

Running head: CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND COLLEGE PLANNING

Career Development and College Planning Needs of Rural High School Students

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### Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank the counseling department at Livonia Central School District for providing me with the opportunities that have been available to me during the past year. A special thank you to Sandy for your invaluable guidance and support is necessary; for without you none of this would have been possible. To my husband- and most likely the only person other than my professor who will read this cover to cover- I offer the most abundant gratitude to you. It was you who, while packing to move into our first house together, tore apart a cardboard box in order to quickly construct a makeshift easel that held up my many articles of research as I wrote my literature review. It was you who listened to and soothed me from my self induced panic attacks while I tried to unpack those boxes, prepare for days at my internship, research for my thesis, and oh, plan our wedding...all while you worked twelve hour night shifts in order to support us. Thank you for your support. Not just the physical kind of support that the cardboard easel provided me with in order to hold up my research, not just the financial kind that you provide our family with, (by family at the current time I mean myself and our six month old cockapoo puppy), but for the emotional kind that you provide me with every day. I love you. *Here's to a happy and successful future together.* To my classmates at Brockport- and most likely the only other people who will ever understand the significance of the two words "bind" and "it" used together in a sentence uttered- or typed- by Dr. Thomas Hernandez-thank you for the understanding as I showed my soul to you in Self and Society, and thank you for the laughs we shared in Implementation. *Here's to beginnings and to ends.* To my parents- and the only two people who truly know both who I have been and who I am now- thank you for your unconditional love and for instilling in me the value of education and a good sense of humor. You are the reason I am who I am today. *Here's to you both.*

Table of Contents

Abstract.....5

Review of the Literature.....7

    Definitions.....7

    Career Development Theories.....10

    College-for-all Policy.....18

    Identified Needs.....23

    Rural Populations.....25

    Interventions.....28

    Implications.....33

Method.....36

    Participants.....37

    Materials.....38

    Procedure.....38

    Analysis.....39

Results.....40

    Survey Question One.....40

    Survey Question Two.....42

    Survey Question Three.....43

    Survey Question Four.....44

    Survey Question Five.....45

    Survey Question Six.....46

    Survey Question Seven.....47

Survey Question Eight.....	48
Discussion.....	49
General Findings.....	49
Needs and Implications.....	52
Limitations.....	55
Conclusion.....	56
References.....	58
Appendix A.....	64
Appendix B.....	74

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine career and college planning needs of rural high school students. This was done by investigating archival data previously collected by a high school in a rural school district in the Northeastern United States. The initial research was done to examine the level of perceived preparedness for life after high school of the senior class at this high school. The purpose of re-examining the results was to find opportunities to meet career and college planning through district school counseling department initiatives. The findings suggest that opportunities do in fact exist, that rural populations have unique career and college planning needs, and that school counselors can strive to meet these needs. For example, participant responses suggested that students need more knowledge and understanding of financial aid, college requirements, and what career opportunities will exist for them in the future. Upon conclusion, a specific suggestion of developing and implementing a K-12 career development portfolio is given. A K-12 career portfolio would enhance career development through human development, help to streamline and improve district counseling curriculum, and serve as documentation of career and college planning throughout a students' schooling.

### Career Development and College Planning Needs of Rural High School Students

“Yet there is no part of life where the need for guidance is more emphatic than in the transition from school to work, - the choice of a vocation, adequate preparation for it, and the attainment of efficiency and success” (Parsons, 1909, p. 4).

Frank Parsons can be considered the father of career counseling. These words-that were written 100 years ago- are still so incredibly applicable to the world of career counseling and college planning today. Parsons not only writes of the significance of vocational choice, but of a very momentous transition: that from school to work. Parsons writes of a need for guidance during vocational choice and during this momentous transition. Guidance counselors- now more appropriately deemed “school counselors”- are in the most paramount position to offer this support that Parsons deemed so emphatic. School counselors should help students choose a college and/or a career, prepare to be successful in either or both, and learn how to find that success.

I chose to seek the answer to the following question: What are the career and college planning needs of rural students? I sought the answer to this question for several reasons. Primarily, the school I was involved in wanted the answer to this question. Secondly, I find the positions that school counselors are in so incredibly “emphatic”- to use Parson’s words- to career development. What better position to be in to help students plan for their future than the one who helps them chart through their present? I believe none. While seeking the answer to that question I found many implications for school counselors. How can we assess career and college planning needs? How can we better help? Should we push students towards college? Do we offer career development lessons in Kindergarten? Possible answers to these questions can be seen throughout the review of the literature and the discussion of the research findings within the following document.

The literature reviewed below was done with the purpose of helping the counseling department at one school district to better serve their students. However, the information it contains- as well as the outcome of the study that follows- will be useful to any school district, anywhere. School counselors exist to help students with personal, social, academic, and career concerns. In order to help students, school counselors must first examine the needs that exist within their particular population of students. In this particular school district, the counselors believed there were gaps that needed to be filled in order to meet the career development and college planning needs of their students. This study examined what these gaps may have been and what needs they may have represented.

#### Review of the Literature

Throughout the past one hundred years, career development has been studied, career theories have been developed, and further research has been done. The purpose of this literature review was for the author to sort through these theories and research in order to find the most applicable concepts for this particular school district, it's counselors, and it's students. The literature will be reviewed first by clarifying terms and providing an exploration of pertinent theoretical concepts. Then, the concept of a vastly changing workplace will be introduced and career development and college planning needs of students will be identified. The unique needs of a rural population are also highlighted. Lastly, existing career development and college planning interventions are explored. Throughout the literature review, implications for school counselors will be discussed pertaining to the specific topic being investigated.

#### *Definitions*

Several terms will be used throughout this review of the literature and throughout the description of the following study that may require defining. Doing so will serve to clarify and

standardize concepts that may hold several different labels or meanings throughout the research on career development, college planning, rural populations, and school counseling.

This research will focus on addressing career and college planning needs. Specifically, a need, as explained by Jeffery et al. (1995), occurs when any form of stress motivates a person to act. Career development needs are frequently rooted in other human development needs (Jeffery, 1995). For example, having fulfilling personal relationships can be considered a human need; we are social creatures. A career development need that may stem from this human development need may be a desire to find a job where one can establish and grow through relationships with others. One who is looking to fulfill this need would best not consider a career that would require working in isolation. In addition, a career should be seen as a lifestyle concept instead of simply a job or a certain field of work (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). Careers are a large part of life, and are often how we define ourselves. A career is a lifelong process, not just which occupation we currently hold. Therefore, career development can be defined as “the lifelong psychological and behavioral processes as well as contextual influences shaping one’s career over the life span” (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005, p. 12). Career development does not end when high school ends- nor does college planning for that matter-as there are many changes that occur throughout our entire lives and many environmental influences that lead us to grow and change within our careers or during our postsecondary learning situations. As Super et al. (1992) stated, “career development is an ongoing process, from birth to death...” (p. 75). For the purpose of this study, college planning refers to the process of researching and selecting postsecondary education, preparing for attending the selected institution, as well as any professional learning opportunities that exist throughout one’s career. In each case, the school counselor is considered to be one of the best people to address career development and college planning needs. For the purpose of

this study, a school counselor is a school based mental health professional that assists students with any academic, personal, social and career development needs (The ASCA National Model, 2005).

The concept of career interventions should also be clarified, as several different types of interventions will be discussed. Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2005) argued that career development interventions involve either helping students increase self-awareness, career awareness, career maturity, develop decision-making skills relating to their future, job-searching skills, or coping skills relating to careers. Career interventions range widely in their complexity. For example, providing individual college counseling to a high school senior is a relatively simple career intervention and can be done on an as needed basis. On the other hand, implementing a kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) career counseling curriculum within a school district is an example of a more complex form of career intervention that would take many hours of research and development. Another important term to clarify that was briefly mentioned above is career maturity. Career maturity refers to the level at which a person is mastering career tasks pertinent for their developmental level (Anderson & Brown, 1997). Super et. al (1992) outlined Super's theoretical models and discussed how the Career-Development Assessment and Counseling (C-DAC) Model integrates developmental theory and assessment with the aim of improving career counseling. The authors of this article preferred the concept of career adaptability to that of career maturity. Career maturity denotes one single high point of maturity while career adaptability refers to the ability to cope with developmental tasks, perhaps with several different high points of maturity. The terms may be used interchangeably below. The concepts of self-awareness, career awareness, coping skills, and career maturity and

adaptability are important to note because several studies explored in this review of the literature refer to these concepts.

For example, Anderson and Brown (1997) studied approximately 100 high school seniors; half attended high school in an urban area and half in rural areas. Through their research-which consisted of having participants complete a packet containing career inventories, career decision making scales, and a demographic survey- they found that the higher one's confidence in their ability to take on the career decision-making process the more likely they are to have a mature attitude toward career decision-making in general. Therefore, career maturity in relation to the career decision-making process is an important concept in the world of career development research. Patton and Creed (2001) also researched career maturity within the context of career development by administering a career decision making scale and a career development inventory to Australian adolescents ages 12 to 18. They found that career maturity increased with age, however, career indecision seemed to increase in the senior year of high school. They proposed that external pressures within school systems might affect decisiveness; the reality of leaving school within months may create this higher level of uncertainty during this time (Patton & Creed, 2001). The idea that the stress of an impending transition affects career maturity portrays the interconnectedness of career needs with other human development needs as discussed by Jeffery et al. (1995), and that career development needs are in fact frequently rooted in other human development needs. In this example, typical external developmental pressures of transitioning and change affect internal feelings related to career and college planning.

### *Career Development Theories*

The career development theories that exist are also important to review because theories are the basis of career counseling techniques, interventions, and school or community career

programs. In a study by Lapan et al. (2003)-which evaluated the impact of several career development intervention strategies on post high school transitions- the authors argued that, “theory-driven career counseling interventions facilitate the growth patterns of constructs that lie at the heart of issues that motivate students to better performance and emotional well-being” (p. 340). This statement not only provides support for the idea that career and college planning interventions need to be based on sound career development theories but also that career needs and other mental health needs are often closely related; as discussed by Jeffery (1995) and Patton and Creed (2001). Just as terms were defined in order to clarify and standardize concepts, so should theories be discussed in order to provide a foundation for understanding career development, and also to understand the rationale for certain career development and college planning interventions.

The concept of career counseling began in the early 1900s with Frank Parsons’ book *Choosing a Vocation* (1909). In his book, Parsons’ emphasized self-knowledge, occupational knowledge, and decision-making skills; an approach now considered the “Trait and Factor approach” to career development. The assumptions behind Parson’s theory were that (a) it is better to chose a vocation than to hunt for a job, (b) one should only chose a vocation after careful self-analysis, (c) students should be presented with a comprehensive list of possible vocations, (d) expert advice is important, and (e) a detailed vocational plan should be written out. Parsons emphasized the importance of using scientific research in career counseling, or what he called “vocational guidance” in his book. Career counseling based on Parson’s theory would include (a) self analysis; students should realize their aptitudes, abilities, and ambitions, (b) information; students should be given knowledge about occupations including the requirements for that occupation, what it takes to succeed, and what the available opportunities are, (c)

stimulation; counselors should fuel student's ambitions with information and show students how to improve their efficiency, (d) cooperation; counselors should help students find gainful employment, and (e) systematic guidance and help; counseling should be provided throughout the transition from school to work and should include a detailed plan for the future and increase preparedness for work (Parsons, 1909).

Another important career development theorist is Donald Super. Super maintained that his theory is not necessarily one unique theoretical concept yet a set of theoretical concepts that takes into account aspects of career development taken from various areas of study (developmental, differential, social, personality, and phenomenological psychology). Self-concept and learning theories unify this set of theories that is based on fourteen propositions reviewed in *A Life-Span, Life-Space Approach to Career Development*- a chapter in *Career choice and development: Applying contemporary theories to practice* (Super, 1990). Within all of Super's writings the concepts of life-span and life-space were referred. Life-span refers to the stages of career development that happen over time in a person's life. Life-space refers to the roles people play within their occupational and personal lives (Super, 1990). The fourteen propositions include the following: (1) people differ in their abilities, personalities, values, interests, and self concepts (2) people are qualified for numerous occupations, (3) occupations require certain combinations of abilities, personalities, values, and interests, (4) people's self-concepts, preferences, abilities, and situations in which they live and work change with time and experience, (5) change is a sequence of growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline, (6) career patterns are influenced by a person's parental socioeconomic level, mental ability, education, skills, personality, career maturity level, and opportunity, (7) career maturity is determined by how successful one is at coping with earlier stages of career development, (8)

the concept of career maturity is hypothetical, (9) career development can be guided by others, (10) career development is the process of developing self-concepts, (Super states “It is a synthesizing and compromising process in which the self-concept is a product of the interaction of inherited aptitudes, physical makeup, opportunity to observe and play various roles, and evaluations of the extent to which the results of role playing meet with the approval of superiors and fellows [interactive learning]” (Super, 1990, p. 207), (11) role playing and learning from feedback leads to either the blending or the compromising of individual and social factors and of self-concepts and reality, (12) when a person finds outlets for their abilities, personality, values, and self-concept they may find work and life satisfaction, (13) the degree of a person’s work satisfaction is reliant on their ability to implement a self-concept, and finally (14) occupations provide a focus for personality (Super, 1990).

Super has also developed five figures that illustrate various aspects of career theory and development that are useful to review in researching career development (Super, 1990, 1994). The first is the Life Career Rainbow, which depicts the concepts of life-span and life-space by representing a life course with a person’s potential major life roles. The Archway of Career Determinants expands on this idea by illustrating more specific career aspects and roles within a life course. The Ladder Model of Life Career Stages depicts the sequence of life stages and specifies the ages at which they usually occur. The Cycling and Recycling Model for Developing Tasks is developed from the Ladder Model but is more like a matrix in showing how people cycle through life stages and may face the same task at different stages in their life. Lastly, the Web Model for Bases of Career Maturity shows a web of basic career development concepts and maturity based on childhood career development literature (Super, 1990, 1994). Super’s fourteen points as well as the five figures briefly discussed above can prove very useful to school

counselors. More broadly, Super's set of theoretical concepts is considered a "trait and factor" theory. Trait and factor theories heavily emphasize the importance of an effective person-environment fit. School counselors who subscribe to trait and factor theories would encourage students to explore their personalities, values, and aptitudes as well as what personalities, values, and aptitudes their desired occupations would require.

Linda Gottfredson's work focused largely on how career aspirations are developed or eliminated during childhood and adolescence. Her theory is very complex and includes many subtleties concerning the socialization of children and how it influences career development. This theory emphasizes the importance of career development in the early years and notes the significance of social class and gender; it is referred to as "Circumscription and Compromise". Circumscription refers to the first stages of developing a self-concept and occupational preference; children eliminate certain occupations as possibilities based on gender and prestige as they become more aware of sex roles and social class through their socialization (Gottfredson, 1981). Circumscription has four stages. The first, orientation to size and power, refers to the stage in which pre-school and kindergarten age children (ages three through five) begin to classify people and careers in terms of "big" and "little" or "powerful" and "weak". The second stage, orientation to sex roles (ages six through eight) refers to the time when children begin to make distinctions in people and careers based on visible attributes such as sex roles; they then begin to eliminate careers based on their own gender. For example, a young female student who has seen no female doctors in her short life may eliminate the possibility that she can aspire to be a doctor during this stage. The third stage (ages nine through thirteen) is that of orientation to social valuation. During this stage children become more aware of social status among people and prestige within careers; they begin to eliminate careers that are too low or too high in

prestige for their own self-concept. The fourth and final stage is the orientation to unique and final self (ages fourteen and above) where adolescents become more aware of alternative career opportunities and of their own interests and values. During this stage an adolescent would begin to eliminate even more incompatible occupations (Gottfredson, 1981). Compromise refers to the idea that individuals will often compromise on their career choice because not all compatible careers will be available. This can be due to accessibility, perceived ability, or current job market trends (Gottfredson, 1981). This theory emphasizes the importance of career development in the early years and notes the significance of social class and gender. School counselors who subscribe to this theory would target career development at an early age by beginning career counseling in the primary levels. One simple way to do so would be to show atypical career role models at the primary level in order to help children avoid eliminating careers based on gender, prestige, or social class.

Lastly, the theory of types and person-environment interactions of John Holland must be explored. Much research has stemmed from Holland's theory; in fact, Gottfredson's theory was based on this. The theory of John Holland was explained in *Making Vocational Choices: A theory of vocational personalities and work environments* (1997). His theory focused on person-environment interactions in order to help people find career satisfaction and positive change. His theory is often referred to as the "RIASEC" theory after the six personality and environment types: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional (Holland, 1997). The "Self-Directed Search" (SDS) is an inventory developed by Holland based on his theory that can be very useful in career counseling (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2005). This inventory helps students learn which three personality types they fit into, and then provides a list of occupations that would most likely require someone with that combination of personality types. For example,

someone who is “REC” would be realistic, enterprising, and conventional. This type of person may be best suited for an occupation such as accounting, or working in the sales office of a big corporation where the work is black and white and there are traditional management and employee relationships. Someone who is “AIS” would be artistic, investigative, and social. This person may best be suited for an occupation such as managing a day camp for children where they would need to be creative and to interact with many different types of people.

Concepts and theories pertaining to career development and college planning must be viewed through a critical lens of the simple idea that times change. Along with the times, student needs also change. Within the past few decades there have been advances in technology and changes in the workplace along with transformations in society and the economy. In 2002 The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics published a document entitled “Working in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. In this document, it was reported that:

- “The labor force is growing more slowly,
- The labor force is getting older,
- More women are working today than in the past,
- Minorities are the fastest growing part of the labor force,
- Immigrants are found at the high and low ends of the education scale,
- Education pays,
- Some jobs with above-average earnings do not require a bachelor's degree, but most require substantial training,
- Workers with computer skills are in demand,
- The ten occupations that will generate the most jobs range widely in their skill requirements,

- Benefits account for more than one-quarter of total compensation,
- Retirement plans are changing,
- Workers will be supporting more Social Security recipients,
- The trend in years spent with an employer is down for men and up for women,
- The temporary help industry has grown rapidly,
- The most common alternative employment arrangement is independent contractor,
- Most mothers work,
- Married couples are working longer, and
- The workplace is becoming safer,” (The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002).

This list portrays changes in the workplace and the transformations that have occurred in society and the economy. For example, the increasing importance of education or job training highlights workplace transformations as skills are becoming more important and more specific. The ideas that benefits account for high percentages of total compensations, that retirement plans are changing, and that workers will support more Social Security recipients’ highlights economical change. This list also sheds light on the changing population that exists within the workplace. For example, women and minorities have become a larger part of the workforce. Interestingly, they are becoming a larger part then the times during which many of the above career development theories were developed. The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2002) Working in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century also forecasted that technology jobs, human health care, education, fitness, and animal health care will be the jobs to grow the fastest. Currently, knowledge jobs- those that require working in an office and developing and implementing ideas based on knowledge of a specific subject area- are the largest, fastest growing, and highest paid

occupations (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). These occupations include jobs in education and health care. Carnevale and Desrochers (2003) studied changes in the distribution of jobs in the United States, provided a breakdown of where these changes have occurred, and suggested that school counselors who understand how economic changes affect skill requirements could better prepare their students.

Jarvis et al. (2003) analyzed traditional vocational decision-making models and discussed a new approach to career development within schools. They suggested that because of the ever-changing workplace students should identify and research industry divisions and prepare for multiple roles within those divisions instead of preparing for just one specific occupation. Students need to be taught how to be flexible and adaptable. According to Gaymer (1972) students need to be “seriously and continuously” (p. 23) informed that their working lives will be full of change. They should be prepared to change jobs often within their field, relocate to different areas of the country, change their type of work, and that their education will need constant amendments through further education or professional development. Gaymer (1972) wrote an article entitled “Career Counseling- Teaching the Art of Career Planning” in which she stressed the importance of postsecondary education and the opinion that students need to expect change in the work environment and be ready to change themselves.

### *College-for-all Policy*

The idea of a changing workplace and the importance of postsecondary education in preparing for this workplace brings about a passionate debate seen in the career development and college planning literature: are college-for-all policies appropriate? A college-for-all policy is seen when a school encourages all students to attend some form of postsecondary education instead of prepare them for the world of work. Interestingly, Barker and Satcher (2000) surveyed

151 high school counselors in the Southeast and found that work bound students receive less attention than college bound students from school counselors, yet that counselors tend to view work-bound students and college-bound students as similar in their needs for assistance with career development. It appears that school counselors acknowledge that both work-bound and college-bound students have developmental needs but may view the needs of college-bound students as more urgent or more important than those of work-bound students (Barker & Satcher, 2000).

Nevertheless, researchers have found support for using college-for-all policies within schools. Carnevale and Desrochers (2003) went as far as to say “The only thing more costly than going to college is not going to college at all” (p. 228). They argued that employers look at educational attainment in order to screen job applicants, that the demand for highly trained employees will continue to rise, that skill demands will go beyond basic cognitive skills, and that a high school diploma is going to be less and less likely to help people find high paying jobs (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). This information would suggest that a college-for-all policy is very appropriate in our current society.

Yet, many more researchers have argued against using college-for all-policies within schools. Surprisingly, although Carnevale and Desrochers (2003) did advocate for students to attend some form of postsecondary education, they also suggested that students needed to graduate from high school with soft skills (cognitive skills such as problem solving skills, decision making skills, and effective communication skills) that are needed in the workplace. After all, students may work during their college career or may drop out of college. For example, Rosenbaum (1998) studied high school seniors and a group of 12 year follow up participants that were previously sophomores studied in the Chicago metropolitan area. Rosenbaum found that

eighty percent of students studied who had low grades in high school failed to get a degree when attending community college. This is an alarmingly high percentage. Arguing adamantly against the policy, Rosenbaum (1998) wrote that a college-for-all policy represents high expectations but leads to higher rates of failure in high school and also leads to more students being unprepared to work after high school. Even college-bound youth begin to believe they can still attain their plans if they do poorly in high school because, quite truthfully, most people are accepted into college now due to open admissions policies. As a result, efforts are reduced in high school and as much as forty percent of students studied believe their success in high school is irrelevant to their success in the future (Rosenbaum, 1998). As mentioned above, less attention is given to work-bound students than college-bound students in schools (Barker & Satcher, 2000). When this happens, work-bound students are misinformed about necessary skills and successful behaviors and often struggle in the labor market without the knowledge of a second chance for more education, as reported by Feller (2003), who analyzed changing workplace needs and employer demands. Recall that group that consisted of eighty percent of poorly performing high school students (Rosenbaum, 1998)- this most likely includes them.

Rosenbaum et al, (1996) interviewed 27 counselors in eight different high schools and found that half of the counselors surveyed reported that they advise college-for-all. If such convincing research is against the policy, why is it used? First open admissions policies exist in community colleges, so as mentioned above, virtually anyone can be accepted into college. For that reason, counselors often encourage students with low grades to “experiment” with college by going to a community college (Rosenbaum, 1996). Second, Rosenbaum et al. (1996) also found that counselors reported that they do not want to be the bearer of bad news. For example, counselors may not think it is their place to discourage students and advise against students’

existing plans (Rosenbaum et al., 1996 & Krei, 2001). Rosenbaum (1996) also found that counselors often protect students' high expectations of themselves even when students have unrealistic goals based on these expectations. This prevents students from taking extra effort to reach their goals or from preparing alternative plans. If students are not informed that they do not have the skills for a specific occupation, how do they know that they need to try and obtain them? Third, counselors push college-for-all policies because they fear angry parents.

Rosenbaum (1996) found that half of counselors surveyed reported that they use this policy because they fear complaints from parents. Lastly, students themselves may lean towards college-for-all because they view being work-bound as a stigmatizing label (Krei, 2001). Krei (2001) studied verbatim interview answers of 35 guidance counselors and 80 vocational teachers from 12 Chicago schools and found that most school counselors encourage students to attend college regardless of the student's plans, abilities, or interests. They also reported that 86 percent of students planned to get college degrees; this shows a high number of students planning on attending postsecondary education, yet how many of them would have been work-bound had this label not carried such a stigma? Unfortunately, this question wasn't addressed in that study.

Importantly, though, some researchers have found actual differences between college-bound and work-bound students, not just in their plans for life after high school. For example, college-bound students see themselves as more sociable and have fewer conflicts with family and authorities, as reported by Berdie and Hood (1964). Berdie and Hood (1964) investigated social and personal attitudes, values, and school experiences of high school seniors and their post high school plans. College-bound students saw themselves as more sociable and indicated few conflicts with others, whereas work-bound students found themselves more shy and expressed less social competence (Berdie & Hood, 1964). Several inferences can be drawn from this.

Perhaps school counselors view work-bound students as difficult to work with, therefore; they give them less attention in career development curriculum. Or, perhaps the more social college-bound students seek help from school counselors because of their sociability. On the other hand, the more socially challenged work-bound students may be less apt to seek out a school counselor's assistance. Even more interestingly, perhaps these students made their postsecondary plans based on their social abilities, with work-bound students feeling apprehensive about entering the very social world of college. This is an area full of opportunities for future exploration.

The research surrounding the college-for-all debate offers many implications for school counselors. Krei (2001) suggested that school counselors give students realistic information about their chances of being accepted into college and about their chances of success. Students should also be advised on how to better these chances. Krei (2001) also suggested that all students be helped to prepare for the workplace in the chance that they do not attend college or complete a degree. It is a reality that students need to be prepared for both the workforce and for some form of postsecondary education when they exit high school. Although work-bound students may immediately enter the workforce after high school, Herr (1997)-who discussed the characteristics and needs of work-bound youth- reported that it is likely that they will enter some form of continuous learning in postsecondary education at some point such as college or vocational job training. Continuous learning leads to success for both work-bound and college-bound students, so both types of students should be knowledgeable of how to seek information on obtaining more education (Barker & Satcher, 2000). On the other hand, college-bound students should graduate high school with the skills necessary for the workplace in the chance that they work during their college career or that they drop out of college before obtaining a

degree (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). Moreover, counselors need to show students the payoffs of hard work in high school; students must understand the relationship between high school and life after high school (Krei, 2001). This may help increase students' work ethic and effort in high school and increase their chances for success in the future. Rosenbaum (2003) again argued against a college-for-all policy and proposed implications for counselors based on misconceptions about the policy. The implications included the ideas that (a) low-achieving students should be warned about their prospects in college and about possibly having to repeat high school courses in college, (b) students with college plans must be prepared for work by having a career plan involving multiple alternatives, (c) effort in high school must be encouraged, and it must be understood that many good jobs do not require a college degree, (d) students should be encouraged to increase academic achievement, take vocational courses, and get job placement help from school professionals, and lastly (e) employment prospects can be best improved before students leave high school (Rosenbaum, 2003). Therefore, school counselors play a critical role in meeting the career development and college planning needs of students in this vastly changing workplace whether a student is work-bound or college-bound.

### *Identified Needs*

School counselors can play this critical role, but they must understand what career development and college planning needs they serve to meet. Some career development research has focused on the career development needs that have been identified in middle school, junior high, and senior high school students. Junior high school and senior high school aged students (grades seven through twelve) worry about meeting entrance requirements for college or other postsecondary education such as vocational training. Code et al. (2006) surveyed a vast number (6,481) of students grades seven through twelve and found that they also worry about finances,

about the difficulty of work, about failing, and about making a commitment to the wrong career choice. This shows that students need help developing a confident, mature attitude about career decision-making. They need to know how to search for information and how to develop alternative plans. Bardick et al. (2004) also surveyed several thousands of students- however, in a province in Canada- and reported that students want increased skills training, higher grades, help from a career center, and help knowing what courses they should be taking in high school.

Overall, there is a need for approaching career and college planning within a developmental needs framework. Students need resources and support from many people while developing career plans, understanding interests and abilities, obtaining information about postsecondary education, and obtaining information on finances (Bloxom et al., 2008). One important need that the literature highlights is that students need help understanding the cost of college and need to know about financial aid opportunities. Many students- and parents alike- believe finances to be their biggest obstacle blocking them from going to college. They often substantially overestimate the cost of college, as reported by Gibbons et al. (2006), who surveyed over two hundred ninth grade students in Southeast America. In conducting their research, Gibbons et al. (2006) had students take home an informational packet containing a survey to read over and complete with a parent. However, a major flaw in this research is that it is unknown whether or not the answers to the surveys were the parents' or the students' responses.

Unfortunately, school counselors do not always meet the career development and college planning needs of their students. Several researchers have examined who students seek for career development and college planning help; school counselors were often very low on the list. For example, Gibbons et al. (2006) found that ninth grade students reported parents and family the most helpful in career decision-making, and found school counselors to be reported as least

helpful. An analysis of several studies show that students rate parents or families, friends, and interesting classes or teachers as most helpful in making career or college decisions (Gibbons et al., 2006, Bardick et al, 2004, Noeth et al., 1984). One study, however, found school counselors to be high on the list when they asked students whom they *would* go to for help (Bloxom et al., 2008). It seems that in many cases students understand that school counselors have the resources to help them with career development and college planning, yet they are not using the support available to them through the school counselors. Counselors must take this into account when developing career interventions; either marketing themselves more effectively to students or requiring career planning visits to the counseling center in order to ensure that students use available resources.

### *Rural Populations*

It is important to understand that different populations may have different needs. In the research following this literature review, a rural population was studied. Rural students and communities present unique career development and college planning needs. Jeffery et al. (1995) explored rural career counseling needs by holding focus groups with parents, community members, and students, According to these researchers rural communities have more close-knit families and homogenous populations. Rural communities may experience geographic isolation and may have limited resources. Furthermore, according to a study of rural high school students from three North Dakota high schools, the barriers that exist in rural communities include reduced accessibility to higher education, limited exposure to different occupations, and fewer high-achieving role models in the community (Apostal & Bilden, 1991). As a result, students in rural areas may have heightened career needs. For example, rural, disadvantaged youth have a higher degree of career indecision and lower levels of career maturity (Rojewski, 1994).

However, the study that concluded this information- Rojewski, 1994- specifically looked at the career maturity and career decision making of economically disadvantaged students in a rural community. It is important to note that although rural communities may experience higher levels of poverty, not all rural students are economically disadvantaged. Another characteristic that has been reported of rural students is lower career aspirations, as reported by Lapan et al. (2003) who studied several hundred eighth grade students in a rural Midwestern American state. Low career aspirations exist when an individual does not set high career goals such as an occupation requiring high skill levels. On the other hand, urban and rural schools are often compared, and in one study (Anderson & Brown, 1997) rural seniors scored significantly higher than urban seniors on tests of career knowledge and skills. Nonetheless, the average scores of both populations were below the national average. Rural students themselves have expressed desires for career development programs that help them explore career options outside of their community; thus, there is a need for programs that show them resources outside of the community (Lehr & Jeffery, 1996).

Conversely, some researchers have argued that the career development and college planning needs of students in rural populations are not unique. For example, Apostol and Bilden (1991) surveyed high school seniors in a rural area and found that they actually held high educational and occupational aspirations. It is important to note that the main difference between this study and that by Lapan et al (2003) is the mean age of the students. Students surveyed by Lapan et al. (2003) were approximately five years younger than those surveyed by Apostol and Bilden (1991) and this could be the reason for such disparate results. Nevertheless, Apostol and Bilden (1991) argued that school professionals should provide resources at a level that matches these high aspirations. Importantly, this conflicting research tells us that the specific needs of a

school population should be assessed before school counselors make any assumptions about the career needs of their students.

Importantly, it has been found that many rural students planning for college will be first generation college students (Fallon, 1997) and that this specific population in fact has unique needs. Fallon (1997) discussed the unique needs of these students and provided implications for school counselors. A first generation college student is the first in their family to attend a postsecondary institution. First generation college students have parents that may not understand the importance of college (Fallon, 1997). According to Fallon (1997) these parents worry that children will not come home after they leave for college or that college will be a financial burden. This is why it is crucial for school counselors in rural settings to help parents and students alike. Parents should be given the opportunity and resources to take a confident, effective, and active role in the career development process (Downing & D'Andrea, 1997), especially because students often rate parents as the most influential in their career decision making (Gibbons et al., 2006).

Specifically, parents in rural populations have unique needs of their own. Downing and D'Andrea (1997) reviewed career development programs both in the United States and in Switzerland, specifically looking at parental involvement. They reported that parents are often concerned about the quality of career development and college planning assistance given to their children. Therefore, parents should be informed about the career curriculum that their school uses. A study conducting focus groups found that rural parents and community members believed that they have different needs than those of urban or suburban parents (Lehr & Jeffery, 1996). These parents expressed concerns about the financial strain of their children attending distant postsecondary institutions. They worried about the "red tape" involved in filing financial

assistance forms. They worried that their children's career choices should be correct for financial reasons; they wanted to avoid expensive mistakes. Parents in rural settings believe that they do not know enough about career education themselves; they don't know what information exists or where to get it. They may believe they are not supported well enough by community agencies. These parents expressed a lack of confidence in making contact with distant institutions or agencies and wanted opportunities like job shadowing and mentoring for their children from these more distant institutions and agencies (Lehr & Jeffery, 1996). Knowing all of this, school counselors must take actions to ensure that parents are empowered and informed so that they may better help their children in career development and college planning. They also must ensure that resources in the community are evident so that parents know what information exists and where to find it.

### *Interventions*

As discussed above, numerous types of structured interventions exist to meet the career development and college-planning needs of students and parents. Many interventions have been developed based on governmental regulations such as the School-To-Work-Opportunities Act (STWOA), National Occupational Information Coordinating Committee (NOICC), and the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) Report. The STWOA was an education reform initiative that sought to create universal school-to-work opportunities in America (STWOA, 1994). Lapan et al. (2003) evaluated the effectiveness of implementing career interventions that were recommended by the STWOA in a rural adolescent population and found that they were in fact effective. Gore et al. (2003) also examined whether students who participated in STWOA based programs saw benefits. They found modest support and a consistent positive effect for career majoring in high school, which is one intervention suggested

by STWOA. Students who career major pick groups of classes in high school that focus on a particular career sector. Career majors give students more confidence in their direction (Gore et al., 2003). The NOICC began years earlier, in 1986, and focused on developmental guidelines for standards in career development programs at all levels. The NOICC listed career development competencies and indicators that high school students should meet. The competencies are as follows:

- “Competency I: Understanding the influence of a positive self-image,
- Competency II: Skills to interact positively with others,
- Competency III: Understanding the impact of growth and development,
- Competency IV: Understanding the relationship between educational achievement and career planning,
- Competency V: Understanding the need for positive attitudes toward work and learning,
- Competency VI: Skills to locate, evaluate and interpret career information,
- Competency VII: Skills to prepare to seek, maintain, and change jobs,
- Competency VIII: Understanding how societal needs and functions influence the nature and structure of work,
- Competency IX: Skills to make decisions,
- Competency X: Understanding the interrelationship of life roles,
- Competency XII: Understanding the continuous changes in male/female roles, and
- Competency XII: Skills in career planning,” (NOICC, 1986).

Overall, these competencies gave a broad theoretic base from which to develop career interventions with an emphasis on positive attitude, understanding connection between school

and work, developing soft skills, and increasing career maturity and career decision-making skills.

The SCANS Report was a statement that focused on the skills that young people need in order to succeed in the workplace, and it supported a K-12 developmental approach. The five basic competencies of the SCANS were (1) available resources, (2) interpersonal skills (3) informational skills-the ability to acquire and evaluate information-, (4) knowledge of systems, and (5) technological skills. These competencies lay on a three part foundation including (1) academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, (2) critical thinking skills, and (3) personal qualities such as responsibility and integrity. Barker and Satcher (2000) supported the use of the principals of the SCANS report and recounted that a K-12 model of career guidance based on the principals of the SCANS is an effective way of tackling career development within schools.

As discussed previously, several researchers have sought to describe terms related to career development and college planning. Some researchers have even attempted to clearly define the types of interventions that are seen in the career counseling literature that serve to meet career development and college planning needs. For example, Dykeman et al. (2003) studied the categorization of career development and narrowed the research down to four types of interventions. The first was work-based interventions; these included interactions with community businesses and organizations. The second was advising interventions; this type of intervention encompassed individual career counseling and planning. The third is introductory interventions, which showed students their own interests and promote self-exploration, such as an inventory assessment. Lastly, the fourth type was called curriculum-based interventions; long-

term interventions that emphasized academic and career awareness, such as a district counseling plan to implement classroom guidance lessons in careers to all grade levels.

It is evident that there is considerable literature concerning career developmental and college planning needs of students that suggest implications for school personnel and describe the certain types of interventions that exist. Research reporting on the effectiveness of specific interventions is limited, though (Baker & Taylor, 1998). It is important to note the findings of Baker and Taylor (1998) who conducted a meta-analysis of career education interventions. Only twelve studies met the requirements for their analysis. However, they found that throughout the past three decades goals and interventions are salient throughout the studies that they analyzed, and they reported that career education interventions seem to have a modest affect size of .34. An affect size of .2 would be considered small, and an affect size of .5 would be considered medium. All but one study that they analyzed had a positive average affect, and although limited, it provided support for career interventions within schools.

Even with limited research in this area, the above discussion pertaining to needs and interventions provides us with several implications for school counselors. First, involving parents is important. Programs that bring parents and students together should be implemented in order to facilitate discussions at home and give families quality resources (Gibbons et al., 2006). Secondly, interventions must be continuous and not fragmented. Career development and college planning curriculum should be well coordinated and should provide support during transitions instead of simply before and/or after them (Smith & Rojewski, 1993).

Although there is limited research about the effectiveness of specific types of career development and college planning interventions, research has supported the use of career counseling in general. Career counseling has positive effects on well-being and skill

development, as well as positive effects overall for schools. Specifically: career counseling clients have higher rates of retention than control groups, as reported by Anderson (2002) who studied the sole effect of career counseling on retention. Positive relationships have also been found between guidance programs and general feelings of self-worth and positive feelings toward school. This idea supports school counseling in general. Specifically, implementing the use of career guidance competencies can bring about positive relationships with peers, increased ability to get along with others, and an increase in abilities related to career planning and educational development in high school students as reported by Multon & Lapan (1995).

Knowing the above information, there are even greater implications for school counselors regarding career development and college planning interventions. Carnevale and Desrochers (2003) suggested that certain indirect competencies should be the overall focus of career development and college planning curriculum. These competencies include soft skills such as problem solving and interpersonal communication. Students need to learn how to work in groups, have positive self-esteem, and good reasoning and problem-solving skills in order to take part in continuous education and find success in the world of work (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003). Especially within the context of a vastly changing work environment, school counselors should help instill in students creativity, entrepreneurial skills, communication skills, team building skills, imagination, flexibility, adaptability, and a sense of ethics (Feller, 2003).

If not for the above rationales, school counselors must focus on career development and college planning because students need to be prepared for the shift that will happen after high school. Whitefield (1988) describes this shift as follows:

“Students have spent their lives in a society structured to meet their needs and promote their achievements. They must now adapt to an occupational society where they are

valued for producing a result or product external to their own growth and development. Their development and success now become their responsibilities to be achieved as by-products of their efforts and the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards gained from their contributions to the occupational society” (p. 15).

It is evident that students in schools across America have needs pertaining to career development and college planning. An argument has been made that school counselors should use specific interventions to meet these needs, and implications of several studies on school counseling career guidance programs have been reviewed. Overall, it is clear that school counselors need to implement specific career development strategies in order to meet these needs.

### *Implications*

One way of meeting career development needs would be through the use of career portfolios. Developing a career portfolio would enhance a K-12 career development and college-planning curriculum. A portfolio would also serve as a reference for students in post high school transition planning. According to Lane (2000), the focus of a portfolio would be on written accounts of personal career development. Also, students should consistently review their portfolios throughout their schooling. Lane (2000) reviewed career development research and wrote specifically about career decision-making. Career curriculums should be implemented in a K-12 fashion because career development and school-to-work transitions are part of a “gradually unfolding process” (Lapan et al., 2003, p. 330). Career curriculum should not be limited to high school. Wahl (2000) made suggestions of how it can be implemented in earlier years; for example, in the primary grades school counselors can introduce students to career vocabulary and clarify concepts pertaining to life after high school. As young children start imagining future

careers, school counselors can help them integrate realistic ideas. In the middle years, students can take part in projects that increase awareness of career trends and to understand how the workplace is constantly changing. In high school, aptitude and interest inventories can assist students in integrating skills, abilities, and career aspirations. Career portfolios not only help students look back and see the progress of their development, but they also help them look forward and imagine the favorable and not so favorable consequences of choosing particular courses. Rosenbaum (1997) encapsulated this idea when he discussed the consequences to choosing particular tracks in the early years of school. Students should be presented with the consequences of choosing any particular track and how it will relate to their future opportunities. For example, if a sixth grade student aspires to be a construction site project manager, school counselors should help this student understand the heavy emphasis on mathematics and technical drawing and encourage them to challenge themselves with higher level math tracks and architectural classes. A career portfolio would be helpful in this process.

At this point, one might argue: “What do career aspirations that students develop in the primary years have to do with the career plans they make in high school?” At first glance, they may seem unconnected. So many changes take place and so much development happens between the early and late years of school that one would think that career aspirations would surely also change. Will it matter what careers students fantasize about in primary school? As Trice and McClellan (1993) reported, “without barriers imposed by ability, children’s career aspirations persist into adulthood” (p. 370). In their research a surprisingly high number of exact matches of career aspirations were seen fifteen years later (up to 34 percent), and an even higher number of matches were seen for occupational themes instead of exact matches (over 50 percent). A study

two years later by McClellan (1995) also found a high level of consistency in occupational aspirations in the children studied.

As the research regarding college-for-all policies is conflicting, so is the research supporting K-12 programs and career portfolios. In a study by Helwig (2004) researching the consistency of career plans throughout time, 56 percent of occupational aspirations named by seniors were not expressed at any point previously in their schooling. The researchers suggested that the seniors moved away from looking at the social value of jobs in their junior and senior years (Helwig, 2004). This research supported the idea that instead of a K-12 approach including a portfolio that helps to plan for a particular career, curriculum should focus on increasing awareness and helping students develop the soft skills discussed above. Furthermore, Helwig (2004) made the argument that, "Career education and its consequent career development happen everywhere, all the time, but will only be effective when the recipient is ready" (p. 56).

Clearly, career development and college planning are complex processes. The complexity is described best by Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey (2005) when they stated, "Careers develop within the context of psychosocial development and societal expectations and against the backdrop of the occupational opportunity structure" (p. 42). The literature reviewed in this investigation supports the idea that students have complex career development and college planning needs that should be addressed throughout their schooling. It is evident that students should be assisted with career development and college planning needs and that schools should provide this help. Researchers have provided various implications to help school counselors or specified career counselors located within schools to coordinate and provide career and college planning services. The research has suggested several career and college planning needs of high school students- and also specifically- needs that students within rural settings may have. The

literature also lends to the fact that the needs of specific populations must be assessed because needs differ between populations. After reviewing the literature, the next step was to analyze data gathered on career development and college planning needs in order to determine which needs existed and which intervention would best suit the needs of the population.

### Method

This research used archival data to investigate career development and college planning needs of rural high school students. The original research was done during the 2008-2009 school year in a mid sized high school in a rural area of in Northeastern America. In order to better understand the population studied it may be helpful to review information about the school district provide by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). According to NYSED the district studied was considered in good standing for academic testing for the 2007-2008 school year. The district had approximately 2,000 students in general education and 150 students in special education. Approximately 650 students attended the high school. At this district, approximately \$14,000 was spent annually per student, while the statewide average for all New York public schools was \$17,000 for the 2007-2008 school year. It was estimated that for the 2007-2008 school year between 11 and 20 percent of families received some form of public assistance (NYSED, 2009). The amount of expenditures per student was lower than the state average, and the amount of families receiving public assistance was relatively high. This illustrates a higher level of poverty for this area, which is important to note because it has been established that rural areas and areas with higher levels of poverty may present unique career and college planning needs.

NYSED also presented information about students' post high school plans. According to data collected from seniors graduating in 2008, 36 percent of students planned to attend a four-

year college, 41 percent a two-year college, and two percent had some other post secondary plans. Three percent planned to join the military, while seven percent planned to go on to some form of employment. One percent of students had “other” known plans, while ten percent had no known plans (NYSED, 2009). Interestingly, an overwhelming majority of the students had plans to attend college (76 percent), while only seven percent had definite plans to enter the workforce. This may either represent a college-for-all policy within this school district, or simply show a sign of the times as open admissions policies sway more and more students to apply to college. This relatively high percentage of students planning to go on to postsecondary education must be remembered as the findings are reviewed. This means that there was much less of a chance that any verbatim response came from a student planning to go straight on to the workforce, thus; the analysis must be done with caution.

Although the information from NYSED presented above was collected one year prior to the research analyzed for this study it will still be seen as a valid representation of the population studied. After all, only one year had passed from one senior class to the next, so it was assumed that the percentages did not change significantly. The information for the 2008-2009 school year was not available at the time of this analysis.

### *Participants*

The above information is important because the data analyzed was archival and the initial survey conductors collected no demographic information from individual participants. What *is* known is that 121 participants took part in the survey and that all were members of the senior class of the high school detailed above, so it can be conjectured that the mean age of the participants was 18. It was reported by the initial conductors of the survey that the participants were selected purposefully by school staff in order to represent a cross section of the senior class,

thus forming a representative sample of the population. It is important to note that this selection was not done scientifically, which left room for bias in the selection of participants.

### *Materials*

The survey that was administered by the school staff consisted of eight questions that were asked orally to the participants, (see Appendix A). One staff member read the questions aloud while the other present staff members recorded responses. The questions are listed below:

- 1. “Academically, are you ready for life after high school? Explain your answer.”
- 2. “What do you think you need to know and be able to do to participate fully in tomorrow’s economy/society?”
- 3. “When you speak with recent graduates, what do they say about their readiness for college, military, or work?”
- 4. “When you think about graduating and moving on, what are you most nervous about?”
- 5. “Based on the first ten weeks of your senior year, what is your impression of the work that you are doing in your classes?”
- 6. “Think back on the class or course that had the most impact on you. Without telling the name of the teacher, or the class, why did it have the most impact on you?”
- 7. “Are your parents the major initiators in helping you develop your post-secondary plans? If so, why?”
- 8. “What do you think the school could do better to help you in the decision making process for after high school?”

### *Procedure*

According to the initial researchers, the students answered the survey questions as part of a regular school procedure of data collection. No extra credit or reward was given for

participation in the survey, and the students were pulled from required Economics and Government classes. According to the original survey document of results the “survey respondents answered [the] questionnaire independently and anonymously”. The method involved asking groups of students several survey questions and anonymously recording qualitative and quantitative information. Several staff members assisted with data collection; each was assigned to listen to and record two students’ responses during what could be described as a guided focus group. One staff member read the questions aloud; the participants did not have a copy of the questions in front of them. The answers were tallied as either *yes*, *no*, *yes and no*, *not sure/unknown*, or *no response*. Subsequently, oral responses were recorded as students were asked to explain their answer. For the purpose of this research they will be considered verbatim responses, however it is important to note that they are not true verbatim responses. Many have been tallied according to how many participants either agreed with the response or said something similar.

### *Analysis*

The initial objective of the research was to determine the perceived level of preparedness of high school seniors for life after high school. The purpose of this analysis of the existing data was to help determine specific career and college planning needs of rural high school students that can be addressed through school counseling initiatives. The analyses of this information could potentially result in recommendations for specific school counseling initiatives that may address the students’ needs. The archival data consisted mainly of qualitative data; *yes* or *no* responses to questions followed by statements made by the participants in order to explain their answer. This analysis looked at both the percentages and the verbatim responses given by the participants in order to find themes and inconsistencies.

## Results

As stated earlier, this analysis looked at both the percentages and the verbatim responses given by the participants in order to find themes and inconsistencies. For each question, first the numbers will be examined: what percentage of students said *yes*, *no*, *yes and no*, or *not sure/unknown* will be reported. Secondly, themes that are seen in the explanations of the answers will be analyzed. Thirdly, inconsistencies between and within the tallied *yes/no* responses and verbatim responses will be explored if appropriate.

*Survey Question One: “Academically, are you ready for life after high school? Explain your answer.”*

### *Percentages.*

In total, 96 (79.3 percent) participants answered *yes*, 11 (9.1 percent) answered *no*, 13 (10.7 percent) answered *yes and no*, and one response (0.9 percent of the data) is missing. For this question the *yes and no* responses can be described as a *yes, but...* response where a participant believed the primary answer to be *yes*, yet in their explanation described an opportunity for improvement by either themselves or the school. It is clear that the majority (96 out of 121; 79.3 percent) of participants believed they were prepared for life after high school.

### *Themes.*

For the first question there are several verbatim responses that tallied noticeably higher numbers. For those that responded *yes*, eight explained that “Advanced Coursework have helped prepare me”, five responded with “Strong study habits will help transition”, and five responded with “Organization skills will help transition”. For those that responded *no*, two explained, “I don’t know how to deal with finances in an efficient way”, and two explained, “No class can prepare me, college will be much tougher”. For those that responded *yes and no* two explained

that “I have done well in high school, but have no real idea what to expect in college”, and two said “Not completely, but getting there”, most likely meaning that they do not feel ready yet, but believe they will in the near future.

*Inconsistencies.*

Several students who answered *yes* attributed their level of preparedness to advanced coursework, classes, and reinforcement, which were most likely gained through school. One student in particular responded by saying “Livonia High School has helped me learn how to learn. When you know how to learn you can do anything”. Yet, two students responded with a very contradictory, “For the most part I wouldn’t give the school too much credit for it”. Several students attributed their level of preparedness to study habits, organizational skills, and work ethic- proficiencies that may or may not have been acquired through school. The 11 percent who believed that they were not ready for life after high school explained that they had a lack of knowledge about finances, lack of knowledge of what “life is going to be like”, and that they are not challenged enough by the school. Most participants attributed this lack of preparedness to the school, some even giving suggestions to assign more homework and some complaining that they are “treated like tenth graders”. Interestingly, one student explained that it is “not the school’s fault”, and another that “no class can prepare me, college will be much tougher”. They reported that they are not prepared, but did not believe that the school could have better prepared them. Those that answered *yes and no* explained that they were prepared yet intimidated about the future, not knowing what to expect in college. Several also gave suggestions of how they could be better prepared, such as “...I wish there were more classes like business math” and “...more motivational strategies still needed”. One of the *yes and no* respondents seemed to fit more in to the *yes* category as they explained “Yes, but high school is not the reason, personal experience

and exposure has prepared me for it". The majority of students answered *yes*, however, why they reported *yes*-how they became ready for life after high school- is still unclear. Many attributed it to school, some to personal characteristics, and some to personal experiences. Interestingly, all but one of the verbatim responses (an explanation of "joining the military helped guide career choice and readiness" to an answer of *yes*) seemed to come from college-bound students.

*Survey Question Two: "What do you think you need to know and be able to do to participate fully in tomorrow's economy/society?"*

*Percentages.*

A total of 102 participants responded; this amounts to 84.3%, whereas the researchers recorded 15 participants (12.4%) did not attempt to answer. For this question four responses (3.3% of the data) are missing. The significance of this data lies within the verbatim responses.

*Themes.*

An overwhelming total of 30 participants responded with "the ability to manage money". Several responses with less than five tallies each were also related to finances. For example, one participant responded with "how far will my money really go", and another with "asset allocation, cash flow, debt management". Eleven participants responded with "work effectively and manage time", ten with "knowledge of available careers that will allow me to contribute to the economy", and eight with "live on my own, be responsible for self". Seven participants responded, "how the economy works and ways we can better it", and six with "working with others". The remaining verbatim responses had less than five participants that said something similar to or agreed with the response. The overarching themes in question two seem to be that participants need to know more about finances, the economy, and the job market in order to be successful after high school.

*Inconsistencies.*

For the most part, question two consisted of participants communicating knowledge or skills they still need in order to make them successful after high school. What was considered inconsistencies in the previous question could be seen as a decent scope of responses for this particular question. Some participants communicated certain skills that they still needed, such as skills relating to money and time management. Some participants communicated knowledge that they still needed such as that of available jobs and the way the economy works. Some participants recounted that they still need to grow on a personal level to be able to make better decisions, ethical choices, and gain more self-responsibility.

*Survey Question Three: “When you speak with recent graduates, what do they say about their readiness for college, military, or work?”*

*Percentages.*

Out of 121 participants, 94 gave a general response (77.7%), 20 participants were tallied under *don't know* (16.5%), and seven did not respond (5.8%).

*Themes.*

This survey question showed a unique response. Out of 121 respondents, 49 were recorded to have said or agreed with a response like “They say they were ready”. This amounts to almost half (40.5%) of the survey participants agreeing that recent graduates of this high school were in fact ready for life after high school. Other significant responses were “Stay in school, do work, and be prepared for work” which five participants responded with, and lastly the responses of “they say they were pretty ready”, “not ready for first semester, but after that fine”, and “college is harder than high school” each had three respondents tallied to have said something like or agree with the statement.

*Inconsistencies.*

Most participants responded that recent graduates were “ready” “pretty ready”, “found a way to deal with it”, or were “fine” after their first semester of college. However, some respondents with fewer tallies next to the response were in opposition. One participant said, “they actually say that {this high school} doesn’t prepare us at all”, and two said or agreed with the idea that, “they weren’t ready to take control of their own funds and economic control”. Despite the inconsistencies it seems as though most recent graduates of this high school were academically ready for college, but may not have been as prepared to handle finances and any other responsibilities that come with living on your own.

*Survey Question Four: “When you think about graduating and moving on, what are you most nervous about?”*

*Percentages.*

Out of the 121 participants, 113 (93.4%) admitted to being nervous about something and gave examples of what it was, five (4.1%) said that *they were not nervous*, three (2.5%) gave no response.

*Themes.*

In the responses to this question several general themes were seen: nervousness about living independently, managing finances and student loans, being accepted into college or finding a job, and leaving home/friends/family. A significant number of 27 respondents were nervous about living independently. Living independently may mean living without the support system of a family or living financially independently, although several students specifically admitted to being most nervous about finances. Twelve participants said or agreed to the statement “where the money will come from and how I will spend it”, and eight to “student loans

and the insecurity of being able to pay them off because I won't pick the right career". Nine participants said, "not finding a job", and 11 said "leaving home, friends, and family".

*Inconsistencies.*

As with question two, what were previously been considered inconsistencies can be seen as a decent scope of responses for this question. However, one interesting finding came about in the responses to question four. As reported above, there were several students who said or agreed to the statement "student loans and the insecurity of being able to pay them off because I won't pick the right career", and several to "not finding a job". Picking the right career and finding a job can be seen as distinct responses. Picking the right career seems as though students are afraid that they will no longer desire to work in the career field that they gain a degree in, whereas finding a job seems as though students are worried that they will not find a source of income.

*Survey Question Five: "Based on the first ten weeks of your senior year, what is your impression of the work that you are doing in your classes?"*

*Percentages.*

Out of 121 participants, 119 attempted a response to this question (98.4%), one did not respond (.8%), and one response is missing (.8%).

*Themes.*

Both positive and negative responses are seen, but it seems that more participants felt positively towards the first ten weeks of their senior year. "Good" was a simple response given, yet 22 participants said or agreed to this simple response. Eleven participants said that it "readies us for the future, real world", nine that they are doing the "best I have ever done", and eight agreed that the work is "still challenging". However, several participants seem to look at their senior year in a more negative light. Eleven participants said, "I am not trying as hard in some

classes”, eight that it was “easy”, and six agreed with the idea that “I think I’m doing nothing and still in the 80s...Pointless!” most likely agreeing with those who said it was “easy”.

*Inconsistencies.*

As stated above, most participants thought that their senior year was “good”. Some participants saw their senior year as challenging and worthwhile, some saw it as easy and pointless. It is unclear whether or not easy and pointless is “good” or if challenging and worthwhile is “good”. It most likely depends on the participants’ attitude towards school in general, which was not investigated in this research.

*Survey Question Six: “Think back on the class or course that had the most impact on you.*

*Without telling the name of the teacher, or the class, why did it have the most impact on you?”*

*Percentages.*

Out of 121, 114 participants offered a response (94.2%), four had no response (3.3%) and three responses are missing (2.5%).

*Themes.*

Four main themes came about in the responses to this question. The first is self awareness: 11 participants said or agreed with the idea that the class with the most impact “taught me about myself”, and nine that it “made me realize the things I love most and career choice”. The second theme was real world application: 10 participants responded that the class included “real world things”, and 11 that it included “workforce readiness and life skills”. Thirdly, a theme of a likeable teacher emerged as 10 students said or agreed with the statement of “I liked the teacher”. The fourth theme is that students were challenged: nine participants said or agreed to the statement “it was really hard and made me study”.

*Inconsistencies.*

Looking at inconsistencies within this question is not necessarily appropriate, however it may be important to review the few negative participant responses. One participant said “nothing in this school” has had an impact, one student said “*I* have the most impact on me”, and one (perhaps sarcastically) responded that “lunch” has had the most impact on them. Again, what have previously been considered inconsistencies may be seen as a decent scope of responses for this particular question. Importantly though, most of the participants agreed that some aspect of school did have an impact on them.

*Survey Question Seven: “Are your parents the major initiators in helping you develop your post-secondary plans? If so, why?”*

*Percentages.*

Sixty-seven participants said *yes*, amounting to 55.4%. Forty-eight participants answered *no*, amounting to 39.7%. One participant responded that they were *not sure* (.8%), one had no response (.8%), and four responses are missing (3.3%). Most participants believed that their parents were the major initiators in helping develop post-secondary plans, while several still believed that they were not.

*Themes.*

Those that said *yes*-that did believe their parents to be the major initiators- told of the support, motivation, and assistance that their parents provided during their post-secondary planning. An overwhelming 21 participants replied with a statement of “strong support of plans and help me succeed” most likely meaning that parents are strongly supportive of their postsecondary plans and push them to be successful in school. Others told of how their parents have helped them with decision-making; 12 said or agreed that “they help me make decisions”,

and others that their parents motivate them because “they push me to move on and do better”. Of those that did not believe their parents to be the major initiators several themes emerged. Interestingly, five participants reported, “my parents support me, but I have chosen my field and back up plan. One participant said “I am worried because I don’t have their help”, one said, “my friends have had more of an influence”, and one said “I don’t live with them”. Some participants seem to have support of their parents but own the decision-making themselves, some do not have support at all, and some see friends as the more influential group in their post-secondary plans.

*Inconsistencies.*

Although more students said *yes* than *no*, there were some themes that ran through each distinct response. Parents can help with decisions, parents can be supportive, or parents can both help with decisions and be supportive. Supportive parents were seen in both the *yes* and *no* responses, most likely because this was a somewhat confusing survey question. Participants may not have known exactly what “initiator” meant. Some answered as though they believed an initiator helped them make decisions and supported them, and some answered as though an initiator could be a parent who simply offers support and leaves the decision-making to the child. It may have been more effective to ask an open-ended question here such as “who has had the greatest impact on your post-secondary plans?”

*Survey Question Eight: “What do you think the school could do better to help you in the decision making process for after high school?”*

*Percentages.*

Ninety-nine participants attempted a response (81.8%), while 22 participants did not attempt a response (18.2%).

*Themes.*

Of the 99 that responded, several themes of suggestions for the school emerged. Eleven participants said, “let me see my full options (careers)”, 10 said that a school staff member should “meet individually with students and discuss what they want to do”, and nine said “talk to students more about life after high school”. These responses show that the participants desire more assistance with career and college planning from the school staff. However, a relatively high number of respondents (16) said, “nothing, keep doing what it is already doing,” suggesting that they were satisfied with the career and college planning support that they received through the school.

*Inconsistencies.*

As with previous questions, differentiating responses for question eight simply shows a decent scope of responses. There is one discrepancy, which was described above. Although most students recount that they could use more help, some stated that they school should do nothing differently.

## Discussion

*General Findings*

The school reported several general issues that were unwrapped by the survey, (see Appendix B). Some of the more career and college planning focused issues that they reported are listed below:

- “Most seniors wanted to have more opportunities for career exploration,”
- “Self responsibility is lacking,”
- “Students identify themselves as lacking study skills and do not see the connection between study habit and personal choices with their future,”

- “Students need soft skills,”
- “A desire for earlier career and college information and planning was identified.”

Within the concerns listed above various student needs were seen; there was a need for more career exploration, earlier career exploration, and for learning soft skills such as self-responsibility. Among the other identified concerns, the initial researchers discussed the importance of the rigor of the senior year, the value of homework as seen by students, and a need to help students improve study skills and become aware of learning styles. Several of these issues did present within some student’s verbatim responses, however; it is unclear exactly how the initial researchers deemed these issues as the most important. For example, only five verbatim responses specifically refer to the idea of *homework*, yet it is heavily emphasized in their list of issues that were unwrapped. Furthermore, numerous students mentioned that they were nervous about or would like to learn more about financial aid and managing money in their verbatim responses, yet this issue was not referred to at all by the school.

Upon re-examining the original survey findings, several themes of student needs specific to career and college planning were seen. First, as discussed above, students did report wanting more opportunities for career and college planning, and they wanted it earlier in their schooling. They need to gain knowledge about what jobs are available and the skills and abilities that those jobs require, and they want to talk with someone about their plans. Second, an overwhelming number of students presented a need to learn more about money management and to become more knowledgeable about financial aid. Third, student responses represented a need to improve life skills such as the ability to live independently, be responsible for self, and manage time. Fourth, parents can be very influential in students’ post secondary plans, so they need to be involved in career development and college planning.

Several questions in particular brought about meaningful insight to issues surrounding career development and college planning of this particular population; specifically questions one, four, and eight of the survey. Many of these issues are consistent with previous research findings that were discussed in the review of the literature. Question one asked students: “Academically, are you ready for life after high school?” Most students who said they were ready for life after high school attributed their readiness to academics; advanced classes, study skills, and reinforcement of their work ethic. Clearly, the academics at this school were meeting their needs. Those that believed that they were not ready said that they needed further assistance with money management, help in understanding the job market, and increased life skills such as how to live on their own and be responsible for themselves. Some students even attributed their lack of readiness to being in a rural community. These students believed that they could not compete to get into the college of their choice with students from larger school districts with more money and more resources. Research by Apostol & Bilden (1991) also reported that rural communities often have limited resources, reduced accessibility to higher education, and limited exposure to different occupations. Because of the limited resources, some students may present higher degrees of career indecision and lower career maturity.

Question four, which asked students “When you think about graduating and moving on, what are you most nervous about?” also presented some significant and interesting responses. Again, students reported that they were nervous about living independently. Moreover, many students responded with “student loans and the insecurity of being able to pay them off because I won’t pick the right career”. It is unclear whether this means that they are afraid that their desired occupation will change, or that the job market will change. Interestingly, previous studies have

also found that students worry about the financial burden of committing to the wrong career choice (Code et al., 2006).

Question eight asked students “What do you think the school could do better to help you in the decision making process for after high school?” Many students suggested ways for improved assistance with career and college planning: meet with students individually, let students see their full options of career choices, talk to students more about life after high school, and to generally give more assistance to students with college choice, research, and the application process. Put simply, these students expressed a need to have more time devoted to their career development and college planning. The idea that students want increased skill training and more career help is consistent with the findings by Bardick et al. (2004) and also Bloxom et al. (2008) who reported that students need help in getting more information about available careers and assistance while developing postsecondary plans.

### *Needs and Implications*

As previously stated there were four themes of needs discovered in this research: (1) the need for earlier and more opportunities for career and college planning that will teach students about what jobs are available, what those jobs require, and provide an opportunity to talk with someone about their plans, (2) a need to learn more about money management, financial aid, and the economy, (3) a need to improve life skills such as the ability to live independently, be responsible for self, and manage time, and (4) the need to involve parents.

From these themes, many implications for school counselors and district wide school counseling programs can be inferred. First and foremost, the school counselors in this specific school district need to give more attention to career development and college planning. Any school counselor can do this by assessing their population of students’ career and college

planning needs and devoting more time throughout the year to address the identified needs. Life skills need to be taught, as students will need to know how to live independently, manage time, and manage money when they graduate from high school. Soft skills also need to be taught, as students will need to know how to work well with others and how to solve problems. Both life skills and soft skills can be brought into every area of instruction- such as social sciences and language arts- and the school counselor can help facilitate this.

Some research explored in the review of the literature also inferred implications for school counselors. Career curriculum should not be limited to high school; it should be a K-12 process of learning, development, and the integration of both (Lapan et al., 2003). In the early years students can be introduced to career vocabulary and concepts pertaining to life after high school (Wahl, 2000), and can be shown atypical career role models such as female doctors and male teachers (Gottfredson, 1981). In the middle level, students can learn self-awareness through the use of interest inventories. They can also begin to learn about the job market, and as Parsons (1909) suggested this can be done by simply showing lists of available occupations. In high school, students should begin to explore where they fit in the working world, and as Super (1990) suggested in his theories of career development, there should be a good person-environment fit. School counselors can help students find out which careers they would succeed in given their specific personality type, interests, and abilities. At this time students should also begin to research colleges if they are interested in attending some form of postsecondary institution, and they also need valuable information about financial aid. This research illustrated the idea that students want more information about paying for college, and that they often worry about how to manage money. Research by Gibbons et al. (2006) also suggested that students need realistic information on finances, especially because they often overestimate the cost of

college. It may be helpful to start introducing the complexities and vocabulary relating to financial aid in the early high school years so that students do not feel overwhelmed when they learn how to apply and begin the application process in their later years.

In some way, all four of the intervention types that Dykeman (2003) discussed should be implemented: work-based interventions (which can be challenging in a rural setting with limited resources), advising interventions, introductory interventions, and curriculum-based interventions. Throughout the planning and implementation of all career development and college planning curriculum programs, there must be a sound basis for the development of the program. Using learning competencies such as those developed by the NOICC or the ASCA national career domain standards can be an effective way to do so.

Lastly, school counselors need to involve parents in the career development and college planning process as often and as much as possible. Parents often help their children make decisions about possible careers, or they may simply offer moral and emotional support as their children navigate through career decision-making and independently make decisions about their future lives. Either way, previous research (Gibbons et al., 2006, Bardick et al, 2004, Noeth et al., 1984) found that students reported family to be the most helpful in career decision-making, followed by friends and interesting classes or teachers. In this investigation, 55.4 percent of the participants responded that their parents played a major role in their postsecondary plans. Thus, as suggested by Downing & D'Andrea (1997), parents should be given the opportunity and the resources to take a confident, effective, and active role in the career development and college planning process. This can be done using various methods. For example, in the primary years students can be given simple career development homework that requires them to work on it with a parent or other adult. They can research careers that fit with their likes and dislikes and

begin to have a conversation with parents about their futures. In the later high school years school counselors can offer regular informational assemblies for parents pertaining to college and financial aid- as they often do- but make sure they present the information in clear, understandable ways. It may be helpful to offer a few informational assemblies and then several workshops thereafter where parents and students may bring in their college and financial aid applications to the school counselor with any questions.

### *Limitations*

#### *Survey Questions.*

Although this research has produced some very useful results, it is important to note the limitations of the study. Firstly, there were several flaws in the way that the data were collected and reported. As mentioned above, the verbatim responses were tallied; one participant could have said the words and two others simply agreed in order for it to have a total of three tallies. Even though, in this example, three people did not say exactly the same response, it is reported that way. This is not entirely accurate. It would have been more accurate to record every verbatim response individually. Furthermore, several of the questions were rather ambiguous. For example, in question one of “Academically, are you ready for life after high school” what exactly makes someone academically ready? It is unclear whether they are academically ready if their current grades are high, or if they have study skills and are prepared for success in college. Lastly, the way that the survey was administered could have affected the results. Although student names were not recorded, there was no anonymity because the students had to answer the questions aloud in front of school staff members; which included teachers, counselors, and administrators. Bias may exist because of this method of data collection.

*Participant Selection.*

Concerns also exist with how the participants were selected. First of all, no demographic information was collected specific to each participant, so it is unclear which student said which response. Secondly, according to NYSED, 76 percent of students from this school plan to go on to college, and seven percent on to the workforce. Due to this fact, the results may not adequately represent work-bound students' needs. In fact, most of the verbatim responses seemed to come from college-bound students. The participants were selected to represent a cross section of the senior class, but it seemed to overwhelmingly represent college-bound students. Lastly, with no methodological way of choosing a sample, the initial researchers may have collected an unrepresentative sample that may have been too heavily laden with college-bound students.

*Conclusion*

This project encompassed an investigation of archival data that looked at high school seniors perceived preparedness for life after high school. The initial research was done in a rural Northeastern school district in America. The re-examination of the research results sought to look more specifically at career development and college planning student needs. Four main needs presented within this re-examination. The first was that students need more opportunities for career and college planning that would teach them about what jobs are available and what those jobs require, and they need these opportunities earlier. The second was that students need to learn more about money management, financial aid, and the economy. The third was that students need to improve life skills such as the ability to live independently, be responsible for self, and manage time. Fourthly, parents need to be involved as best they can in career development and college planning.

Clearly, opportunities exist for school counselors to improve career development and college planning initiatives within this particular school district, and with it being a rural population there are in fact unique needs. As previously discussed, a K-12 career portfolio would enhance career development through human development, help to streamline and improve district counseling curriculum, and serve as documentation of career and college planning throughout a students' schooling. A K-12 career portfolio is suggested for this school district. This research not only presented existing needs but also areas for future research. In particular, this school district could further explore student needs by administering a needs assessment that is more specific and focused on career development and college planning with less room for bias and with a more representative sample. For school districts across America, this research presented the idea to consider K-12 career development initiatives in rural areas, and to perhaps devote further research to this area in the future.

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Appendix A: Student Survey Response Data

# Student Survey Response Data

- Number of students surveyed: 121
- Grade and Locations of Survey: Seniors/ Economics and Government Classes
- Survey Date: 12/2008
- Method of completion: Survey respondents answered questionnaire independently and anonymously.

**Question 1:** Academically, are you ready for life after High School? Explain your answer.

**Yes: (96total)** (*65 are in general agreement with no specific reason listed*)

Many classes have helped me prepare for college: 2

Strong study habits will help transition: 5

Advanced Coursework have helped prepare me: 8

Organization skills will help transition: 5

Test taking skills are at an advanced level: 1

Joining the military helped guide career choice and readiness: 1

Learned how to make smart (good) decisions throughout high school: 1

Work ethic and reinforcement: 3

College level essay preparation: 2

Livonia High School has helped me learn how to learn. When you know how to learn you can do anything: 1

For the most part I wouldn't give the school too much credit for it: 2

**No: (11 total)** (*1 stated no with no specific reason*)

I haven't even completed high school yet: 1

I don't think I have the right knowledge and tools to compete with kids from bigger schools: 1

I don't know how to deal with finances in an efficient way: 2

I don't know anything, there should be assigned homeroom everyday: 1

I don't think we get enough knowledge of what life is going to be like, still treated like 10<sup>th</sup> graders: 1

No but not the school's fault: 1

Most of the work is guided; someone is there to hold our hand: 1

No class can prepare me, college will be much tougher: 2

**Yes and No: (13 total)** (*2 stated yes/no with no specific reason*)

Yes, but I wish there were more classes like business math: 1

More motivational strategies still needed: 1

I am prepared, but feel other students don't work to their potential in school and teachers don't seem to care: 1

I have done well in high school, but have no real idea what to expect in college: 2

The heavy college workload intimidates me: 1

Yes, but high school is not the reason, personal experience and exposure has prepared me for it: 1

Yes, I have good grades, but I am not sure what I want to be: 1  
Not completely, but getting there: 2  
I don't that much about money: 1

**Not sure: 0**

**NO Response (No answer attempted): 0**

**Question 2:** What do you think you need to know and be able to do to participate fully in tomorrow's economy/society?

**Summary of General Responses: (total 102)**

Knowledge of available careers that will allow me to contribute to the economy: 10

The ability to manage money: 30

Computer and technology knowledge: 3

Ethical choices: 2

Make smart decisions: 4

Distinguish needs vs wants: 1

How the economy works and ways we can better it: 7

How to be competitive in the business world and world of work: 3

Working with others: 6

How far will my money really go: 1

Asset allocation, cash flow, debt management: 1

Communication of ideas: 1

Business and Economics classes: 1

Work effectively and manage time: 11

Common sense: 3

How to function as a citizen: 3

Learn about Problems of tomorrow: 4

Live on my own, be responsible for self: 8

Business Math /English: 2

Go to College: 1

**NO Response (No answer attempted): 15**

**Question 3:** When you speak with recent graduates, what do they say about their readiness for college, military or work?

**Summary of General Responses: (total 94)**

Have to make time and do your work: 2

Very ready because of the high standards of the school: 2

They say they were ready: 49

They say they were pretty ready: 3

They actually say that Livonia doesn't prepare us at all: 1

A lot of them are struggling with the rigor: 7

They weren't ready to take control of their own funds and economic control: 2

The cash flow is not there as expected: 1

Once high school is over reality steps in: 1

Academically prepared, but not easy living on your own: 2

Some are doing great, but some that I looked up to have dropped out of school or are working low paying jobs: 1

A majority of the graduates go to MCC and aren't prepared for anything better: 1

Some say they were ready, but others say they slacked off in high school and it came back to hurt them: 1

Many people are still unsure of what they want to do, I feel like I have no grasp of life after high school: 2

Some say they were not ready, but found a way to deal with it: 1

Stay in school, do work, and be prepared for work: 5

Different than what they thought: 2

Not ready first semester, but after that fine: 3

Different than they thought, more independent, more work: 1

College is harder than high school: 3

Its about the people not the school: 1

Weren't Ready, but I am: 1

College is better: 1

Don't think that many kids care about the next stage of their life: 1

Don't know: (total 20)

**NO Response (No answer attempted): 7**

**Question 4:** When you think about graduating and moving on, what are you most nervous about?

**Summary of General Responses: (total 113)**

Being Independent: 27

Fear of failure: 9

Uncertainty of the future: 3

The transition from high school to college life: 5

Where the money will come from and how I will spend it: 12

Afford school and still work: 2

Nervous about paying for college: 3

Student loans and the insecurity of being able to pay them off because I won't pick the right career: 8

Not knowing what to do: 1

Not being able to pick a productive career path: 3

Not having friends anymore: 3

Not finding a job in my chosen field of work: 5

Not liking my roommate: 1

Having enough drive to do all my work and having enough money: 2

Losing my security blanket (high school, teachers): 1

Picking the right college for me: 1

Being accepted into the college I want to attend: 5

Tests and essays in college: 1

Being younger than most people: 1

Not knowing what I am supposed to do to get ready for college or how to figure out where to go: 2

Leaving Friends and Family: 6

Finding a job: 4

Leaving home: 5

Hard Work: 2

Whether to join the Air Force: 1

Nervous about my academic skills: 2

**Not Nervous, very well planned: 5**

**NO Response (No answer attempted): 3**

**Question 5:** Based on the first ten weeks of your senior year, what is your impression of the work that you are doing in your classes?

**Summary of General Responses: (total 119)**

Readies us for the future, real world: 11  
Too much focus on life after high school: 1  
I like it, its hands on and is very exciting: 1  
More projects than homework: 2  
Pretty easy, I like it a lot, more learning of life skills: 2  
Its pretty easy: 7  
Easier than 11<sup>th</sup> grade: 2  
Like 11<sup>th</sup> grade, very different than 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade: 1  
Moderately easy not overwhelming: 8  
Fairly hard classes, but with time and effort its not so bad: 3  
More difficult than I thought it would be: 1  
Not enough time for schoolwork, work, family, friends: 2  
Good: 22  
On topic classes: 1  
Doing lots of homework: 1  
I did not slack off this year: 2  
I am not trying as hard in some classes, I could do better: 11  
My GPA is higher because of the number of classes I am taking: 1  
Not as complicated as I thought it would be: 1  
Best I have ever done: 9  
I think I'm doing nothing and still in the 80s...Pointless!: 6  
Some of it seems like busy work: 3  
Important, but takes a back seat to friendship, activities, job: 1  
Too much work: 1  
Still Challenging: 8  
Time consuming: 1  
Some classes are helpful and some aren't: 4  
Pointless: 4

**NO Response (No answer attempted):1**

**Question 6:** Think back on the class or course that had the most impact on you. Without telling me the name of the teacher, or the class, why did it have the most impact on you?

**Summary of General Responses: (total 114)**

Real world things: 10  
It taught me a lot that I know I will use: 1  
The teacher helped me understand how to succeed in and out of classes: 1  
Taught me how to study: 2  
Taught me the value of studying and hard work: 2  
Interesting course that made me happy: 5  
It was really hard (challenging) and made me study: 9  
I liked the teacher: 10  
Caring teacher: 4  
Teacher made class fun and easy for me to learn: 1  
Teacher relates to students and makes us see why it is important: 2  
Teacher made students want to learn and challenged them to rely on themselves: 2  
Teacher taught in an interactive way: 2  
Workforce readiness and life skills: 11  
Taught me organization and self-discipline: 1  
Learned a lot: 2  
Made me realize the things I love most and career choice: 9  
Made me look at life differently: 6  
Helped me understand the economy and what is coming: 3  
Taught me how to use money, checking, and savings accounts: 1  
Taught me the dos and don'ts in the business world: 1  
Taught me how to succeed with other people through communication skills and how to go far in life: 3  
Taught me about myself: 11  
Taught me to have confidence and that you have nothing to fear: 3  
I was treated like a college student: 1  
Grade was based more on effort and personal achievement: 1  
I learned how to read: 1  
Taught vocab. and writing skills: 1  
Lunch (Lord of the Flies): 1  
Taught me how college would actually be like: 1  
I have the most impact on me: 1  
Nothing in this school: 1  
Small class teacher was relaxed: 1  
Taught me to win: 1  
Only course which promoted music performance: 1  
Bigger Perspective on the world: 1

**NO Response (No answer attempted): 4**

**Question 7:** Are your parents the major initiators in helping you develop your post-secondary plans? If so why?

**Yes: (total 67)** *(14 are in general agreement with no specific reason listed)*

They are giving me ideas about jobs but I still don't know what I want to be: 1

Both believe college will help my future: 2

Strong support of plans and help me succeed: 21

They push me to move on and do better: 6

They help me make decisions: 12

They direct me in the way I should go so I can succeed: 3

If they didn't help I would probably slack off: 1

They always want to make sure that I am staying in contact with certain colleges: 3

They push me to do what they did after high school. Go to their school and have their major: 1

My parents success story has inspired me: 1

My parents care, but didn't go to college, so they don't know much about it: 2

**No: (total 48)** *(7 stated No with no specific reason listed)*

My parents support me, but I have chosen my field and back up plans: 5

My parents want me to go, but I have always wanted to go too: 1

I filled out all my own applications to college: 2

My friends have had more of an influence: 1

Don't live with them: 1

I am worried because I don't have their help: 1

**Not sure:1**

**NO Response (No answer attempted):1**

**Question 8:** What do you think the school could do better to help you in the decision making process for after high school?

**Summary of General Responses: (total 99)**

Meet individually with students and discuss what they want to do: 10  
More personal examples of people that went to college or just went to work: 1  
Start college planning earlier (SATs) (9<sup>th</sup> grade-11th): 3  
Move college fairs: 3  
Let me see my full options (careers): 11  
Make us go out and try new things (Work shadow program): 1  
Have a class devoted to career choice: 2  
Have a class that only teaches about life after high school: 1  
Give deadlines and assistance to students for college choice, research, and application process: 5  
Teach us how to use the common application and secondary forms because we were confused: 3  
Talk to students more about life after high school: 9  
Teach more about non-local colleges: 1  
Have easier access to counselors for college opportunities: 2  
Have counselors help me more with college decisions: 9  
Give us more freedom and responsibility: 1  
Have the each class feel more like college: 1  
Anything, I feel like there is no help: 1  
Nothing/ keep doing what it is already doing: 16  
It is not the school's responsibility: 2  
The school is fine. Kids will let themselves fail if they let themselves fail: 1  
Not sure, but the main problem is the senior work ethic: 1  
Let us make our own choices. Let us fail if its our own choice: 3  
Give no second chances on homework: 2  
Have all teachers with seniors spend 1 class giving their own advice from personal experiences: 1  
Teachers should be confidence boosters: 1  
Help me!: 1  
A lot: 2  
To learn to be more responsible: 2  
Variety of Classes:2  
Make sure I get into the classes I wanted: 1

**NO Response (No answer attempted):22**

Appendix B: School Report

Listed below are the issues that we identified as being unwrapped by our data:

- ❖ The perception of students is that the rigor of senior year is not challenging when compared to junior year.
- ❖ Most seniors wanted to have more opportunities for career exploration.
- ❖ Courses or classes that students could identify with or see as connected to the "real world" were valued.
- ❖ Self responsibility is lacking as students either take ownership for making poor choices or never take ownership.
- ❖ Students identify themselves as lacking study skills and do not see the connection between study habits and personal choices with their future.
- ❖ Students need soft skill and CDOS
- ❖ Most students value extracurricular and sports over academics, and see academics as a necessary element of school that gets in the way of fun.
- ❖ Most students do not see the need or the purpose of homework.
- ❖ Most students only care about the work that they value and do not see learning for learning.
- ❖ Students often see learning as a grade.
- ❖ Study skills instruction needed for-how to study, what is your learning style, how do you adapt to different teaching styles?
- ❖ Is the issue a transition of responsibility not just seniors, but starting at each grade level and moving to the next grade level and then to college?
- ❖ Should we pay more attention to how we identify and group students?
- ❖ A desire for earlier career and college information and planning was identified. How do we make the connection more real?