the teacher.” She says there needs to be more awareness and education provided to students on what it means to be undocumented and what their options are. She recalled feeling defeated thinking she would not be able to attend college and that all of her hard work would be for nothing. “If teachers don’t know then they are not going to understand how they can actually help.” This lack of information only adds to the frustration when “you find yourself having to teach that person that you wanted help from.”

When responding to what she wants people to see when they see her, Alexandria replied, “I want them to see that I am who I am because of the people that are part of my community.” She feels that parents of undocumented children are often blamed and victimized. She says that she has noticed that people are willing to help the children and not the parents but acknowledges that she would not be the resilient person she is without them. “It shows how much people are willing to do to help their families” is how she explained parents leaving their home country for the unknown of coming to the United States. “You risk your life and you risk your children’s

life, but if you are living in a place where you don't feel like you have hope...you do something about it." She does not want to be portrayed as "this incredible immigrant student" and be made as an example because she believes that the parents that brought them here, have been the examples of what it means to work hard. After getting off-topic for just a minute, she concluded her answer to this question and elaborated on not being used as an example by saying "There are so many other kids that could be like me, but they aren't because they may not have had the same people in their life that helped me get there."

Alexandria stated that she is not one to live with regrets. Although certain aspects of her life "suck and some parts are unfair," she acknowledges she would not be who she is without those parts of her life. Although Alexandria has achieved her goal of becoming a teacher, she would like to start a scholarship program in the future and develop a college access program for undocumented students. She would like to do this closer to Greene County where she grew up. "I feel a lot of kids and families need that support." This is an idea that she has talked about with her brother as well. "Even for kids that are born here, their parents still don't know how to help them" is another way she explained the need for such a service.

The most emotional part of this interview came when Alexandria discussed the current political climate and the atmosphere that immigrants are living in. She was in college during the campaign and the 2016 presidential election. During this time, her mother found out she had a tumor. "She is undocumented. So, her process to try to get surgery without having healthcare made it really hard for all of us because we don't have anything we can do, we can't change that." She said dealing with this, along with the future of DACA being up in the air, made her college years extremely difficult. She constantly feared what would happen to her if the DACA program ended and wondered if she would be able to get a job after college, which added to her

stress. Alexandria acknowledged that all of this stress came back to one factor: “I’m undocumented. My mom is undocumented.” During this same time, her maternal grandmother in Mexico got sick and passed away. They were unable to travel to see her. Alexandria’s mother had not seen her mom in 19 years. Throughout all of this, along with the hateful rhetoric, some of it present on her college campus, she still had to show up for class and perform every day.

When it comes to her thoughts on achieving the American Dream, Alexandria summed it up saying, “I think it’s this thing that has been idolized by a lot of individuals in the US and outside of the US.” She believes that people look at the United States as a place where you can make your dreams come true. This is important especially when you come from a place where you do not have access to prosperity. She believes there are systems in place to prevent some people from achieving the American Dream and that it is not just about being honest and working hard, but that it is also about “what you look like, where you come from, what’s your status, and the color of your skin ultimately.”

Cross-Case Analysis

The participants in this study were very honest and candid in their interviews with the researcher. They provided a perspective that could only be captured by taking the time to have conversations with those who are living undocumented and feeling the impacts of it daily. These interviews produced a range of emotions from both the researcher, as well as the participants. On one hand, as principal of the school where these students attended, the researcher was left in awe of the strength and resiliency of these students. On the other hand, however, the researcher was left feeling like these students have been let down and not adequately prepared for life after high school graduation, which is what this study is aiming to improve.

Impact of Being Undocumented

Figure 5 summarizes the impacts of being undocumented identified by study participants. In terms of how being undocumented has impacted the lives of those interviewed here, the data collected matches up with that of the literature review. Both Paloma and Gabriel spoke about the difficulties of continuing their education due to financial barriers posed by not being allowed to receive adequate financial aid. Lack of finances and the rising costs of college often result in poor retention rates for undocumented students (Zarate & Burciaga, 2009). On top of that, these students are also charged out-of-state tuition rates that can sometimes triple the price of tuition. This is what caused Gabriel to not even attempt to go to college after graduating from high school with an associate degree. Paloma completed one year at a private university before returning home to work because she could not afford the cost of tuition. Alexandria, the one graduate that managed to earn her bachelor's degree, was able to do so because of receiving a full scholarship from a private university. Without that opportunity, her fate would likely have been that of her undocumented peers. Although Camila and Patricia are yet to graduate high school, they both express apprehension about their ability to continue their education beyond GEC.

Fear and Stress

Another impact identified by multiple participants is the fear and stress that comes with the uncertainty of living undocumented. Camila spoke of immediately "looking for an exit" when she enters a building. Patricia told of how her friends make insensitive comments that they consider to be jokes that are hurtful to her. Alexandria was unable to travel to Mexico to visit her dying grandmother and watched her mother fight through a tumor without health insurance because she is undocumented. All of this, while she was miles away in college, still forced to

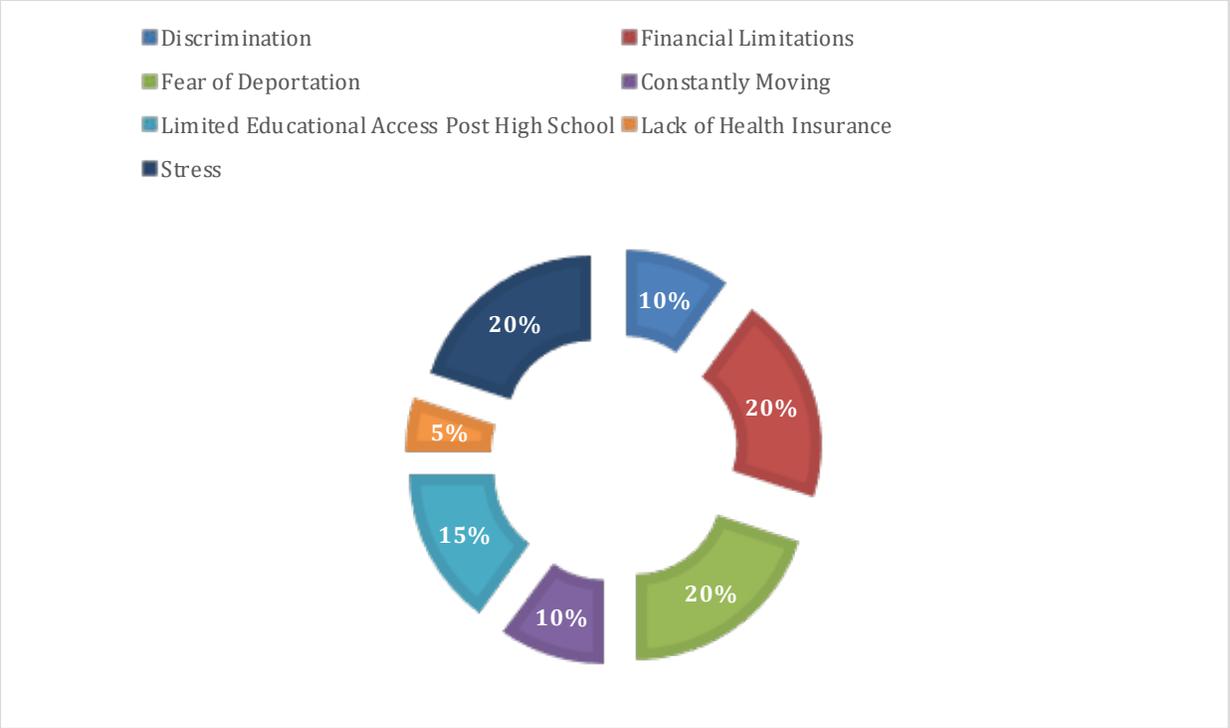


Figure 5. Impacts of being undocumented.

produce at a high level and earn her degree. Gabriel also does not have health insurance. At some point during all of the interviews conducted, the participants spoke of the added stressors of having family members, mostly their parents, that are undocumented and also do not have DACA. Gabriel's stress has even manifested itself into negative feelings towards his parents. He has two brothers that were born here. He asks his parents why he could not have been born here too or why did they have to relocate to North Carolina, where he believes opportunities are limited.

What Schools Can Do

The second research question for this study asks what can schools do to impact the dream of undocumented students? To avoid dancing around this topic or attempting to get to it in a roundabout way, the researcher asked each participant directly: what can schools do better to help students like you? The resounding answer to this question is to provide information.

Although this study is a qualitative one, 100% of the interviewees here stated in some form that they need more information from their school. See Figure 6 for a graphic display of what the participants identified as needs from schools. In performing a cross-case analysis and comparing answers to question number seven every participant in one way or another stated how they wished they would have gotten more information from the school or provided more information to the staff. Alexandria told of how she did not think school was the appropriate place to talk about her undocumented status. She equated telling a teacher to telling the police about her status. Paloma spoke of the frustration of working with school staff that did not understand what it meant to be undocumented. She said staff would send her information about scholarships but most required that you be a legal resident. This was frustrating and happened largely due to staff being uninformed. Gabriel also felt he would have benefitted from the school

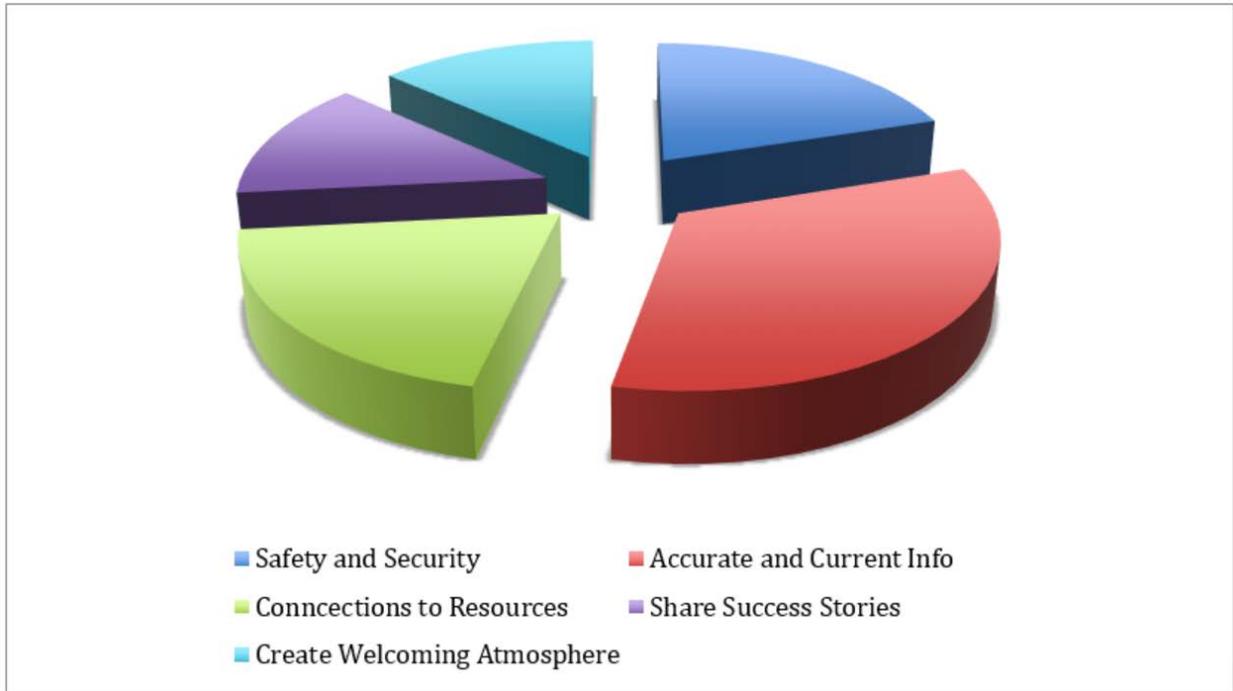


Figure 6. What participants need from schools.

having more information, specifically when it came to scholarships that he qualified for. Patricia says in her experience, the staff knows a little, but "they don't know all the information needed." She used the word "freelancing" when describing how she feels the staff goes about trying to help her. Camila's initial response to this question was "don't single anybody out," but a little further into that same reply, she added, "help us make a change in what's going on because now it's a lot harder to get an education." So again, the researcher could deduce, that information and support is needed.

Phase Three Study Impact

In phase three of the study, the researcher planned to use information learned in phase one and phase two of the study to make changes at GEC that more intentionally serve undocumented students. The goal was to have these students better prepared for their life after high school graduation. The Covid-19 pandemic that caused schools to close on March 13, 2020, for face-to-face instruction had an adverse impact on plan development and implementation.

Once the pandemic hit, the focus of Greene County Schools, and the nation's for that matter, shifted to public health and safety and how to provide education remotely. The researcher was unable to maintain contact with the participants, that were already graduated for over two months. This was critical while trying to create staff professional development because these participants were intended to play an instrumental role in the development and delivery of any professional development given as a result of this study.

In addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, there had also been worldwide racial unrest due to the killing of George Floyd. Mr. Floyd was an unarmed black man who was killed by police in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Mr. Floyd's death sparked weeks of marches, protests, demonstrations of solidarity, and in some cases, rioting and looting across the country. The events surrounding

this tragic incident impacted all that witnessed it. In many ways, it shifted the conversation about race-relations in all parts of life. Greene County Schools had not been exempted from the reality. As the principal of GEC and a black man, the researcher had been tasked by district leadership to provide perspective on what it means to be black or brown in today's America. The researcher helped craft the district's response to the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. When asked about the impact of these events on her life in a subsequent conversation, Patricia told the researcher, "I hate this happened. It's horrible...but I'm thankful people are not focused on Mexicans right now... I just want to get to November third."

November 3, 2020 was the date of the presidential election. The election was predicted to be close and hard-fought. Proponents of immigrants' rights largely wanted a return to decency in America's politics and treatment of immigrants and minorities. Donald Trump lost the election by over seven million votes, and republicans did not gain control of the senate.

With all that had transpired in the past several months, this study has continued to progress and bring about change that will hopefully improve the undocumented student experience at GEC. One change that was directly attributable to this study was the addition of a new school counselor. At the conclusion of the most recent school year, the former counselor announced her resignation due to her family relocating. The trepidation of having to replace a school counselor during the Covid-19 pandemic, in the wake of the death of George Floyd, and five months out from a presidential election was palpable for the researcher. At the same time, however, it brought about an opportunity to bring change and pursue a candidate that would enhance the school. The researcher was able to find a candidate with the potential to do just that.

On June 30, 2020, the Greene County School board approved the contract of the new school counselor. The new counselor was fluent in Spanish. Her first job out of college was a

Spanish teacher. She also graduated with a concentration in Hispanic Studies. This appreciation for Latinx families, and the literal ability to speak the language, presented tremendous promise to the Spanish-speaking families at GEC. The pursuit of this candidate was a direct result of the data derived from this study.

At the conclusion of phase two of the study, the work of advocating and educating started for the researcher. On February 14, 2020 GCS began a two-day, district-wide professional development session on human trafficking. Dr. Carolyn Stone was brought in to deliver this training to all staff. On day one of the PD, Dr. Stone met with district leadership and principals. During the presentation, Dr. Stone spoke of how undocumented individuals were more likely to be trafficked and forced into sexual servitude. After the presentation for district leadership, there was an opportunity for a question-and-answer session with Dr. Stone. The researcher asked during this session if she would be sure to expand on this information when she met with the entire staff the following day. She was happy to oblige. She presented more detailed information on the rural farming community in which GCS is located. From there, she helped staff realize how these individuals end up in Greene County. She told of how they are often victimized and fail to report crime and abuse because of their illegal status. Realizing that not everyone is empathetic towards the plight of undocumented students, the researcher felt it was imperative to get information embedded into any PD offerings where it fit seamlessly. This was one example.

Another opportunity for advocacy came during GEC's annual middle school recruitment season. To recap, students at GEC have to apply in eighth grade and go through a process that begins with GEC representatives going to the local middle school and introducing GEC to potential applicants. This year, Patricia was strategically placed on the recruitment team with the researcher to give the sales pitch. GEC typically takes four teams each year and presents to two

classes each. The researcher asked Patricia, prior to meeting with the first group of students, to “in Spanish, tell students that if they’re undocumented, they should strongly consider applying to GEC because it gives them a chance at free college.” She agreed to this, and during both of the presentations, she presented this information in Spanish.

After all applications had been received and student interviews conducted, the staff of GEC met to select the next freshman class. During deliberation, one of the teachers got emotional when talking about a student that they had interviewed. They went on to explain how this student told them during the interview that they were undocumented. When he heard Patricia say that in the recruitment presentation, that was the first time he thought about coming to the early college. He also said that it was the first time he heard someone talk about it in school. This student was accepted to the early college and began receiving a free college education in the fall of 2020.

Another bright spot for this study came on March 6, 2020. One of the students that participated in the pilot study in phase one, Maluma, told the researcher that morning her family wanted to meet after school. The researcher asked if everything was ok and she assured him it was. They wanted to discuss her future plans. Around 3:30 that same afternoon, after most students had already left for the day and the halls were empty, the researcher stepped out of the office to see Maluma, along with her parents and two of her siblings. They were all smiling and crying and Maluma told me they had received their Permanent Resident Card, or Green Card, and that they can apply for permanent citizenship in 10 years! As a result, she was able to re-apply to colleges and qualify for in-state resident tuition and scholarships. Ultimately, she decided to join the Navy. Although this study did not directly impact her family receiving their green cards, the atmosphere of the family wanting to share this milestone with the researcher and

the school is a sign of the shifting attitude towards undocumented students at GEC. Her story will be shared and will instill hope in future students moving forward.

Each year GCS has the opportunity to take between 15 and 20 students to the North Carolina Society of Hispanic Professionals annual educational summit in Raleigh. This year's conference was scheduled for March 27 and was ultimately cancelled due to Covid-19. This is a pride-filled event put on by the Latinx community for the Latinx community each year. Students have the opportunity to network with other students and professionals from across the state. One strategy the researcher will implement as a result of this study is ensuring that students who self-identify as undocumented have the opportunity to attend this event at least one time before they graduate from high school.

On March 13, 2020, Patricia walked into the researcher's office, along with a teacher and stated that she had good news to share. Patricia and the researcher did not know, at the time, that it would be the last face-to-face day of her high school career. She proceeded to tell us that she had received a full scholarship, specifically for Dreamers, to Eastern Connecticut University. She added that she tweeted her accomplishment and another young person, whom she does not know, tweeted back, "does this mean I have hope?" See this exchange in Appendix F.

On June 18, 2020, the Supreme Court struck down an attempt by the Trump administration to end the DACA program. Although this decision did not state that DACA recipients would have permanent resident status in the US, it did provide hope for undocumented individuals that depend on DACA for their survival (The Trump administration did not make another attempt to end DACA before being voted out of office in the November 3, 2020 election).

On June 30, 2020, district leadership held a meeting with the superintendent and principals about race relations in GCS. The conversation was intense at times and uncomfortable for many involved. This meeting was a continuation of the conversations held after the murder of George Floyd. At one point during the conversation, the superintendent turned to the researcher and another principal, who happened to be enrolled in the same doctoral program and asked us to begin thinking of ways to improve relations with our Latinx community because “it’s important that they don’t feel forgotten and I know it’s the focus of your doctoral work.” This comment in isolation is not a big deal but, for the superintendent to have it on his mind during critical conversations about race relations, and that everyone needs to account for our Latinx students, is profound. They now have advocates in the room at the highest levels in GCS.

The work of this study continued to have an authentic impact on the lives of undocumented students into the summer of 2020. One of the strategies learned from reviewing literature that is important to improving conditions for undocumented students is sharing success stories. The researcher witnessed the power of this during data collection when it became evident that most of the students interviewed were keenly aware of Alexandria’s accomplishments. One of the goals of this research is to use the information gained to educate and advocate formally and informally. This advocacy along with sharing this work with those involved as well as staff members, has led to the enrollment of another undocumented student new to the state and school district.

On July 16, 2020, the researcher was made aware of a student from South Carolina who was looking to relocate to Snow Hill with her family. The student, who confided in church parishioners that she is undocumented, has been enrolled in an early college high school in South Carolina. Because of her undocumented status, she has not been allowed to take college courses

at their school's institute of higher education. This is a large reason for the family looking to relocate. The sister of Paloma (who was interviewed for this study) attends this same church and knew of this work. She reached out to the researcher with an overview of the student's situation and to inquire about the possibility of the student being admitted to GEC. The researcher at that point connected her with the GEC administrative assistant to get some preliminary information (grades, transcripts) which the school would collect for any student looking to transfer in, and to set up a virtual meeting for the following week.

On the morning of July 20, 2020, the virtual meeting was conducted with the student, administrative assistant (the school interviews all incoming students in groups of at least two staff members), and the researcher (principal). The student was confident, and informed. She asked thoughtful questions and answered questions from the staff with candor and humility. At the conclusion of the meeting, the student was offered conditional acceptance to GEC. The only conditions were that the student provide two letters of recommendation from the current school and the family must verify residence within the Greene County School District. Once this family relocates and enrolls in GEC, this student will be one step closer to achieving her dreams of attending college. She will have the opportunity to earn two years of college credit and career-based certifications at no cost to her or her family as an undocumented Latinx student. This connection may not have been made without the work done in this study.

On November 17, 2020, the researcher, in partnership with a peer researcher, facilitated a Pirate Graduate Talk to the academic community at East Carolina University. This talk provided an opportunity to present the research, findings, and recommendations herein to a wide range of academics. The talk was successful and opened dialogue between the researchers and the university to uncover ways that they can better support these students and the state at large. The

researchers have been asked to conduct a follow-up to this talk and have scheduled it for March 9, 2021. This discussion will focus more on action steps the university can take and will include presentations from participants in this study.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has provided an analysis of the data retrieved from the pilot interviews conducted in phase one of the study. Following that analysis, individual analysis of the five interviews conducted in phase two has been provided along with cross-case analysis that outlines the themes found across multiple interviews. After concluding the data collection in phase two of this study, the researcher provided firsthand student accounts of the impact of being undocumented and what these participants feel schools can do to help students like them. The researcher also presented early impacts and action steps taken during phase three of the study. In chapter five, the researcher will discuss the implications of this data on practice at GEC moving forward and also how the researcher will utilize this data to educate and inform the advocacy for undocumented students in Greene County Schools. Figure 7 is a graphic display of the most common words and themes gathered throughout the data collection phase of this study.



Figure 7. Common words and themes.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this qualitative case, the researcher analyzed the lives of undocumented Latinx early college high school students to uncover strategies to serve them more intentionally and prepare them for life after high school. This study came about after years of witnessing students work hard and do all the right things only to be limited in their options for continuing their education at the university level or securing gainful employment. This study was conducted in three phases and was guided by two overarching research questions. The first research question was: how has the undocumented status of these students impacted their lives and ability to achieve academic and career success after high school? The second research question was: how can the staff of Greene Early College better prepare undocumented students for life beyond high school.

In phase one, the researcher worked to develop plans for the study. This included conducting a literature review to build background knowledge of the problem being studied. The researcher gained a broader understanding of the plight of undocumented individuals that assisted with the development of interview questions and protocols that were piloted in phase one. These procedures were refined and altered before, and the study proposal was defended before entering phase two.

In phase two of the study, the researcher conducted five semi-structured interviews with current and former undocumented students that had self-disclosed their undocumented status with the researcher. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to uncover answers to the research questions outlined above.

The final phase of this study involves utilizing the information gleaned from phases one and two to make substantive changes in the way GEC prepares undocumented students for life after high school graduation.

Summary of the Findings

To be a more effective advocate for the undocumented students of GEC, the researcher needed to understand from those living the undocumented experience exactly what that meant to them and how it impacted their lives daily. Having conversations with the study participants provided an in-depth view of the undocumented experience that was authentic and at times, emotional. The key factors identified by participants were coded into seven themes. These themes were discrimination, financial limitations, fear of deportation, constantly moving, limited access after high school, lack of health insurance, and general stress.

Prejudice and discrimination played a major role in the lives of those interviewed for this study. When it came to discrimination, students spoke of both direct and indirect acts and overall fears. Undocumented people are often forced to live with dehumanizing behaviors and “Hispanophobia” (Storlie & Jach, 2012). The media often perpetuates this image of immigrants through its use of stereotypical language and images (Storlie & Jach, 2012). This rhetoric was also ramped up by the president with racist policies such as building a wall along the Mexican border and attempting (unsuccessfully) to end the DACA program. When asked about the current political climate in the country right now, Patricia stated, "it puts fear in my heart." Her fear was more for her family members than herself. She acknowledged that although she felt some protection because of DACA, her family members did not have that same protection. She also told of inappropriate jokes made by people close to her that were offensive and discriminatory. Camila discussed how she always looks for an exit when entering an unfamiliar place in the event she needs to make a quick exit.

At numerous points during conversations, financial limitations were discussed. Gabriel, for example, expressed his exacerbation and not being able to afford to continue his education

after high school. This was not due to any academic concerns or other disqualifications but because he and his family could not afford the out-of-state tuition rates that are sometimes triple the cost of in-state tuition. Paloma also started to attend college at a private institution out of state but was forced to withdraw and return home after one year because of the unaffordability of tuition. These findings corroborate information uncovered in phase one as lack of financial support was the largest obstacle faced by undocumented students that made it to college (Pérez, 2012). These students all too often are not able to fully utilize their abilities, and their aspirations go unfulfilled (Williams, 2015; Zarate & Burciaga, 2009). In states where undocumented students are forced to pay out-of-state tuition, combined with the high cost of education and being ineligible for financial aid, college enrollment drops by 8.4% (Villarraga-Orjuela & Kerr, 2017).

Fears of deportation were expressed throughout the interviews. In the first pilot interview conducted in phase one of the study, Maluma spoke of the fear of not knowing if her parents would be home when she arrived home from school. Alexandria told of how her parents feared being stopped by the police. Jessie also lived with those fears and her parents would stress to her the importance of never getting into any trouble and always doing the right thing. Because many successful undocumented Latinx students attribute their strong will to succeed to the sacrifices made by their parents and other family members, it is understandable that they would fear for the safety of their family members (Enriquez, 2011; Pérez et al., 2010). Latinx cultures often originate from collectivistic cultures that place a high level of importance on the family (Storlie & Jach, 2012).

Another pattern that became evident during data collection was of participants and their families constantly moving. Three of the participants in the study had lived in at least three

states. One other participant has only lived in one state but has lived in multiple cities within the state. The reason for relocating was due to employment opportunities in each case. These trends were consistent with information gathered in during the literature review for this study. Only 35% of undocumented families of all nationalities own their homes (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Undocumented families are more likely than U.S. residents or legal immigrants to relocate within the same city (Passel & Cohn, 2009).

All of the students interviewed expressed directly or indirectly the desire to continue their education after high school. They each chose to pursue GEC as a means to help make that happen and guarantee two years of college at no cost to their families. Alexandria was the only student that was able to achieve this goal by the conclusion of this study. All seven of these students completed their associate degree. Patricia was also awarded a full scholarship to an out-of-state university which she plans to attend in the fall of 2020.

Lack of health insurance was brought up by two of the three participants that have already graduated from high school and are living as adults. Although it was not a major focus of the literature review, it was uncovered that 59% of undocumented adults were uninsured in 2007. Forty-five percent of the children born to undocumented parents were uninsured that same year (Passel & Cohn, 2009). Gabriel talked about the importance of having his job because that is the only way he'd be able to have any kind of health insurance. Alexandria spoke of health insurance in slightly different contexts. She told explicitly of how both her mother and grandmother suffered from health complications while she was in college. Both are undocumented and have no healthcare coverage and were forced to pay all medical bills out-of-pocket or visit emergency rooms for their healthcare. In a future study, this is an area I would recommend researchers to focus more closely on.

These students persevere each day of their lives under tremendous stress. Even if the stress is not directly their own, they still endure it. They come to school daily worried about their parents or other family members being deported. Alexandria had to work her way through college while her mother battled serious health issues. Maluma has to leave school to interpret for her parents and has properties and bank accounts in her name because she is the only one in her family that can. The students' mere existence makes them criminal in the eyes of many and yet, they continue to press forward.

This understanding is what provided the researcher with the key tenets that led to addressing the second research question. What can the staff of GEC do to impact the dreams of these students? Moreover, how can staff provide an atmosphere of intentionality and support for undocumented students while they are in our charge? For these questions, the participants had ideas as well and were willing to share their thoughts. The needs of schools expressed by these students were summed up as providing accurate and current information, providing safety and security, connecting students to resources, create a welcoming atmosphere, and sharing success stories.

As a senior preparing to graduate and enter the world, Patricia spoke at length about the frustrations of not being able to get information from teachers and educators at school. This was not due to an unwillingness to help but because staff members were not versed in her situation as an undocumented student. She spoke of how her counselor did not understand that she could not apply for all of the scholarships that she would send in her monthly messages. Alexandria explained it as "having to teach the people that you are going to for help." Gabriel also felt that his situation could have turned out differently had those at the school level been better prepared to serve his specific needs.

Maluma looked to the school to be a haven for her. When she was asked what schools can do for students like her, she gave arguably the most moving response of this entire study. She said very plainly, "make us feel protected." She added that she wants to know that no one is going to come into the school and take her away. To the same question, Jessie stated that schools should not single students out in negative ways.

All of the students interviewed for the study were well aware of the limitations posed by their undocumented status. They know that if they receive a list of twenty scholarship opportunities that most of them will not apply to them. What they want, is a shorter list, even if it is only three or four scholarships that they can apply for. They want to know what schools are welcoming to undocumented students and Latinx students in general.

The students appreciated how GEC allowed them to be themselves and helped them discover their identity. They expressed interest in all schools doing the same for their students by creating a welcoming atmosphere for their students and their families. Several of the students attributed part of their academic success to their parents and the support they provided them. Alexandria added that you cannot acknowledge the accomplishments that she has had without acknowledging the sacrifices of her parents.

It was also important to students that success stories of other undocumented students were shared. Patricia knew of Alexandria and her story and looked to her as a role model even though they had never met in person. The researcher, upon realizing this, was able to connect the two and Alexandria was serving as a mentor to Patricia for her senior project before the school year was cut short because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Like Alexandria, Patricia was awarded a full scholarship. When she shared it on her social media platform, another young student responded to it by asking, "does that mean I have hope?"

Interpretation of the Findings

The theoretical framework selected to frame this study is self-affirmation theory. Self-affirmation theory was developed by social psychologist Claude M. Steele in the 1980s. It is the belief that people are motivated to maintain high levels of self-integrity and strive to uphold an image of being morally adequate and overall good people (Steele, 1988). In researching numerous theoretical models to help provide understanding into how a marginalized group that seems to be under attack in various aspects of their lives continues to show up for school and work routinely while maintaining a positive view of themselves and the world around them. Although not explicitly stated in any of the interviews, examples of the benefits of self-affirmations were abundantly clear throughout each of the conversations held with study participants.

To get an understanding of the importance of self-affirmation in the lives of students, the researcher designed a specific question to gauge its importance. The question was: what do you want people to see when they see you? In asking this question, the researcher wanted to get into the mind of each undocumented student and in essence, see how they saw themselves. The answers to this question aligned with Steel's theory of self-affirmation each time. Maluma wants people to see someone "who is successful even though they went through a hard life." Jessie wishes for others to see the effort that she's put in into becoming the person she is despite her circumstances. Both Gabriel and Paloma want to be viewed as hard workers. Patricia wants to be seen "as a student, not an undocumented student, just a student." Alexandria acknowledged that although some parts of her life "suck and some parts are unfair" that she would not be the person she is without going through those parts of her life.

As a novice researcher, there could not have been a better match between theory and practice as self-affirmation is to the lives of these students. Although each student acknowledged that others have helped them along the way, each wanted to be judged on their works and the content of their character, not their undocumented status. Having this knowledge now, it becomes imperative that GEC works to contribute to this self-affirmation. When students enter our school buildings, they should see signs and posters in their native languages. These posters and signs should have faces that resemble the faces of the entire student body. If music is played, it needs to be representative of all cultures. At events, such as prom, allow students to help select playlists to ensure inclusion. As a principal, the researcher will also work with the child nutrition specialist to see if more Latinx dishes can be added to school menus. These are but a few examples of strategies that will be implemented at GEC and within GCS moving forward.

The undocumented students in this study also placed a lot of value on the importance of family. Although a part of the literature review, the researcher underestimated the value the family plays in the lives of students. Many immigrant parents hold high academic aspirations for their children even though they themselves did not receive a formal education (Pérez, 2012). Students with lower levels of academic success reported not having strong protective factors like supportive parents and friends (Pérez, 2012). There was an assumption by the researcher that peer influence would have played a more significant role when in fact, peers were scarcely mentioned in the interviews, and when they were it was not necessarily positive. One example was when Patricia told of being teased and jokingly told that she was from "South Mexico" when she talked about being viewed as a southern girl. Enriquez (2011) noted in her study of 54 undocumented college students that while many came from supportive families, their families were not at school with them. They credited peers, both documented and undocumented with

providing social capital in school. In the literature review, many students reported wanting to do well in school because their peers placed a high level of importance on education (Gleeson & Gonzales, 2012; Pérez et al., 2010). Whether or not this notion held true for the students interviewed in this study was inconclusive.

Storlie and Jach (2012) stated that Latinx cultures originate from collectivistic cultures and place a high level of importance on the family. This was prevalent in multiple conversations. Many successful undocumented Latinx students attribute their strong will to succeed to the sacrifices made by their parents and other family members in bringing them to the United States (Enriquez, 2011; Pérez et al., 2010). Interestingly, Alexandria, who some would say was the most successful in terms of being able to achieve her goals of acquiring advanced degrees and becoming a teacher was also the most vocal about the role her parents continue to play in her success. She spoke of how Mexican students, in general, wanting "to do everything to make your parents proud." Now that she's achieved the dreams her parents had for her, she is driven now by a desire to help her parents so they can have better jobs. She was moved to tears later in her interview when discussing her parent's sacrifices in bringing her family to the United States. "You risk your life and you risk your children's life, but if you are living in a place where you don't feel like you have hope...you do something about it."

There were other findings confirmed throughout the study as well. These include financial limitations as all students at some point mentioned the cost of attending college and the stress it has placed on them. The school culture and climate of GEC were also significant in the lives of participants. Although not perfect and often not having information pertinent to students' lives, there was an atmosphere of respect and inclusion and various examples of positive relationships with staff members.

Another area of focus from the literature review that was confirmed in the study was the concept of selective acculturation. Selective acculturation is linked to the most positive outcomes concerning mental health and stress. In selective acculturation, the parents and children can successfully maintain healthy attachments to both their ethnic culture and that of the host country (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2013). In the cases of the students interviewed for this study, it was apparent that although students were much more connected with the culture of the United States than their parents, who all migrated from Mexico and El Salvador, do so with the encouragement and blessing of their parents. They also work to maintain a seemingly healthy balance between both the native culture and that of the United States.

Two areas from the literature review that were not supported in the data collection for this study were peer influence and poverty. Gleeson and Gonzales (2012) found in their study that friends were credited most often with helping navigate their K-12 academic experience and uncover paths to college. The researcher did not find evidence to support this with the participants interviewed. There was much more focus on the supports provided by families and the individual determination of the students than was placed on peer relationships. The researcher did not specifically inquire about the importance of peer connections; however, there was no direct line of questioning about families either.

Poverty was another area that was not brought up in the interviews. It is estimated that nearly 40% of undocumented children reside in homes that are below the poverty threshold (Pérez, 2012). This could be the case for the students interviewed for this study. The difficulties faced by these students were due more to their undocumented status, and that of their parents than it was to poverty. Gabriel mentioned that he would have been able to afford to attend college at in-state prices, even without financial assistance, but the out-of-state rate was

insurmountable for him. No one interviewed for this study discussed the economic or physical insecurities often associated with living in poverty (Gleeson & Gonzalez, 2012).

Limitations of the Study

As a doctoral degree candidate, the researcher in this study was given a very specific set of expectations that uniquely positioned him to complete this study. This dissertation was to be a problem of practice dissertation, designed around an issue of social justice, in which the researcher has some level of influence. These guidelines are quite specific. Also, this entire program of study was to be completed in just three years and written so that all stakeholders can derive meaning from its contents.

This context must be provided to understand the limitations present in this study. The researcher in this study is the principal of the school in which these students attend or graduated from. The students interviewed as part of this study have known the researcher for between four and six years. Throughout this time, there is a certain level of trust that is established which allowed the researcher to elicit heartfelt, authentic responses that may not have been achieved with someone conducting this study that did not have the prior relationship with study participants. This could lead to issues with the generalizability of the findings displayed in this study.

In terms of the study's execution, the researcher was at the mercy of the participants. There was one former student that verbally agreed to participate in the study but once the researcher obtained approval from IRB could not be reached for an interview. The researcher has not heard from this young man in over a year. One has to try to not let the mind wonder about what could be the reason for this.

Due to the reasons mentioned above, it could be that the results found in this study only apply to GEC. For that reason, however, it is the professional opinion of the researcher that this study should be conducted and recreated with any group of marginalized students that schools or educational professionals wish to better understand and serve more intentionally. Lastly, because there was not a specific strategy implemented and tested, this study does not yield results that are measurable in a quantitative aspect.

Implications of the Findings for Practice

One of the research questions of this study wanted to address what schools, in the case GEC, can do to impact the dreams of undocumented students of obtaining college and career success after high school. It is the school's mission to prepare every student for college, careers, and life. A secondary goal of this study was to develop a tool in this dissertation that would allow the researcher to use my platform to advocate for undocumented Latinx students and help advance their cause.

For those interested in pursuing this work at any level, some clear steps can be taken that have been outlined in this study by reviewing literature and analyzing the lived experiences of undocumented Latinx students. Researchers have identified strategies that can be implemented to increase the academic success of undocumented students in the United States (DeLaCroix & Dillard, 2018; Enriquez, 2011; Perez et al., 2009; Storlie & Jach, 2012). The strategies include providing emotional support and education to adults as well as students themselves. Students receive most of their emotional resilience from their families' academic expectations of them (Enriquez, 2011). This was confirmed in the data collection for this study. If schools can bolster the knowledge of the family, they help the student. Encouraging students to join or create community organizations that promote positive youth development is another strategy that has

had positive impacts on student achievement (Perez et al., 2009). Schools should provide professional development to staff centered on multicultural sensitivity and provide information about how to support undocumented students to all stakeholders (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Ensuring school publications and school and media outlets provide documents written in all languages of the student body it serves is another strategy that assists in immigrant student achievement (Storlie & Jach, 2012). Furthermore, school support staff can educate themselves and teach immigrant rights, let undocumented students know you stand with them, offer financial support to organizations supporting immigrant communities, and advocate for district policies that safeguard students (DeLaCroix & Dillard, 2018). These are strategies that can be implemented into the practice of any institution serving undocumented students.

There are implications from this study that relate specifically to GEC and some of the changes can already be seen within the school. Feedback derived from the collection led to a reprioritization of the qualities desired in a new school counselor when the position became available. The outgoing counselor did an above-average job for GEC, but her resignation created an opportunity to fill a void highlighted in this study. In addressing this need, the researcher has hired a new counselor that is fluent in Spanish and has a concentration in Latinx Studies while obtaining her bachelor's degree. This addition to the school staff should yield tremendous benefits when it comes to communicating with our Spanish-speaking community. It also adds a staff member that does not have to be sold on the importance of serving this community with intentionality.

The school staff participated in an initial overview to a more extensive professional development that will be built in consultation with the participants of this study. These sessions provided background information on the problem of practice for this study. The researcher

provided a brief overview of the literature reviewed for this study as well as an extensive look at the data collected from the students themselves. One staff member told the researcher after the initial presentation that she was “floored by what I heard today.” She added, “whenever I heard about undocumented people, I only thought about adults. I thought the kids were legal because they were here (at school).” The researcher thanked her for her candor and feedback and added “that is why this work is so vital.”

After building this background knowledge, the researcher will solicit the assistance of the staff with developing a plan for working with our undocumented community that centers on the needs outlined in this study. Those needs are student safety and security. This will not be limited to physical safety but also the mental and psychological needs of these students. In the words of Maluma, we want to ensure that our students “feel protected” while enrolled in GEC.

Other areas to be addressed in this plan will include the development of a database of accurate and current information related to undocumented resources. These resources can include college scholarships and grants for undocumented students, colleges that are Latinx-friendly, legal resources, connections to civic organizations, or even their rights as it pertains to dealing with Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE). The plan will also include strategies for enhancing the welcoming atmosphere within the school for students and their families. There will also be a focus within the school to share success stories of undocumented individuals that have successfully maneuvered undocumented life and achieved their dreams because we know this serves as inspiration for students following this trajectory. Lastly, the researcher, who is also a school principal and devoted to a career in public education, will continue to speak up for this community and attempt to build allies in this cause throughout the remainder of my career in public service.

The goal of this plan is to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the whole child when it comes to all of our students, including our undocumented students. The school counselor and college liaison have already taken steps to improve conditions at GEC. Resources that are specifically for undocumented students are labeled and outline in students' Moodle account. This way, students do not have to disclose their status to have access to information. The school counselor is working to create a support group or club at the school for undocumented students. This has proven tricky to accomplish because we do not want to isolate other students or single out our undocumented students. The presentation delivered to staff will also be routinely updated and will become a part of the opening meeting of each school year as well as a portion of onboarding requirements for new staff.

Recommendations

The researcher in this study stands extremely proud of the work done in this study. The most rewarding aspect of this study is that it is already driving change in areas that extend beyond this study. By advocating for the rights of undocumented families within the personal life of the researcher, there have been adjustments made in the practice of associates that work in a local health department and its work with the undocumented community. A family member of the researcher that serves a large Spanish-speaking community in their work with social services has also revisited and altered certain practices that may have inhibited successful interactions with the Latinx community.

This first recommendation for anyone pursuing this or related work is to talk about your study and any new knowledge gained with anyone willing to listen. Many people do not understand the plight of undocumented students. Even those who may be sympathetic to the cause may not have personal experiences working with this community. Use your platform to

create those experiences where possible. Knowledge and understanding are power, and although we may not be able to change laws, we can collectively advance the condition in which these individuals live and work in the communities we share.

For anyone pursuing this work as a formal study or perhaps extending this study, the researcher recommends examining the role of relationships at a deeper level. The focus of this study was creating a tool for advocacy and altering the practices at GEC. Throughout the study, however, both during the literature review as well as during data collection and student interviews, the complexity of relationships was evident or inexplicably absent. One example of the latter would be peer relationships. The information reviewed in the literature placed tremendous value on peer connections among successful undocumented students. This was not confirmed in the study conducted here and warrants further investigation.

Although the importance of family was indeed validated in this study, further study on the dynamics of family and the impact it plays in the success and mental well-being of undocumented students should be examined. To do this, future researchers may consider adding more questions specifically related to the family. It may also be worthwhile to interview family members.

Another recommendation would be to interview fewer students and go more in-depth with the entire study and involve students in the data collection process. One possible strategy could be having specific assignments for study participants that help paint a more vivid experience of undocumented life. For example, having a student to take pictures of something in the community that scares them and have them record their thoughts or views of the images in the photographs.

A final recommendation would be the implementation of an instrument that affords the researcher baseline data in terms of student perceptions of their inclusion within the school community. This could be administered to staff as well. Once plans have been designed and implemented and staff members have received professional development, these surveys could be re-administered to measure the rate at which strategies had an impact on the students being served.

Study Impact on the Researcher

I am a better man and a better principal because of the work I have had the privilege to do with this study. For three years, I tried to keep this work from being about me. I wanted to remain unbiased, and I genuinely believe that I have managed to do so, but I am forever changed for the better. I have grown from being a successful graduate student who wanted to do what was necessary to get the A, to a scholarly practitioner and novice researcher.

The growth that I have undergone has been humbling and has challenged me in ways that I have not been challenged before. I now possess a much better understanding of the power of the position I hold as an educator and principal. I have learned that I, too, have privilege that comes with being a citizen of the United States. This privilege affords me opportunities granted at birth that others are fighting for every day. When I write about this privilege, I am not just speaking to the opportunity to receive a Pell Grant or a scholarship and the benefit not to have to worry about whether my mother will be deported while I am at work or school. I have the privilege of being able to legally drive my car or to vote in elections that will shape my future. I have the privilege of having some representation in areas that I aspire to, even if that representation is limited. The students whose lives are depicted in this study do not always have that privilege.

Many moments have caused me to have a range of physical emotions ranging from pure joy to utter disappointment and sorrow during this study. Even today, these interviews are difficult to read or listen to without being shaken to my core. I stated multiple times that this study would be difficult because, as the researcher, I am also the principal of these students. I know them and their families. I owed them a service that, at times, I failed to provide. It was never due to lack of effort, but I failed in some instances. As the leader of GEC, it stops with me.

During the first interview conducted for this study, I entered it thinking I was piloting some questions and going through the steps of conducting a research study and practicing interview protocols. How wrong was that assumption? Less than three minutes into the first pilot interview, I had a student, my student, tell me that schools need to "make us feel protected and let us know that no one is going to come to take us away." At that moment, I truly began to understand the power of the position I hold as a principal. It is why the pilot interviews made their way into the narrative and findings of this study. This type of data was too valuable simply to be used to evaluate study questions.

I had a little brown girl tell me that she equated talking to her teachers about her undocumented status with talking to the police. As a black man myself, I know the fear of being pulled over by the police. I've had "the talk" with family and friends, and I have seen too often in the media how simple infractions or traffic violations can end in loss of life. Having a student sitting in our classrooms with those same fears moved me to want to be better for these students.

When you have a great young man, who wants to be a nurse, and the only thing between him and his goal are antiquated laws and legislation requiring him to pay four times the tuition as his brothers because he was born in Mexico, it makes me want to act to change this narrative. During a global pandemic, we have talented young people with ability, scholarship, a heart to

serve, and we're keeping them from capitalizing on their talents and contributing to the country that they have grown to call home.

This study began with wanting to help undocumented students achieve their dreams of going to college and gaining successful careers. At the end of this study, that is still the goal, but what changed during phase one of this study was how I help students get there. I assumed that my role would be to advocate with district leadership, lawmakers, colleges, and universities. Although that is an integral part of this work, the most crucial piece is ensuring the four or five years that these students are in our charge are safe physically and emotionally for all students. Students must have access to the information they need and feel comfortable communicating with the staff about those needs. The best way for me to help undocumented students achieve their dreams is by ensuring their high school years are productive and that students are challenged and supported while they strive to reach their ultimate potential. This is a challenge that I accept fully and humbly. As my colleague, Patrick Greene, stated to me two years ago, “these kids need a champion.” Now, at least in Greene County, North Carolina, they have two.

Conclusions

Odds are, if you are reading this dissertation, you care about undocumented students and you want to know how you can better serve them and advocate on their behalf. I believe this dissertation will assist you in that endeavor. This study has been a life-changing experience for me as a researcher. I have grown to develop an appreciation for the grit and determination of a group of people that has given new meaning to my own life. I have been reminded through this work that the importance of school for this group of undocumented students cannot be found in the curriculum. They expect schools to, “make us feel protected” and at the heart of what we do, that should be our ultimate focus. Alexandria stated in our conversation that, “I viewed talking to

my teachers about being undocumented like talking to the police.” With the current climate surrounding police brutality and treatment towards black and brown communities in our country, it is alarming to imagine our students having that same type of trepidation in school daily talking to educators as they would the police. We have work to do in this area. We owe it to our students. As Camila stated so eloquently and wise beyond her years “immigrants made the American dream.” It is incumbent upon us to help these students achieve their dreams.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: [Rodney McNeill](#)
CC: [Marjorie Ringle](#)
Date: 9/30/2019
Re: [UMCIRB 19-001797](#)
DETERMINING WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) occurred on 9/30/2019. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a Final Report application to the UMCIRB prior to the Expected End Date provided in the IRB application. If the study is not completed by this date, an Amendment will need to be submitted to extend the Expected End Date. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
Determining Ways to Improve Access for Undocumented Students	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Informed Consent. Updated 9/5/19	Consent Forms
Interview Questions	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: PILOT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Background Information

- Where did your family immigrate from?
- What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?
- What was your age of arrival?
- Did your entire family come to the United States together?
- How many states have you lived in?

Interview Questions

1. What has been the most difficult part of being an undocumented student in the United States?
2. In what ways has being undocumented impacted your life?
3. Do you feel you are successful? Why or why not?
4. Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, or guidance?
5. When did you first realize that your situation was different than others around you?
6. What role has Greene Early College played in your life thus far?
7. Why did you decide to come to GEC as opposed to GCHS?
8. What could schools do better to help students like you?
9. What do you want people to see when they see you?
10. What would you like people reading this final report to know about you?
11. If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?
12. What career would you like to have in 10 years? Do you believe you will be able to achieve that, why or why not?
13. How does the current political climate in this country impact your life on a day-to-day basis?

APPENDIX C: PILOT INTERVIEW #1: *MALUMA

This interview is part of my study for improving access for undocumented students. This is pilot interview number one.

RESEARCHER: Where did your family immigrate from?
MALUMA: My family emigrated from El Salvador, specifically [muffled].
RESEARCHER: What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?
MALUMA: My dad couldn't find a job. My mom was working hard hours and she wasn't making nearly enough to pay for the house that we were living in back then.
RESEARCHER: How old were you when your family came to the United States?
MALUMA: Thirteen.
RESEARCHER: Did your entire family come to the United States together?
MALUMA: No. My mom came here first. Then she sent for my older sister. Then she sent for me. And lastly, my other sister, who just got here about a year ago.
RESEARCHER: How many states have you lived in?
MALUMA: One. But I have moved around several times from city to city.
RESEARCHER: What has been the most difficult part about being an undocumented student in the United States?
MALUMA: Probably the fear of like leaving the life I have grown up in and comforted in and adapted myself to.
RESEARCHER: In what ways has being undocumented impacted your life?
MALUMA: I couldn't go to college. I couldn't afford it.
RESEARCHER: As of right now, do you feel that you are successful?
MALUMA: I feel that I am successful for the way that I got here and the way that I could live my life, as most as I could.
RESEARCHER: Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, and guidance?
MALUMA: Probably my mother and my stepfather.
RESEARCHER: Why those?
MALUMA: My mother mostly because she has been here the longest out of my whole family and my stepfather because he knows a lot about the laws and things related to immigration.
RESEARCHER: When did you first realize that your situation was different from others around you?
MALUMA: In high school, probably my junior year.
RESEARCHER: What happened in your junior year?
MALUMA: My counselor started talking to me about colleges and I told her that I was undocumented and she told me the prices that I would have to pay due to me being undocumented.
RESEARCHER: What role has Greene Early College played in your life thus far?
MALUMA: It has helped me realize that I can get somewhere even if I am undocumented and I can get the help I need.

RESEARCHER: Why did you decide to come to Greene Early College and not the traditional high school?

MALUMA: For me, in the back of my mind, it was always like well if I do have to pay out of state tuition and all of these other things, at least if I can't get into college, I will have my Associate's degree when I graduate that will help push me out a little bit further than just having my normal high school degree.

RESEARCHER: What do you feel schools could do better to help students like you?

MALUMA: Make them feel protected. Help them realize that even though they are undocumented, it doesn't mean that they are bad people. It just means that they are in a bad situation.

RESEARCHER: And when you say 'help them feel protected', what does that look like?

MALUMA: It kind of, for me it means like, making sure that they don't feel scared, that they aren't going to be ripped away from everything. That they are going to be safe, at least in the school perimeters and nobody is going to just take them.

RESEARCHER: What do you want people to see when they see you?

MALUMA: I want them to see somebody who is successful even though they went through a hard life and a hard time throughout their whole life.

RESEARCHER: When I complete this study, I have to write a final report based on everything that I've learned and everything that I know. When people are reading this final report, what would you want them to know about you and about being undocumented?

MALUMA: Not all immigrants are alike. Not everybody comes here to commit crimes. A lot of us just want to get out of the bad situations that are in our countries and some of us have to run away due to certain situations, dangers, and threats to us.

RESEARCHER: If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?

MALUMA: Probably making sure that my parents are documented just because my biggest fear is coming home and not seeing them there and finding out that they were taken from me.

RESEARCHER: What career would you like to have in ten years and do you believe that you will be able to achieve that?

MALUMA: I've always wanted to become an immigration lawyer and in ten years I do really see myself doing something with the law and I do think I can make it but it is just going to take a lot of hard work and effort to get there.

RESEARCHER: Last question, how does the current political climate that exists in this country impact your life on a day to day basis?

MALUMA: Personally, I constantly hear my parents talk about it like "what if this happens and we have to put the house in [redacted] name in case something does happens to us" or "we have to go to the lawyers to make sure this is straight". And just making sure that we, as a whole, stay safe in general and don't get taken.

RESEARCHER: Thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to add that maybe I didn't ask that you would like to be portrayed in this interview?

MALUMA: No.

RESEARCHER: Thank you.

APPENDIX D: PILOT INTERVIEW #2: *JESSIE

This interview is part of my study for improving access for undocumented students. This is pilot interview number two.

RESEARCHER: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. Your information will be a great help to what we're trying to do, so let's get started. Where did your family immigrate from?

JESSIE: It was Mexico. Do you need to the exact area? It is this town called Hidalgo, Mexico.

RESEARCHER: What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?

JESSIE: Well we came because of my mom. She was a single mom. She raised her own son basically at the age of 5 and she just wanted a better future for us so she brought me, and at that time, my two older brothers and we came. She sold everything she had and we just came

RESEARCHER: How old were you when your family came to the United States?

JESSIE: Oh, I was like three months old, two months.

RESEARCHER: Did your entire family come to the United States together?

JESSIE: Well at that time, it was only me, my mom, and two older brothers so at that time I would say that was my entire family.

RESEARCHER: How many states have you lived in?

JESSIE: Well when I was younger, they say we lived in Arizona and Florida, then North Carolina, so three.

RESEARCHER: What has been the most difficult part about being an undocumented student in the United States?

JESSIE: I feel like the fact that when I was younger, I couldn't be open about it because I didn't know how other people would react. So, when people would ask, I would cover it up with something else and change the topic. I think that the major thing was that I couldn't be open about it. And some things I couldn't relate to with other children but now I've learned and grew up. Everyone comes from different backgrounds and it's not that bad being an illegal immigrant.

RESEARCHER: In what ways has being undocumented impacted your life, being undocumented?

JESSIE: It makes me take into consideration all of the struggles and the effort we put in and that we have to not take it for granted. My mom tells us that we have to take it into consideration that if we mess up with anything that it could affect us in a big way, as we are trying to get our papers. And that it might affect us from getting that. It's like we are more cautious about certain things.

RESEARCHER: As of right now, do you feel that you are successful?

JESSIE: At this point, yes. I feel like I'm actually being successful. I'm actually pushing to strive for my best and everything. Not just in school but also in life. Our living, right now, we are in a good state than we were a few years back. And I can say that we changed a lot, as a family and myself, we changed a lot.

RESEARCHER: Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, and guidance?

JESSIE: For support, I will turn to one of my teachers here. But for guidance and anything else like that, I have a therapist that I go to. She will give me information and makes me feel like everything is ok and that I can express myself without having to worry about situations.

RESEARCHER: When did you first realize that your situation was different from others around you?

JESSIE: I realized that it was different when we first starting our papers to get the process done to actually become citizens. That's when I realized that I was different from other children. Before I didn't know, I was just a little kid, I didn't know. But then as the process starting going [sic] and everything was changing, and how we had to be more responsible and cautious and appreciate what we were given because not many people have it.

RESEARCHER: What role has Greene Early College played in your life thus far?

JESSIE: It's played like a big role because like it gave me an opportunity to have an extra step in life because my brothers didn't get the opportunity to do it because they chose Greene Central. It helped me to not worry about paying for my associates. It helped me emotionally when my peers and teachers have been there when I couldn't take certain situations. Academically, I feel like I got more experience and actually learned more than I would have at an ordinary school.

RESEARCHER: Why did you decide to come to Greene Early College and not the traditional high school?

JESSIE: At first, I admit that in 8th grade I saw many people were applying and I was interested and I was like "I [sic] never been there". And I heard some of my little brothers' cousins that they came here before but I never found myself related to them and I never knew nothing [sic] about this place so I was clueless. So, I applied just for the fact that people were like "oh you won't get in" so I applied. And once I got in and got accepted, I couldn't believe it myself. I didn't really think that I was going to make it in here.

RESEARCHER: What do you feel schools could do better to help students like you?

JESSIE: I feel like they could have, I feel like we have it already. But more, a stronger personal connection with the student. I feel like that's the key thing. That students have a bigger involvement because they know that it is a bigger connection between the classroom and the teacher.

RESEARCHER: What do you want people to see when they see you?

JESSIE: I feel like I want them to see, um, in a way, I want them to see the effort. All of the work that I have put, if that makes any sense. Like the effort. Like to see that I have actually made it this far besides my circumstances.

RESEARCHER: So, you are you saying that you want people to recognize you as someone who works hard and earns what you get?

JESSIE: Yea. Not like it was just handed to me. Like that I actually had sleepless nights some days actually working to make something that would actually get me to good grades instead of just like throwing it all together.

RESEARCHER: When I complete this study, I have to write a final report based on everything that I've learned and everything that I know. When people are reading this final report, what would you want them to know about you and about being undocumented?

JESSIE: I feel like there is more to it than, like, that we were all put in this section, well in this school. And I would like them to see, or know I may be different, like my circumstances made me different, but that didn't prevent me from behaving different from another student. That didn't prevent me from not achieving the goals that I set myself up to. That didn't stop me and it shouldn't stop other students because that shouldn't be an excuse. Like if a person actually wants to strive to do something, they have to keep in mind, but also have to know that their circumstances can get better if like they do, if they take the right paths.

RESEARCHER: If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?

JESSIE: Um, I don't think that I would actually like to change anything for the fact that I don't think that it would have made me the person that I am because I feel like if I were to change being an immigrant or whatever, I don't think I would act the same. I feel like I would be, I would take things for granted. I won't actually appreciate actually getting my papers ready or whatever. I'm like more concerned about, sometimes I over think things, and I think that is part of the reason. So, I don't think I would actually change anything, like my situation, everything I face, I don't think that I would like to change anything.

RESEARCHER: What career would you like to have in ten years and do you believe that you will be able to achieve that?

JESSIE: Um, I would decide between forensics or there was a goal to actually be in the DEA because I would grow up watching criminal investigations stuff with my parents. And I actually feel like I would be able to because my parents are so supportive about us choosing a career that we love and we appreciate. They don't force us to do anything educational wise. One time, my brother, he got accepted into the school that he wanted to be in but due to his legal status, he couldn't go. He got so depressed and he said that he didn't want to go to school anymore, he wanted to stop his education. My parents told him that you can't do that because you have a strong and clear path and you can do it. His talent, you want to be a graphic designer, his talent was like designing. He was actually really good and he tried to give up. So, I feel like I would be able to achieve it because my parents wouldn't let me give up on something that I worked so hard to achieve.

RESEARCHER: Last question, how does the current political climate that exists in this country impact your life on a day to day basis?

JESSIE: Well, um, my parents are really up to date on the news and everything. And they tell us to watch the news with them. I mean, I'm interested in the news. Sometimes, when I see the news, I see new policies against, like the immigration stuff like that, I take into consideration that I can't be messing up [sic] so easily. That I have to take into consideration that I was

put into this situation and now I have to make better of it. I see new policies coming up and I think to myself that I can't let these policies stop me and I have become a better person or find a better way to not let these policies stop what I'm actually wanting to achieve. Because if I let that happen, if I get scared of this happening, then that's the life that's going to be lived, being scared and not actually wanting to strive and get my goal.

RESEARCHER: Thank you. Is there anything else that you would like to add that maybe I didn't ask that you would like to be portrayed in this interview?

JESSIE: Um, I feel like sometimes, like from where I come from, it was really hard growing up because I didn't have a dad and everything. Well he left us. Like growing up, we weren't in the best situations. Like my mom always tried to make it the best for us but it wasn't always the best. But now like people, God like put people in front of our path, I think that's what made our life better. Like besides the fact that my mom having to raise herself, [*phone rings*] um, having to raise herself at like age 5, she raised herself and my uncles and aunts, 5 of them, they had to go into the world. That makes me think that if she could raise my uncles and aunts, then she can raise us. And that didn't stop her from like raising us and becoming the people we are today. So, I don't think nothing [sic] should be stopping me from achieving what I want.

RESEARCHER: So, thank you for participating in my interview today. I appreciate it.

APPENDIX E: CASE STUDY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Background Information

- Where did your family immigrate from?
- What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?
- What was your age of arrival?
- Did your entire family come to the United States together?
- How many states have you lived in?
- What was the first language you learned to speak?

Interview Questions

1. What has been the most difficult part of being an undocumented student in the United States?
2. In what ways has being undocumented impacted your life?
3. Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, or guidance?
4. When did you first realize that your situation was different than others around you?
5. What role has Greene Early College played in your life thus far?
6. Why did you decide to come to GEC as opposed to GCHS?
7. What could schools do better to help students like you?
8. What do you want people to see when they see you?
9. What would you like people reading this final report to know about you?
10. If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?
11. What career would you like to have in 10 years? Do you believe you will be able to achieve that, why or why not?
12. How does the current political climate in this country impact your life on a day-to-day basis?
13. What are your thoughts on the American Dream?

APPENDIX F: TWITTER POST AND REPLY



APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW #1: *CAMILA

- RESEARCHER: Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study, in this interview for me. I have every belief that it is going to help a lot of people so let's jump right in to get started. Tell me where your family immigrated from.
- CAMILA: Aguascalientes, Mexico.
- RESEARCHER: What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?
- CAMILA: For a better life because we couldn't make anything over there. It was hard to get money. It was hard to get food every single day. It was a struggle. We wanted to get away from that.
- RESEARCHER: How old were you when your family came to the United States?
- CAMILA: Three years old.
- RESEARCHER: Did your entire family come to the United States together?
- CAMILA: No. Um, my mom had come over here first just to make sure that everything was safe because around that time it was a lot of stuff going on where the border was heavy to get across. So, my mom came with her brothers first, then the rest of us came.
- RESEARCHER: How many states have you lived in?
- CAMILA: I've lived in three.
- RESEARCHER: What was the first language that you learned to speak?
- CAMILA: Spanish. And then when I started going to school, I learned English. My parents couldn't teach me, they didn't know.
- RESEARCHER: What has been the most difficult part about being an undocumented student in the United States?
- CAMILA: I can't do much. I can't go to work or continue education like other people can. I can't have the things that other people have. I have to live a low [mumbles] life basically and work a lot harder for everything that I want.
- RESEARCHER: What life? What did you say?
- CAMILA: A harder life.
- RESEARCHER: A harder life. Ok. In what ways has being undocumented impacted your life, being undocumented?
- CAMILA: It's made it difficult to be who I am. It's made it difficult to go to school and not knowing that I can't continue that education. That I can't do everything that someone born here might can do. Um, like to get a house or something or buy a property. I can't do that. I don't have the right documents for it.
- RESEARCHER: Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, or guidance?
- CAMILA: Mainly my mother because whenever things get rough, I tell her I have a lot of doubts and stuff that I can't be anything in life, she tells me that we came here for a reason and we got to make something out of that.
- RESEARCHER: When did you first realize that your situation was different from others around you?

CAMILA: Probably when I was in middle school, around there, when I first got there. Um, other kids that could fill out forms and stuff and I noticed that I couldn't. I would always get different ones. And whenever I wanted to go to field trips or go out somewhere, my parents were always like "no, it's better to stay here" and stuff.

RESEARCHER: What role has Greene Early College played in your life thus far?

CAMILA: Greene Early College has given me more opportunities than I thought I would have because not being from here, just made me feel...in this school, that I belonged here. That I had a reason to be here. And that I can learn something new and it made it a lot easier. Education here was a lot easier.

RESEARCHER: Why did you decide to come to Greene Early College and not the traditional high school?

CAMILA: GEC, it has better opportunities, and I heard that it is a great place, especially for Hispanics. And people here, they just made it seem like you are welcome, no matter who you are.

RESEARCHER: What do you feel schools could do better to help students like you?

CAMILA: I feel like the best that they can do is just don't single anybody out and so far GEC has never done that. GEC has always made this place feel like a home and that I belong like I said. And help us make a change in what's going on because now it's a lot harder to get an education and we want that. We can do everything right but we can't get that just because we are illegal.

RESEARCHER: What do you want people to see when they see you?

CAMILA: I don't want them to see the color of my skin or the other language that I speak or where I come from. I want them to see who I am as a person, my heart, my mind, how I think, and what I do, like how much I can work.

RESEARCHER: What would you like the people reading this final report to know about you?

CAMILA: I want them to know that I didn't come here to hurt anybody. I didn't come here to ruin anything or to kill anybody. I didn't come here to damage anything. I came here to work and do everything that I couldn't do over there. I want them to know that I want a better life and I don't want to grow up knowing that my life is constantly in danger. I want them to know that I am a good person and that I came here for a better reason.

RESEARCHER: If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?

CAMILA: Um...probably the only thing that I would want to change is how much we suffered and how much we were discriminated against because of who we are.

RESEARCHER: What career would you like to have in say ten years and do you believe that you will be able to achieve that?

CAMILA: Um...I've always wanted to be a doctor but I can't necessarily be a doctor because of the circumstances that I have right now.

RESEARCHER: How does the current political climate that exists in this country impact your life on a day to day basis?

CAMILA: It's horrible. Everywhere that I walk, I always think of an exit because there is constantly Hispanics being targeted. Anyone who speaks Spanish, you have a target on your back. And whenever I enter a place, I always think of the first exit to go to because I see a lot of shootings and stuff right now, because of the president, because we are Mexican, or because we speak Spanish, we are not supposed to belong here. And there's a lot of people that don't like us because we speak Spanish or because we are from Mexico and they call us rapists, murderers, gang members and everything. But we're not all like that. There's always a good side and a bad side, but I'm on the good side. The president right now is making it a lot harder for us to have a dream to have a better life.

RESEARCHER: Last question, what are your thoughts on the American Dream?

CAMILA: My thoughts on the American Dream is that if you really want it, you can work for it and you can find a way. It is hard and has never been easy. But I know that one day I am going to make my parents proud and that I am going to give them everything that they gave me because they literally risked their lives for me.

RESEARCHER: Thank you Camila. This has been very helpful and I thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

APPENDIX H: INTERVIEW #2: *PALOMA

- RESEARCHER: Thank you Paloma for agreeing to take part in this interview today. I really appreciate it. Let's go ahead and get started. Where did your family immigrate from?
- PALOMA: Mexico City, Mexico
- RESEARCHER: What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?
- PALOMA: For a better life, financial stability.
- RESEARCHER: How old were you when your family came to the United States?
- PALOMA: I was an year old.
- RESEARCHER: Did your entire family come at once?
- PALOMA: Yes,
- RESEARCHER: How many states have you lived in?
- PALOMA: About three states.
- RESEARCHER: What was the first language that you learned to speak?
- PALOMA: Spanish.
- RESEARCHER: What has been the most difficult part about being an undocumented student in the United States?
- PALOMA: The fact that you don't have the same playing field as everybody else. You kind of start at a disadvantage and there is doors closed for you right from the get go. That you are not able to do certain things because you don't have the documentation to be here. I remember one of the first ones I experienced was when I couldn't get my ID because I didn't have the documentation to be here.
- RESEARCHER: And how old were you when that happened? Do you remember, roughly?
- PALOMA: I don't remember but I was probably in middle school. It was for school or something and I went to go get it but they were like you don't have no type of support or something.
- RESEARCHER: In what other ways has being undocumented impacted your life to this point?
- PALOMA: Well most significantly, school and work. There are so many boundaries to study. Or especially, financially, scholarships and stuff. They don't allow as many scholarships, or rarely any, for undocumented people. And to be able to advance, and to have you know, so to say a place in society, you can't do that. And then work, if you don't have papers, you can't work, even if it's an honest job.
- RESEARCHER: Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, or guidance?
- PALOMA: Mostly people from GEC. [REDACTED] has been a person who has always been there and always reached out. Ms. [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. Just the teachers here have helped a lot.
- RESEARCHER: You've talked about it a little bit just now but when did you first realize that your situation was different from others around you?

PALOMA: In middle school, when that occurred. My mother explained to me that I wasn't born here and stuff like that. I mean, I knew that, but that obviously...I wasn't a citizen. So, there were certain things that unless things changed, I wasn't going to be able to do. And that was before we got the DREAM Act, which was the DACA papers.

RESEARCHER: What role has Greene Early College played in your life thus far?

PALOMA: Well to a certain degree, it is an advancement of education. I have the two-year associates degree that sets me apart from other people I guess. And you know, just the support here, and the teachers. Knowing that they will do their best to try to get you moving forward and doing something with your life apart from just having your high school degree.

RESEARCHER: Why did you decide to come to Greene Early College and not the traditional high school?

PALOMA: I want to say that it was mostly for that, the two-year college. In the future I knew that would help me out more than anything else because if I didn't have the financial support, then at least I would have that.

RESEARCHER: What do you think schools could do better to help students like you?

PALOMA: I would say that they could probably be more informed. I remember when I was doing my registering and applying and everything, there was a lot of, just from the get go, there were a lot of requirements and they weren't really knowledgeable on those requirements so like that kept putting boundaries and it gets frustrating when they keep telling you that you have to do this, you have to do that when everyone else seems to be breezing right through it. And they weren't really knowledgeable on certain requirements and things like that.

RESEARCHER: What do you want people to see when they see you?

PALOMA: Someone who is working hard that is trying to make a difference in the community and people's lives around them.

RESEARCHER: When I prepare my final report, what would you like the people reading this final report to know about you?

PALOMA: That regardless of the circumstances, I believe that if you really want to succeed, you'll work out and you will see the positive things and not all of the negative things. Eventually things work out. We all have our timing. Whether it takes us four years, five years to get our degrees. Whether we don't take that route and still are successful. It just depends on your timing.

RESEARCHER: If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?

PALOMA: I don't think I would necessarily change anything. I believe that everyone goes through certain things for a reason; it builds our character. It builds who they are. I think that I have that strive and determination to keep going and make something because of where I come from. I want to see my family succeed. My sisters, who see me, they all tell me sometimes "I want to do better than you" and I say "go ahead, I want to see you do better than me". That's what I would hope.

RESEARCHER: In ten years, what career would you like to have and do you believe that you will be able to achieve that?

PALOMA: Probably somewhere in the film industry. Yeah, I think it's obtainable if you work hard enough.

RESEARCHER: How does the current political climate that exists in this country impact your life on a day to day basis?

PALOMA: Since...really, I haven't seen anything around me. A lot of people say stuff and bicker. I remember when he first said that he would terminate the papers, I got really stressed out and was like this can't be happening. I was like I have a job to at least maintain. And everyone around me started getting flustered. I think for a while he took it away and then he closed it off. So new people that hadn't registered for it or hadn't applied for it, were able to continue to do it. And I felt bad for those people. But he did give us an opportunity to keep renewing our papers within studying and doing stuff like that. I hear people bicker all the time. At least we haven't directly experienced some of that turmoil but we have seen some of the effects of it, which being the papers when they started stressing us out. Eventually it worked out. I'm hoping that in the future, they can come to an agreement on the matter. Whether they do it or not, people are still going to find a way to cross the border or figure something out. It's been done before so it's going to keep happening again.

RESEARCHER: Last question, what are your thoughts on the American Dream?

PALOMA: I think it's difficult to obtain it sometimes. Like I know at one point I became very discouraged after I graduated. And I was like, so all the years of hard work and striving to do something better. I was putting time in and time out and you know, trying to do the best I could. Essentially it doesn't matter that I graduated second in the class and class president, I did all that. and I'm working a 40-hour job not necessarily doing what I want to do. But I believe if you try, and you work for it, and keep that grit and determination to do it, it's very possible. But we...the immigrants, we aren't trying to take anybody's place. We are just trying to advance and make within our own community something better that will benefit us all. We do make up a lot of people. We work in different areas. We are willing to do the work. We are just trying to make something better for our families.

RESEARCHER: One additional question, what are your educational plans moving forward?

PALOMA: Hopefully find a school that will help me out and go there.

RESEARCHER: Thank you.

APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW #3: *PATRICIA

- RESEARCHER: So, thank you Patricia for agreeing to take part in this interview. I really appreciate it. Your information is going to help a lot of people and I'm thankful for your time. So, let's get started. Where did your family immigrated from?
- PATRICIA: My family immigrated from Guatemala, Mexico.
- RESEARCHER: What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?
- PATRICIA: Um, our life in Mexico, from what my parents tell me wasn't real easy because my mom had my brother when she was 16 and then had me, she got pregnant when she was 17 and then had me when she was 18. So, it was kind of back to back. And my dad would travel from United States to Mexico all the time. He would transition. He would go work over here in the United States and then send us money. And so, then my mom was like, kind of like we need to stay together and that's when they were like we need to go. So, we just got on a van and they brought us to the United States.
- RESEARCHER: How old were you when your family came to the United States?
- PATRICIA: I was one.
- RESEARCHER: Did your entire family come at once?
- PATRICIA: As I said previous, my dad had already been multiple times to the United States. He would kind of like come back, and then go back to the United States. It was kind of like a transition until we were all like we kind of got to go together. And that's when we all picked up and left.
- RESEARCHER: How many states have you lived in?
- PATRICIA: Um, I think...we were only here in North Carolina my whole life. And we were going to go to Florida because that's where all of my family is at but there is more work here in North Carolina so we decided to stay.
- RESEARCHER: What was the first language that you learned to speak?
- PATRICIA: Spanish.
- RESEARCHER: What has been the most difficult part about being an undocumented student in the United States?
- PATRICIA: Limited opportunities. Like even though I have good grades and everything, it's more difficult for me to get into colleges because they don't like undocumented students and stuff like that. There could be any other student that is not as smart as me but get more opportunities than me because of my undocumented status.
- RESEARCHER: In what ways has being undocumented impacted your life to this point?

PATRICIA: Being undocumented impacts my life every day. To like not being able to get my driver's license because I have to apply for DACA and all this. And it's just like a lot. It goes into it like. And then people are like, they always throw racist little comments to you like thinking that it is funny but it's not. Like for example, someone was like, I was telling them like "oh yeah, I'm kind of like southern cause I was raised in North Carolina and I have all the southern ways" and then someone was like "yeah I'm from south Mexico". And I was like [inaudible gesture]. And they were like "I'm just joking, just joking". Like people just see it as funny.

RESEARCHER: Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, or guidance?

PATRICIA: Nobody. [Long pause.] Well like, my teachers can guide me. But like a lot of people here don't have the information.

RESEARCHER: What type of information, when you say they don't have the information, what type of information specifically?

PATRICIA: Like what scholarships to apply. Teachers send me scholarships but you have to be a US citizen. And I'm like I can't apply to those because of my situation. And I ask for help but they don't know where to guide me because they just don't have the information.

RESEARCHER: When did you first realize that your situation was different from others around you?

PATRICIA: I realized in middle school because I have an older brother and he got the whole DACA thing first. So, I had already knew about it and I was like "year I have to apply for that when I turn 15". I started my thing when I was 14 so that when I turned 15, I could get it. But I don't think I got it until I was almost about to turn 16 because the whole Trump thing put everything on pause.

RESEARCHER: What role has Greene Early College played in your life thus far?

PATRICIA: Greene Early College has taught me that there is people that can do it because there has obviously been students that have attended this school who have done it and have gotten far. So that's kind of the thing, that's just kind of like if they can do it, then you can do it. And I personally believe that everything is...and we also get free college.

RESEARCHER: Why did you decide to come to Greene Early College and not the traditional high school?

PATRICIA: Um...well every since I was a little kid, I always knew, barely intermediate, I always knew early college. High school was never an option for me. I told my parents that I was like "if I don't get into the early college, then I don't know what I'm doing because I am not going to the high school".

RESEARCHER: What do you have against the high school?

PATRICIA: Um...well the early college, they have more opportunities, free college, I graduate with my diploma, my associates. It's like I'm already building my future when I'm in high school.

RESEARCHER: What do you feel schools could do better to help students like you?

PATRICIA: Have information.

RESEARCHER: What specifically?

PATRICIA: So, a lot of like counselors and stuff, they know a little bit but they're not like...kind of...they don't know all the information needed. They don't know where to guide us. They are kind of like just freelancing it. Like "oh yeah, you should apply to these because they offer a lot of scholarships". But they are not like telling us "make sure you apply to these and these scholarships because these are for undocumented students" or "make sure that when you go to college and they are offering you a lot of money, make sure you ask these questions because sometimes they can trick you". They need to know that kind of information.

RESEARCHER: What do you want people to see when they see you?

PATRICIA: I want people to see me as a student, not an undocumented student, just a student.

RESEARCHER: When I complete this study, I have to create a final report. What would you like the people reading this final report to know about you?

PATRICIA: I would want people to know that right now I am struggling so in the future I can help other people.

RESEARCHER: If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?

PATRICIA: Um...I don't know.

RESEARCHER: What career would you like to have in say ten years and do you believe that you will be able to achieve that?

PATRICIA: I want to major in criminal justice so I can know how everything works and stuff. But I want to become an immigrant lawyer and hopefully start a nonprofit organization that helps students like me so they know the information. So, they will have lists to look at, what scholarships to apply, what college offer the most money. I want to help people that struggle like I do right now.

RESEARCHER: How does the current political climate that exists in this country impact your life on a day to day basis?

PATRICIA: It puts fear in my heart. I mean, I'm protected because of DACA but my family isn't. So, my family can get taken away at any moment. And people just like...since like...Mexicans...a lot of people, most people identify race as Mexican, White, Black. But like they throw a lot of comments that they don't think are racist or anything like that. For me, when I'm talking Spanish, they are like "oh speak English" or something like that and I'm like "why? Why don't you speak Spanish?". It's like those little comments. And they are throwing them out like they are not racist. Cause I feel like the culture nowadays is just used to it and it shouldn't be like that.

RESEARCHER: Last question, what are your thoughts on the American Dream?

PATRICIA: I think that the American Dream is...I mean. I feel like more immigrants achieve the American Dream more than citizens nowadays because a lot of people are like "Mexicans are stealing my jobs". But we are the ones that do the hard jobs. We are the ones that are like....and it's not even just

us. It's the minorities. They are the ones that put more work into it than regular citizens and it's the truth. Immigrants made the American Dream.

RESEARCHER: Alright, I am going to come back to one of the questions to see if you have an answer yet. If you could change anything about your life, what would it be and why?

PATRICIA: The support that I have in my life. Because like, I don't have anybody that has gone through it. I am a first-gen student. My brother graduated from high school and everything but he hasn't gone to college or anything. So, I'm kind of like blind sighted. I don't know what to do. I apply to colleges, doing all of this by myself, and I can't just like "hey, can you help me?"

RESEARCHER: Thank you.

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW #4: *GABRIEL

- RESEARCHER: So, tell me, where did your family immigrate from?
GABRIEL: We are originally from Mexico.
RESEARCHER: Where in Mexico?
GABRIEL: The northern part of Mexico it's called Matamoros Tamaulipas. It's like right below Texas, like the south most parts of Texas, which is Brownsville.
RESEARCHER: Ok. What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?
GABRIEL: I'd say opportunity or work because Mexico is not in good standing, economically. It's not many good jobs in Mexico
RESEARCHER: How old were you when your family came to the United States?
GABRIEL: I was about two and a half.
RESEARCHER: Did your entire family come to the United States together?
GABRIEL: First, no. First a couple of cousins, then my dad, myself and my mom. And then my dad's siblings, sisters.
RESEARCHER: How many states have you lived in?
GABRIEL: One.
RESEARCHER: What was the first language that you learned to speak?
GABRIEL: Spanish.
RESEARCHER: Tell me, what has been the most difficult part about being an undocumented student in the United States or what was the most difficult part for you?
GABRIEL: [Silence.] [Deep sigh.] [Silence.] I guess my case would be not being able to go to school like I wanted to.
RESEARCHER: You mean, go to college?
GABRIEL: Yeah.
RESEARCHER: Alright. Well tell me a little bit about what happened with you.
GABRIEL: My case, being undocumented, I don't have legal status. So, when you want to apply to like a university, not only do you not get financial aid, but you get an out-of-state tuition rate. So, its way more expensive. Every school that I applied to, they told me the same thing.
RESEARCHER: And were you accepted?
GABRIEL: I was accepted to like five schools but they were all like it's going to be \$22,000, \$23,000, \$28,000, \$24,000. Dag, that's a lot of money and no financial aid and scholarships doesn't cover not even half of it. So, I was like it's no point in going, not right now anyways.
RESEARCHER: Where did you want to go?
GABRIEL: Anywhere really! [Nervous laugh.] That would help economically, the best you know. I would have been good even going to ECU, close to home or anywhere really.
RESEARCHER: In what ways has being undocumented impacted your life, I know you talked about going to college but what other ways?

GABRIEL: Um, like not having health insurance. What else? If it wasn't for my DACA, I wouldn't be able to work, have a driver's license, open a bank account, just do like every day, simple basic life stuff.

RESEARCHER: Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, or guidance?

GABRIEL: About what?

RESEARCHER: About anything.

GABRIEL: About my legal status? About anything?

RESEARCHER: Yep. Well, your legal status.

GABRIEL: Maybe my lawyer. I can't really go to my parents. My lawyer and family that are citizens here, or residents.

RESEARCHER: Why did you say you can't go to your parents?

GABRIEL: Because they are illegal themselves. They don't even speak English here. They have been here for about 20 years and they still don't know how to speak English. It is hard for them to learn it still. It's not easy. It was easy for me because I was a kid and you are able to pick it up, both languages.

RESEARCHER: I understand. When did you first realize that your situation was different than others around you?

GABRIEL: Being that I came as a two-year-old with a Visa, as a Visa passport. My case for my DACA, you could say is easier, because those that came when they were older and/or without the Visa, they don't qualify for DACA so they can't get that social security number that lets them get a job, get a license. So, they are still here illegally, technically illegally. I came here not illegally, but because my Visa was over at three months, I had to go back. But that wasn't really my choice because I was with my mom, a two-year-old, I was brought here without my consent basically you know. And I'm sure that there is more like me out there. It's just crazy.

RESEARCHER: What role did Greene Early College play in your life?

GABRIEL: Well when I first found out about it in middle school, they were like saying two years of college basically free. So, I was like yeah, that will help my dad, help give him a little weight off his chest. God knows school is expensive, well it can be expensive. So, I put school first over my hobbies. Because I like soccer, I wanted to play soccer in high school but I couldn't do it coming here, yeah.

RESEARCHER: So, you had to sacrifice?

GABRIEL: I had to sacrifice but it's just soccer man. School will always come first. So, I wanted to come here.

RESEARCHER: Is that why you decided to come here, the free tuition?

GABRIEL: Yeah, free tuition. Because I was like I can at least get two years free, you know? And then I could just pay for the rest later in life, whenever I go back to school.

RESEARCHER: So, the reason I am doing this study is to figure out how we can better support our students that are undocumented. So, from your perspective, what could schools do better to help students like you?

GABRIEL: Um, I don't really...um.

RESEARCHER: What, if anything, could we have done, had we known, what could we have done differently that may would have had you better prepared for life after graduation?

GABRIEL: Maybe looking at scholarships that offer a full ride for undocumented students. Because there are, and I applied to some, but I didn't get them because they are very competitive. And I mean, it's really the student that has to put work into and get involved in the school, join the clubs, you know what I'm saying. Stand out, so that when you apply to the scholarship, the scholars are like "oh, this student deserves it more than others".

RESEARCHER: What do you want people to see when they see you?

GABRIEL: I guess don't give up. Undocumented or not. Do what you can, make the most out of life, no matter what obstacle comes at your face.

RESEARCHER: So, you want people to see someone who makes the most out of...

GABRIEL: Makes the most out of...yeah. Just don't give up. Don't put your head down, keep your head up. And if you're knocked down a couple times, just get back up.

RESEARCHER: When I finish this study, I'm going to prepare a final report, my findings from this study [phone rings], what would you like the people reading this final report to know about you?

GABRIEL: It's been hard. When you are little, you don't think about it. As you get older, you're like I have to get a job one day, I have to pay bills and stuff. What if I didn't get my DACA? I would have been working and getting paid under the table like people say. Harsh jobs, harsh conditions. But with DACA you do get a lot more opportunity. It's just two different worlds: Spanish and English, in a country where undocumented aren't really accepted, it can be hard.

RESEARCHER: If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?

GABRIEL: That's funny. [Nervous giggle.] If I could have citizenship, dual citizenship, be a US citizen. It would be nice. I have always joked with my mom and told her like "like why wasn't I born in the US, why I'm not a US citizen because my brothers are?" And she is just like "I don't know, it wasn't your destiny, wasn't your faith, or whatever" And I always tell my dad "like why did we have to come all the way to North Carolina, out of all of the states, you had to come all of the way to the far east, why didn't we stop in Texas?" They're just jokes that I make with them.

RESEARCHER: What career would you like to have in say ten years and do you believe that you will be able to do it?

GABRIEL: I've always wanted to be a nurse, RN, and if I could, be a doctor, a surgeon or something. I just like the medical field, I like it, I don't know why.

RESEARCHER: Do you think that you will be able to do it?

GABRIEL: I hope so. I want to go back to school.

RESEARCHER: How does the current political climate that exists in this country impact your life on a day to day basis?

GABRIEL: Well, you have people, that support undocumented being deported and stuff and it is not a good feeling. Especially like going, for example, they are doing a license check down the road from your house, you don't know if you are going to go home or not or be deported. If I get deported and go back to Mexico, I don't know how it's going to be like because I haven't been to Mexico since I was two, I don't know anybody. It would be a whole new life, starting from scratch. I've just been lucky, I guess.

RESEARCHER: Last question, what are your thoughts on the American Dream?

GABRIEL: American dream? To have a good life, be successful, be happy with what you have done with life. Yeah, not living a life of regret. It's just...to make it. It's hard to explain.

RESEARCHER: I understand. You've done a good job and I appreciate it.

APPENDIX K: INTERVIEW #5: *ALEXANDRIA

- RESEARCHER: So, thank you for agreeing to help me with this study. So, tell me where did your family immigrate from?
- ALEXANDRIA: We immigrated from Mexico, from the state Michoacán.
- RESEARCHER: What have you been told about why your family came to the United States?
- ALEXANDRIA: Just like the struggles that my family faced in Mexico and my parents really valued, well I think a lot of families do, but like wanting a better future for their kids, so they decided to take the risk and come to the US to hopefully have a better future for us and for them.
- RESEARCHER: How old were you when your family came to the United States?
- ALEXANDRIA: I was three years old.
- RESEARCHER: Did your entire family come at once?
- ALEXANDRIA: Yes, so my parents and my three siblings, we came.
- RESEARCHER: How many states have you lived in?
- ALEXANDRIA: I've only lived in North Carolina.
- RESEARCHER: What was the first language that you learned to speak?
- ALEXANDRIA: Spanish.
- RESEARCHER: Alright, so first question: what has been the most difficult part about being an undocumented student in the United States for you?
- ALEXANDRIA: I would say the lack of information people have I think in general, but also like in schools. I think that a lot of teachers and staff don't really understand what that means, what implications it comes along with, and the everyday struggles that you have to face as a kid. But then also like with your family because most likely if you are undocumented, your parents are too. So just like, having that fear of always something happening to your parents, sometimes not even to yourself, and then you think about yourself. It's like the lack of information that people have. And the misconceptions people have about immigrants. It's just like, you feel like people don't really understand you and it's really hard to get the support you need because the people that you think might be able to help you, also don't have the information at hand.
- RESEARCHER: In what ways has being undocumented impacted your life?
- ALEXANDRIA: I think it has just made me resilient. My parents have always like supported me but also motivated me. I think that, in general, kids that come from their parents migrating or themselves migrating to the US, you often times, just like, you want to do everything to make your parents proud. That has made me the person I am to this today. I graduated college, which is their biggest dream, but like I'm still trying to continue making them proud and thinking of what I can do now to help them so that they can have a better job or working better jobs.
- RESEARCHER: Who are the people in your life that you turn to for support, information, or guidance maybe now or in the past?

ALEXANDRIA: I turned to a couple of people. When I was in high school, I turned a lot to my brother because he is undocumented as well and he is older than me. So, he was able to go to college and so he was like the person that I turned to when I needed something when I was applying to college because he had gone through it. Even now, I always, maybe not for advice, but to just talk about the things that I am feeling because of my status, my husband. In college, I turned to a professor there who just like supported me and was willing to help me. In high school, I turned to my principal, [REDACTED], who he always believed in me since the moment I told him that I was undocumented.

RESEARCHER: How did you know that you could trust these people? What made you confide in the people you just named? Not your brother or your parents obviously, but your professor or Mr. [REDACTED] what was it about those people?

ALEXANDRIA: Well, I guess with [REDACTED], it kind of happened out of nowhere. My parents really wanted me to go to college and I ended up going to early college and my brother always knew that he wanted to go to [UNC] Chapel Hill. One summer, or at some point, he went to an event and they told him that he had better chances of going to college if he went to a high school, like a regular high school. So, since that moment, because my brother was going to go to early college too, but he didn't. And we already knew all that before I even applied to early college but I wanted to go to early college. And so, I ended up being in early college in ninth grade and then before tenth grade started, it really came down to my parents saying "This is a university that's prestigious that told your brother this. We need to do what they say because this is what they told us." And so, I didn't want to do it but I also wanted to go to college so I was like I guess that what I should do. So, I went to early college, and [REDACTED], I think it was the first time I met him because we had a different principal. And I told him I'm going to transfer. I told someone before they told me to talk to him. They didn't want me to transfer. So, then he talked to me and asked "why do you want to transfer". And so, I kind of just told him this is why I want to transfer because I'm undocumented [sniffles] and I want to go to college and this is what someone told my brother and I need to do the same. He's like "No, you can go to college even if you stay here. I'll help you. I'll give you advice. I'll tell you what you can do right now". My mom was there the whole time and I think that really made a difference because she saw that he cared and was like "if he says that he can help you, then you can stay here. We just want the best for you and what's going to get you the higher chance to go to college". So that's how I ended up telling him. I had never met him and just talked to him about it [Chuckles.] And I like cried to him. "Like I don't know what to do because this is what my parents say, this is what this college person I have never met said". Really from that moment on, he already knew this huge part of me. A lot of Hispanic students know who's undocumented but you don't really talk to teachers about it. So, this was like this person who now knew this part of

me and believed in me. And I always had a lot of doubts about myself so it was nice to feel like someone believed in me. [Sniffles]. And he just like became this person in my life that I could turn to [sniffles] when I was in high school and when I was applying for college.

In college, like, the professor, well he wasn't a professor, he was a staff member. I think that a couple of people in college already knew that I was undocumented because of the way that I expressed myself in things, the things that I supported and spoke out about. But there was still people that I didn't really have, I didn't know who I could like talk to about it. I had heard him talking to other kids or the way that he discussed certain issues that impact people in the US, specifically people of color. Clearly he was aware of the injustices that impact people's life. I just decided to talk to him one day. Because we felt like, me and another student, we felt like the Hispanic population wasn't being supported at my university. So, we talked to him about it and we discussed the issues we noticed and felt. And he listened to us and that just like made a difference. So then later on, he kind of became a person that I talked when I felt frustrated about the things that were going on in the US.

RESEARCHER: When did you first realize that your situation was different from others around you?

ALEXANDRIA: I think I always knew. Like, I think even from a young age, I didn't have the, I didn't have the vocabulary to say "I know I'm undocumented" but since I was young, you hear your parents say, you're driving in the car and you're like "be careful, there's a police there, you don't want the police to stop you". Just like hearing things like that made me realize that from the start it made me feel like that maybe as a Hispanic person, I am different from other people. But then as I started getting older, I understood more. Especially in college, I mean in high school, like I think that's like the first time. Well once like everyone starts getting their license and you can't, that was the moment where I started seeing a direct impact to the things that I wanted to do but couldn't because of my status. I think that I always knew that there was something different and as I have gotten older, I understand it more. Like in college, well applying to college and um now that I am older there are things that impact me more directly and before I think our parents were the only one that understood what it meant. As parents, they didn't talk to us about what they were facing but now I can understand more. I have DACA so I can get a license but like my parents have never, well at some point they did have a license until it wasn't allowed anymore. So, like seeing that, when they lost their license, I think about it randomly everyday like I can do this, I can work at a school and have a career because I have this temporary work permit. But like if I didn't, what would I be doing? I have friends that didn't get DACA and so I really see that now as well. I might not have citizenship but I have this one thing that makes me feel somewhat safe for at least two years, every time I renew it.

RESEARCHER: What role did Greene Early College played in your life?

ALEXANDRIA: For me, early college helped me gain a lot of confidence in who I was. I always doubted myself. I wasn't very confident. I just came into a space that me feel that people cared about me. I had friends, I had friends before but you are older you can trust people and talk about other things in your life. And I felt like teachers cared about you. I somehow ended up doing all this stuff at the early college that I never thought I could. It just made me feel confident about myself and believe in myself academically but also like through the activities that I participated in. It just helped me gain meaningful friendships in people that I felt always had good intentions for me and the people around me.

RESEARCHER: Awesome. That's what I'm hoping to be able to make sure that we continue. Why did you decide, you talked about it a little bit earlier but I will give you a chance to talk about it some, why did you decide to come to Greene Early College as opposed to Greene Central?

ALEXANDRIA: Well I thought that my brother could go to college but I didn't think that I could because he had always been in honor classes and stuff like that and he had gone to events at Chapel Hill. I was not very confident. Maybe he was confident or maybe he was just going with the flow. But I always looked up to him as like this really smart person. Like I said, I always doubted myself. So, one, I wanted to go to early college because I was scared that if I couldn't go to college, like I already knew that it was going to be hard in general for someone like to me to go to college. But then having doubts about myself, I was like well if I can't get into college, and I can't get a scholarship, at least I can have an associate's degree. That was one of the biggest reasons why I went to early college. Because I was just scared that if nothing else worked out, and if I could go to early college then I would be able to have an associate's degree. And I didn't know what that would mean afterwards but I was like at least I have these two years and it's free. As an undocumented person, even to get community college credits, it's more expensive. That's really why I chose to go to early college but I also, this is just random, I went there because I always felt like my parents wanted me to be more like Jose, my brother, and I was kind of rebelling. I am not going to do everything he does.

RESEARCHER: From your perspective, what could schools could do better to help students like you?

ALEXANDRIA: I think there is a lot of work to do in schools to help kids like me. Because I think that it's just not talked about. I don't think that I ever knew someone that discussed things related to immigrants or an immigrant's status. So school was never a place where I thought you should talk about that. I thought it was kind of like the police.

RESEARCHER: Wow.

ALEXANDRIA: Like I can't tell the police I'm undocumented, so I can't tell the teacher that I am undocumented. Like I don't know what happens if a teacher knows. So, I don't think that there is a space for kids to know that your teachers are there to help you and help you understand what that means for you as a student. So, I feel that we just need to make sure kids know that

you don't have to tell me that you are undocumented but this is somewhere that you can go to learn about what that means to you and what your options are. Because I think a lot of students know that they are undocumented and they automatically think that means that I can't go to college. So, if you are in middle school and you're like if I can't go to college then what's the purpose of school? Or if you try really hard and still don't go to college then what is the purpose of me doing all of that. It just makes you feel defeated. Whether it happens early on in your education and you're not going to be able to do that or it happens later on in your life. I think that there needs to be more awareness of what that means. As an education major, and now as a teacher, I had a short presentation on it when I was student teaching and so many teachers were like I never knew any of this stuff. I didn't know that I could be undocumented but my sibling might not be. Or what does it mean to be in a mixed status family? What does it mean for a kid to know that they are undocumented? And that their parents are undocumented? What are the fears that come along with that on an everyday basis for a child? How does that impact them? And if you are afraid of what will happen to your parents today, how can you focus in school? What are the emotional impacts and economic impacts and limitations for that family and for the people that are a part of that family? And also, like not just understanding what it means and how it impacts you but also how does it impact you for your life after high school. Does it mean that a student can or can't go? Because some teachers just think that they can't, but you could. Some teachers don't think there is a difference, but there is. There are a lot of limitations. If teachers don't know then they are not going to understand how they can actually help them. I know for me, when I was in high school, I was the type of student that people knew I wanted to go to college and I worked really hard to make that happen. But not everyone who is undocumented feels like that is something that they can do. No one ever told them that it was something that you can do. It can just hold a student back from their full potential. And I had people that believed in me but not every student who is undocumented has that. So, I feel that I have been very lucky to have people support me, have parents that support me and I had a few people at early college who knew that and wanted to help me. But even some times when I told my counselor, because she didn't know, sometimes she would help me and she would send me scholarships but then I would read the perquisites and I was like I can't, I'm not a US citizen. I'm not a resident. And it was really hard for her to understand that. She was like frustrated and confused with like how can I help you if everything I find has this as a requirement. So, I think that like teachers, counselors, principals, there just needs to be better awareness of it. So that kids know that they're aware of it and if you feel safe enough to disclose it, they will be able to help you. Because if not, you find yourself having to teach that person that you wanted help from. And then ultimately it comes along with a lot of trauma having to talk about this every time with

someone as a child, even if you are in high school, it's hard to have to face that and then feel like now you know this part about me but I still don't have any help. I didn't put blame on anyone but it still makes you feel helpless. These are the people you felt like could help you but they can't because they might not know. And even if they do, there is just so much information on how can I actually help an undocumented student. [Deep breaths.]

RESEARCHER: That's what we are working to change. What do you want people to see when they see you?

ALEXANDRIA: I just want them to see that I am who I am because of the people that are part of my community [voice quivers], who are documented, or not documented. These Mexican immigrants, Hispanic immigrants like have taught me so much and I wouldn't be who I am today if it wasn't for them. [Cries audibly.] Sometimes I feel like we put the victim on parents for bringing their children here and we want to help the child but not the parents and it's like I wouldn't be this resilient person who wants to believe in a better future because I just happen to be this way. My parents risked everything for me believe that I could do something better with my life. So, it's not about putting the blame on parents for bringing their little children to the US but I think it shows how much people are willing to do to help their families. Yeah, you risk your life and you risk your children's life but if you are living in a place where you don't feel like you have hope, you either stay there and feel helpless or you do something about it. So, I don't want people to like make me or other people who end up going to college that are undocumented and making this incredible immigrant student and say like "they are the example". We are the example because these people are the example of what it means to work hard. Working in the fields and feeling fear every single day of your life but still keeping hope that your life will be better, who does that? I am who I am because of them and every single person that has risked their life to be here and have shown me this is what it means to work hard and want to do better for yourself and your community.

RESEARCHER: Don't stop people from sharing your story though. Because there are people, and I am not even supposed to be doing this on tape but I will cut that part out, there are people that believe that they can do it now because they know you did it. Just like the student that I gave your email address to, she knows of you, I don't even think that she knows you personally but and she is really bright academically and very outspoken a lot like you, and feels like she has a chance to do something because she knows of someone that did it. It is a part of instilling hope that there is more for you. So, you and your brother should be celebrated and applauded. I love what you said but the younger kids need to see it. Because what you see is what they will be.

ALEXANDRIA: And I want them to know that because I think that representation is important. Seeing someone that looks like you and who might have the same situation as you, makes a difference. I think it's more so for the

people who don't understand the situation that like victimize the children, like have sympathy for the children of these immigrant parents but not sympathy for those parents. I want others kids to know that we can work really hard to make that happen to you, for you as well. But for everyone else, like don't make me the exception. There are so many other kids that could be like me but they aren't because they may have not have had the same people in their life that helped me get here.

RESEARCHER: I am going to skip number nine unless you want to add something but it says: what would you like the people reading this final report to know about you? But it sounds like you've answered that.

ALEXANDRIA: Yeah.

RESEARCHER: If there was anything about your life that you could change, what would that be and why?

ALEXANDRIA: I've never been the type of person to regret certain things or want to change things. I think that everything in my life has made me who I am today. Even though some parts of it suck and some parts are unfair, but I don't know who I would be without those parts of me.

RESEARCHER: Right now, you are a teacher, in ten years, where do you see yourself career wise and do you believe that you will be able to do that?

ALEXANDRIA: In ten years, I would like to still be doing something in education but helping kids get to college has always ultimately been my goal. But I feel like being in a classroom is important to understand the different parts that impact the student. So, I would like to start a scholarship or start a college access program or become part of one. I really want to do something back home now that I have been in this area Raleigh/Durham/Elon. I have been able to see a lot of cool organizations that are reaching out to kids like me, students of color, first generation students, like and there is so much information that these families are able to get because of them. And I feel like back home, because we are in a small town, a rural area, like we might not have those and I think a lot of kids and families need that support. Me and my brother have talked about it, like starting something for kids back home so that they are getting additional support. Like having a scholarship that they know that they could get even if they are not a citizen. Like making that happen and helping parents understand that we can help you. And like you said, there are a lot of people that look up to us because it is nearly impossible to be undocumented and go to college and somehow two kids in one family were able to make that happen. Like I don't know how that happened and I am very thankful for it. I think a lot of people, a lot of families were like "wait, what? That can happen?". And so, since then, parents have reached out to us and asked us to help their children. And even for kids who are born here, their parents still don't know how to help them. Obviously, their journey to college is a little bit different from us because some of the access they have that we didn't. It just shows that it's not just about being undocumented and often times it's about that but also for kids who have citizenship, their parents don't know how to help them. So that's what I would like to be doing in ten years, like

have a scholarship established and be part of a program or start a program that helps families understand that process and help them get there.

RESEARCHER: Awesome. Almost done. How does the current political climate that exists in this country impact your life on a day to day basis?

ALEXANDRIA: [Deep sigh.] This was really, really hard for me in college. Because, like, the same things you face in high school of not knowing what to do, you do in college too. It's not something that you stop facing once you accomplish a certain thing in your life. You still keep facing those things. In college, my mom got sick. [Voice quivers.] She had a tumor. She is not documented. So, her process to try to get surgery without having healthcare made it really hard for all of us because we don't have anything we can do, we can't change that. Coming across doctors that don't understand either and what that means for her and why she can't get insurance. It made it, it impacted me, when the announcements of DACA, not knowing what would happen with that made it really difficult for me. Because it was just so much insecurity like what would happen next year. That was my sophomore year when Trump got elected. What will happen in two years when I finish college? Will I be able to get a job? If I don't have DACA, what will I do? It is just so much stuff that is not in your control. I went through a really, really hard time my junior year. My mom was sick. My grandma passed away and we couldn't go see her. My mom hadn't seen her in like 19 years...

RESEARCHER: Wow.

ALEXANDRIA: ...and so, all of these things tied down to one thing. I'm undocumented. My mom is undocumented. She can't get health insurance. My grandma is sick and will most likely will pass away and we can't see her. I don't know what is going on with DACA. Will I be able to get a job after college? And so, like all of these things in the news. It was every single day something happening about immigrants, about DACA, about what people felt they could say towards people like me. I just felt alone. There's not a lot of kids in college who's undocumented. So, you don't have someone else that you can talk to and feel like they understand what I'm going through or have those same feelings. And so, I was basically falling apart and it was just really, really hard with not knowing how to deal with it all. On top of that, like college, having to still show up to class and just looking around and not seeing people that look like me because there are still not a lot of Hispanic people going to college. And just feeling that everyone is just going on with their life. [Sniffles.] Obviously, everyone has issues in their life but I just felt like not everyone is having the same issues as me because of their status. I think it heightened the fear that people are already feeling and times it by ten for families, for children, for people in college. It's made it difficult but I think that my community and people like me, we're resilient. We have never had an option but to be strong. So, you just keep pushing and working and trying your best so that you can help yourself and the people around you,

RESEARCHER: Last question, what are your thoughts on the American Dream?

ALEXANDRIA:

I think that the American Dream can happen for people but I think it's this thing that has been idolized by a lot of individuals in the US and outside of the US. People look up to the US as a place that you can make your dreams come true. And so, obviously if you don't have that where you live and you want it, all of these people risked their life to be here. Their life is a little bit better than back home because there is access to a space to live and people don't have that everywhere. I think that people just don't understand that isn't not just about working hard and it's not just about being an honest person. You can be honest and work really hard and people will look at you like you don't fit the type of person that can get the American dream. So, if you don't get it, it's okay, I don't care, it's your fault. I think it happens even with people who aren't Hispanic, who aren't immigrants. People of color are stereotyped and you have to face things that white people don't. And often times we think it's because they didn't work hard enough or they didn't try hard enough or they didn't believe it. But it's like no, there are so many issues that come into play. And its things that are not in one person's control, it's systems that make it harder, not for everyone, but for specific people. I think that we idolize it. And some people think that if you work hard, and you're honest, and you believe in yourself, then you deserve it. But it's not really just about those things. It's about what you look like, where you come from, what's your status, and the color of your skin, ultimately.

RESEARCHER:

Thank you.

APPENDIX L: PIRATE GRAD TALK PRESENTATION

Supporting Undocumented Student's High School Experiences and Access to Higher Education

Patrick Greene and Rodney McNeill
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
East Carolina University



1

Undocumented?

- Foreign-born people who do not possess a valid visa or other immigration documentation
- No human being is illegal!



2

Maria's Story



3

Mirella



4

Background

- Greene County Schools
- Our work as principals



GREENE COUNTY SCHOOLS
Educating Greene County's Tomorrow Today



5

Context of the Problem

- 10-12 million undocumented immigrants live in the U.S.
100,000 graduate from high school each year
States vary in support of access to higher education



6

Context of the Problem

- Plyler vs. Doe (1982)**
 Undocumented students have a right to K-12 education
 No guarantee to higher education



7

Context of the Problem

- DREAM Act (2001)**
 Attempted to secure a path to citizenship and education - has not passed
- DACA (2012)**
 Provides some temporary protections
 Suspended for new applicants



8

Impact for Students Today

- Undocumented students in NC**
 No access to federal aid
 No access to in-state resident tuition (22 states do)
 Impacts high school graduation rates
 Social and emotional impacts




9

Rodney's Study

- Rodney's study seeks to evaluate the lived experiences of undocumented students to provide a more inclusive experience and advocacy
- Interviewed 7 undocumented students that have now all graduated from early college



10

Rodney's Study

Participant	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Country of Birth	Year of Arrival	Year of Graduation	Current Location
Participant 1	21	Male	Hispanic	Mexico	2008	2012	Charlotte, NC
Participant 2	22	Female	Hispanic	Mexico	2009	2013	Charlotte, NC
Participant 3	23	Male	Hispanic	Mexico	2010	2014	Charlotte, NC
Participant 4	24	Female	Hispanic	Mexico	2011	2015	Charlotte, NC
Participant 5	25	Male	Hispanic	Mexico	2012	2016	Charlotte, NC
Participant 6	26	Female	Hispanic	Mexico	2013	2017	Charlotte, NC
Participant 7	27	Male	Hispanic	Mexico	2014	2018	Charlotte, NC



11

Rodney's Study

- Self-Affirmation Theory** is the belief that people are motivated to maintain high levels of self-integrity (Steele, 1988).
- People overcome perceived attacks on self-identity by affirming other aspects of self that are of equal importance (Steele, 1988).



12

Rodney's Study

- How has being an undocumented student impacted your life?
- What can schools and staff do to impact the dreams of attaining a college education and gainful employment?



13

Patrick's Study

Social Capital Theory

- The theory of social capital describes the network of people that an individual has and how that network can provide the individual with resources through their connections (Ruth, 2018).
- Individuals can "patchwork" information and resources from various members of the group (Enriquez, 2011).



14

Patrick's Study

Action/Year	Title	Findings
Oliver (2022)	No undocumented child left behind: Path to DREAM the education of undocumented immigrants.	Path to DREAM equal access to a DREAM education for undocumented immigrants, but not college.
Smith and Miller (2014)	In-state college tuition policies for undocumented immigrants: Implications for high school enrollment among non-student Hispanic youth.	In-state Resident Tuition policies impact undocumented student success in high school and graduation rates.
Shultz (2021)	The art of the reveal: Undocumented high school students, institutional agents, and the disclosure of legal status.	Reporting or not reporting legal status to school officials change access to information about college.
Enriquez (2011)	Because we feel the pressure and we also feel the support.	Most students use social capital to arrive at needed information.
Ruth (2018)	Measuring the college dream: The effects of parents on the social capital of first generation undocumented immigrant students.	Support systems from families, schools, and communities can help immigrant, first-generation and minority students gain access to higher education.
Treviño and English (2017)	Finding freedom: Facilitating postsecondary pathways for undocumented students.	School practices can either limit or provide access to social capital.



15

Patrick's Study

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16

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17

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18

Patrick's Study

- Patrick's study examined how access to social capital impacts a student's ability to go to college.



19

Findings

- Students are extremely resilient
- Live in constant fear for themselves and family members
- Limited opportunities - *"I have to pay three times the tuition to attend ECU as my brother"*
- Acculturative Stress

20

Findings

- Safety and Security - *"Make us feel protected"*
- Access to information relevant to their situation
- Share successes
- "Don't single us out"*
- Representation matters
- Viewed based on content of character, not immigration status

21

Findings

- Connect school, family and community supports
- Educate students and families on laws and how support matters
- Educate teachers and counselors on their role
- Build a school environment that outwardly shows support
- Coach students on rigorous courses and self-determination

22

How You Can Help

- Support In-State tuition legislation for NC (HB-319)
- Support community advocates and schools that work with undocumented students and families
- Learn about current legislation and social biases that impact undocumented students

23

How You Can Help

- Support campus policies and initiatives that help undocumented students feel involved
- Partner with organizations that support undocumented students and can help guide our efforts
- Develop local initiatives to support undocumented students

24

Supportive Organizations

- North Carolina Society of Hispanic Professionals - <https://www.thencshp.org/>
- LatinxEd - <https://latinxed.org/about-us/>
- ImmSchools - <https://www.immschools.org/>



