Technical Report - Dissertation, Tulane University, 2022.

# ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS MATTER: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE AND COUNSELORS IN CHARTER AND TRADITIONAL PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

EDUCATION RESEARCH ALLIANCE FOR NEW ORLEANS

Danica Brown, Tulane University

*Published December 13th, 2022*

Educationresearchalliancenola.org

# ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS MATTER: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE AND COUNSELORS IN CHARTER AND TRADITIONAL PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

AN ABSTRACT

SUBMITTED ON THE 13TH DAY OF DECEMBER 2022

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF

THE CITY, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY PROGRAM

OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE

OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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# ABSTRACT

High schools are viewed by policymakers, practitioners, and researchers alike as key institutions in facilitating access to college, especially for minoritized students from low-income families. A school-wide strategy for making college accessible is for high schools to establish a college-going culture that normalizes college attendance, elevates it as an attainable postsecondary option, and provides the support and resource structure students need to complete the college application process. Prior research has demonstrated a positive relationship between college-going culture and college enrollment. However, this work has not considered the ways in which various elements combine to make a strong, effective college-going culture. Nor has this research examined the broader policy contexts in which schools and counselors establish a college-going culture. I draw from multiple bodies of literature to examine the ways in which state, district, and school contexts shape college-going culture and counselors' work. I utilize a multiple case study of four Greater New Orleans charter and traditional public high schools. This included semi-structured interviews with school leaders, counselors, teachers, and teacher leaders, observations, and an analysis of data from documents, websites, and social media posts. Louisiana provided a critical context to examine these dynamics as one of the first states to enact policy changes and direct resources toward college readiness and access. I found that the availability of college practices/resources alone did not comprise a strong college-going culture. While all schools had numerous college-going supports, due in large part to Louisiana's policies, schools differed in the strength of their college-going cultures due to the influence of many overlapping organizational factors. Furthermore, counselors' ability to support students with the college process was shaped by the school, district-level, and state contexts determining their roles and the structure, resources, and college counseling norms they implemented in schools. As a result, counselors faced role conflict and role incongruity from the interaction of these contexts. This hindered their ability to provide direct college support to students. Case study findings illustrate the importance of cohesion within and among the various elements of college-going culture and among the contexts shaping school-wide college-going support and counselors' work.

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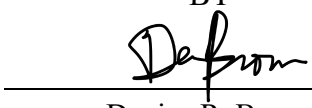

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I dedicate this dissertation to my son and grandmother who are no longer with us.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many people have supported and encouraged me along this journey. First, I would like to thank my advisors—Dr. Douglas Harris and Dr. Patrick Rafail. Thanks, Doug, for the many meetings to discuss my research and develop ideas for my dissertation. I appreciate your mentorship and thoughtful feedback throughout this process. I have learned so much in working with you as a research assistant for the Education Research Alliance for New Orleans and the National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice. I am also grateful for the numerous research opportunities you provided that allowed me to learn from some of the top qualitative researchers in the field of school choice policy — Dr. Katrina Bulkley, Dr. Julie Marsh, and Dr. Huriya Jabbar. I express much gratitude to you all for your kindness and willingness to mentor me academically and professionally.

I thank Patrick, co-advisor and one of my first professors at Tulane. I appreciate the theoretical and methodological foundation you laid for me early on in my doctoral journey through Research Design and statistics courses. You required us to write a dissertation proposal in our first semester of graduate school. I was terrified, but this assignment showed me early on what was needed to develop a research project. I am grateful for the experience and for the feedback on my papers and projects. And thank you for the many meetings and email exchanges to discuss and provide feedback on my dissertation. This allowed me to deepen and flesh out the theoretical contributions of my research.

I would also like to thank my committee members —Dr. Michael Cunningham and Dr. Katrina Bulkley. Mike, I learned so much about strengths-based approaches to researching the experiences of minoritized students in your Black Youth Psychology course. This led to collaborations on a conference presentation, a paper, and to dissertation research that centers the type of educational spaces where minoritized students thrive and succeed. Thank you for your thoughtful feedback on drafts and on my ideas.

I thank Katy for joining my committee as an external member. I've worked on research projects with you, gaining my first experiences with the research process through interviewing, developing protocols, analyzing data, and writing. What I learned from this real-time training is invaluable and has helped me to conduct my dissertation research. I truly appreciate you working closely with me throughout this process.

I express gratitude for an amazing group of women who I shared this journey with, the diva cohort—Karina Bull, Tait Kellogg, Jessica Liddell, Megha Patel and Sarah Woodward. I appreciate your friendship and the numerous forms of support you all have provided me along this journey.

I extend a huge thank you to Briana Mohan, Tulane's former Senior Academic and Career Advisor, for your encouragement and going above and beyond to support me throughout this process. Your whole group and individualized career sessions helped me to stay the course while thinking about how the dissertation connects to my future career

goals. Thank you, Dr. Lauren Lukkarila, for your support through the Dissertation Success Cohort and time management meetings. These were critical in helping me to design and enact a plan for my revisions. Thank you, Dr. Beth Godbee, for your writing coaching support, listening ear, and commitment to social justice throughout the writing process. And thank you Dr. Tangela Blakely-Reavis for reading a draft, offering feedback, and virtually writing alongside me on Zoom during a global pandemic.

I would also like to thank Tulane University School of Liberal Arts for supporting this research through the Dissertation Completion Fellowship and the Summer Merit Award.

I thank my parents for their continued support throughout my educational and professional journey. You both have stood by me, encouraging me through it all, and provided tangible assistance with meals and childcare. I truly appreciate you. I thank my grandmother who believed I could accomplish anything, and I thank my siblings for their love and support. I express gratitude to my friends and extended family who have all cheered me on.

To my husband who had a front-row seat on my journey, thank you for your patience and partnership throughout this process. Your listening ear and constant affirmation provided the motivation I needed to keep writing. In the moments when I wanted to give up, you reminded me that "I got this" while encouraging me to keep moving forward by breaking very large tasks down into smaller increments.

To my sons, thank you for changing my life throughout this journey. Your giggles, smiles, and unconditional love for "mama" made the journey worth it. I will carry the love, joy, and memory of my first-born son with me forever.

Pursuing a Ph.D. with the support of so many family members, friends, and colleagues has shown me that this was a "village" effort. I express tremendous gratitude for the many people who have contributed in so many ways to the completion of this dissertation.

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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background on the Role of High Schools in College Access

As a college degree has become increasingly more important to enhance future earnings and to facilitate social mobility, educational policymakers look to high schools to not only prepare students academically for college coursework, but to provide other forms of college-going support to students, especially historically underrepresented students—racially minoritized, low-income, first-generation college students (Engberg and Wolniak 2010; Hill 2008; Roderick et al. 2008). Race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status (SES) have indeed shaped access to higher education in the U.S. as disparities remain in minoritized students' college graduation rates compared to White students. As a result, research has elucidated the critical role of high schools in providing college opportunities and supports for underrepresented groups (Engberg and Wolniak 2010; Hill 2008; 2012; Holland 2019; Lee et al. 2017; Mehan 2012; Roderick et al. 2008). This body of work argues that schools can serve a critical organizational role in helping or hindering students from less economically advantaged backgrounds and minoritized students to take the necessary steps to navigate the college search and application process (Bates and Anderson 2014; Beal and Crockett 2010; Bui 2008; Cherng 2017).

A dominant perspective within this literature posits that if students from certain backgrounds do not possess the social and cultural capital from family members to assist in college planning, the schooling context can help to fill these gaps (Holland and Farmer-Hinton 2009; Engberg and Wolniak 2010). Through this literature, various aspects of the school context, climate, and school practices are viewed as important

contributors to students' access to college (Roderick et al. 2011). Alternatively, some scholars argue that schools are social sorting institutions that serve as gatekeepers or barriers to college attendance for some students through lower expectations based on students' race or SES (MacLeod 1987; Rosenbaum, Miller, and Krei 1996; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995).

Studies that examine the effects of high schools on college-going have focused on specific practices within high schools that facilitate college attendance. Much of this research has looked at the role of counselors and resources to enhance counselors' ability to support students with college planning activities like assistance with applications, guidance on financial aid and scholarships, college tours, opportunities for one-to-one college counseling, etc. but this research tends to neglect counselors' college-related roles while considering the contexts in which their work is done (Bryan et al. 2011; Falsey and Heyns 1984; Mckillip, Rawls, and Barry 2012).

Other research has analyzed national, state, and city-level survey data on teachers, parents, or school leaders' perceptions to operationalize specific school-level practices and organizational norms geared toward college access (Engberg and Wolniak 2010; Hill 2008; Roderick et al. 2011). For example, Hill's (2008) influential study on schools' college-linking strategies categorized high schools based on practices that provided support to students in the form of resources and norms for college attendance. This research highlighted the importance of connecting students and parents with the proper resources to help students pursue college. Hill (2008) categorized schools as traditional, clearinghouse, or brokering. Schools employing a *traditional* college-linking strategy had very few college resources and lacked an "organizational commitment" to offering

available resources to students (p.60). Clearinghouse schools had many resources but lacked intention in getting resources to students. Brokering schools had both numerous college resources and dedication in providing access to their resources. Hill (2008) found that traditional public schools tended to be clearinghouses for college information, often lacking outreach to students to provide the assistance needed to navigate the college application process.

Attending brokering schools significantly increased students' chances of attending a four-year college as schools focused on school-initiated outreach to students and families. Likewise, attending clearinghouse schools significantly increased the odds of attending a four-year college, but this relationship operated differently by racial/ethnic group. It is important to note that brokering schools served a smaller population of racially minoritized students and those from low SES backgrounds.

These results shed light on the critical role of schools in college outcomes while elucidating important disparities by race/ethnicity and SES in accessing high schools with strong support structures for college attendance. This research also sheds light on the intersection of school type and schools' college planning supports as public schools typically employed a clearinghouse strategy. Hill's (2008:55) research reveals two aspects of high schools that are vital in college access: one, availability and distribution of resources, and two, "organizational norms that communicate values and establish practices that are related to college going".

As suggested above, research on high school practices that support access to college has led to a focus on the overall culture around college-going in schools, not just assessing the role of counselors, but examining college access school-wide to understand

schools' practices and communication of norms for college attendance. Influential studies of Chicago high schools by researchers at the Consortium on Chicago School Research have been pivotal to the development of the conceptualization of college-going culture (Roderick et al. 2008, 2011). This work accounts for the expectations that teachers have for their students attending college and supportive relationships that extend beyond counselors to teachers. Schneider (2007) calls this a "college-going community". In this manner, students are surrounded by adults (e.g., teachers, counselors, leaders) who help enhance "college knowledge" by teaching students about college application processes, the meaning of college, and benefits of obtaining a college degree (Conley 2005).

Roderick et al.'s (2011) study of college enrollment and college match of Chicago public school students employed a multidimensional approach to examine college-going culture. Measures of college-going culture included rates of prior year graduates who enrolled in college and who applied to at least three colleges and rate of FAFSA completion of prior year graduates. An additional measure, which captured teachers' perceptions of the college-going culture, included a survey evaluating teachers' assessment of expectations, curriculum, shared goals, and sense of responsibility to support students with college planning. Roderick and colleagues (2011:199) found that students with similar academic and family backgrounds were 9% to 13% more likely to apply and be accepted into four-year colleges if they attended schools with stronger college-going cultures. Thus, differences in teachers' perceptions of the college-going cultures of their respective schools influenced "the extent to which students with similar characteristics take the steps to apply to a four-year college as well as their choice among colleges".

In sum, this literature highlights the important contribution of the high school context including organizational norms and resources to support students through the college application process (e.g., identifying colleges, touring colleges, taking standardized tests for admissions, submitting applications) with the goal of ultimately enrolling into college. However, this research does not consider the broader educational policy context of diverse school options, such as charter schools, that many urban school systems are embedded in across the U.S. Charter schools have an opportunity to operate differently than the traditional, neighborhood public school (Bulkley et al. 2021) and, with greater autonomy, may use different strategies or practices for promoting college attendance. Various types of public high schools (e.g., charter, traditional public school (TPS)) may also mean access to different learning environments with different resource and support structures for college. School type elucidates another organizational dimension of comparison that sheds light on potential differences in the college-going culture of schools within the public sector.

Furthermore, the state and district contexts that schools are embedded in can shape a school's ability to establish a college-going culture that supports all students with college planning. States' role in college access operates through policies that elevate college access in high schools and that hold schools accountable for college practices and supports like Louisiana's requirement of students to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS) applications (discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4), state assessments that include measures of college readiness (Jackson and Kurlaender 2016) or aligning high school coursework for graduation with state university admissions requirements (Jimenez and

Sargrad 2018). Following Noll (2021), I refer to this as college (or college-going) accountability throughout this dissertation. I also use the term college readiness accountability to describe the roles of federal and state policies in college access.

Similarly, districts can set a college-going agenda across schools, providing various system-wide supports like college-focused programs (Perna et al. 2008) or put pressure on schools to implement college-related practices tied to the accountability system and school performance points (Noll 2021). Taken together, these state and district policies and practices can shape schools' behaviors and abilities to provide systemic college-going support. However, little research has explored the relationship between college-going culture and college accountability.

## 1.2 Research Questions

The purpose of my dissertation is to understand how organizational conditions shape high schools' college-going cultures. I do this by exploring and describing the college-going cultures of four high schools from two districts (i.e., New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS) and a demographically comparable district). My research contributes to an understanding of the ways in which high schools' organizational contexts lead to variation in schools' college-going cultures across schools and the vital role of counselors within schools' college-going cultures. My research is guided by two main research questions.

**Main RQ1.** How do high schools' organizational contexts shape college-going culture among four Greater New Orleans charter and traditional public high schools serving predominantly low-income, African American, and Latinx students? Specifically,

I examine the ways in which individual *school* contexts (i.e., college-going norms, college practices, and resources), *districts* (i.e., charter vs. TPS, school-based autonomy, district expectations), and the *state accountability* context (i.e., college readiness policies and initiatives) shape schools' college-going cultures. To address **Main RQ1.**, I ask the following research subquestions:

**RQ1.** What is the culture around college attendance among the four high schools in this study and in what ways do schools exhibit variation in their college-going cultures?

**RQ2.** How does the college-going culture of charter high schools compare to that of traditional public high schools?

**RQ3.** What are the barriers to college-going culture across schools?

My second main research question focuses on the role of school counselors as critical actors in schools' college-going cultures. I ask:

**Main RQ2.** How do various organizational contexts shape high school counselors' work in the college-going culture of schools serving predominantly minoritized students from low-income families in light of counselors' broader role expectations? Specifically, I examine how individual *school* contexts (i.e., college counseling norms, counseling departments' resources, and structure, counselor role expectations), *district* context (i.e., charter vs. TPS, school-based autonomy, district expectations), and the *state accountability* context (i.e., policy around counselor roles, college and career readiness policies) shape college counseling including how counselors navigate expectations from multiple sources.

## 1.3 Significance of the Study

My dissertation contributes a more nuanced understanding of college-going culture that considers the various organizational contexts —state and district — that schools and counselors are embedded within, makes important contributions to the broader literatures on college access and charter schools, and has implications for education policy focused on college readiness.

My research extends current conceptualizations of college-going culture, which typically emphasize numerous school-wide behaviors or college-going practices without attention to the ways in which these practices are interconnected to help students navigate the college-going process. I extend current conceptualizations of college-going culture in two ways.

First, I argue that more empirical attention be given to the variation in college-going culture among high schools rather than the presence or absence of a college-going culture as high schools exist within broader state and district policy contexts that also shape their cultures. Few studies to date have focused on the intersection of context and variation in the strength of schools' college-going cultures, and most of these studies are quantitative (e.g., Engberg and Gilbert 2014; Hill 2008; Robinson and Roksa 2016) and do not offer insight into *how* schools vary in college-going culture. Furthermore, few qualitative studies have focused on describing this variation (e.g., Holland 2019) as they use a single case study research design, examining one high school (e.g., Achinstein, Curry, and Ogawa 2015; Farmer-Hinton 2011; Welton and Williams 2015).

My dissertation fills this gap in the literature with an in-depth examination of the college-going cultures of four high schools. I begin with a typology of college-going

culture—limited, moderate, and strong—to provide thick description of each school's college-going culture and a comparison across school types. My cross-case analysis led to the development of a theory of cohesion in college-going culture (Chapter 6), which indicates the interconnectedness *among*, *across*, and *within* the broader domains of college-going culture—college-going norms, resources/practices, and stakeholder involvement— identified by previous research.

I argue that conceptualizations of college-going culture should consider the cohesiveness of schools' college-going behaviors and practices, norms, and the involvement of multiple stakeholders in college planning. Are college practices interconnected, purposely built upon each other, and sequenced in a manner that helps first-generation college students to understand the complex college planning and application processes? Furthermore, what is the role of cohesion across state, district, and school contexts in college-going culture? My research addresses these questions.

My research also contributes to college-going culture literature using the lens of role theory (Freeman and Coll 1997)—role conflict and role incongruity—to understand counselors' involvement in the college-going process given their role expectations. Many college access studies of high schools examine the role of counselors without investigating counselors' college-related work in context. Counselors work within schools but have professional training that often conflicts with the expectations of school and district leaders—non-counseling professionals. My research contributes to an understanding of counselors' work in college-going culture considering their broader role expectations that emerge from various contexts. My findings indicate the need for more

clearly defined roles for school-based stakeholders like counselors and teachers in college-going culture.

Next, my research contributes to the literature comparing the college-going cultures of multiple school types. Most studies do not compare college-going culture of different school types. Some scholars have examined magnet and non-magnet schools (e.g., Nienhusser and Ives 2020) or public versus private schools (e.g., McDonough 1997), yet little qualitative research compares charter and TPSs (e.g., Mehan 2012 is an exception) and how school-based autonomy in some charter schools can intersect with college-going culture.

## 1.4 Organizational Statement

My dissertation is organized into six chapters. In Chapter 2, I bring together various bodies of literature to understand how context shapes college-going culture. I provide a diagram (Figure 2.1) and outline of the major concepts that I draw on in this study. The first section focuses on the limited research available on the role of state and district contexts in college-going culture. In this section, I also describe research examining school type and college-going culture and the research available on the impact of charter schools on college outcomes. In the next section, I conceptualize college-going culture and how prior research has defined the term. The final section of this chapter focuses on the role of counselors in schools' college-going cultures, with particular attention to the organizational contexts shaping counselors' role expectations and their college-related work. I discuss counselors' workload and challenges in establishing a college-going culture and end this section with a discussion of role conflict and role

incongruity, situating counselors' college-related work within the context of their broader roles.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and methods for this multiple case study. I describe how I sampled schools and participants for this research and discuss the state, district, and school contexts in which this study takes place. I describe the various sources of data collected—semi-structured interviews, observations, documents, and data from social media—and how I analyzed these data. I give insight into my positionality and how it shaped my research as well as the limitations of this study.

In Chapter 4, I present the results from my school-level case study analysis. I utilized a preliminary schema—limited, moderate, and strong—to provide an in-depth discussion of four case study schools' college-going cultures. I found that while all schools had numerous college-going supports, due in large part to Louisiana's college and career readiness policies, schools differed in the strength of their college-going cultures due to other contextual factors.

Thus, I argue that the availability of college practices/resources alone does not comprise a strong college-going culture. Schools must work to make college practices and resources accessible school-wide to bring cohesion to their practices *and* align their practices with college norms and multiple stakeholder involvement. This adds up to what I call a *cohesive college-going culture*, which I describe in detail in Chapter 6. I conclude with a cross-case discussion of five themes centered around the practices of schools with stronger college-going cultures and the barriers to college-going culture. These cross-case findings also illustrate the importance of cohesion within and among the various elements

of college-going culture and among the various contexts shaping school-wide college-going support and counselors' work.

In Chapter 5, I present the results from my analysis of how various organizational contexts shape high school counselors' work in schools' college-going cultures given their role expectations. I conclude that school, district-level, and state contexts *determine* the structure, resources, and college counseling norms implemented in schools, and these contexts *collectively* influence whether and how counselors support students throughout the college-going process. The consequence of this is that counselors face role conflict and role incongruity from the interaction of these contexts.

In Chapter 6, I summarize my dissertation and conclude with a discussion of two main contributions of my research— a theory of cohesion in college-going culture and the ways in which intersection and interaction of various contexts shape college-going culture and counselors. I argue that cohesion is the defining feature shaping the quality and depth of schools' college-going cultures and is influenced by the multiple overlapping contexts that schools are embedded in. I also discuss the implications for educational policy and practice and directions for future research.

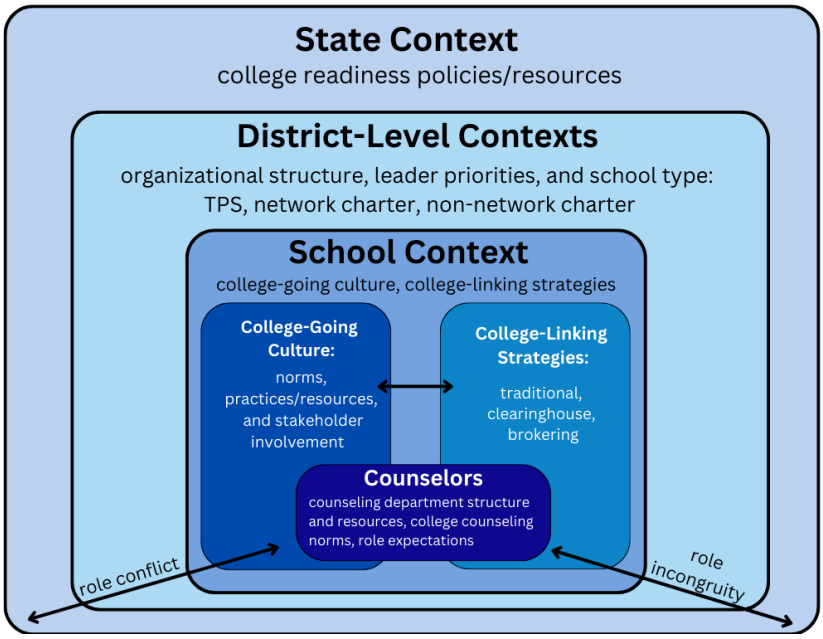
# CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I review relevant literature and build my conceptual framework to understand how high schools' organizational contexts shape school college-going culture and the role of counselors. These contexts include states, districts, and schools. I focus within the school context where college-going culture and college-linking strategies are enacted. Working within the school context and its college-going culture, teachers, leaders, and especially counselors use various strategies to support the college-going process. And the literature casts counselors as primarily responsible for college planning support. Because counselors' workloads and responsibilities are impacted by all three contexts, they face conflict and incongruity in their roles. Figure 2.1 is based on various literatures and illustrates the relationships among these multiple contexts and the complexities bearing on college-going culture and counselors.

There is limited research on the role of state and district-level contexts in college-going culture. Therefore, I begin this chapter with brief discussions of college readiness policies and resources (state context) and organizational structure, leader priorities, and school type (district-level context). I describe the influence of school type on college-going culture with a broader discussion of the limited research comparing college access among multiple school types such as charter versus public schools and magnet versus non-magnet schools.

FIGURE 2.1

A CONTEXUALIZED FRAMEWORK FOR COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE AND THE ROLE OF COUNSELORS




I highlight concepts that define variations in aspects of college-going culture such as McDonough's (1997) discussion of *proactive* vs. *reactive* college counseling in private and public schools. Overall, I discuss research that examines the ways in which state and district contexts shape college access. I end this section with a focus on research examining college attendance and charter schools.

From there, I address school context by conceptualizing *college-going culture* from extant literature, discussing schools' college-going norms, practices, and stakeholder involvement. I describe how prior research defines the normalization of college attendance in schools and the related academic and non-academic college-going

practices that support college application and admission as these qualities contribute to a school-wide college-going culture. I highlight Hill's (2008) concept of *college-linking strategies*, which illustrates how schools can vary in their college-going cultures in employing *traditional*, *clearinghouse*, or *brokering* approaches to college supports based on the norms and resources schools provide to students. This concept helps to explain relationships among school norms, practices, and resources that promote college attendance (represented by the double-sided arrow in figure 2.1). I then turn attention to the accessibility of college and college planning supports in high schools and the role of multiple stakeholders in college-going culture.

In the final section, I describe the role of counselors in schools' college-going cultures as counselors are viewed in the literature and in education policy as most critical in providing students with direct college-going support. In this section, I draw on role conflict and role incongruity to argue that counselor's college-related work exists within and is shaped by the intersection and interaction among schools, district, and state education contexts. As a result, counselor's college-related work must be viewed considering their broader roles and responsibilities and the multiple expectations that guide their work. In this section, I also describe how counseling department structure, resources, and college counseling norms shape college-going culture. I conclude this section with a discussion of the ways in which counselor role expectations and workload can contribute to challenges with establishing a college-going culture and end with a description of role conflict and role incongruity.

## 2.1 The Role of State and District Contexts in College-Going Culture

While many studies have examined college-going culture, research investigating the role of state and district contexts is very limited. The few studies that we have suggests that college-going culture is shaped by the policies and practices emanating from federal, state, and district entities as well as the resources available to schools to enact these policies (Nienhusser and Ives 2020; Noll 2021). Furthermore, schools' implementation of state and district policies and practices reflect pressure from the climate of test-based accountability (Falabella 2014) through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and college-going accountability related to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Two studies focusing on college counseling and/or college choice provide a foundation for examining the intersection of state and district contexts and high school college-going culture. Perna's (2006) conceptual model situates students' college choice processes at the core of multiple, nested contexts of influence including the school and community, higher education, and broader social, economic, and policy contexts. Perna et al. (2008) draw on this conceptual model to understand how college counseling, one important component of a college-going culture, is shaped not only by schools, but by contexts external to the school, namely, federal and state policy contexts. They found that districts with a strong commitment to college counseling provided greater resources to schools in the form of college counselors, district-led workshops, and district-wide programs to increase college access.

More recently, a qualitative study by Noll (2021) examined the misalignment between college accountability and college-going culture in a no-excuses charter school. Noll found that this charter school increased college enrollment rates with their college-

centered goals and targeted approach to college attendance, but with unintended consequences for students' postsecondary decision-making. Instead of students pursuing postsecondary plans that aligned with their beliefs and values, many students followed the school's approach to college accountability policies taking the steps to enroll in colleges that were deemed appropriate by school staff. Noll described the tension and discrepancy among students' postsecondary desires and the school's goals as incongruence. Noll found that congruence among a student's and the "school's approach mediated their ability to draw on their full range of resources to participate in the college choice process and forge postsecondary trajectories they believed in (p. 3)." Similarly, Welton and Williams (2015) found that test-based accountability in a minoritized, high poverty Texas high school hindered the establishment of a college-going culture through a narrow focus on students' passing the state exit exam and pressure to boost school performance ratings.

Not only do states influence college-going culture through sanctioning certain practices related to college accountability measures, district-level policies and practices also shape college-going culture in important ways. Hill's (2012) research on the capacity of urban high schools to provide college counseling found that district policies and practices put pressure on schools and hindered college counseling through reducing funding for magnet schools and accountability policy that contributed to instability in school leadership.

This relationship was also reflected in Nienhusser and Ives's (2020:22) study of college-going culture in magnet versus non-magnet schools. They highlight the role of districts in shaping schools' resource structures concluding that:

> college-going culture differences should not be attributed to students, instead they should be linked to district-level policies (e.g., magnet school enrollment policies, limited college-going resources, policies that steer special needs learners to nonmagnet schools) that place nonmagnet schools at a disadvantage, compared to magnet schools. As a result, district-level policies should be altered to better support struggling urban schools that need more resources to support their college-going activities.

Taken together, this research highlights the importance of not only considering what happens in schools as it relates to college access, but systematically and intentionally examining the contexts external to the school that have a bearing on efforts to establish a school-wide college-going culture. Noll (2021) calls for more research on the intersection of college accountability and school college-going culture. My research answers this call through examining the ways in which state, districts, and schools shape college-going culture for minoritized students from low-income families.

### 2.1.1 School Type and College-Going Culture

Research comparing the college-going cultures of different school types is also limited, especially qualitative research. One exception is McDonough's (1997) qualitative study of college counseling and college choice among students in four private and public high schools in California. Findings indicate that students two-year and four-year college attendance decisions were shaped by schools' organizational habitus (i.e., "the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behavior through an intermediate organization and family habitus that is reasonable or rational behavior in context"), counselors' norms, expectations, assessments, and college-planning resources (McDonough 1997:158). This study also demonstrated that the college practices of private schools in the study aligned with a more *proactive* approach in supporting

college-bound students, while public schools in this study exhibited behaviors that were reflective of a *reactive* approach, due to limited time and resources for college planning.

McDonough (1997:105) described a proactive approach to college counseling as providing resources and "nurturing and supportive services to students". On the other hand, reactive college counseling was characterized by limited resources and time devoted to college planning leaving students responsible for reaching out for support. As a result, public school students who were from less advantaged backgrounds had less access to college counseling in their schools due to schools' limited resources.

Although sector differences were not the main focus of McDonough's (1997) study, this research suggests that public and private schools differ in organizational conditions that facilitate access to college counseling and norms that support educational advancement. While this research is important in elucidating the role of school context and student body composition in college outcomes, the public versus private comparison does not capture the current context of more diverse public-school options aiming to address disparities in college attendance among minoritized and low-income students, namely charter schools.

Nienhusser and Ives (2020) utilized Corwin and Tierney's (2007) conceptualization of college culture to examine how magnet school status shaped college-going culture. They compared the cultures of one magnet school and two non-magnet schools in the same district in the following five areas: academic momentum, understanding of how college plans develop, clear mission statement, comprehensive college counseling services, and coordinated and systematic college support. They found that the magnet school in the study had a stronger college-going culture due to

differences in areas such as academic preparation. For example, non-magnet school participants discussed the lack of AP courses and very high counselor caseloads. Furthermore, for students attending non-magnet schools, college was viewed as optional and not the expectation as many of these students were not perceived to be college bound like students attending magnet schools. These studies suggest variation in college-going culture based on organizational context—school type and the resources available in magnet schools.

A burgeoning body of quantitative research focuses on the causal effects of high schools of various types (i.e., private, charter, TPS) on outcomes such as college enrollment and persistence. Findings indicate that charter school attendance has had a positive impact on college enrollment in many U.S. cities with a substantial charter school presence (e.g., Chicago, Boston, New York, New Orleans) (Foreman 2017).

In an evaluation of current research on the impact of schools of choice on long-term outcomes, Foreman (2017) identifies 13 studies that used experimental methods (i.e., randomized control trials) or quasi-experimental matching methods to understand the impact of various school types on outcomes such as college enrollment, college persistence, and high school graduation. Seven of the 13 studies examined charter schools. One study looked at open enrollment public schools in a particular district. Five studies investigated private school choice through vouchers. Some of these studies used lottery application processes examining the effects on college enrollment of lottery winners versus lottery losers. Results of this research suggest differences in college outcomes by high school type. For example, charter schools overall had a positive impact on college enrollment. In Boston, Chicago, Florida, New York City and a national

analysis, the odds of college attendance were greater for students attending charter schools than students attending traditional public schools.

In Chicago, Davis and Heller (2015) examined the effect of a high-poverty, predominantly racial/ethnic minority, high performing Chicago network charter school on the college outcomes of lottery winners and losers. They found a significant positive effect of 10 percentage points on college enrollment of lottery winners immediately after high school and 9.5 percentage point increase in the persistence (i.e., enrolled four or more semesters) of lottery winners. Davis and Heller (2015) conclude that a *high-quality* charter high school can lead to students persisting for more than a year in college.

Similarly, in a study of college outcomes of charter schools in New Orleans, Harris and Larsen (2018) found positive effects of charter school attendance on college outcomes. Their results indicated an increase of 8 to 15 percentage points in college enrollment and 4 to 7 percentage points in college persistence (i.e., attending 2 or more years). This quantitative research provides evidence on the effect of school type on college outcomes and raises additional questions regarding *the ways* in which college-going norms and practices in charter schools facilitate college attendance. Taken together, this research suggests a need for more qualitative studies of the role of school type in college-going culture. My research builds upon this important previous work to uncover potential qualitative differences in college going culture—expectations, practices, and norms—of charter compared to TPSs.

In the current study, I focus on school and education policy contexts by considering how *state context* (college and career readiness policies and resources), *district-level* context, and *school* norms, practices, and resources collectively shape

schools' college-going culture more broadly. These contexts also shape high school counselors' college-related work including the availability of college counseling, which is vital to helping students to pursue college.

Taken together, this research suggests that school type, one indicator of schools' organizational context, makes a difference in the college-going cultures of schools, especially those serving underrepresented students (i.e., Black, Latinx, and low-income). And that charter school attendance is associated with increased rates of college enrollment, but in what ways and at what costs does attending a charter school impact students' transition to college? Understanding college-going norms, college planning activities, school practices, and factors shaping college outcomes across various school types is critical to understanding the central role of high schools in students transition to postsecondary education, especially for minoritized students and those from low-income families who rely more heavily on support from their schools to pursue college. Furthermore, understanding schools' organizational contexts gives insight into college-going culture and the role of counselors, so the remainder of this chapter focuses not on state and district, but on the school context.

## 2.2 College-Going Culture

A high school's college-going culture is broadly characterized by a school-wide, organizational approach to college planning that makes college attendance accessible for students from various racial/ethnic and economic backgrounds (Corwin and Tierney 2007; McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez 2002; McDonough 1997). Specifically, college-going culture is defined by school-level norms, practices, and strategies that

facilitate and support college attendance (Corwin and Tierney 2007; Engberg and Gilbert 2014; Hill 2008). Holland and Farmer-Hinton (2009:26) explain:

> college culture [in schools] reflects environments that are accessible to all students and saturated with ever-present information and resources and ongoing formal and informal conversations that help students to understand the various facets of preparing for, enrolling in, and graduating from postsecondary academic institutions as those experiences specifically pertain to the students' current and future lives.

This definition aligns with the work of researchers who identified various conditions for implementing and sustaining a college-going culture (e.g., Corwin and Tierney 2007; Engberg and Gilbert 2014; Farmer-Hinton 2011; Hill 2008; 2012; Holland and Farmer-Hinton 2009; Knight-Manuel 2019; McClafferty et al. 2002; McKillip, Godfrey, and Rawls 2013; Roderick et al. 2011; Roderick et al. 2008; Schneider 2007).

Early research by McClafferty et al. (2002) proposes several principles that highlight the norms and behaviors associated with strong college-going cultures. They include college talk, clear expectations, accessible college information and resources, a comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty and family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation of a college-going message throughout students' K-12 school experiences. These principles suggest that an effective college-going culture intentionally integrates information, resources, supports, and multiple stakeholders in a school-wide effort to help students to aspire to, apply, get accepted, enroll, and persist in college (Roderick et al. 2008). Moreover, these principles highlight the importance of creating a climate where college attendance is normalized— where there is a school-wide expectation that students can and will attend college— and where school practices behaviorally support these goals.

In contrast, a college-going culture is not comprised of what Corwin and Tierney (2007) describe as *isolated college services,* characterized by college supports that are only accessible to a small population of students in a school, college planning efforts led by one individual such as a college counselor, and a lack of common college goals among school leaders, teachers, and counselors. Isolated college services are a part of a "lack of systemic support for college-going" reflected through schools' having limited or no relationships with colleges; no college-going mission or few faculty and staff members who acknowledge it; limited learning opportunities (e.g., AP, dual enrollment); counselors who do not emphasize college attendance; counselors with no administrative support; or limited college resources (Corwin and Tierney 2007:8). In addition, research suggests that isolated college services can also look like college access programs that lack school-wide recognition, support, or on-going funding and that do not comprise the establishment of a school-wide culture around attending college (See Amaro-Jiménez and Hungerford-Kresser 2013 and Welton and Williams 2015).

The involvement of multiple stakeholders including school faculty, staff, and the broader community is also vital to the creation and sustainment of a strong college-going culture. Centering the responsibility of adults, Roderick and colleagues (2011:199) "define college-going climate as the extent to which *adults* within the high school create an environment that promotes norms for college attendance and provides the information, resources, and supports students need to effectively navigate college search and application". School leaders, teachers, and counselors are critical to developing and enacting the practices consistent with a college-going culture that makes college accessible to students' school-wide (Corwin and Tierney 2007). Moreover, leaders and

counselors in schools are responsible for initiating partnerships with higher education institutions who are also stakeholders in the broader community that provide students with college resources and opportunities such as dual enrollment courses. While the literature highlights the key role that school leaders (Bosworth, Convertino, and Hurwitz 2014), teachers, and counselors play in college-going culture, less research has articulated formalized roles and responsibilities for these key stakeholders.

Finally, a burgeoning body of research has explicitly focused on the role of students' race and cultural backgrounds in creating and sustaining a college-going culture (Achinstein et al. 2015; Knight and Marciano 2013; Knight-Manuel et al. 2019; Noll 2021; Oakes 2003; Stanton-Salazar 2001). For instance, Knight-Manuel et al. (2019) and Knight and Marciano (2013) highlighted the importance of a culturally relevant college-going culture that emphasizes a strengths-based perspective and a collaborative effort to facilitate college attendance among students of color. In this way, students are viewed in light of their cultural strengths, such as in the ways they speak, and are encouraged to embrace these qualities while adopting dominant culture to pursue college.

Similarly, Noll (2021) describes the role of cultural congruence in school environments where there is pressure to attend college. She concludes that alignment between a school's college attendance goals and students' values plays a mediating role in their ability to use all their resources (dominant school-based and nondominant cultural resources) to make college decisions that support their own desires and beliefs. Taken together, this work elucidates the need for more culturally responsive approaches to college access (Jayakumar, Vue, and Allen 2013; Welton and Martinez 2014) and shifts

the focus away from student deficits to the ways in which schools can help students draw on their full range of resources in the college-going process.

In sum, conceptualizations of college-going culture emphasize four important aspects of the role of high schools in making college accessible to all students: 1) normalization of college attendance; 2) actions that support school-wide accessibility of college attendance and college supports; 3) school-level behaviors or practices evidenced by a structure that supports students completing the necessary steps to attend college; and 4) the role of multiple stakeholders in the process of developing and sustaining a college-going culture. Furthermore, the presence or absence of a culturally relevant, strengths-based perspective that positively considers students' race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural background in college access shape all four qualities. While these qualities overlap in many ways, each has a distinct contribution to the overall college-going culture in a school and is discussed in the following sections.

### 2.2.1 College-Going Norms

The normative aspect of a school's college-going culture is concerned with whether college attendance is a common goal for students in a school (McKillip et al. 2013) and highlights the expressed (i.e., verbal or non-verbal) values or importance of college attendance among educators and students (McClafferty et al. 2002). Schools normalize college attendance formally through written mission statements that emphasize college preparation (Farmer-Hinton 2011) and informally through leaders, teachers, counselors, and other school staff having expectations for students in their schools to attend and succeed in college. Schools communicate these expectations to students in various ways such as through the conversations that adults have with students about the

college application process, through the intentionality with which college resources are made available to all students, or through the time and resources schools devote to college supports (Corwin and Tierney 2007; Engberg and Gilbert 2014; McClafferty et al. 2002).

In contrast, schools do not normalize college attendance when a select group of students are viewed as college-bound while others are not perceived as "college material" (Achinstein et al. 2015; Nienhusser and Ives 2020; Oakes 2003). This contributes to a deficit framing, rather than a strengths-based perspective, on students' academic potential and can negatively impact students' college aspirations. Schools operating from a strengths-based perspective have faculty and staff members who believe that all students are capable of attending college, despite their racial/ethnic or socioeconomic status, and work towards that goal even in the face of tensions and challenges in establishing a college-going culture (Mehan 2012; Farmer-Hinton 2011). Research by Achinstein et al. (2015) examined how educators worked to "relabel" Latinx students, who were often viewed with lower expectations by adults, as capable of attending and succeeding in college. Normalizing college attendance through adults having high college expectations for all students and communicating those expectations in various ways provides the foundation for a college-going culture.

### 2.2.2 High Schools' College-Going Practices

In addition to normalizing college attendance, practices that develop students' college aspirations, prepare students for the rigor of college, and provide them with the concrete support needed to navigate complex college application processes positively

influences the creation and adoption of a college-going culture (Roderick et al. 2011). These school-based practices or behaviors focus on college preparation (Conley 2007); concrete, individualized assistance with college planning tasks (McKillip et al. 2012; 2013); and partnerships with higher education institutions including college access programs (Corwin and Tierney 2007).

Preparation for college includes both academic and non-academic factors (Conley 2007; 2012; Tierney and Duncheon 2015), and schools with strong college-going cultures focus on both. Schools' academic practices aim to enhance content knowledge by providing access to a rigorous college prep curriculum that includes high school coursework that positions students for enrollment in four-year colleges and college-level courses where students can receive college credits such as Dual Enrollment (DE) or Advanced Placement (AP). Academic practices can also include preparation for college entrance exams such as ACT preparation courses or bootcamps, although less research has explored how these supports have shaped schools' college-going cultures.

Offering access to a college preparatory curriculum to all students, regardless of academic performance or social background, has been a focus of policies aimed at making college accessible to all. As of a 2018 report from the Center for American Progress, only four states—Louisiana, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Michigan — have fully aligned their diploma requirements with their states public university system's admissions requirements (Jimenez and Sargrad 2018). These practices contribute to a school environment that normalizes college attendance through providing opportunities for academic college preparation.

Non-academic school practices—mindsets, soft skills, and other non-cognitive skills that aid in succeeding in college—prepare students mentally, socially, and financially for college. A focus on mental, social, and financial preparation for college builds students' "contextual skills and awareness" (Conley 2007:17). The focus of this preparation is to elucidate the norms of higher education (e.g., how to interact with faculty, staff, and students from diverse backgrounds) and to enhance students' "college knowledge"— their understanding of college expectations, admissions requirements, college costs, and financial aid (Conley 2005).

Non-academic preparation in high school often occurs through informal and formal opportunities to engage in college talk (McClafferty et al. 2002). Informally, teachers, counselors, or other adults may speak with students about their college experiences and provide support with college applications or schools may maintain relationships with alumni who come to speak with students about their college experiences. Formally, schools may offer courses that focus on college and career planning, host college fairs and college tours, or implement programs that focus on exposure to college and development of college aspirations (Amaro-Jiménez and Hungerford-Kresser 2013). Both academic and non-academic support provides a school infrastructure that encourages students to pursue college.

One-to-one concrete assistance with college planning tasks is critical to helping students move from aspiration to application. Research has shown that support with various aspects of the college-going process is associated with higher rates of college enrollment, especially for minoritized and low-income students (Roderick et al. 2011). For instance, one influential study of college-going culture in Chicago found that students

who submitted a FAFSA application and completed several college applications were more likely to enroll and be accepted into college (Roderick et al. 2008). This study also found that concrete support with college planning was particularly helpful for Latinx students.

School partnerships with higher education institutions are yet another critical school practice within college-going culture that connects high schools to higher education (McClafferty et al. 2002). While high schools focus on making sure students graduate, an important prerequisite for college attendance, higher education partnerships can provide the support needed to give students access to college resources and experiences that can enhance their chances of applying and enrolling into college.

### 2.2.3 High Schools' College-Linking Strategies (Hill 2008)

Hill's (2008) college-linking strategies provide a framework for examining school practices, resources, and norms as well as outreach to students and families to provide college planning opportunities. School practices that Hill (2008) examined included adults encouraging students to tour colleges, assisting students with college and financial aid applications and contacting college personnel on behalf of students. Norms were measured by one question that assessed whether parents were contacted by school staff about their student's college choices. Schools with limited college resources and very little "organizational commitment to facilitating access to available resources among students and their families" were considered *traditional* (p. 60). Schools with many resources and less intentional outreach to students and families were defined as

*clearinghouses* for college-going support. Schools with numerous resources and a commitment to outreach were described as *brokering*.

The results of this study indicate that these three classifications of college-linking strategies are related to variation in college enrollment. For instance, attending brokering schools significantly increased the odds of attending a four-year college by more than 800%. Attending clearinghouse schools significantly increased the odds of attending a four-year college by more than 600%. Hill's research also found that public schools were often clearinghouses for college information. I utilize Hill's framework in addition to conceptualizations of college-going culture from extant literature to understand a school's role in facilitating access to college.

### 2.2.4 Accessibility of College Attendance and College Planning Supports

As suggested in previous sections, schools with strong college-going cultures focus on making norms, resources, and opportunities accessible school-wide (Schneider 2007). They do this by initiating college supports, rather than putting the onus on students and families to reach out for assistance (Hill 2008; Hill 2012), and through having dedicated time and space for individualized college counseling and college planning activities (Corwin and Tierney 2007; Engberg and Gilbert 2014).

School-initiated outreach to students and families occurs when school leaders, faculty, and staff establish systems for providing practical, individualized support with various aspects of college planning such as completing college essays, college applications, scholarships, and financial aid applications. In this way, schools are enacting a college-going norm that sends a message to students that they can go to

college, and they have the support within their schools to do so. A strengths-based perspective among school faculty and staff is key to making college attendance accessible to all students. When students are viewed by adults in light of their strengths, students can "see themselves as competitive college applicants" (Schneider 2007, p.8).

### 2.2.5 The Role of Multiple Stakeholders in Schools' College-Going Cultures

An effective college-going culture also requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders both within and outside of high schools to provide the social support that prospective first-generation college students need to make the transition to college (Holland 2019; McKillip et al. 2013; Schneider 2007). In schools, this includes leaders, teachers, counselors, and other school staff members who can serve as cultural guides, helping students to navigate and understand the institutional norms of higher education (Lareau 2015) or who can act as institutional agents, who through their networks, facilitate access to vital resources (Stanton-Salazar 2011). Leaders are responsible for establishing and leading the way in carrying out a college-going vision (Bosworth et al. 2014; Martinez and Everman 2017). Without a school leader communicating the importance of college in their school, other adults may view college as less of a priority.

Most research on college-going culture does not explicate nor distinguish the role of teachers in developing and sustaining a schools' college-going culture. However, the literature suggests that teachers play a critical role in college access due to their frequent contact with students and their responsibility for preparing students academically for rigorous college coursework (Roderick et al. 2008). Since teachers encounter students daily, they have an opportunity to influence students' college aspirations through

encouraging them to pursue college as a postsecondary option and by sharing their college experiences with students. Research has found that how teachers participate in and view the college climate in a school shapes students' participation in college planning and ultimately their college enrollment (Roderick et al. 2011).

Outside of schools, family members are stakeholders who can offer encouragement if they have not obtained a college degree or provide practical assistance if they do have college experience. Staff working in higher education partnerships are also important stakeholders who can bridge the gap between high school and college by providing opportunities and resources. High school personnel can collaborate with colleges on these efforts. Former students can also play a vital role in schools' college culture and can provide peer support throughout the college planning process (Bloom et al. 2020).

All of these stakeholders encounter students in different capacities and have different levels of access to students. For instance, teachers have frequent contact with students and can share their college experiences with students on a daily basis. Research suggests that when all stakeholders work together, this can lead to an effective college-going culture that supports all students in pursuing college as a goal (Corwin and Tierney 2007).

## 2.3 High School Counselors and College-Going Culture

A high school's college-going culture provides one organizational context in which counselors conduct their work. A body of research suggests that resources, college counseling norms, counseling department structures, and the characteristics of the student

body (e.g., race and SES) contribute to differences in the strength of a high school's college culture and provide varying contexts that shape counselors ability to support students in the college planning process (McDonough 1997). Moreover, some research suggests that counselors have agency and can positively shape their schools' college culture by leading the charge in normalizing college attendance (McClafferty Jarsky, McDonough, and Núñez 2009). Taken together, these perspectives on high school counselors and college-going culture elucidate: 1) a reciprocal relationship among counselors and the culture of college attendance in their high school environments and 2) the importance of examining counselors' college-related work in light of various organizational contexts, both within individual schools and externally through the influence of district and state policies, practices, and expectations.

As discussed in Section 2.2, a school's college-going culture aims to normalize college attendance for all students by preparing students academically for college coursework and providing equitable access to the necessary information, resources, and support to apply, enroll, and understand what it takes to ultimately graduate from college (Corwin and Tierney 2007; Engberg and Gilbert 2014; Holland and Farmer-Hinton 2009; McClafferty et al. 2002; Roderick et al. 2011). At the heart of a school's college culture are relationships with adults that provide opportunities for individualized support (Hill 2012) including ongoing formal and informal conversations that enhance the academic, financial, and social aspects of college readiness (McKillip et al. 2013). While research on college-going culture emphasizes the involvement of all school personnel including school leaders and teachers (Corwin and Tierney 2007; Roderick et al. 2011), high school counselors are widely viewed as having the most critical role in supporting students with

college planning, especially Black, Latinx, and low-income students, and in establishing a school's college culture overall (McClafferty et al. 2002; McDonough 1997; McDonough 2005; Perna et al. 2008).

One perspective posits that high school counselors can serve as "institutional agents" sharing college-related resources, information, and support through ongoing relationships with students with the goal of helping students transition to college and increasing students' social capital (Farmer-Hinton and McCullough 2008; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995; Stanton-Salazar 1997). Researchers using this lens describe counselors as institutional agents who can establish trusting relationships with students and provide access to school-based social capital (Farmer-Hinton 2008; Holland 2019). In this manner, counselors serve as guides through the college selection and application process, ensuring that students complete college planning tasks such as take the necessary courses and tests for college admission, navigate financial aid and scholarships, and address any psychological barriers to college attendance.

In contrast, prior research has shown how counselors can be gatekeepers to college attendance, leading some students down a college path and steering others away from college or towards less selective institutions (Rosenbaum et al. 1996). While these individual perspectives emphasize the role counselors play in college access, much of this research lacks in-depth qualitative evidence of the broader organizational contexts shaping counselors' college-related work including considerations of counselors' wider roles and responsibilities that are also shaped by district and state policies.

As described in Section 2.2, the college-going culture literature describes the organizational conditions for turning college aspirations into college enrollment, and a lot

of this work centers the role of the counselor. In their review of the literature on counselors and college access, McKillip, Rawls, and Barry (2012) identified key school-level considerations that shape the effectiveness of counselors in providing one-to-one assistance with college preparation and planning including structure of the counseling department; early and ongoing college preparation and planning; collaboration among counselors, teachers, and other school staff; and schools' college-related resources. Support from counselors is critical in taking the practical steps to enroll into college, especially for minoritized students from low-income families.

Of the ways in which counselors can support students with college planning, a substantial body of quantitative research links student-counselor meetings to positive college outcomes (Belasco 2013; Bryan et al. 2011; Robinson and Roksa 2016). For instance, Belasco (2013) and Bryan et al.'s (2011) studies show that meeting with counselors regarding college is positively associated with students' college application and enrollment rates. In particular, Belasco (2013) found that students meeting with their high school counselor about college admission positively correlated with college enrollment, especially that of low-income students, who were more likely to enroll in four-year colleges (versus two-year or none) if they met with their counselors in both 10$^{th}$ and 12$^{th}$ grades.

Similarly, Bryan et al. (2011) examined the influence of student-counselor meetings and the number of high school counselors in a school on college application rates and found significant positive relationship on both measures. Specifically, students in schools with more counselors were more likely to apply to two or more colleges, and students who met with counselors by 10$^{th}$ grade were twice as likely to complete one

college application and 3.5 times more likely to complete two or more applications. Furthermore, the most economically disadvantaged students who had not met with their counselor were significantly less likely to apply to two or more colleges than low-SES students who met with the counselor after 10th grade.

Taken together, this research suggests an important role of high school counselors' individualized support with college attendance for students from less economically advantaged backgrounds. However, this research provides less insight into the mechanisms of *how* meeting with the counselor influences college attendance such as the benefit students can get from individualized meetings with their counselors, especially students who would be first-generation college students. In these meetings, counselors could help students navigate the various aspects of the college-going process and successfully submit applications. Counselors could answer students' questions about the process and provide a plan with clear action steps for students to take (Corwin and Tierney 2007). Counselors could serve as cultural guides helping students to understand the expectations of higher education (Lareau 2015).

Evidence on the benefits of student-counselor meetings on college outcomes by race is less clear. While finding positive outcomes for low-SES students, and for all students, in some cases, Bryan and colleagues (2011) also found positive effects of not meeting with a counselor for Black and Latinx students. For instance, Black students who had not spoken with their counselor regarding college were more likely to apply to one or more colleges versus not applying. A possible explanation for this could be counselors' low expectations of students based on race or SES that undermines students' college aspirations and impacts their decisions to complete the college application process

(Holland 2019). This evidence suggests the need for more research on counselors' perceptions of students based on race and SES and how meeting with counselors can influence college transitions of students of color, including the content and quality of the interactions and the barriers to student support among these students.

As discussed, early and ongoing opportunities for individualized college supports, especially in the form of meeting with counselors, could be beneficial to students in general, guiding them through the application process (Bryan et al. 2011; Farmer-Hinton and McCullough 2008; Robinson and Roksa 2016), but as discussed above, research is needed to uncover the nature of the interactions that lead some Black students to not complete the process. While evidence highlights the importance of meeting with counselors to college outcomes, access to college counseling and opportunities for individualized college supports are limited for low-income, Latinx, and Black students who are often concentrated in schools with weak or non-existent college-going cultures (Holland 2015; Perna 2006; Robinson and Roksa 2016; Roderick et al. 2011).

Black, Latinx, and low-income students typically attend schools with less emphasis on college attendance (Robinson and Roska 2016) and do not have access to college counseling due to high counselor caseloads, fewer counselors in their schools, counselors having less time to devote to college, and counselors with lower expectations for minoritized students. As a result, these students do not receive the type of in-school support that research suggests can shape their application, enrollment, and persistence in college. Furthermore, limited access to a counselor can contribute to academically qualified students not taking the steps to apply to college or opting for attending less selective institutions (Ceja 2000).

### 2.3.1 Organizational Context Shaping Counselors College-Related Work

As described above, the various organizational contexts that counselors work within—schools, districts, state — shape counselors' college-related work in important ways. While little research focuses on the role of state and district contexts in counselors' college-related work (Perna et al. 2008 is an exception), research points to schools' organizational conditions shaping counselors' ability to provide effective support to all students. In particular, prior research names the structure of counseling departments, college counseling norms, and school resources for college attendance as vital to a strong college-going culture (Engberg and Gilbert 2014; Hill 2008; 2012 McClafferty et al. 2002; McKillip et al. 2012; McKillip et al. 2013). In the following section, I discuss how extant literature has examined these organizational factors.

#### 2.3.1.1 Counseling Department Structure, Resources, and College Counseling Norms

Research examining counseling department structures and college counseling norms have typically been quantitative investigations of counselors' caseload (i.e., student-to-counselor ratio) and time devoted to college counseling (e.g., Engberg and Gilbert 2014).

A substantial body of research suggests that higher caseloads hinder counselors from guiding students through the college application process (Bryan et al. 2011; McDonough 1997; 2005). In particular, students in schools with large caseloads are less likely to speak with counselors about college, take SAT/ACT, and enroll in 4-yr colleges (Bryan, Kim, and Liu 2022; Woods and Domina 2014). This is unfortunate as Black, Latinx, and low-income students, who often rely heavily on their schools for college

support, typically attend schools with higher caseloads and therefore have fewer opportunities for individualized college support than their White or more advantaged peers who are concentrated in schools with the lowest caseloads (Bridgeland and Bruce 2011a; Woods and Domina 2014). This research suggests that counselor effectiveness and college attendance are largely due to resource disparities that exist across schools.

While higher counseling caseloads have been associated with negative college outcomes, research by Mulhern (2020:2) suggests that the quality of college counseling matters even more than student-counselor ratio and is "driven by the information and direct assistance they provide students". In sum, this research suggests the need for in-depth understanding of *how* counselor caseload impacts college counseling and counselors' college-related work as a whole.

One aspect of counseling department structure that has received less empirical attention in terms of its influence on the availability of college counseling is the perception that all counselors should act as college counselors (McClafferty 2002) versus having a separate counselor devoted to college planning (Corwin and Tierney 2007). One element of McClafferty et al.'s (2002:19) conceptualization of college-going culture includes "a comprehensive counseling model where all counselors are college counselors". To employ such a model, the authors highlight the importance of assessing a school's current counseling department structure to understand "… a school's policies, resources, and organizational structures and… whether and how high school students are encouraged and assisted to go to college" giving insight into "the artifacts of a school's decisions about what is important, and how and why school resources are allocated as they are" (McClafferty 2002:19). Findings suggest that restructuring counseling

departments can help to implement a comprehensive approach to college counseling by engaging the entire counseling department in acquiring the knowledge to support students in the college application process rather than placing the responsibility for college planning on one guidance counselor who is already tasked with many roles and responsibilities.

In terms of organizational resources within counseling departments, the presence of administrative support impacts counselors' ability to provide individualized assistance in the college transition process (Corwin and Tierney 2007; Hill 2012). Counseling departments without secretaries tend to have counselors who are overburdened with tasks and mounting paperwork and unable to provide consistent, personalized college support. Corwin and Tierney (2007) argue that the lack of administrative assistance for college counselors signals schools' low levels of college-going support and less school-wide emphasis on college. Hill's (2012) qualitative study of college counseling in two magnet high schools serving predominantly African American students, most of whom would be first-generation college students, found that district-level budget cuts led to the elimination of a secretary at both high schools, which increased counselors' workload and decreased the time counselors had to devote to college counseling. Administrative support in counseling departments is examined less often in college-going culture studies, but it provides important information about the broader organizational context, especially challenges with institutional resources, in which counselors do their college-related work.

In addition to counseling department structure and resources, college counseling norms contribute to a schools' college-going culture. Schools with strong norms around providing college counseling to all students not only have a school-wide expectation for

college attendance, but they prioritize college counseling by intentionally devoting time to meet with students one-to-one (Perna et al. 2008) and use a brokering approach to college counseling (i.e., numerous college resources and outreach to students to provide these resources and other supports) with counselor-initiated outreach to students rather than student/parent-initiated contact with counselors (Hill 2008; 2012; Perna et al. 2008).

While a school-wide expectation for college attendance is foundational to schools' college-going culture, a counseling infrastructure where college counseling is prioritized, is early and ongoing, and leads to students transitioning to college is needed (Hill 2012). In their study of the counseling opportunity structure, Engberg and Gilbert (2014) operationalized the normative aspects of a counseling opportunity structure as the average counselor caseload, the number of hours counselors engaged in college counseling, and whether college attendance was a goal within counseling departments. Providing the academic and social counseling that is needed to support first-generation college students in the college transition goes beyond the normalization of college attendance and inundating students with resources and information (Conley 2007; 2012).

Hill (2012) argues that high schools should use a "brokering" approach to college counseling characterized by schools reaching out to students to disseminate college information and resources rather than putting the onus on students to reach out in search of resources and support. In particular, Hill (2012:39) states that schools who employ a brokering strategy have "an exceptional structure for college planning resources and norms that promote the equitable distribution of these resources through school-initiated outreach to students and their families". Prior research by Hill (2008) suggests that schools who use a brokering approach have a positive impact on the four-year college

enrollment of students from various racial/ethnic backgrounds. In contrast, a "clearinghouse" strategy (i.e., numerous resources and less outreach) had differential effects on the likelihood of college enrollment by racial/ethnic group.

With counselors inundated with tasks and lots of paperwork while serving hundreds of students, often the expectation is for students to reach out to counselors for support with the college application process. Other research suggests that student-initiated contact with counselors is based on race and class. For instance, a study by Holland (2019) indicated that even in diverse school settings, middle and upper-income White students reached out to their counselors more often for college planning supports and felt entitled to such assistance whereas lower-income students of color appeared to be socialized to wait for counselors to approach them, lessening their access to the counseling they need to complete the college application process (Holland 2019). These findings have important implications for college counseling, biases among counselors, and the strategies counselors use in their work with diverse student groups as well as the ability for students and counselors to develop trusting relationships that facilitate student access to important information and resources to matriculate to college (Holland 2015; 2019).

In summary, schools' organizational context in terms of counseling department structure, resources, and college counseling norms affects how counselors enact their college-related work through providing an environment where counselors have the time to provide the supports students need (Engberg and Gilbert 2014; Hill 2008; 2012; McClafferty et al. 2002; McKillip et al. 2012). However less research has qualitatively

examined schools' counseling department structures, in particular, how counseling departments are organized, how counselors enact their roles, and how tasks are allocated.

#### 2.3.1.2 College Counseling and School Type

There is limited research comparing college counseling in various school types, especially qualitative studies. Research by Farmer-Hinton and colleagues (2006; 2008; 2011) are important exceptions. These studies of charter schools found that with increased autonomy and less district oversight, charter schools had an opportunity to address educational inequality through college access.

Using longitudinal counselor interview data from a mixed-methods study, Farmer-Hinton and McCullough (2008) examined college counseling in a college-prep charter high school and found that organizational challenges such as developing a new school and lack of counselors with high school counseling experience hindered the implementation of comprehensive college counseling. For instance, counselors felt that they spent a lot of time responding to students' immediate needs and the organizational needs of their school (e.g., serving as substitute teachers, administrative tasks) taking time away from college counseling and building a college-going culture. In other words, college counseling in this charter school was reactive (McDonough 1997) as counselors grappled with the demands on their time to support the school with non-counseling tasks and help students through crises. Public school counselors faced these challenges as they typically work in environments with less resources devoted to college attendance and as more roles and responsibilities are added to the school counseling position without taking any tasks away (McDonough 2005).

### 2.3.2 Counselor Role Expectations, Workload, and Challenges with Establishing College-Going Culture

Over time, counselors have been assigned various duties that conflict with the role of supporting students with college, including school-centered administrative tasks like scheduling and testing and student-centered roles such as mental health counseling (Blake 2020). As roles have been added to the counseling position, none have been taken away or renegotiated, especially in schools serving low-income students and students of color (Blake 2020; Bridgeland and Bruce 2011b). These added responsibilities take away from counselors serving as guides in the college planning process and providing personalized support to students who may not have such assistance in their homes or communities.

As highlighted, challenges with counselors establishing a college culture emanate from various contexts. At the school-level, counselors typically report to non-counseling staff members who are unfamiliar with counselors' training and role expectations communicated from professional counseling organizations (Blake 2018). State and district-level college and career readiness policies connected to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) impact counselors work through accountability measures that focus primarily on test-based performance (NCLB) and incorporating non-testing benchmarks such as policies focused on college and career readiness (ESSA). These policies impact counselors as they add to their responsibilities, turning attention away from college counseling and school-wide implementation of a college-going culture to increased paperwork with managing the testing process and

implementing practices that are measured as part of schools' performance scores like FAFSA completion in Louisiana (Perna et al. 2008; Welton and Williams 2015).

### 2.3.3 Role Conflict and Role Incongruity

To describe a counselor's role in college-going culture, I supplement the literatures on counselors and college-going culture with concepts from role theory, specifically, role conflict and role incongruity (Freeman and Coll 1997). Role conflict occurs when there are multiple expectations for individuals' behavior from different sources (Biddle 1986; Freeman and Coll 1997). As mental health professionals in their fields and educators in schools, high school counselors often experience role conflict due to differing expectations from their professions (i.e., how counselors perceive their role from their training and professional networks) and from schools (i.e., district, state, school leaders', parents', teachers', and students' expectations of counselors). As a result, counselors engage in numerous tasks that conflict with their expectations for themselves, which are often influenced by professional counseling norms (Blake 2020).

Role incongruity is related to role conflict and is characterized by "conflicts with the structure of the system (including allocation of resources) in relation to work assignments" (Freeman and Coll 1997:36). Lack of adequate resources in counseling departments such as high student-counselor ratios or support staff constrains the time that counselors have to provide direct support to students in the college application process. Furthermore, role conflict and role incongruity can lead to counselors feeling stressed, overloaded, and burned out while ultimately not being able to effectively support students with college planning (Freeman and Coll 1997).

In conclusion, my research draws on numerous concepts from existing college-going culture literature to understand how multiple contexts collectively influence college-going culture and counselors, to conceptualize variation in college-going culture among schools, and to argue that variation is shaped by schools' organizational contexts. Furthermore, considering these multiple bodies of literature suggests that college practices should be interconnected and built on each other so students can better understand the complex college application process. I draw on Hill's (2008) college-linking strategies to describe how differences in norms and resource structures lead to varying college-going cultures. I utilize role theory to explain tensions and challenges in counselors' college-related work given their broader roles and responsibilities.

# CHAPTER 3. METHODS

My dissertation used a multiple case study approach, as discussed by Yin (2003) and Ragin and Becker (1992), to understand how high schools' organizational contexts shaped: 1) college-going culture of schools serving students who have been historically underrepresented in colleges (Chapter 4) and 2) counselors' work in schools' college-going cultures given their broader role expectations (Chapter 5). Case study methods were well-suited for this study as they allowed me to examine "contextual conditions—believing that they might be highly pertinent to" my "phenomenon of study" (Yin 2003:13).

My primary source of data was semi-structured, in-person and virtual interviews with 40 school leaders, counselors, teachers, and teacher leaders across four Greater New Orleans high schools. Qualitative interviews with participants across different roles allowed me to capture nuanced perspectives on schools' college-going norms and practices to develop an overall understanding of schools' college-going cultures (Rubin and Rubin 2005). To supplement and triangulate interviews, I conducted observations over the course of eight days at Forest Charter High School and Garden Charter High School. I was unable to conduct observations in the two traditional public schools (TPS), Woodlot High School and Orchard High School, due to school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic so I collected additional observational data from documents, websites, and social media across all four schools. This included an analysis of 50 documents from school, district, network, and state-level websites such as the Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) and the Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance (LOSFA). I also analyzed 35 social media posts related to college and career

readiness practices across the four schools from 2019 to 2020. Additional data from the four high schools allowed me to contextualize and to triangulate the interview data to provide thick descriptions of cases of college-going culture. See Section 3.3 for a discussion of in-person versus virtual (technology-based) interviews and Section 3.5 for further discussion of the study limitations.

While my analysis focused on comparing high schools more broadly in terms of the ways in which various school and district-level contextual factors shaped college-going culture, one key contextual factor I examined was school type through a comparison of charter and traditional public high schools. Anecdotally, charters are known for emphasizing college as the goal for many of their students, so this comparison yielded important insights into college-going culture across different school types. Moreover, charter schools have greater autonomy than TPSs in school-level decision-making, including an opportunity for more innovative educational practices (Bulkley et al. 2021). Considering these findings, I examined the similarities and differences in the college norms and practices of charter and traditional public high schools.

## 3.1 State and District Contexts of Case Study Schools

Louisiana provided an informative context for examining high schools' college-going culture as policy changes prior to this study attempted to address the low levels of postsecondary education and the future jobs that would require some postsecondary education or training. In 2019, only 24% of Louisiana residents ages 25 years or older had a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census 2019). According to data from the LDOE, only 56.6% of Louisiana's high school graduates enrolled in a two-year or four-year

college in fall 2019 compared with the national average of 66% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). These statistics show even greater disparities when examined by race and income. African American and Latinx students' college enrollment rates during this same period were approximately 52.5% and 43.2% respectively, and only 47.4% of Louisiana students categorized as economically disadvantaged enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges (LDOE 2019).

Facing a shortage of qualified workers, the LDOE implemented college and career readiness policies to position students to pursue college degrees or postsecondary career training (Culbertson et al. 2019). The policy changes included requiring juniors to take the ACT beginning with the 2013 graduating class and making FAFSA completion or an application for the Taylor Opportunity Program for Students (TOPS), Louisiana's college scholarship program, a graduation requirement[1] beginning in the 2017-2018 school year. This was the first financial aid policy like this in the nation (Culbertson et al. 2019; LDOE 2019).

In addition, starting with 9th graders in the 2014-2015 school year, LDOE implemented two diploma pathways, also referred to as diploma tracks throughout this dissertation: TOPS University and Jump Start TOPS Tech (LDOE N.d.; Culbertson et al. 2019). The TOPS University pathway or the "college diploma"[2] track is focused on college readiness and positions students to meet the requirements for attending four-year state colleges and universities. Students complete the necessary coursework and

[1] Families can complete a waiver if they refuse to complete FAFSA. An LEA can apply for a waiver if a student is unable to complete a FAFSA application or a TOPS award application. See Louisiana's Financial Aid Access Policy.

[2] LDOE has referred to TOPS University diploma as the "college diploma" in documents on their website and in policy documents (e.g., Bulletin 741).

requirements for college entry to become eligible for a TOPS scholarship to attend four-year state institutions. The Jump Start TOPS Tech pathway or the "career diploma"[3] track emphasizes career readiness and prepares students to enter a two-year degree program or the workforce by obtaining additional career certifications or industry-based credentials (IBCs). Students are positioned to meet the requirements for a TOPS Tech scholarship that provides funding for up to two years of postsecondary education (LOFSA 2021). While students can pursue one or both diploma pathways, adults at all four schools expressed having more of a focus on the TOPS University pathway as the majority of students in their schools were put on the "college diploma" path.

Along with these policies were changes to the accountability system. Beginning in 2017-2018, the school performance score (SPS) formula for high schools evaluated four components equally: on-time high school graduation rate, ACT/WorkKeys, state assessments, and strength of diploma (LDOE 2018). WorkKeys is an assessment of workplace skills (ACT N.d.). Strength of diploma measures college and career readiness, and schools receive additional SPS points if students completed college coursework or acquired career credentials (e.g., Advanced Placement (AP) courses, Dual Enrollment (DE), Associates Degree, IBCs) (LDOE 2018).

Louisiana schools have seen progress on measures of college readiness and enrollment with the policy changes described above. Research by the Center for American Progress (2018) found that Louisiana was one of only four states in the nation that aligned their high school diploma requirements with admissions requirements for

[3] LDOE has referred to Jump Start TOPS Tech diploma as the "career diploma" in documents on their website and in policy documents (e.g., Bulletin 741).

state public colleges and universities (Jimenez and Sargrad 2018). LDOE (2019) also reported that Louisiana's college enrollment rates reached an "all-time high" with 25,083 of the 43,707 students who graduated in four years in 2018 enrolling in college, a 23% increase from 2012 college enrollment rates. LDOE attributed much of this progress to the increased number of African American students pursuing postsecondary education—2,500 more in 2018 than in 2012.

The four high schools in this study came from two Louisiana school districts—New Orleans Public Schools (NOLA-PS) and a comparison district. Both districts provided theoretically salient contexts for examining *how* organizational contexts shaped high schools' cultures around college attendance. They focused on preparing students for college and careers and offered different school options such as charter schools, open enrollment options, or magnet schools focused on college attendance. With freedom from direct district oversight, research suggests that charter schools have increased school-based autonomy and the ability to implement school-wide organizational changes (Bulkley et al. 2021). This study sought to understand how school-based autonomy, one element of district-level context examined in this study, shaped counselors' college-related work and schools' college-going cultures more broadly.

NOLA-PS was well-suited for this study as it is the only all-charter district in the U.S. and served more than 80% of students from low-income families in 2019 (i.e., identified as economically disadvantaged[4] by LDOE). Approximately 90% of students identified as African American or Latinx — groups that are disproportionately

[4] LDOE classifies students as "economically disadvantaged" based on a number of income indicators such as eligibility for the state's food assistance programs or healthcare programs, homelessness, English Language Learners, etc. See Act 136 (HB 130) of 2017 for a full description.

underrepresented in colleges and universities (LDOE 2019). Moreover, research has shown that New Orleans rates of college enrollment and persistence have significantly increased with the transition to an all-charter district compared to the pre-Katrina college enrollment and persistence rates when most schools were TPSs and were directly managed by the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) (Harris and Larsen 2018). Recently, approximately 61% of the NOLA-PS graduating class of 2019 enrolled in a two-year or four-year college with more than 72% of those students attending four-year colleges (LDOE 2019).

The TPSs in this study are located in a demographically similar district with approximately 80% of students identified as economically disadvantaged with approximately 70% identified as African American or Latinx in 2019 (LDOE 2019). The two-year and four-year college enrollment rate in this district was about 50% in fall 2019, with more than 70% of those students enrolled in a four-year college (LDOE 2019).

### 3.2 School and Participant Sampling

I used purposive and convenience sampling strategies to obtain a sample of four high schools from the two demographically similar districts described above (Patton 2002; Creswell 2013). My purposeful sampling design was based on three criteria: schools' racial/ethnic and income demographics, school type, and schools' college enrollment rates (Yin 2003). I aimed to have a mixture of charter and TPSs that were open enrollment (i.e., no admissions criteria were required for entrance into the school) and served a predominantly African American and Latinx (at least 75%) and low-income population (70% or more students classified as economically disadvantaged according to

LDOE). I also sought at least one school with college enrollment rates above Louisiana's rate of 56% for fall 2019 and one school below this rate as well as representation of charter schools with different management structures—charter schools that were a part of a network and schools that were not, referred to as standalone charter schools or non-network charter schools throughout this dissertation. To be eligible for this study, schools must have had no admissions requirements and serve the demographics outlined above. After eliminating high schools with admissions requirements, such as magnet schools and alternative schools, schools that did not serve a significant portion of African American and Latinx students, schools with specialized missions such as arts-focused high schools, and schools with no college enrollment data due to no graduating senior class, 17 high schools in the two districts were eligible for participation in the study.

To recruit schools, I created an excel spreadsheet with information on the eligible high schools' LDOE 2018-2019 college attendance rates, school type, schools' racial and economic demographics, academic performance, and school leader contact information. I later chose not to include schools with significant leadership changes— principal's first year at the school, no principal listed, or changes in management—because of the difficulty in obtaining leader contact information due to turnover. Consent and support from the school leader was a requirement for participation in this study based on the terms outlined in my IRB proposal. Moreover, principals in their first year at a school would not have had the opportunity to establish or attempt to establish a college-going culture (Bosworth et al. 2014). This brought the total of eligible schools from 17 to 13.

I then emailed school leaders to participate in the study. When I received no response, I followed-up through email, phone call, or contact from people in my personal

and professional networks. I reached out to additional school leaders that did not meet the full criteria to have a greater number of schools in the study. Nine principals either declined to participate or never responded. After multiple communication attempts to provide additional information about my study, four school leaders agreed to participate. All four schools met the full criteria, "purposefully inform[ing] an understanding of" college-going culture among schools serving minoritized and low-income students (Creswell 2013:156). Many students in these schools would be first-generation college attendees or the first in their families to go to college if they chose to do so.

The sample of four schools included one network NOLA-PS charter school (i.e., overseen by an organization managing multiple schools), one non-network NOLA-PS charter school, and two TPSs from a demographically similar district to that of NOLA-PS. I chose two TPSs in the same district to focus the investigation on variation among approaches to college support and counseling among charter and TPSs in two demographically similar districts, not variation within districts.

Participants at each school were recruited using purposeful sampling, snowball sampling, and professional networks to obtain a range of perspectives across positions, grade-levels, disciplines, and years of educational experience (Patton 2002). Prior college access research typically focuses on one perspective (e.g., counselors or students). I specifically sought to interview counselors, teachers, leaders, and other academic staff members such as teacher leaders to get a holistic, in-depth understanding of schools' culture around college attendance, both symbolically and materially (Hill 2008; Roderick et al. 2011). The combination of interviews with teachers, leaders, and counselors in each school provided a more comprehensive examination of schools'

college-going cultures and triangulated perspectives of participants across different roles. I sought to interview at least nine people including the principal and another leader such as an assistant principal, three or more school counselors, and four or more teachers, teacher leaders, or other academic staff members. School leaders would give insight into their vision for college access and the college practices currently implemented. School counselors would provide in-depth understanding of their role in supporting students with college and their perception of schools' college-going culture. Teachers and other staff would provide information on their personal sense of responsibility in assisting students with college planning and their perceptions of whether the responsibility for supporting students with college is shared among other teachers, staff, and leaders in the school.

## 3.3 Background on High School Contexts

Table 3.1 summarizes information about the organizational contexts of the four case study schools.

TABLE 3.1

SCHOOLS' ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS[a] (2019-2020)

| | Forest Charter High School | Garden Charter High School | Orchard High School | Woodlot High School |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School Type | Network Charter | Standalone Charter[b] | TPS | TPS |
| Enrollment | 1000 | 1000 | 1400 | 1300 |
| % African American and Latinx | 95% | 95% | 85% | 75% |
| % Economically Disadvantaged | 80% | 80% | 90% | 85% |
| Class of 2019 | 70% | 70% | 45% | 45% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Two-Year and Four-Year College Enrollment Rate[c] | | | | |
| College Prep or College Readiness Mission or Focus[d] | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Note: TPS = traditional public school

[a] Data are approximated to maintain school anonymity.

[b] independently managed, not part of a network

[c] LDOE's reported measure of students enrolled in college the first fall (2019) after high school graduation from the National Student Clearinghouse and Board of Regents.

[d] based on a school's mission statement or from interviews with school leaders

Forest Charter High School's mission statement focused on college preparation. Forest was part of a network of charter schools managed by a charter management organization (CMO) and enrolled approximately 1000 students in the 2019-2020 school year. Approximately 95% of those students were African American or Latinx, and about 80% were considered economically disadvantaged. About 70% of Forest's class of 2019 enrolled in a two-year or four-year college with most of those students attending four-year colleges. This was well over Louisiana's college attendance rate of approximately 56% that year. According to the principal, most parents had not attended college. Forest had four school counselors with no college counselor. Each counselor was responsible for a grade-level cohort, and they followed their group of students through graduation.

Garden Charter High School's mission statement centered around academic excellence and preparation for college and future careers. Garden is a non-network, standalone charter school and enrolled approximately 1000 students in the 2019-2020 school year. Most (95%) of those students were African American or Latinx, and about 80% were considered economically disadvantaged. Approximately 70% of Garden's class of 2019 enrolled in a two-year or four-year college with most of those students

attending four-year colleges. Garden also had four school counselors. One counselor was responsible for college and career readiness. Another counselor supported 9th grade students, and two counselors supported 10th through 12th grade students with their caseloads determined by students' last names.

Orchard, a TPS, enrolled more than 1000 students in the 2019-2020 school year. About 85% of those students were African American or Latinx, and approximately 90% were considered economically disadvantaged. While Orchard's mission statement highlighted college and career readiness, 45% of their graduating class of 2019 enrolled in a two-year or four-year college. Orchard had four school counselors with each counselor responsible for a grade-level cohort of students whom they followed through graduation.

Woodlot's mission statement focused on preparing students for future careers and postsecondary life. Woodlot is a TPS that enrolled more than 1000 students in the 2019-2020 school year. Approximately 75% of those students were African American or Latinx, and about 85% were considered economically disadvantaged. Less than half (45%) of WHS's graduating class of 2019 enrolled in a two-year or four-year college.

## 3.4 Data Collection

### 3.4.1 Interviews with School Leaders, Counselors, Teachers, and Teacher Leaders

Semi-structured interviews, the primary source of data for this study, were conducted from October 2019 to September 2020 with most interviews lasting 20 minutes to 70 minutes. One leader interview, four teacher interviews, and two counselor interviews lasted less than 20 minutes. All of these brief interviews occurred at Garden and Forest where I was able to visit the schools, conduct observations, and follow-up in-person to clarify participants' comments. At Woodlot and Orchard, interviews tended to be longer in duration as I added protocol questions to better understand the school context and college resources available in the physical space since I could not visit. On average, interviews lasted 36 minutes across all four schools. Six of nine leader interviews, seven of 13 counselor interviews, and eight of 18 teacher interviews exceeded 36 minutes.

Table 3.2 displays the number of participants interviewed at each school by role. I interviewed nine participants at Woodlot, 10 participants at Orchard, 10 participants at Forest, and 11 participants at Garden.

TABLE 3.2

NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS BY SCHOOL AND ROLE

| | Forest Charter High School | Garden Prep High School | Orchard High School | Woodlot High School |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Number of Interviews | 10 | 11 | 10 | 9 |
| Number of Leader Interviews[a] | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Number of Counselor Interviews | 3 | 3 | 4 | 3 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Teacher Interviews | 5 | 5 | 4 | 2 |
| Number of Teacher-Leader Interviews[b] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |

[a] Leaders include principals and assistant principals.
[b] Teacher-leaders were former classroom teachers who were primarily responsible for coaching and supporting teachers.

Interviews occurred until saturation was reached–when participants provided no new insights with additional interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2005). Across schools, saturation was reached after eight interviews with at least two participants in each role. The level of saturation was determined by noting the information gained from each interview and the topics I needed to follow-up on in subsequent interviews. At each school, I interviewed the principal, one or more assistant principals, four or more teachers or teacher leaders, and three or more counselors. As described above, counselors' roles differed depending on the school. Forest, Woodlot, and Orchard counselors supported grade-level cohorts, following their group of students through graduation. Garden had one counselor devoted to college and career readiness, one 9th grade counselor, and two 10th-12th grade counselors whose caseload was determined by students' last names. Teacher participants taught a range of core and elective courses across all grade levels including AP courses, social studies, Biology, Algebra I, Calculus, and music/band. Teacher leaders were educators whose primary responsibility was to support and coach other teachers. They did not currently have teaching loads, but they were former teachers. While many college access studies focus on one group (e.g., students or counselors), the combination of teacher, leader, and counselor perspectives provided a more comprehensive understanding of how schools approached college supports and their broader college-going cultures.

Table 3.3 summarizes participants' self-identified demographics. Ages ranged from 24 to 69 with 35.9% identifying as male and 64.1% identifying as female. Most participants (n=28) identified as African American or Black; eight participants identified as White, White American, or Caucasian; three participants identified as Latinx or Multi-racial (Latinx and another race); and one participant declined to state their gender, race/ethnicity, and age.

TABLE 3.3

DEMOGRAPHICS OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS[a] (n=40)

| | n (%) |
|---|---|
| **Race/Ethnicity** | |
| African American | 28 (70%) |
| White | 8 (20%) |
| Latinx | 2 (5%) |
| Multi-Racial | 1 (2.5%) |
| Declined to State | 1 (2.5%) |
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 14 (35%) |
| Female | 25 (62.5%) |
| Declined to State | 1 (2.5%) |
| **Age** | |
| 20-39 | 16 (40%) |
| 40-59 | 19 (47.5%) |
| 60 and above | 4 (10%) |
| Declined to State | 1 (2.5%) |
| **First-Generation College Graduate?** | |
| Yes | 21 (52.5%) |
| No | 16 (40%) |
| No Data | 3 (7.5%) |

[a] All demographics are self-reported.

When discussing first-generation status, 56.8% of participants reported that their parents did not have a college degree. Although this was not the focus of the study, some participants at Garden and Forest discussed their own experiences as first-generation college students so I added this question to my protocol for later interviews at Orchard and Woodlot. I followed up with Garden and Forest participants via email to obtain this information if it was not discussed. I was not able to identify first-generation status for three participants.

In-person interviews at Garden and Forest were conducted in various locations such as classrooms and offices during the school visits; virtual interviews at Orchard and Woodlot were conducted via Zoom or by phone due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although I received important insights from interviews done in-person and remotely, each mode had its strengths and weaknesses. For instance, in-person interviews made it easier to observe aspects of the school environment and participants' non-verbal cues (Seitz 2016). This was more difficult with virtual interviews (O'Connor et al. 2008) as I could only see what was in view of the camera (Seitz 2016). In addition, two participants chose not to turn on their video and two interviews occurred over the phone due to technological difficulties. To mitigate these concerns, I asked clarifying questions during virtual interviews if I noticed something in the background or sensed hesitation to respond. I added a section of questions to my protocol that specifically asked about the school environment and what I would see if I were to visit the school. I also analyzed social media posts and documents from websites from all four schools to add to my observational data. This will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

One strength of using technology for interviews was that scheduling was more

straightforward as participants were able to schedule interviews at a time and place most convenient for them (Deakin and Wakefield 2014; Hanna 2012) rather than being constrained to school hours while having to navigate their work responsibilities. Moreover, I was able to conduct Zoom interviews during the scheduled time and, for the most part, had participants undivided attention during that time slot. In-person interviews would sometimes be rescheduled or cut short due to things that would come up throughout the school day. Overall, while each mode of interviewing—in-person and virtual—had its strengths and weaknesses, the quality of case study data from virtual interviews was comparable to in-person interviews both yielding important insights into my research questions.

I developed interview protocols based on a review of prior college access and college-going culture literature (e.g., Hill 2008; Roderick et al. 2011). Roderick et al.'s (2008) study from the Consortium on Chicago School Research was particularly helpful in developing protocols, especially teacher interview questions. Interview protocols were divided into nine main domains of inquiry: 1) School Context, 2) Perceptions of College-Going Culture and Importance of College Attendance, 3) College-Related Practices, 4) Support from Counselors, 5) Support from Teachers, 6) Family Support and Involvement, 7) Curriculum, 8) Resources and Opportunity Structure, and 9) School Environment. I developed slightly different protocols for counselors, teachers, and leaders to understand the roles of various stakeholders in each schools' college-going culture and schools' broader organizational context including their goals, work culture, resource structures, and schools' enactment of state-level college and career readiness policies. I probed differently based on each participant's role. For instance, every participant was asked

questions about the school context and perspectives on their schools' college-going culture and college-related practices. However, school counselor interviews also focused on understanding counselors' general role expectations to understand where college support fit within their responsibilities as well as various college opportunities and school/community partnerships managed by the counseling office. Teacher interviews focused on teachers' perceptions of responsibility for college supports, parental support for college, and coursework/curriculum. Leader interviews emphasized the vision/mission as it pertained to college attendance and the school environment.

It is also important to note that I asked participants for their perspectives on others' roles in college-going culture. For example, teachers were asked how counselors supported students with college and counselors were asked about teachers' roles. Getting multiple perspectives about educators' work helped to validate and challenge the data I received, providing in-depth knowledge about participants' roles and perceptions. See Appendices A, B, and C for the full interview guides. I transcribed interviews using software such as Gglot, Temi, and Otter. I discuss interview transcription in greater detail in Section 3.5 Data Analysis.

To protect participants' identities, I developed a list of pseudonyms or code names in Table 3.4. These names are used throughout Chapter 4, Chapter 5, and Chapter 6 to represent participants.

TABLE 3.4

LIST OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

| Pseudonym | Role | School |
|---|---|---|
| Sophia | Assistant Principal | Forest Charter High School |
| Philip | Music Teacher | Forest Charter High School |
| Doris | 9th Grade Counselor | Forest Charter High School |
| Alice | Math Teacher | Forest Charter High School |
| Teresa | 12th Grade Counselor | Forest Charter High School |
| Marie | 11th Grade Counselor | Forest Charter High School |
| Ralph | Principal | Forest Charter High School |
| Albert | Advanced Placement (AP) Teacher | Forest Charter High School |
| Danielle | AP and Dual Enrollment (DE) Teacher | Forest Charter High School |
| Rose | Spanish Teacher | Forest Charter High School |
| John | Assistant Principal | Garden Charter High School |
| Sally | 10th to 12th Grade Counselor | Garden Charter High School |
| Ashley | 9th Grade Counselor | Garden Charter High School |
| Tina | College & Career Readiness Counselor | Garden Charter High School |
| Sara | Assistant Principal | Garden Charter High School |
| Roy | Science Teacher | Garden Charter High School |
| Margaret | Math Teacher | Garden Charter High School |
| George | Principal | Garden Charter High School |
| Erica | English Teacher | Garden Charter High School |
| Judy | Music Teacher | Garden Charter High School |
| Amber | Social Studies Teacher | Garden Charter High School |
| Kevin | 11th Grade Counselor | Woodlot High School |
| Joan | Principal | Woodlot High School |
| Walter | Assistant Principal | Woodlot High School |
| Jason | Social Studies Teacher | Woodlot High School |
| Helen | 12th Grade Counselor | Woodlot High School |
| Diane | Master Teacher | Woodlot High School |
| Brenda | ESL Counselor | Woodlot High School |
| Frank | Master Teacher | Woodlot High School |
| Heather | DE Teacher | Woodlot High School |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sheila | Principal | Orchard High School |
| Robert | 9th Grade Counselor | Orchard High School |
| Charles | Assistant Principal | Orchard High School |
| Linda | DE Teacher | Orchard High School |
| Lisa | 11th Grade Counselor | Orchard High School |
| Susan | 12th Grade Counselor | Orchard High School |
| Donald | Social Studies Teacher | Orchard High School |
| Jennifer | English Teacher | Orchard High School |
| Jessica | 10th Grade Counselor | Orchard High School |
| Kenneth | ESL Teacher | Orchard High School |

### 3.4.2 Positionality and Reflexivity

In qualitative research, it is important to be aware of self and the research context by reflecting on personal identities and power dynamics among researcher and participants and how these factors shape data collection, analysis, and writing of findings (Milner 2007; Patton 2002; Weaver-Hightower 2018). Milner's (2007) Framework of Researcher Racial and Cultural Positionality uses the context of education research to discuss the importance of acknowledging, rather than ignoring in a color-blind manner, the ways in which racial and cultural identities of researchers and participants shape the research process. Guided by critical race theory, this process included "researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system" (Milner 2007:395). This framework guided my approach to research as I reflected on my identity and educational experiences in relation to participants and the broader educational context.

As an African American, woman, and first-generation college graduate, aspects of my identity aligned with that of participants and students served in case study schools,

which gave me unique insight into participants' responses. For instance, I understood the extensive elaborations by school counselors describing student barriers to college attendance such as lack of concrete parental support in the college application process since many parents did not have college degrees like my parents. This insider knowledge was very helpful, but I had to be mindful not to jump to conclusions and to continue to probe even when I felt I understood. Sometimes this was difficult.

My identity as a former educator also shaped my research. As a former high school teacher in New Orleans, I understood many aspects of schools' organizational context, which was useful in establishing trust and rapport with participants, allowing participants to speak openly about college support in their schools. This identity also forced me to reflect on my assumptions surrounding schools' college-going cultures and to challenge my perspectives on how I thought college supports should look in the case study schools.

Other aspects of my identity did not align with students' identities in the case study schools. I come from a middle-class background, while many students did not. I did not fully understand the challenges students faced in balancing different responsibilities as described by adult participants, such as choosing between jobs to support their families and attending after-school ACT prep sessions. Because of this, I employed responsive interviewing, which called for a level of flexibility in the questions asked to make sure interviews were conversational and accurately captured the phenomena of interest (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

### 3.4.3 Observations, Documents, and Social Media Posts

Observations took place during the four days that I visited each charter school. During this time, I observed college-related events (e.g., College Access Program[5] week at Forest), interactions in common spaces (e.g., library, main office), whole group assemblies, AP classes, and other core content classes across various grade-levels. While principals granted me permission to observe around the school building, to be respectful, I obtained additional verbal permission from teachers to observe in their classrooms.

Handwritten and typed field notes were taken during observations (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995) or audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis using Just Press Record application and Free Transcription website. I then cleaned and added detail to the transcribed notes. Observations were not a primary source of data, but I used them to triangulate or provide additional support for the descriptions of practices charter school participants discussed in interviews. Through in-person school visits I was able to ask follow-up questions and hold informal, unrecorded conversations with parents, students, and other staff members. If I needed to follow-up with TPS participants, I sent emails or spoke with personal contacts.

I used purposeful sampling to identify documents to analyze. I visited each schools' website, their corresponding district and/or CMO websites, and state-level websites such as the LDOE and LOSFA websites in search of information and policies on college readiness and college supports. I captured information from websites like school mission statements and downloaded documents such as state accountability policies and

[5] To protect the identity of the school, I do not share the actual name of the program.

college and career readiness initiatives as well as the Louisiana School Counseling Model, which described counselors' roles and responsibilities.

Data from 35 social media[6] posts allowed me to glean additional information from schools' environments in the form of photographs and comments. Schools varied in their use of social media. The social media posts I analyzed were chosen based on their relevance to college and career readiness, high school graduation, or the school context in general. For instance, schools would post photographs of college scholarship recipients, displays of walls with students' names and college attendance choices, and college-related events like college signing day. I also reviewed comments on social media posts to get a sense of outsiders' perceptions of school supports for college attendance in case study schools.

Multiple data sources provided a more comprehensive, in-depth understanding of the communication of values and beliefs about college attendance and how these messages shaped schools' college norms and practices. These additional data sources also provided greater understanding of how state and district contexts shaped counselors college-related work, the focus of Chapter 5. The combination of interviews with participants in different roles, observations, data from social media, and documentary data provide a more comprehensive examination of the many facets of schools' college-going cultures than interviews alone.

[6] To protect schools' identities, I do not name the social media platforms from which data was collected.

## 3.5 Data Analysis

Data from my qualitative interviews, documents, and social media posts were analyzed in four phases: 1) preliminary analysis, 2) data reduction, 3) detailed case profiles, and 4) cross-case synthesis (Miles and Huberman 1994; Saldaña 2013; Yin 2003). This process was iterative and required me to revisit data and the literature multiple times before drawing conclusions (Maxwell 2013).

### 3.5.1 Preliminary Analysis

I employed a variety of strategies in the early stages of analysis. In this phase, I wrote post-interview notes summarizing participants' main points and noting follow-up questions for subsequent interviews; created a descriptive, "start list" of codes based on the research questions and literature on college access or college-going culture; and wrote reflective memos to capture my analytic and methodological thoughts, processes, and questions throughout data collection and analysis (Bazeley 2013; Miles and Huberman 1994; Saldaña 2013). These preliminary analysis strategies allowed me to constantly reflect on my data throughout the process instead of waiting until the end of data collection to start analysis. With this process, I was able to identify topics that I needed to follow up on or clarify in subsequent interviews.

Next, as part of my preliminary analysis, I transcribed interviews using various software such as Gglot, Temi, and Otter. Afterward, I cleaned each interview for accuracy and added more context and detail to the transcripts (Patton 2002). This process included listening to each interview recording, correcting grammatical mistakes that would change the meaning of participants' responses, and making note of nonverbal data

such as facial expressions, pauses, tone of voice, and other gestures that were important to understanding participants' perspectives on a topic (Miles and Huberman 1994:51).

### 3.5.2 Data Reduction

The next phase of the analysis process—data reduction—included coding and the development of linked databases (i.e., Excel spreadsheets categorized based on codes). The databases allowed me to further reduce interview data to a graphical display of excerpts for systematic analysis (Miles and Huberman 1994).

I developed a hierarchical coding structure and a provisional list of codes from extant literature on college-going culture (Saldaña 2013). I developed high-level, deductive codes to represent college supports from participants across multiple roles (i.e., support from leaders, counselors, teachers, parents), perceptions of school-wide college norms, and college practices. For instance, within "support from counselors," I coded deductively for participants' perspectives on one-to-one college counseling and support, specific examples of one-to-one support, structure of the counseling department, counselors' actual roles/responsibilities, perceptions of counselors' workload, support with future planning, and whole group college-related assemblies/events implemented by counselors. Although deductive codes were primarily used in this stage of analysis, inductive codes such as "first gen status affecting college practices" were added throughout the process to capture emergent themes across participants and schools.

Next, I created linked databases in Excel for each high school by compiling all the excerpts and summarizing or taking notes on excerpts. In the data reduction stage, these within-case data displays allowed me to describe schools' college-going culture including

how participants provided or did not provide various types of college supports (Miles and Huberman 1994). I also created a spreadsheet to organize and categorize data from documents and social media. This spreadsheet lists documents and social media posts and notes on their relevance to schools' college-going cultures. I noted things discussed in interviews that related to the documents or social media posts.

### 3.5.3 Detailed Case Profiles

The third step in my analysis was writing detailed case profiles for each school. The purpose of the profiles was to summarize and describe (Bazeley 2013) each school's college-going culture in depth (Maxwell 2013; Saldaña 2013) and begin to identify salient themes within schools. The case profiles were 65-110 single-spaced pages per school and included participant quotes to illustrate each theme. Data from my analysis of school, district, CMO, and LDOE documents and social media were discussed in the profiles to triangulate and supplement interview data.

The case profiles were organized based on my hierarchical coding structure (discussed in the previous section) from which I developed a case profile template that included various categories and sub-categories relating to schools' college-going cultures and broader school context (See Appendix D for the case profile template). For instance, one of the main sections discussed participants' *perceptions of college-going culture* in their schools. In this section, I included detailed descriptions of the following: expectations in the school around college attendance including pressure in attending college; barriers to college attendance; beliefs around school preparing students for

college; beliefs around students' expectations being realistic; and beliefs around who's responsible for assisting students with college planning.

Each section of a case profile summarized participants' perspectives on a given topic based on their prevalence or divergence from commonly stated views. These detailed case profiles provided thick description of schools' college-going cultures from the perspectives of leaders, counselors, and teachers within each school.

### 3.5.4 Cross-Case Analysis

My research questions and conceptual framework presented in Figure 2.1 guided my cross-case analysis. In my analysis, I sought to understand how high schools' organizational contexts shaped their college-going cultures. Using the constant comparative method (Strauss and Corbin 1994), I reviewed the individual profiles to understand the main findings within and across schools. I identified potential themes to investigate from memos I wrote of reoccurring issues, themes, and associations I noted throughout data collection and analysis (Bazeley 2013). I reviewed each case in light of these themes, exploring commonalities and differences among cases. The cross-case analysis revealed the strengths and weaknesses of schools' college-going cultures. In Chapter 4, I described schools using a preliminary typology of college-going culture—limited, moderate, strong. This typology led to the development of a theory of cohesion in college-going culture (outlined in Chapter 6) that sheds light on the ways in which various organizational contexts such as schools' college practices or school type shaped their college-going cultures.

## 3.6 Limitations

I conducted four case studies of two charter and two TPSs, capturing the depth of the schools' cultures around college access. I acknowledge the tradeoff among depth and breadth. Since my goal was to provide thick descriptions of cases, I focused more on depth and, as a result, had less breadth. The limited number of charter schools did not provide insight into all the various charter school models in New Orleans, and while all schools in this study served students of similar demographics, the small number of TPSs did not represent all TPSs in the area. In sum, this study does not capture the breadth of Greater New Orleans schools serving African American, Latinx, and low-income students. Therefore, the results of this study are not generalizable and should be viewed as exploratory.

As described in previous sections, due to school closures related to COVID-19, I was unable to conduct observations in the two TPSs. This limited the insider knowledge that I was able to gain from TPSs in terms of observing student and adult interactions firsthand and how students made use of the college resources their schools provided. I addressed this limitation by adding questions about the school environment to the interview protocols and asking TPS participants to describe areas of the school such as where the counseling suite was located or where students can access college information. In addition, an analysis of documents and college-related social media posts as described in Section 3.5 added to the interview data and provided additional insight and a different perspective on the school environment. However, because of the lack of observational data in all four schools, I relied less on observations of schools' college-going cultures and more on participants' accounts of schools' college-going cultures through interviews.

# CHAPTER 4. A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE IN CHARTER AND TRADITIONAL PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

## 4.1 Introduction

This qualitative study examined how high schools' organizational contexts shaped college-going culture among four Greater New Orleans charter and traditional public high schools serving predominantly low-income, African American, and Latinx students. The findings presented in this chapter address the following research subquestions presented in Chapter 1: 1) What was the culture around college attendance among the four high schools in this study, and in what ways did schools exhibit variations in college-going culture? 2) What college-linking strategies (Hill 2008)—traditional, clearinghouse, brokering—did schools use in the college-going process? 3) How did the college-going culture of charter high schools compare to that of traditional public high schools? 4) What were the barriers to college-going culture across schools?

I describe, in-depth, the college-going cultures of each case study school utilizing a preliminary schema for understanding variation in college-going culture across schools—limited, moderate, strong— which led to the development of a theory of cohesion that I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 6. I use the term *cohesion* in this chapter to describe the interconnectedness and logical, strategic sequencing of schools' college-going practices and resources and to argue that cohesion requires both *accessibility* and *availability* of resources and practices. However, cohesion can be enacted within and across multiple domains of college-going culture—practices/resources, norms, stakeholder involvement—contributing to a higher level of

cohesion in a school's college-going culture. In Chapter 6, I argue that cohesion is the defining feature shaping the quality and depth of schools' college-going cultures.

In this chapter, I typologize schools as having *limited*, *moderate*, or *strong* college-going cultures by examining schools' college-going norms, practices, and perceptions of responsibility for college supports. To explain each school's *college norms*, I present findings on adults' expectations of students attending college, their perspectives on students' college expectations, their perceptions of pressure on students to attend college in their schools and, if so, sources of pressure, and their perceptions of preparation for college in each school. Next, I describe schools' *college-going practices* and *college-linking strategies*— traditional, clearinghouse, and brokering (Hill 2008; 2012). College practices are discussed in three main categories: practices focused on 1) information and exposure to college, 2) academic preparation, and 3) concrete support with the college application process. These categories were informed by my review of the literature, especially Roderick et al.'s (2011), Hill's (2008; 2012), McDonough (1997), and Corwin and Tierney's (2007) research related to college-going culture. I focus mainly on formalized practices that were reported by participants and some that were highlighted on social media. I also note the few cases where participants discussed informal practices. Finally, I describe school leaders', counselors', and teachers' perceptions of responsibility for college-going supports, which provides the foundation for cohesion in stakeholder involvement, a concept I develop in Chapter 6.

TABLE 4.1

REPORTED COLLEGE-GOING PRACTICES BY SCHOOL

| | Garden Charter High School | Forest Charter High School | Woodlot High School | Orchard High School |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Information and Exposure** | | | | |
| College tours | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| College fairs | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| College and/or Career Day | Yes | Yes | Not reported | Yes |
| Informal, individualized college conversations | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Formal college conversations (e.g., alumni guest speakers) | Yes | Yes | Not reported | Not reported |
| Whole group meetings to deliver college information (e.g., Senior Parent Night) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| College information distributed using technology (e.g., Google Classroom) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| College information publicized in physical space (e.g., pamphlets, posters) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Ongoing visits from college representatives | Yes | Yes | Not reported | Yes |
| School-based college access program(s) | Not reported | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| **Academic Preparation** | | | | |
| ACT testing | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| ACT preparation (e.g., | Yes | Yes | Not reported | Yes |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| bootcamps, Pre-ACT) | | | | |
| Dual Enrollment (DE) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| AP courses | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Honors courses | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| TOPS University pathway focus | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| TOPS tracker | Yes | Yes | Not reported | Not reported |
| Summer college courses | Yes | No | No | No |
| College-like course schedule | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| CLEP testing | Not reported | Not reported | Yes | Yes |
| **Concrete Support with College-Going Process** | | | | |
| Formal, individualized assistance with FAFSA (staff-initiated) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Formal, individualized assistance with college applications (staff-initiated) | Yes | No | No | No |
| Informal, individualized support with college application process (student-initiated) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Individualized assistance with scholarship applications (student-initiated) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

Note: This is not an exhaustive list of college practices at each school. I focused on formalized practices that were reported by participants and/or highlighted on social media. I noted instances of informal practices.

As illustrated in Table 4.1, Orchard, Woodlot, Forest, and Garden engaged in numerous college-going practices that provided students with information, experiences,

and academic preparation for college. However, Garden had more of a focus than the other three schools on practices that provided concrete support with the college application process, which is critical for helping students to navigate application requirements and to ultimately submit their applications. Furthermore, while all schools in this study had extensive college practices, they differed in the level of accessibility to these practices. My findings suggest that *availability* and *accessibility* are crucial components of cohesion in practices and contribute to a stronger, more cohesive college-going culture. I describe the availability and accessibility of schools' college practices in greater detail in the description of each school's college-going culture.

TABLE 4.2

SUMMARY OF CASE STUDY SCHOOLS' COLLEGE-GOING CULTURES

| | Garden Charter High School | Forest Charter High School | Orchard High School | Woodlot High School |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| College-Going Culture | Strong | Moderate | Limited | Limited |
| College-Linking Strategy | Brokering | Clearinghouse/ Brokering | Clearinghouse | Clearinghouse |
| School-Wide College Norms? | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| Cohesion in College Practices | Cohesive | Cohesive/Incohesive | Incohesive | Incohesive |
| Availability of College Practices/Resources | Extensive | Extensive | Extensive | Extensive |
| Accessibility of College Practices/Resources | High | High | Low | Low |
| Shared Responsibility for College Support | High | Moderate | Low | Low |

In Table 4.2, I summarize the college-going cultures of the four schools. Based on my preliminary schema, Orchard and Woodlot had limited college-going cultures, which were reflected through a lack of school-wide college expectations, incohesive college practices (i.e., college practices that were not interconnected nor purposefully built on each other, not logically sequenced, and/or not accessible to all students), and a clearinghouse approach to college supports (i.e., many college resources, but less intentional outreach to students, especially in terms of individualized support with the complex college application process). Forest had a moderate college-going culture with many adults having expectations for students attending college, but a combination of cohesive and incohesive practices, and both clearinghouse and brokering approaches (i.e., many resources and outreach to students and families, especially relating to one-to-one assistance with navigating the college application process) in providing college supports. Garden had a strong college-going culture with leaders, counselors, and teachers having high expectations for their students, many cohesive college practices that they worked to embed within the broader culture of the school, and a brokering approach to college support. Categorizing schools in this way was an initial step in describing schools' college-going cultures in depth and provided the foundation and opportunity for a theory of cohesion to emerge from the cross-case analysis. As shown in Table 3.4, pseudonyms are used in this chapter to protect participants' identities. See Table 3.1 for a summary of schools' organizational contexts, which include school-level demographics and college-enrollment rates.

In the final section of this chapter, I present cross-case findings of schools' college-going cultures highlighting five themes related to the practices of schools with

stronger college-going cultures and the barriers to college-going culture. In sum, these findings indicate that the strength of a school's college-going culture is shaped by cohesion in various domains of college-going culture and by contextual factors within and external to schools.

Cohesion in college practices, a vital component of a strong college-going culture, intersected with alignment among school staffs' perceptions of responsibility for college supports. To illustrate, Garden's practices were logical and strategic and staff school-wide took responsibility for assisting students with college, providing, for instance, school-wide access to academic opportunities like ACT bootcamp. Second, within-school contextual factors, namely staff members' deficit racialized and classed perceptions regarding students' college aspirations and their potential to access college practices/resources was related to a weaker college-going culture.

Finally, contextual factors external to schools such as district expectations and accountability pressures (Falabella 2014) played a role in limiting the college practices that schools with weaker college-going cultures focused more heavily on like FAFSA applications. On the other hand, having greater school-based autonomy from district and network oversight intersected with a stronger college-going culture, allowing Garden, for instance, to change their practices to better meet students' academic needs.

These findings point to two important contributions of this dissertation: one, the ways in which organizational contexts shape high schools' college-going cultures, and two, a reconceptualization of college-going culture to include cohesion *within* and *across* multiple domains.

## 4.2 Case Studies of College-Going Culture

### 4.2.1 Limited College-Going Culture at Orchard High School

Orchard had a limited college-going culture. The nature of this culture was reflected in their clearinghouse approach to college support (Hill 2008; 2012), lack of school-wide expectations for college attendance, numerous, yet incohesive college practices, and lack of a shared sense of responsibility for assisting students with college planning. Orchard tended to be a clearinghouse for college information as leaders, teachers, and counselors inundated their predominantly African American and Latinx students with college information and some opportunities for exposure to college, while offering little concrete, individualized assistance with the college application process. In addition, Orchard focused more on implementing college practices tied to the accountability system (e.g., FAFSA applications) due to district pressure. These practices were done in isolation from a school-wide effort to support college attendance. The majority of Orchard students did not matriculate to college. In fall 2019, Orchard had a two- and four-year college enrollment rate of approximately 40%.

#### 4.2.1.1 Orchard's College-Going Norms: No School-Wide College Expectations

Similar to Woodlot, Forest, and Garden, Orchard's mission statement focused on preparing students for college and/or careers by giving students access to rigorous coursework and a collaborative community of support. In addition, the majority of Orchard students were placed on the college diploma track, rather than the Jumpstart career diploma track or pathway, as defined by the state (See Chapter 3 for more on diploma pathways). However, participants generally expressed that there was not a

school-wide expectation for college attendance. This paradox was evident when Sheila, the principal, said that “they push for college” but they know everyone is not going, but they "prepare them [students] as if they are going." Participants generally believed that many Orchard students were not going to college and did not have to go to four-year colleges to be successful, but could go to two-year colleges or straight into the workforce. According to Charles, an assistant principal, and others, some students needed to go "into the workforce a little bit quicker" because they were “breadwinners for their family.” When asked whether adults in the school expected all students to go to college, Lisa, the 11th grade counselor, explained:

> That is not my expectation because I know that every student is not built for college. I think that we have a lot of entrepreneurs that are out here. And one thing that I do stress to most of my kids is not that I don't stress going to college. I know that college is not for everyone. So I also like to stress the point of being an entrepreneur. If your decision is to open up your own business, “Hey, you can go to [community college] and get a two-year business degree that will help enlighten you a little bit more. And so when you step out into the field of business, you have some insight.” So I give that to my kids all the time.

Most participants said that there was no school-wide pressure on students to attend college as Orchard did not subscribe to college-for-all. When asked about the expectation among staff that all students go to college, Charles compared Orchard, a TPS, to charter schools, stating:

> I don't think that that's [college is] something that is pushed. And I think that some of the charter schools I've seen, that was their ultimate goal that “Every person was going to college.” You know, I think that more so at our school… it's more so based on the abilities of that kid or the interests of that child…And if they choose not to go directly into college, I do understand that. I don't look down upon any school that simply focuses on this "all in approach" where every single

> kid has to go to college. I don't necessarily, I guess, subscribe to that thought process…

Some participants categorized students as four-year college students or not, explaining that it is not the expectation that *all* students go to college at Orchard. Some participants focused on students' interests and abilities to determine the best postsecondary path, and others highlighted the importance of providing college as one option for students, but not as the only way to be successful. Linda, a Dual Enrollment teacher, illustrated low college expectations for Orchard students, particularly among teachers, stating:

> …to be honest, I really don't think all teachers think that every kid will be successful in college. And I think that they don't believe that they all will go. I think the majority think that our kids… at Orchard will attend. And then when things happen, you know, when we get a Posse scholar or something like that…they get very excited about it, but I believe if you discuss it more, you talk about it more and show it more, then even the teachers start changing. You know, they start thinking, "Well, yeah, maybe this kid can go to college and maybe he can be successful." Yeah, It's not 100%, though.

Participants identified several reasons why many of their students would not or could not go to college. The main reasons participants discussed were: the demographics of the population; low college aspirations among some students; lack of academic and non-academic preparation; and adults having low college expectations for some students including differing expectations based on students' academic performance.

Orchard served many English Language Learners (ELL) and undocumented students. Donald, a social studies teacher, and Kenneth, an ESL teacher, felt that not having a social security number hindered, discouraged, or even disqualified many students from pursuing a college degree. Donald described it this way, "I serve a lot of undocumented students" and "when we sit down together to fill out college applications, and we get to the part where the application inevitably will ask for the student's social

security number and we run into a roadblock... it's heartbreaking." In discussing Orchard's ELL population, Sheila compared Orchard students to the district's magnet school students, explaining:

> if one third of your population, they don't have what it takes to apply for college, you know, so we're in a different situation than a typical school or a [magnet school] most of those kids there, they have social security numbers, they have everything they need to apply. But my kids, I don't care how smart they are, some of them may not have that social security number and may not be able to go to school. And so it puts our school in a different, or in a unique situation, because where most schools are just talking "college, college, college, we have to say something different." We have to have another plan because most of our kids know, "There is no hope for me to go to college." So what else can you do for me, Ms. [Principal]? And that's why we have to have those other options.

While there was no school-wide pressure for college attendance, there was pressure for top-performing students to go to college. This pressure filtered down from district leaders' requirement for schools to track top-performing students' college admissions and scholarships. Sheila, the principal, explained:

> Oh, definitely [there is pressure]. They [district leaders] you know, every report… "What are your top 20 doing?"…they want to know what the … top [performing] kids in each class are doing. And that's fine and dandy, but, you know, "the middle child just kind of gets forgotten"… they keep track of students that get scholarships, and the amount of scholarships every year. At the end of the year, we have to turn in the amount of kids who qualify for TOPS Tech, TOPS, all of those things. And so there is a definite tracking of those kids who are in the upper, the top part of the class.

A focus on college attendance among high achieving students was also expressed when Sheila talked about being proud of the top-performing students from her "favorite" graduating class finishing college. Jennifer, an English teacher, also talked about being sure that her Advanced Placement (AP) students were going to finish college.

Participants had different college expectations based on student demographics and academic performance. Top-performing Orchard students or students attending the district's magnet schools were generally viewed as college-bound.

According to participants, students' college expectations varied. Some participants said the average student would say they were going to college. According to Jessica, the 10th grade counselor, students would say adults expected them to go to college or have a postsecondary plan, even if it did not include four-year college. Sheila and Donald, who have been at the school for eight years at the time of data collection, said the number of students having college expectations and taking steps to go has increased. Susan, the 12th grade counselor, said students' expectations around college attendance would vary, but the average student would say they wanted to go to college, while some students were "adamant" that they did not want to go, and others felt that college was "not attainable for them." Lisa, the 11th grade counselor, said her cohort of students were ready to go to college and were applying before the official start of their senior year. These perceptions of students' college expectations suggested that Orchard lacked school-wide norms for college attendance, making a strong college-going culture difficult to develop and sustain.

Some participants felt that some students' college expectations were unrealistic as they did not understand the college application process and/or the academic requirements for admission into four-year colleges. Jessica described how students' four-year college aspirations failed to come to fruition due to a lack of understanding of the college-going process and the early preparation and planning that is required.

> [Some students say] "Oh, I want to go to State University." Okay, what's your GPA? "Oh I don't even know." "Let's look at it. 2.3 GPA. Okay, what's your ACT score?" "Oh I ain't take it yet." "But you in your senior year. When are you gonna take it?" "Oh, I don't know. y'all can tell me when I can take it?" But you want to go to State University?
>
> Okay, or my favorite. "I'm leaving here. I'm going," one of them was going to Out-of-State University…Okay, cool. So "have you even talked with anyone at the college, scholarship opportunities?" "No." "Do you even know the requirements to get in?" "No." "How are you gonna get there? How are you gonna visit the campus because I mean, you do want to do a visit just to see if this is really what you want to do." "Naw, I won't be able to do that." But you want to go to Out-of-State University. I mean, seriously.
>
> These are the conversations that I have where I have to sit down with kids and say, "Okay, let's be realistic about your situation. Your momma ain't got no car; you ain't got no car; ya'll ain't got no money. This is your GPA. You have no ACT score. Not saying Out-of-State University ain't an option. But do you think if you had to go to college today, would you be able to get yourself to Out-of-State University?" "No."
>
> "Okay, so if you had to go to school today, What school would you be able to get into?"… "maybe [a local community college]," "I think Ding, ding, ding, ding [laughs]. Let's start there. You wanted to go to Out-of-State University. If this was something you really wanted to do, you would have been looking at Out-of-State University in 10th, at least in 10th, 11th grade and understood what you needed to have to get in. You would have understood what the ACT requirement was… You would have known some of this so you were working towards getting in. But you can't come to me your senior year talking about you want to go to Out-of-State University." And that's where they have unrealistic expectations because we have forgot to teach them how to be adults. We didn't sit down and say, "Okay, this is where you want to go. Great. The preparation for that starts now. In ninth grade, you start preparing for Out-of-State University."

Similar to Jessica, Charles said students' reality did not always match their college aspirations. Most students would say yes, they were going to college, but some did not have the academic credentials to go to a four-year college, so educators encouraged them to think about going to community college. Robert, 9th grade counselor, felt disappointed

when students aspired and planned to go to a four-year college, but ended up going to a local community college.

> One issue, I feel like if I go back to the class I worked with two years ago, I feel like probably 80% or so who said they were going to go to college did one of the unfortunate things that I ran into… Some of the students ended up sending me messages over the summer, asking me to send their scores to [a local community college], and you know, there's nothing wrong with [the local community college], it's great, but they got accepted into a four-year school. And I was just kind of like, "Okay, why? You got accepted into [a private HBCU]… you got accepted into [public HBCU], you know, why you all of a sudden decided to go to [community college]?" And it was tuition reasons. They didn't get a full scholarship, didn't get enough scholarship money, and decided that they were going to go the cheaper route to [community college], so that was kind of unfortunate. But that was just a handful of kids. It wasn't a whole bunch of them, but I always hate to see that.

In summary, participants did not hold school-wide expectations for college attendance, and some participants did not believe college was necessary for a successful future. High-achieving students were viewed as college bound, and the principal expressed pressure from district leaders for top-performing students to go to college, especially four-year colleges, as they required a report of top students' college admissions and scholarships. ELL, undocumented students, and lower-achieving students were not necessarily viewed as "four-year college students." Orchards' leaders and staff generally felt that their high population of ELL and undocumented students did not aspire to attend college and needed to go into the workforce to support their families. They also described the many barriers to college for undocumented students, which participants believed made it nearly impossible for them to go to college. Orchards' leaders, teachers, and counselors expressed that students' college expectations varied and

some were unrealistic as students often lacked college knowledge and did not have a full understanding of college requirements and expectations.

#### 4.2.1.2 Orchard's Incohesive College Practices and Clearinghouse Approach to College Support

With a limited college-going culture, Orchard primarily employed a clearinghouse strategy in supporting students with college. This strategy was evidenced by their numerous college resources, but less intentional outreach to students and families with assistance on the complex college application process. Orchard's practices were incohesive. In other words, they were disconnected, not accessible school-wide, nor sequenced in a way that made the steps towards college application clear to students. As shown in Table 4.1, Orchard offered a lot of college information, opportunities for exposure to college, and a number of opportunities for academic preparation for college. However, Orchard provided minimal individualized, concrete assistance with various aspects of the college application process outside of support with FAFSA applications, a requirement for all Louisiana high school students unless they submit a waiver or complete a TOPS application, which many students at Orchard are ineligible for due to their ACT scores (See Chapter 3, Section 3.1 for more on Louisiana's college readiness policies).

Leaders, teachers, and counselors emphasized the importance of college support in the high school environment as many students would be first-generation college attendees and some even the first in their families to graduate from high school. Thus, many college practices were geared towards providing college information and some

practices focused on exposing students to college. Sheila, the principal used the word "exposure" often, describing the need for Orchard students to experience college and have access to college opportunities. She said:

> It's kind of hard for me to talk you [students] into…going to a university… [and] you've never been away from home and so sometimes you don't thrive well because you don't know how to operate outside of the bubble. And so we have to expose them to things and the more exposure, the better.

Linda, Dual Enrollment instructor and department chair, highlighted how vital the school context was for exposing students to college when discussing how Orchard provided opportunities to tour local colleges. She stated, "That [college tours] helps them [students] because some of them would never go on a college campus unless they have done it through the school system." Linda explained that Orchard staff "have taken them [students to] Baton Rouge" to "visit all of them [the colleges] in that area and all of the ones here in the city. I think they've even gone to schools [in another state]…college visits are very important."

As another source of exposure to college, Sheila described how leaders' and teachers' college and graduation photos were displayed in the school to serve as a source of inspiration to students and to encourage student-initiated conversations about college. Sheila encouraged staff members "to be open to answering a lot of questions and to provide a lot of assistance" since many students would be first-generation college attendees.

> This year, our leadership encouraged all of our staff to turn in our…graduation photos from college. In fact, we just took it down today. Many of our teachers were up with their graduation photos and just a little blurb about what school they went to, and what was their major. And so we're constantly putting it out… about schools, and about attending a college or a university once you leave here. And again, it's a talking piece… a lot of people found out I went to [a local university]

> like that. I have my degrees on my wall and people go, “Oh, you went to [a local university]…I don't think I could.” One girl said, "I don't think I can get there because I don't think I have the grades for it." She applied anyway, got accepted, and she got money. So, you know, it's just, again, putting things in their face so they can see it, I guess just to expose them to it. And hopefully it starts a conversation with a live person.

Orchard focused on providing students with college information and exposing students to college and, by displaying adults’ colleges, Sheila, the principal hoped that students would reach out to initiate a conversation to obtain more information.

Orchard also held college fairs for juniors and seniors to provide students with college information. Jessica, 10th grade counselor, described how she organized an annual Orchard college fair in collaboration with the Louisiana Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (LACRAO) and staff from a local university. This counselor included professional schools in addition to Louisiana colleges. Jennifer, a teacher, explained how she helped students to navigate the college fair, encouraging students to ask college representatives for fee waivers for completing the application during the college fair.

> I remember Out-of-State University was here and a couple other places you know, other states represented in the gym, and they could go from table to table and get the information and talk to the advisors or whoever about their particular school and how to best apply and that sort of thing. And I would tell them [students] to ask if they filled out the application that day for them [representatives] to waive the application fee. So mine went with a purpose. “We're gonna get this application for no money.” Okay, We working today. So, we took advantage of that.

Other practices focused on providing college information included Career Day, information in the school environment (e.g., posters, pamphlets), or social media posts of ACT deadlines and college admissions requirements. Robert, 9th grade counselor,

described the wealth of information (i.e., pamphlets, booklets) available to students in the counseling suite from the college fair and from college representatives visiting Orchard during lunch, acknowledging that counselors needed to do a better job of getting this information to students.

> …we actually have tables outside [the counseling suite] that have stacks of stuff where kids can take it. We actually have little wall hangers too. That fills up pretty quick…We have some stuff on a table outside. We have stuff in a pull-out drawer, just information on all the different schools. A lot of the ones that come to our college fair though, cuz [sic] that's where we get the most stuff. And then some of the same schools come back and do individual lunch time presentations too…they'll come and set up at lunchtime…whatever they don't get rid of that day, they'll just leave with us and we can put it out in here [the counseling suite] so they got a lot of stuff available to them. Some of the stuff like the stuff in drawers, we probably have to do a better job of letting the kids know it's there cuz the kids aren't just going to start pulling open drawers. But yeah, we have a lot of stuff that the kids have access too.

In addition to many practices focused on information and exposure to college, as shown in Table 4.1, Orchard offered academic supports such as free ACT testing, ACT bootcamps, DE, and AP courses. Sheila described Orchard's partnerships with a local Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and a local community college who provides instructors for DE courses. Orchard offers core content courses like College Algebra as well as a Hotel, Lodging, and Management course. Sheila discussed DE and access to DE courses:

> We do offer Dual Enrollment [DE], we've been doing that for a while. So students get their first chance at "What is college going to be like?"…[with hotel, lodging, and management] the kid can earn an IBC and then earn a Dual Enrollment credit for those. So those are some of the things that we push. The requirements to get in the course sometimes limits who can go in because you have to have a certain ACT score…

Low ACT scores were a challenge at Orchard, especially for students in eligibility for taking DE courses for college credit. Orchard addressed low ACT scores by offering "optional" ACT bootcamps. However, these opportunities were not necessarily accessible to all students as "bubble kids" were mainly encouraged to attend. According to Robert:

> It's one of those things that's offered as an elective. Kids can take it. We try to really stress some of the "bubble kids." When I say bubble kids, the ones who are really close to scholarships, like we're talking like 17, 18, 19 on the ACT. We really stress that they take it. We also, a couple times a year, will outsource to a company that'll come in and do like a separate little ACT bootcamp. And the numbers for those, I mean, it was crazy… I think it was like a month long and they would go one day a week. And then it would be like a couple hours on that day…the idea of it was kind of like our little crash course right before one of the tests… And the results were awesome… also from what I understand, it was kind of pricey. So it's something that we would have to budget for every year, but that was pretty awesome to see. So I know a lot of the ACT prep courses have had some success.

When discussing Orchard's college practices, participants would describe how the accountability system and SPS points contributed to many of these practices. Sheila talked about district leaders wanting schools in this district to focus on certain practices related to gaining SPS points. She also distinguished practices happening at Orchard that may not have occurred in other district schools, illustrating some school-based autonomy to implement additional college supports:

> Interviewer: And then so some of these things that you described, if I talk to other school leaders, are these some of the same things that are happening in other schools in the district? Or are these specific to Orchard?
>
> Sheila: No, I think all of us are Dual Enrollment. Again, from central office, there are certain things that they kind of want us to focus on, of course they are SPS related because they get you points but Dual Enrollment is one, CLEP [College-Level Examination Program] testing. I think every school does it. Every school may not be a site, but Orchard is actually a registered CLEP site. The big push for

> ACT because it is a part of our SPS, so you see more and more kids. You know it's mandatory to take ACT in 11th grade. Here at Orchard, we go a step further, we offer the pre-ACT, we've been doing it the last couple of years, we buy it and so all of our 10th graders get to take it and then they get a score that we start working on when we get that information back to ensure that they get a higher score the next time because we want to put our students in a position where they can start getting some money the higher that ACT, the more money you can get.

Orchard offered many of the college opportunities required by the district, but they also offered pre-ACT, and they were a CLEP site, making college credits via CLEP testing more accessible to students.

As described above, Orchard had a wealth of college information and some opportunities for exposure to college and academic college-readiness supports, although academic enrichment like ACT Bootcamp was not accessible school-wide. However, participants discussed concrete college assistance less often as participants did not describe a formalized process for supporting students with college applications, scholarships, and other aspects of college-going. Some counselors and teachers informally assisted students with various aspects of the college application process, mainly completing the FAFSA. Participants often spoke of the FAFSA as a district requirement for high school graduation rather than a part of the college-going process. Jennifer, an English teacher, said:

> [FAFSA is] mandatory at this school, you can't graduate, even if you're not going to college, you can't graduate unless you've done a FAFSA. That's a graduation requirement for [this district]. So, the parents get involved, the counselor set up workshops for the parents. They can come in after school or whatever to get help with filling out the FAFSA and where to put what. I allow them to do it in my classroom. A lot of times, they'll have to get on the phone and find out the parents social or this, that, or the other because if a parent hasn't gone to college, it's kind of difficult sometimes for them to figure out what to do with a FAFSA and having to set up their own account and log in. And this kind of thing. It' s time consuming and they can easily get discouraged if it's too difficult so the counselors always set

> up. We have multiple sessions every year. I know at least about three or four of them where parents can come in or give the actual counselor permission to do a certain amount of it and show it to them for them to approve and sign off and that sort of thing. So, we definitely, the counselors definitely do the FAFSA with them.

Leaders, counselors, and teachers pointed out that FAFSA was emphasized as a priority and a requirement for all students, even students who did not want to go to college. This practice reflected an isolated college practice rather than a cohesive component of a college-going culture. Furthermore, students may lack an understanding of its purpose and connection to college attendance.

Assistance with college applications, scholarships, and other steps in the college application process were also discussed, but not as often as FAFSA, and not as a formalized school-wide practice. For instance, Sheila briefly stated, “We do housing forms for college; we help with their financial aid; we help them to even do applications because a lot of them they don't have anyone at home to assist them.” Charles, the assistant principal, also said:

> I’ve seen our counselor sit with students and help them fill out applications. I've seen our counselors and teachers sit with students and help them apply for…scholarships and help them write and fill out the applications and any type of essays that they have to complete…to be considered for those type of grants.

To summarize, many of Orchard’s college practices were incohesive, isolated, and often centered around satisfying the requirements of the district and the state accountability system to gain SPS points. Orchard was a clearinghouse for college information, putting less focus on systematically getting information to students or offering individualized supports. Orchard offered some opportunities for exposure to college through things like college fairs and some opportunities for academic preparation

for college with their ACT Bootcamp, but only “bubble kids” were encouraged to attend, making this college practice less accessible to students school-wide. Moreover, Orchard’s provision of individualized, concrete support with various aspects of the college application process was minimal.

#### 4.2.1.3 Perceptions of Responsibility for College Supports at Orchard

Orchard leaders, teachers, and counselors did not express a shared sense of responsibility for supporting students with college, indicating a lack of collaboration for college support. According to most participants (i.e., teachers, counselors, and the assistant principal), the formal responsibility for assisting with college was "largely on" counselors or the senior counselor, in particular. While Principal Sheila said “we all have a responsibility to assist [students] with” college planning, she also stated that counselors and the curriculum department took the lead. Some participants, such as counselors and leaders, also discussed the curriculum department, teachers, and families as having important roles in college supports, but not as formalized as counselors.

Orchard teachers did not have defined roles in college support. While teachers and leaders would share their college experiences and write letters of recommendation, participants believed that providing formalized, concrete support was not a teacher’s job responsibility. Jessica, 10$^{th}$ grade counselor, said that teachers did not feel responsible for college planning because they did not know how to be helpful or "some of them think my job is to teach this and get them passing this class. And that is me helping them [with college]." Jessica also stated that most Orchard teachers wanted to help "it's just they're not quite sure where they would fit in."

According to Principal Sheila, there was no formal or required way that teachers assisted with college. Sheila said teachers have volunteered to do things and "some teachers do a little bit more than others like the teacher that started the college trip or like the teacher I have that will provide after-school sessions." As discussed above, Jennifer had a college corner housed with information and a senior exit interview to help students think about their postsecondary plans. No other teachers I spoke to mentioned these types of support. When I asked Jennifer whether other teachers in the school did what she was doing in her classroom, she said, “I don't know. I feel like one of those rappers. [singing] "I don't know what they do," … [participant laughs], But I know this happens in my room every year.” Similarly, Donald, a social studies teacher, said he assisted his students with college planning like his teachers supported him as a first-generation college student. Although these teachers provided information and support, this was not the norm as teachers lacked a clearly defined role in college planning.

Counselors’ role in college support was somewhat defined, with the senior counselor having the most formalized role with ensuring that students completed FAFSA applications and communicating college information to students and families, for example. Counselors’ role in college-going culture is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

In summary, Orchard’s college-going culture was limited. This was evidenced first by their lack of school-wide college expectations. Orchard did not normalize college attendance for all students. Instead, participants often viewed top-performing students as college bound. Second, Orchard implemented incohesive college practices and a clearinghouse approach (Hill 2008) to college support. Their focus was on providing

information as well as college practices tied to the accountability system, like FAFSA, due to pressure from the district. There was not a focus on a systemic (Corwin & Tierney 2007), holistic approach to supporting students with the college application process. Third, Orchard lacked a shared sense of responsibility and limited collaboration in supporting students with college. Teachers lacked a clearly defined role in college planning initiatives, and counselors were viewed as primarily responsible for this work.

### 4.2.2 Limited College-Going Culture at Woodlot High School

Like Orchard, Woodlot's college-going culture was limited as adults' had differing college expectations, practices that were largely incohesive (i.e., college practices that were not interconnected and part of a school-wide approach to college supports, nor sequenced in a manner that led students through the college application process), a clearinghouse strategy (Hill 2008; 2012) for college-going support (i.e., numerous college resources and information with little outreach to students, especially in providing concrete, individualized assistance with the college application process), and little shared sense of responsibility for assisting students with college planning. Like Orchard, most Woodlot students did not go to college as their fall 2019 two- and four-year college enrollment rate was approximately 40%.

#### 4.2.2.1 Woodlot's College-Going Norms: Differing College Expectations

While college readiness or college preparation was not explicitly stated in Woodlot's mission statement, Joan, the principal, said that there were "high expectations for college" at Woodlot, which were "embedded in our whole vision and mission for our students" and "ingrained in the culture of our school." Joan was careful to explain that

she defined college as two-year, four-year, or any other postsecondary educational training towards a career. When asked what Woodlot's expectations for college attendance were, she said:

> Oh the students they would tell you "Oh Ms. Joan wants every student to go to college." And my definition of college is just school, period. A college could be a career college or it could be a four-year college where a student is going into a profession where we would call more of a white collar profession. College could also extend to a student who is going into a career, which would be more of a blue collar job. But any schooling that enables a student to go into a career where they have received training, I would say is college and that's what we express to our kids. We said if you want to go to a two-year college and get some kind of training for more trade or technical school or if you want to go to college for four or five years, whatever the case might be, then they both are equally as important. And we strive to ensure that our students get those experiences at school so that they'll be able to…meet their aspirations someday, you know, to be successful in that way. Every student would say, "Oh, yeah, Ms. Joan wants us to go to college."

Joan's perspective that Woodlot students were expected to go to college and that college was any postsecondary education differed from the perceptions of the assistant principal, counselors, and teachers. Walter, the assistant principal, highlighted *preparation* for four-year colleges at Woodlot rather than the *strong expectation* that students actually go to college like the principal emphasized. He said that "it's the expectation that you have the *opportunity* to go to college, not so much that you will go, but that we are providing you with the quality education that you would need to transition to college, if that's your plan." On the other hand, counselors highlighted an expectation to attend *four-year* colleges, which was different from the principal's focus on students acquiring any postsecondary educational training. Helen, Woodlot's senior counselor, said that most students "would say that they're going to go to a four-year college." Kevin,

the 11th grade counselor, also focused on four-year college attendance and described Woodlot as "the college bound school in [this area]…that's what we're preaching over here. That's what we're encouraging. We want our students to primarily attend four-year universities. That's what our expectation is."

In contrast to counselors' perspectives, Diane, a master teacher, responded to the question of Woodlot's college expectations as centered around college as an *option* and not necessarily an *expectation*:

> You know what, it [college] honestly is going to depend on the student, not every student is interested in going to college… I think that we understand that all of our students are different. And then in some cases, that is not a part of our students' long-term plan. So I think that making sure that we don't ever lose sight of that career readiness aspect is really important for our students, so that they understand that we're not here to tell them…what success is gonna look like for them, or what the journey looks like for them, because that's really up to each individual. But we do want to make sure that we offer the tools and the options that are necessary in order for them to kind of evaluate and make the right decisions for them as individuals.

Even though Diane stated that college attendance was an option at Woodlot based on students' interests, Heather, a DE teacher, stated that Woodlot "failed to communicate" the full range of postsecondary options to students, often emphasizing four-year college attendance as the goal. She said:

> I don't think we did a good enough job telling kids that college isn't the only option. And I think we spent a lot of time focusing on going to [four-year] schools… instead of stressing to kids that, "Hey, you know what, if you don't really know what you want to do, go to [community college] for two years, get your core classes taken care of." So but I think because we didn't do that, we made kids feel like they had two choices, "college and doing the traditional four-year track", or "I'm just gonna go get a job after school," there was no real sense of, "Hey, I could go to tech school" or, you know,… "I'm a Senior and I don't know what I want to do. I can still go to college and kind of figure it out when I get there," I think actually the failure to communicate options put a lot of pressure

> on students to feel like they had to know when they graduated school, what they were going to do with the rest of their lives. There wasn't a lot of focus on college is a time to figure that out.

Despite Principal Joan's inclusive definition of college, Heather felt that community college and other postsecondary paths were not as much of a focus as four-year colleges. However, Assistant Principal Walter had a different perspective when he said that they "push [community college] a lot… because there are some benefits to starting off perhaps at a [community college], do your two years there, then transfer to a larger institution."

While Joan and the counselors expressed that there were high expectations for college attendance, most participants stated that Woodlot did not pressure students to attend college. Rather, Jason, a social studies teacher, and others said that students were "strongly encouraged" to go. Kevin described it this way, "I don't feel like there's pressure. But again, I feel like…we highly encourage it…I think it's one of the expectations that we have." Even though students were not pressured to attend college, some participants expressed that students should be prepared for college, especially four-year colleges. Walter said, "Our conversation with students is not so much, that you will go to college. But if your plans are to go to college, we want you to be college ready …"

When discussing college expectations, many participants focused on the demographics of the students Woodlot served, in particular the lack of college aspirations among their Latinx students. Walter stated, "…we have a high Hispanic population. A lot of those kids don't really have the aspiration to leave high school and go on to college. Most of them are thinking about…going directly to the workforce, trying to figure out how they can be contributors in their household." Heather also discussed the lack of

college aspirations among their students who were identified as low-income and ESL (English as Second Language) or ELL, stating:

> At Woodlot there's a large ESL population. A lot of those students are undocumented. The likelihood of them going to college is small. And even if they do go to college, there's a million hoops they have to jump through to really get to college. A large portion of our student background came from low-income backgrounds, where academics wasn't as important as getting a job and you know, putting food on the table.

Similarly, Frank, a master teacher, felt that college aspirations differed among "native born" students and immigrant students, with American students having higher college aspirations than Latinx students due to the strong and increasing focus on college attendance in the United States. These participants discussion of low college aspirations among their Latinx and low-income students also reflected a lack of school-wide norms for college attendance.

In summary, participants' perspectives differed in terms of whether students were expected to go to college and whether two-year and/or four-year colleges were the goal. Joan, the principal, had high expectations for students attending college, and she defined college as any post-secondary educational training. Walter, the assistant principal mainly focused on preparation for four-year colleges, not necessarily an expectation that students go to college. Counselors stated that students were primarily expected to attend four-year colleges. Diane, a master teacher, felt that the school focused on college as an option based on students' interests, while Heather, DE teacher, argued that Woodlot heavily focused on four-year college attendance, leaving students without an understanding of other options like community college. Differing responses around college expectations

and variation in participants' definition of college illustrated a lack of school-wide college-going norms.

#### 4.2.2.2 Woodlots' Incohesive College Practices and Clearinghouse Approach to College Support

Like Orchard, Woodlot had a limited college-going culture as they implemented incohesive college practices and primarily used a clearinghouse strategy (Hill 2008) in supporting students with college. This strategy was shown by their numerous college resources, especially information, but less intention in providing concrete, individualized student support with the college application process. As shown in Section 4.1, Table 4.1 lists Woodlot's school-wide college practices including various resources, information, and opportunities that exposed students to college and that prepared students academically for college. However, evidence suggests that these practices were isolated or piecemeal and not a part of a holistic, comprehensive effort to provide college-going support.

According to Heather and others, many Woodlot students would be first-generation college students so Woodlot engaged in numerous practices that provided information and some that offered exposure such as college tours, college fairs, and grade-level parent nights. Principal Joan described the annual college fairs and college tours that students across all grade-levels had the opportunity to participate in. Since college fairs and college tours were made accessible to students across all grade-levels, students had access to college information and experiences as early as ninth grade. However, Heather did not feel that students knew how to take advantage of these

opportunities. She said, “We did a college fair…twice a year and kids looked at it as an opportunity to not be in class and wander around and get free pens and not ‘Hey, like, I need to be thinking about what I want to do when I leave Woodlot’ and ‘Am I going to go to college?’”

In addition to college fairs and college tours, participants spoke highly of the use of technology to relay information and opportunities to students and parents. Diane described the various ways that technology was used to communicate college information:

> We have a huge social media platform and we have a really great coordinator… She's our librarian…last year we realized how impactful it was that we were sending it out on [social media] and our students were joining… She's also in charge of our school website, she is on it, like it is updated daily. Anything that we need them to understand, they post there. We post scholarship opportunities… but it's really, it's not even the website, but the social media platform has been really exciting to see how impactful it is…you get to reach a larger audience. But those kids, man, they grew up in the social media age. So clearly you know now that we've kind of leveraged that in our favor, it's been working out really well. We also send mass texts like we gather students cell phone numbers… and we send out mass school texts to parents and students to keep them involved too, because we want the parents on board as well.

Grade-level parent nights were also utilized to provide information to students and parents in a whole group format, but Kevin, 11th grade counselor, said that they were not well-attended:

> Interviewer: How do students get information about college requirements or scholarships or deadlines, things like that?
>
> Kevin: Usually, it's the parent nights. Sometimes we'll have informational meetings in the cafeteria. Most of the time though it's through parent nights. We don't really send the information home, we usually send the postcard home that we're holding parent meetings. I mean, if we're lucky, we get like 25 parents show

> up if we're lucky. On a good night, it's 25…We do a lot of outreach…I know a lot of the parents work, some work two jobs, so it's hard to get them there.

Kevin also discussed a college access program, a partnership with two local universities focused on recruiting students and letting them know the admissions requirements.

In addition to many practices focused on information and some on exposure to college, Woodlot had numerous academic supports for college such as free ACT testing, DE, and AP courses. Assistant principal Walter described Woodlot's diploma pathways and coursework in this way:

> Like I shared, all of our students are on the university Tops track [college pathway] so that means all of their coursework meets the requirements for admissions to all of the public institutions in the state of Louisiana…we encourage our students to enroll in an AP class at some point during their high school career so they can be exposed to what they could possibly see at the college level as well.

Like all other case study schools, Woodlot students on average had low ACT scores. Walter said that:

> while we really push it [four-year college], the ACT performance is not at the level where we can definitely say all of our students are going to leave us and go on to a [four-year college]… that may only be maybe…25% of the students who may be eligible at graduation to go on to some type of a four-year institution.

Participants did not discuss ACT tutoring or preparation during interviews. While Woodlot offered free ACT testing and college preparatory coursework, some participants stated that students did not fully understand the purpose of these academic opportunities. For instance, Heather said:

> …they did make the kids take the ACT; They did offer Dual Enrollment; They did offer AP. So they gave students opportunities to prepare for college. I just don't think

> they always communicated well why those opportunities were valuable and what the other options were.

According to Heather and Walter, students were inundated with college information and opportunities, but they lacked understanding of the purpose and value of these opportunities.

As described above, Woodlot offered many academic opportunities to prepare students for college, but these practices were incohesive as they were largely driven by pressure from the accountability system—School Performance Score (SPS) points. Walter described accountability pressure and college practices in this way:

> with the accountability system there are points that's associated with your students taking Dual Enrollment classes, taking that CLEP test that I talked about, taking AP classes, so all of those things can add to your School's Performance Score (SPS). So, most school administrators are actively recruiting students to take those classes. "Hey, take that CLEP test." Out of this graduating class…I'm sure we were able to get [over 100] of them to take the CLEP examination, which, for a school accounts for 50 additional points in accountability per child. So, when you start thinking about the fact that two of those kids can make up for a drop out on your School Performance Score, so when you look at it…that accounts for 70 dropouts…that's major. You start talking about the fact that those same kids or another group of kids can take an AP exam and if they get the AP plus three, again, that counts as 50 additional points. So, you start becoming a little bit more strategic in how you schedule kids and the opportunities that you put before them.

Woodlot provided information, resources to expose students to college, and academic supports in preparation for college, but participants discussed concrete support with the college application process less often. There were minimal opportunities for individualized assistance with college applications from counselors and teachers [See Ch. 5 for more on counselors and college-going culture]. Like Orchard, most of the concrete support focused on assisting students and families with completing the FAFSA application, as participants described this as a graduation requirement. The senior counselor, with support from LOSFA, coordinated FAFSA nights and workshops during

the day to allow students and parents to complete the FAFSA. Helen, the senior counselor, described her process for organizing opportunities to support students with the FAFSA application in this way:

> …so in October when the window opens, I have a representative from LOSFA to come out to Woodlot and we go through all the English classes and let the kids set up their accounts. And then she explains to them what they need to do and what they should bring home to the parents to get the parents to do their part… up to this time, I'm checking with them [students] and making sure they have it done because we get a report from the district every month saying whose been completed and so forth. And for those who have not, I'll call the parents "Do you need any help?" and the doors open. They can come from 10 to 2, and I would help them with it in the college room, which is like a little room right outside my office with three computers. It's back there by the counselor's office, and the parents will come in there with their child and work on it. And I have also had some FAFSA nights where they can come. I think I did it 5:30 to 7. And then sometimes it goes on as far as 8:30 or 9.

As discussed above by Helen, there were numerous opportunities for students and families to receive support with FAFSA. However, some participants said that students did not understand the importance of completing the FAFSA. Walter said:

> The state requires all seniors to complete the FAFSA application. So that's the requirement. I don't think they still quite get that, and parents don't understand the purpose of completing that FAFSA application and the doors that it could perhaps unlock for qualifying for grants and scholarships because I think to qualify for any scholarship grants, you have to have a FAFSA application on file.

Similarly, Heather stated:

> the counselors would chase them down about filling out a FAFSA form, which became a graduation requirement. And they didn't even understand what FAFSA was, or why they were doing it, they just knew that the counselors kept trying to pull them into their office and get them to fill out a form.

This suggests that completing FAFSA was more about fulfilling the state's requirement than helping students to understand the entire college-going process and the benefits of completing a financial aid application to this process.

As stated above, concrete assistance with college applications was minimal and was mainly initiated by students. According to Walter, students could come into counselors' offices or teachers' classrooms seeking help, but typically counselors would not initiate this type of support because they lacked the time for one-on-one meetings. Counselors' role in college-going culture is described in-depth in Chapter 5.

Overall, Woodlot employed a clearinghouse approach to college supports. Students had access to a lot of college information, and there were resources aimed at exposing students to college and preparing students academically for college, but there was less time and attention devoted to individualized assistance with the application process and with helping students to understand the purpose and importance of various parts of the process. Heather even said that "I think we just still had a lot more students that felt lost in the college search and lost in what they were supposed to do." Similarly, Walter said, "…I think just getting them to fully understand the steps necessary to go to college…I think that's a struggle that we have."

#### 4.2.2.3 Perceptions of Responsibility for College Supports at Woodlot

Woodlot's leaders, counselors, and teachers did not have a shared sense of responsibility for college support. While Principal Joan, Assistant Principal Walter, and Jason, a teacher, said that college-going assistance should be everyone's responsibility, they acknowledged that counselors were primarily responsible for this work. Jason

illustrated this point when he said, “everybody who walks in the door as an educator, or even not as an educator, [who has] the ability to listen to a student and the ability to understand where he or she is coming from” is responsible for assisting students with college planning and should “take an active role in [college planning supports] and share the responsibility.” However, Jason also acknowledged that “counselors, of course, are going to take a lot of that burden on them.” Kevin, 11th grade counselor, acknowledged this as well. Similarly, Walter felt that college planning support should be a shared responsibility, but teachers did not “take a personal ownership” of college supports at Woodlot. Ideally, assisting students with the college-going process should be a collaborative effort, but in practice it was primarily a counselor’s responsibility.

The lack of a shared sense of responsibility was also evident in the fact that teachers lacked a clearly defined role in supporting students. While participants described instances where teachers held conversations with students about college, helped with college applications, or drove a student to an out-of-state college, participants did not state that there was a formalized way that teachers were involved. Furthermore, Walter said that “teachers will have conversations about college,” but this is tied to their expectations of students:

> so, if I look at my class and I don’t see college in the future for them. Then I may not have that conversation. But if I’m teaching my honors class…we may venture off into that arena a little bit more. And that may not be the norm for all teachers, but that’s just my perspective of it.

With counselors primarily responsible for college planning and teachers not having defined roles in college support, Woodlot did not express a shared sense of responsibility for assisting students with college.

Woodlot was another case of a limited college-going culture with adults' having different expectations for college attendance, incohesive college practices, a clearinghouse approach (Hill 2008) to college-going support, and no shared sense of responsibility for assisting students with college planning. Like Orchard, SPS points related to pressure from the district seemed to drive many of the schools' college practices, contributing to incohesive, piecemeal supports that lacked connection for students to understand the entire college-going process.

#### 4.2.3 Moderate College-Going Culture at Forest Charter High School

In contrast to Orchards' and Woodlots' limited college-going cultures, Forest had a moderate college-going culture. The nature of this culture was reflected in leaders, counselors, and teachers having school-wide college expectations, both cohesive and incohesive college practices, clearinghouse and brokering strategies (Hill 2008; 2012) for college-going support, and some shared sense of responsibility for assisting students with college planning. Forest also sent most of their students to college as their two-year and four-year college enrollment rate was approximately 70% in fall 2019.

##### 4.2.3.1 Forest's College-Going Norms: "Traditionally" College Prep in a "College Readiness Network"

Forest's mission at the school and charter network levels explicitly highlighted college preparation, but interview and observational data complicate whether college attendance was a school-wide goal. Participants generally agreed that Forest focused on preparing students for college. When asked whether Forest students felt they were expected to go to college, Ralph, the principal, and teachers stated that students would

generally say that they were expected to go. According to Philip, a music teacher, this expectation was tied to the fact that Forest "has traditionally been a college preparatory school." Philip went on to say:

> We prepare students for college, even if that's not what they want to do, even if they want to go to the military instead or go to trade school. We're still going to prepare them academically as if they were going to college because we believe traditionally here at Forest that we want kids to have that at the top of their first choice, "I want to go to college" just so they could have the experience at least and be prepared for that.

Similarly, Danielle, a DE teacher, connected Forest's college expectations to its college preparatory mission, stating that students were:

> expected to go to college because this is a college preparatory school. So if you ask them, they gon' [sic] say that they're pushed to go to college, that their goal is to register for college, to take the ACT, to do the FAFSA, to apply to go. And some of them, if they're in the right classes, they'll tell you they're in college because they're getting Dual Enrollment credits while they're still in high school.

Teresa, Forest's senior counselor, echoed Forest's long-standing college prep focus stating,

> Forest has always been a school that was college prep, …even before the state did the Jump[start], the two [diploma] options. It had always been a college prep [school]. So they've always preached college, Dual Enrollment, AP courses. That has always been a part of Forest culture.

Preparing students for college and a focus on college attendance at Forest even if students did not want to go was a challenge for some teachers, like Albert, an AP teacher, who stated:

> So officially the message is "college, college, college, college, we're all going to [two- or four-year] college"… but also the issue has been with teachers like, "Well, what do we do with the student who tells you 'That's not my agenda.'" Like, you have students who say "I'm tired of people telling me go to college. I

> don't want to go to college." "I'm going to do this, this, or this." And so you have some teachers are actually… saying now like, "Yes, I want all of you to go to college at some point in your life."

Other participants, especially counselors, acknowledged that college-for-all was not a realistic goal as some students did not want to go to college, did not need a four-year degree for certain careers, or did not have the academic qualifications for entrance into a four-year college. Despite the schools' college-going mission, counselors tended to highlight college as one "option" as they focused on the importance of students having a postsecondary plan rather than the narrow focus of attending a four-year college. Teresa stated that,

> Everyone should have an option to go somewhere, whether it's a two-year program, and we use that word "college", I think, too loosely because not everybody wants a four-year degree, nor do they need it because it's more college readiness. Be ready to go if you so choose, whether it's a two-year program, a four-year program, whether it's a certificate program or a trade, but be ready to be successful after [high school]. Have some postsecondary plan. And we try to expose kids to all of that.

In connection with counselors focus on postsecondary options, Alice, a math teacher, described college attendance as a school-wide goal that has fluctuated over time due to changes in messaging from leaders and counselors who began to promote other options like trade schools. She felt that the messaging around college attendance got "lost" for some students as other options were promoted.

> I feel like they [students] know that our expectation is for them to go to college. Maybe not all of them though. Like I said, in that two-year gap where we kind of lost sight of that they might not feel like they have to go to college because at one point we were drilling and telling them do a trade school, you know. Yeah. Because they were telling it to us like, you know, every kid not gon' go to college.
>
> Interviewer: Oh that's what the leaders were telling you...? the prior leadership? Who was saying that?

> Alice: I wouldn't say just the leaders. It would probably be counselors. You know, we would just hear from different things. And they would just say, maybe the leaders was too, like “all kids not going to go to college.” That's the reality, like that was their reality. And that's why I say we kind of lost sight of it, because, you know, we kind of went to what's the reality of it, not what we expect or what we want Forest to be. So it will be, "The reality is they could do trade schools. Put a trade school up as your college board or your college wall, instead of just a college. Just put a trade school.” saying, “Hey, it's okay to go this route". So I think some of those students will probably think college isn't like the first option. College isn't the only thing that I need to do or what we expect from them cuz like I said the message wasn't really clear.

Although participants generally reported expectations for college attendance at Forest due to their college prep mission, many teachers and a counselor stated that there was not pressure on students from adults within the school for students to go to college. Alice felt that “it should be pressure being that we want to be college prep… But I don't feel like the kids feel pressure. You know like “If I go, I go, if I don't, I don’t”…” Similarly, Philip said “the expectation is that you want them to go to college, but” with the military and career technical programs, they “give kids options outside of college… other avenues outside of a traditional college pathway.”

Marie, 11th grade counselor, also stated there was not pressure on students to attend college, but pressure on counselors from “leaders in our network, they want to see the counselors push it.” Doris, Forest’s 9th grade counselor, even discussed how all students were put on a TOPS University diploma pathway as they “are a college readiness network.”

> The whole network's goal is to, not that every kid has to go to college, but that every kid will be positioned to go to college. So you will be college ready. Now it's up to you to decide whether that's what you want to do. But we prepared you, essentially is that thought. So by default… the first two years your core courses are aligned with TOPS University and Jumpstart like no matter what.

Similarly, Danielle, AP and DE teacher, felt that network leaders pressured adults at Forest to focus on college. She said,

> Danielle: sometimes there's a sense of pressure to push them to go to college because like that's all they talk about, "going to college, going to college, making sure they're college ready." But all children are NOT [she emphasizes] college material and all of them don't want to go. So what are you giving those that don't want to go?
>
> Interviewer: Where do these messages come from? So who is "they" who keep saying those types of things?
>
> Danielle: Like it may not even be here, but like central office [network leaders].

In summary, participants acknowledged that Forest "traditionally" had a college preparatory mission, emphasized college as an expectation, and worked to prepare students for college even if they did not want to go. However, many participants also believed that college was one "option," and there were other postsecondary pathways. While teachers stated that students were not pressured to attend college, some counselors and teachers said that network leaders tended to pressure the school to focus on college attendance. While pushing a college attendance agenda, some teachers were unsure of how to support those students who did not want to go to college.

#### 4.2.3.2 Forests' Cohesive and Incohesive College Practices with Clearinghouse and Brokering Approaches to College Support

Forest employed both brokering and clearinghouse approaches to supporting students with college. As shown in Table 4.1, Forest shared college information, resources, and opportunities that exposed students to college and that prepared students academically for college. However, Forest provided less practical support with the application process as organizational challenges sometimes limited their ability to

provide individualized support to students and families, including one-to-one college counseling (discussed in greater detail in Ch. 5).

According to participants, many Forest students would be first-generation college attendees so Forest engaged in numerous practices to provide students with college information and exposure to college experiences such as school-based and city-wide college fairs, college tours, and Career Day. Albert, AP teacher, summarized some of these practices stating,

> [The senior counselor] organizes college fairs. We had one where it was like a bunch of schools over at [a New Orleans high school] and then she organized another one I think was just HBCUs. Um, so we do college fairs to get them interested. We also have, usually in the spring, a Career Day. So it's also "Here are the careers. Now what do you need to do to get this career?" Some of them [careers] might, "You have to go to college" and some might be more, "Oh, just go to a trade school and do this" kind of thing.

Forest also focused on early and on-going college exposure by implementing a grant-funded college access program that highlighted the academic and non-academic aspects of college life and engaged students in activities throughout the school year such as conversations with current college students. This program illustrated a cohesive college practice as it coordinated activities that were interconnected and purposely built on each other, allowing students to understand the many facets of applying to college and persisting in college. At the time of data collection, Forest was the only school in this study that discussed offering this program. The program started with ninth graders and added a grade-level each year. Ralph, the principal of Forest, described the program as focusing "a lot more on the social emotional piece in going to college… and trying to get that energy and excitement as early as their freshman year." The freshman counselor,

who coordinated the program, described how the school was able to get the funds to implement and design this program for their school:

> …thanks to her [senior counselor] relationship with LOSFA [Louisiana Office of Student Financial Assistance], we were able to benefit from this [college access program name] grant that came from the state, because it's not every school…but, we're one of those schools. And so that allows us to be able to take them on college tours. That allows us additional funds within the school to do things that would get them into college and keep them there. Which, you know, it gives us freedom to implement initiatives and activities and programs that will do that. If it's going to meet that, like if we can show that they will be able to get into college and stay in college with how we use the funds, then they pretty much permit us to use the funds. So that's the great thing. So we take them on college tours. We have a college club after school. We have an official induction ceremony. We had that yesterday where we make a big deal out of joining… We induct them in their freshman year, but it follows them every year. So my freshmen last year, they came to the induction yesterday just to support, but they were already inducted last year. So it's just going to follow them. So this year we have 9th and 10th graders. Next year we'll have 9th through 11th, the year after, everybody is going to be [college access program name].

During my visit to the school, I observed an event for this program with a panel of college students describing their experiences and providing advice to students on how to balance academics and social life. Students freely asked questions of the panelists as the discussion was facilitated by Forest students who appeared to be very engaged in this event. I heard several announcements made for students to attend this event, and many teachers were aware of the program based on interviews and informal conversations with teachers. However, the program was only moderately attended by students.

In addition to many practices focused on exposure to college, Forest also had numerous academic supports for college such as free ACT testing, ACT preparation, DE, and many AP courses. Like all other case study schools, Forest students on average had low ACT scores so the school offered ACT tutoring, bootcamps, and pre-ACT testing to

increase the scores. Many students did not get at least a 20 on the ACT to qualify for the TOPS scholarship to attend a Louisiana college or university, which would cover tuition and other costs depending on their score. Teresa, senior counselor, described the challenges with students not getting high enough ACT scores, emphasizing students' lack of preparation:

> Two point five GPA and a 20 on the A.C.T.. Any state school, your tuition would be paid. That sounds so easy. So simple….They'll have the GPA, but they can't get that [20] because they're not preparing their self. They're not being college ready…we have tutoring, ACT bootcamp. "I can't. I got to work" But where you work at? How much you make an hour? So if you can get this 20 on the ACT, you understand that that $8.50 you making, you know how many hours you have to work $8.50 to pay for your tuition? Come on! We got to process this. Give a couple of hours. Come to the tutoring, talk to your employer and say I need to go to ACT boot camp so I can raise my ACT score so I can get into college…

To provide students' opportunities to get college and high school credits, Forest, like all case study schools, offered DE courses such as college-level mathematics. Danielle was also a math instructor at a local HBCU so in addition to her high school math courses she taught DE at Forest. This provided a great benefit to Forest students who did not "have to jump through all the loops that a normal person would have to jump through to get admitted [into the local college] because it's me. If it was somebody else, you would be jumping through a whole lot of other hoops to get this college credit." Moreover, if students did not have the required ACT math subscore of 19 to immediately enroll in the course, the DE teacher said that students "could take the Math 098 [remedial math]. So if I get you early enough to take the 098 … then you still could matriculate long as you still have me the whole time." She also said that if students were ahead, they could progress through other DE math courses as she did not want to "hold back" any

students. Because of this teacher's relationship with a local university, Forest students could be easily admitted into DE courses even if they did not have the required ACT scores. Having Danielle, both a college professor and a full-time teacher at Forest, was very beneficial for students struggling to access DE due to ACT scores, which was a struggle at other schools in this study.

While Forest provided many opportunities geared towards exposure and academic preparation, participants discussed concrete college supports less often as organizational conditions constrained the counseling department (e.g., no secretary; grade-level structure of the department left the senior counselor primarily responsible for college support), providing less time and opportunities for individualized college supports [See Ch. 5 for more on counselors and college-going culture]. Most of the individualized, concrete support focused on assisting students and families with completing the FAFSA application, as all participants described this as a graduation requirement. Teresa, with support from LOSFA, coordinated FAFSA nights and workshops during the day to allow parents to complete the FAFSA.

Assistance with applying and enrolling into college was mainly initiated by students who could come into counselors' offices or teachers' classrooms seeking help. Although teachers helped students, there was no requirement for teachers to support students with college. Albert, an AP teacher, described counselors and teachers as "unofficially" supporting students with the college application process:

> Interviewer: So, in terms of the assistance with college planning, in what ways do you see teachers assisting students with planning for college?
>
> Albert: I think unofficially, so I don't think, nothing official. Like there's nothing that we do the school says, "okay, teachers, you're going to do this." I think unofficially though, I've definitely seen teachers like after school, like helping

> kids with college essays. I've seen teachers helping like, okay, we're going to log in and let's check the application, let's see what you're missing. I've seen teachers help filling out scholarship paperwork or pointing them to websites that they can go do scholarships. I see our counselors doing a lot of that as well, providing opportunities and they'll find scholarships and make announcements, you know, "Hey, if you're a young woman who does this or a man or you just a student who likes this,"… we have a scholarship for you. Um, but a lot of it's unofficial on their own time.

Similarly, Danielle described the informal support students received if they requested it:

> I know for me personally, I've helped do FAFSA forms…I went with children to colleges, so I've, you know, in various ways, it's just, it really depends on what they need from us as to how we help them.
>
> Interviewer: But they do approach you and you give them that one-to-one support?
>
> Danielle: Oh yeah. Yes.
>
> Interviewer: Is that an expectation of the leadership or you just do it?
>
> Danielle: I don't know. I think I just do it. I really think it's more just me.

With a range of college resources and supports, but differing levels of individualized outreach, Forest employed both brokering and clearinghouse college-linking strategies. A brokering strategy was evident primarily through various practices focused on exposing students to college, outreach to students and families to provide college information, informal support from teachers and counselors with the college application process, and their college access program that brought cohesion to their college practices. A clearinghouse strategy was evident through the schools' numerous resources and external partnerships, but various organizational challenges with initiating support to provide students and families with formal, individualized assistance with college applications.

#### 4.2.3.3 Perceptions of Responsibility for College Supports at Forest

Forest had some shared sense of responsibility for college supports. Counselors, leaders, and teachers believed that everyone was responsible for assisting students with college planning. Sophia, an assistant principal, said,

> From the homeroom teacher to the fourth period teacher to admin, counselors… it's a concerted effort. If you really want to see children go [to college], the conversation has to be about college… the conversation has to be whole school.

Similarly, from Teresa's (senior counselor) perspective:

> Everybody should be versed in what the state requirements for kids to get into [college] or, not even the test scores, but perseverance, grit, motivation, knowing that that's what gets you either in and out after four years or in and out after one semester. You know, knowing that you have to put in the work. And just preparing them to be able to do the work to understand that you need to be able to write a five-page essay, or ten-page essay, or twenty-page essay, be able to do a research paper, be able to go to a science class and a lab. I think that's everybody responsibility because that's what college is about, you know, expanding horizons and acquiring knowledge and all of that. So, everybody in this building should be a part of that: custodians to the man at the top, the principal. Everybody. We should all be speaking the same language. So I think it's everybody's role and sitting down and deciding what piece of this pie you want to take….You gon' be the flour? You gon' be the eggs? You gon' be some sugar? So that when we make this, mix it all up and bake it, it's gon' come out tasting good. And that'll be the success of the kids moving on. So everybody plays a part.

While leaders, teachers, and counselors said in theory everyone was responsible for assisting students with college planning, this was not always the case in practice. Teachers lacked a clearly defined role in college supports. While teachers informally assisted students with college applications, scholarships, letters of recommendation, etc., teachers did not fully understand their role in college planning outside of teaching their courses and preparing students academically for standardized tests. Some teachers like Alice, Albert, and Rose, and, senior counselor, Teresa even said that teachers may not

view themselves as being responsible for supporting students with college planning. According to Rose, “lower level teachers” or freshman and sophomore teachers may not “feel as obligated or have the opportunity” to support students with college planning. When I asked Alice, a 9th grade math teacher, were there any expectations coming from leaders about what teachers should be doing to help students get to college, she said:

> We don't really, I don't think that's really a conversation that we have from leadership. I think in the beginning of the year they just kind of made it plain and simple that we are a college prep school so we need to prepare kids for college. But they didn't really tell us what's our expectations for what that should look like? They didn't really model what it should probably sound like or be like in the classroom. So maybe we don't really know what we should be doing as far as how we can prepare the kids for college inside the classroom.

Principal Ralph further illustrated an unclear role for teachers when he said a teacher’s role in college planning:

> could be two-fold. There's no...I'mma [sic] go out on the limb and say more from a modeling standpoint. So like we encourage teachers to advertise, wear their university, post their university, tell their story. But the biggest role is making sure their [students are] academically ready…So we just tell them if you get them academically ready,…we'll take care of the conversation. But they do have the autonomy to have those discussions in class and everything we do from an academic standpoint there to tie back to real world. So in a lesson, a teacher may say when you get to college, here's what they're going to ask of you … or when you get on the job, here's why we do this. So just making sure they're tying it back to real world experience, [making] the connection.

Moreover, counselors and teachers expressed that teachers felt more pressure to raise test scores than to support students with college. Teresa said they have "tunnel vision" and are focused on test scores because the SPS and their job stability are connected to test scores. She said, while “everybody's on the same thing about raising ACT scores and making sure that the kids can get the ACT score to get into a

college,…teachers'… focus is [on other standardized] tests." Teresa went on to say that teachers:

> are so overwhelmed with the amount of demands and I guess what they have to do to meet because everybody job is relying on a EOC [End-of-Course test] or a LEAP [Louisiana Educational Assessment Program] score…so I think most of them have tunnel vision. And then again, if you're able to teach the content and the kids are able to learn the content, then there would be room for doing a lot more.

Forest's shared sense of responsibility for college support was moderate as teachers supported students with college but lacked clearly defined roles due to unclear expectations from leadership. Teachers were willing to support students informally and would offer support with things like college applications, letters of recommendation, etc.

Forest was a case of a moderate college-going culture with adults' having school-wide expectations for college attendance based on their "traditional" college prep status, a combination of cohesive and incohesive college practices, both clearinghouse and brokering approaches (Hill 2008; 2012) to college-going support, and some shared sense of responsibility for assisting students with college planning. Forests' college access program worked to bring cohesion to their college practices, providing students the opportunity to develop a full picture of the college-going process.

### 4.2.4 Strong College-Going Culture at Garden Charter High School

In contrast to Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest, findings from this study suggest that Garden Charter High School had a strong college-going culture. Garden's leaders, teachers, and counselors had high expectations for college attendance and contributed to cohesive college practices (i.e., college practices that were interconnected and a part of a school-wide approach to college supports), a brokering college-linking strategy (Hill

2008; 2012) (i.e., numerous college resources and consistent outreach to students to provide resources including concrete, individualized assistance with the college application process), and a shared sense of responsibility for assisting students with college planning. Approximately 70% of Garden students matriculated to a two-year or four-year college in fall 2019.

#### 4.2.4.1. Garden's College-Going Norms: High Expectations for College Attendance

Leaders, counselors, and teachers at Garden Charter High School generally expected students to go to two-year, and mainly, four-year colleges, and they normalized college attendance through their high academic expectations and their school-wide college and career readiness practices. Erica, an English teacher, illustrated Garden's college expectations stating, "I think college attendance… it's a given for these kids like, you have to. You're expected to [go to college] when you come here. The kids know that." An emphasis on college attendance was discussed by other teachers and leaders who also acknowledged that college attendance was based on students' career goals and interests. When asked about the expectation for students in attending college, George, the principal, stated:

> I have some kids who are in the electrician program at [community college] so they can go either right into the workforce because they're certified electricians. Or they can continue on to a university that would become electrical engineers, which would give them a unique skillset because how many electrical engineers are electricians? So…they got the theory side and they got the practical side of actually wiring a house, knowing all the mechanics of what they need to do on that level. So it [college attendance] just depends on the individual, but we're going to give them the knowledge and the basics in the core so they can be successful with whatever they choose to do.

While this perspective mirrors what most participants stated about Garden's focus on college and career readiness due to students' individual interests, some teachers and leaders explicitly stated that Garden pressured students to attend college. When asked about the schools' expectations around college attendance, Amber, a social studies teacher at Garden, described Garden's strong focus on college attendance in this way:

> Like [college attendance] that's all [Garden] it's driven off… [Garden] drives off of college preparation like ACT prep and making sure that they [students] have the qualifications. We actually reward some kids for actually being qualified for college, whether they go or not. So, like as a sophomore,… you get a 21 on the ACT and a 3.4, you're able to get off campus, that means you get half days. You also, when you're a junior, you're able to…go to [community college], start your college courses… So a lot of the kids already be kind of qualified… for college when they exit or have some type of certification.

This description aligned with my observations of the strong focus on college attendance at Garden and my interviews with other leaders, teachers, and counselors. To further illustrate this point, Erica asserted that Garden pressured students to go to college, but she did not view this as a good thing for some students. When asked why she felt that Garden pressured students to attend college, Erica stated:

> Because it's our rule. You gotta apply [to college]. You have to do this essay. You have to. You have to. And that can negatively impact some, like my 10 [students] that feel like it's not for them in this moment. That could negatively impact them, but it's so blatant throughout the building. You got the college posters eeeverywhere [emphasized]. This hallway down here, everywhere! It's very clear to them that children that graduate from Garden go to college…I think it could definitely seem like we're just shoving something down their throat, like "you have to do it because we said so and that's what's good for you." "That's what your momma want you to do so we want you to do it too" sort of thing. But no, I work with them like "Hey, I get it. It's really not for everybody."

John, an assistant principal, had a slightly different perspective, describing the pressure to attend college at Garden as "good, supportive pressure," due to the wide range of college resources and supports available to Garden students. This leader led an

initiative to completely change the schools' curriculum to make it more rigorous, so students were not only college ready, but "sustainable". In contrast, some counselors felt that Garden did not force students to go to college or to complete college applications, but some teachers and leaders discussed college applications as a requirement and how the counseling department coordinated a school-wide College Application Day to support students individually with their college applications [discussed in more detail in Section 4.2.4.2].

Although Garden focused on college attendance, many participants stated that they did not expect every student at Garden to get a four-year college degree, nor did they believe that college attendance was "a necessity to be successful," as Ashley, Garden's 9th grade counselor, described it. She summarized Garden's college expectations stating, "What I really like about this school is that, yes, we're pushing students to go to college, but at the same time we also are aware that college is not for everybody." Even though this was stated, observational data and interviews with leaders, teachers, and counselors about the schools' college practices provides evidence that Garden sent a strong message about attending college, especially four-year schools.

Gardens' leaders, teachers, and counselors aimed to provide all students access to college opportunities even as they acknowledged that college attendance was a student's individual decision and one of multiple postsecondary paths. Gardens' leaders and staff believed that students should be prepared and exposed to college to decide the career they are interested in and pursue the education needed to reach their career goals. Overall, Garden normalized college attendance as a viable option for students. Even more, they normalized future success for their predominantly African American students through

their college-related practices, career readiness supports, and especially through the school's collaborative and supportive "family-like" culture and their belief in students' ability to succeed. This was evident in how Assistant Principal John who previously taught at Garden, wanted students to:

> sit next to anybody and be able to be college ready and sustainable. You know, that was my mindset in my classroom. That was my mindset as an academic dean, that is my mindset now as assistant principal is "Our kids are not inferior to no one. They can go to any university and be prepared." We have to give them a base, build on that base. You know, let's leverage the relationships and culture that we build to really push them in being [college] ready.

"Leveraging" Garden's collaborative school culture that prioritized strong relationships among teachers, students, and leaders intersected with Garden's college-going culture, which provided a holistic, systemic approach to supporting students with various aspects of college planning.

In summary, Garden had high expectations for college attendance, strongly encouraging or even pressuring students to attend college through the school's focus on rigorous academics and supportive college practices. Gardens' leaders, teachers, and counselors believed that both four-year and two-year colleges were valuable to students' futures and could provide important skills, experiences, and opportunities for future success. Leaders also firmly believed that Garden students could succeed in college. While Garden emphasized college attendance, most participants also acknowledged that college was one option and was based on students' individual interests.

#### 4.2.4.2 Gardens' Cohesive College Practices and A Brokering Approach to College Support

Garden's leaders and staff employed cohesive college practices and a brokering approach to college supports. This was reflected through their numerous college resources, outreach to students and families to offer these resources, and individualized college-going support. As shown in Table 4.1, Garden engaged in practices that provided information and exposure to college, prepared students academically for college, and provided concrete assistance to students with the college application process. Garden leaders, counselors, and teachers worked to prepare students for college through what the leaders described as the schools' "programmatic alignment" of rigorous coursework, numerous college and career resources, and various supports adults' provided students.

As many students would be first-generation college attendees and were unfamiliar with the complex college-going process, many of Garden's practices focused on information about admissions requirements and exposure to college experiences. For instance, all Garden participants discussed how counselors organized events such as college tours, college fairs, and College and Career Day to connect students with college representatives who could provide information about their institutions so students could make informed decisions. Like all four schools in this study, some college fairs were organized in collaboration with LOSFA. Tina, the college and career readiness counselor, described the different ways that counselors provided students and parents with college information:

> They have two years of going to the College and Career Day [at Garden], and they get pamphlets, flyers and everything… There's another college fair that happens in the city…they have an opportunity to go to that. When we get

> information, whether it's in the mail about scholarships, emails, outside programs, summer programs, we send all of that information out to the parents as well as the students.

In addition, teachers and leaders decorated their doors with college posters displaying information about their colleges and universities. Participants described this as a conversation starter so students could learn more about adults' college experiences. John described the door decorations as one portion of Garden's "programmatically aligned" college practices:

> One of our support team members, Ms. [name], she had a wonderful idea…to beef up just the culture of college. And this was before we had our college fair, we did a college door decorating contest to kind of build up, you know, what that culture looks like. So she came up with that idea. Teachers got really into it because, you know, we get to brag on our schools, um, and rep[resent] our schools. And that was before the college fair. So the kids seeing colleges on doors and then now this is college fair. And after the college fair was the College Application Day that the counselors did in collaboration with the…English IV teachers and the English IV teachers doing one of their major culminating tasks for the quarter was your college application essay. So it's just programmatically aligning so many things where it's like, "Whoa, this is just culture. So it's in our classes. It's in our counseling sessions. It's in our assemblies[s].”

In this excerpt John described how Garden focused on "aligning" college practices within the school in a logical and strategic way, forming cohesive college practices.

Garden also focused heavily on academic preparation for college, for example, through their school-wide focus on college writing, their college-like semester course schedule, and DE coursework. Like all Louisiana public high schools, Garden provided free ACT testing to juniors. However, Garden also provided multiple ways of preparing for the test and improving students' scores, as ACT was a challenge for many students in attending four-year colleges. In describing the schools' focus on ACT, Roy, a science

teacher, noted the challenges students faced with their ACT scores and described how students were supported in multiple ways:

> The ACT, I think may be one of the larger struggles… I do hear a lot of the kids comparing scores, talking about scores, thinking about scores, ACT bootcamps, practice tests. And so I do know that it is a very serious thing to them as they go further along. I think the school does provide them with a lot of resources, if the kids…take advantage of them…They have ACT bootcamps. There's one going on now. There are vouchers for kids to take ACT I think once a year, maybe twice. And then kids take the Pre-ACT when they're freshmen, take it again as sophomores, and then they do it I think twice as Juniors and twice as seniors. So they're getting multiple opportunities to sort of get familiar with the ACT in addition to any class prep that involves ACT prep too.

Similarly, Sara, an assistant principal, discussed how, as a former classroom teacher, she provided strong support for ACT preparation, which led to her implementing a school-wide initiative to improve ACT scores through tutoring and bootcamps.

Gardens' leaders, counselors, and teachers also provided concrete supports throughout the college enrollment process. Like Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest, Gardens' counselors held FAFSA nights and workshops during the day, with support from LOSFA staff, to assist students and parents individually with completing the FAFSA application.

Participants also described formal, individualized support with college applications on College Application Day, which was held over a two-day period, where students received support from counselors, teachers, and college representatives in completing multiple college applications. Students could also see a counselor after the event if they needed further assistance. Erica described College Application Day:

> Just earlier this week, [we held] College Application Day…They have reps come in. There are a bunch of people from [a local HBCU] that came, a few reps from [community college], a few reps from [a local university] and [another HBCU] they come in and they help the kids finish their college applications because it's a

> requir[ement]. It becomes really, really for them in that moment because they all come to the library, we roll our computer carts up… So every one of our [senior] classes, me and the other English IV teacher, we have to bring our kids up for them to complete at least one [college application].

Garden primarily employed a brokering approach to supporting students with college attendance through their strong college norms emphasized symbolically throughout their building (e.g., posters displaying information about teachers' and leaders' colleges), through various practices focused on making college accessible to their students, and through intentional outreach to students and families to provide college planning support. Not only did Gardens' leaders and staff engage students in multiple college-going practices, they integrated these practices in a strategic way to form cohesive college practices as leaders focused on "programmatically aligning" practices across departments.

#### 4.2.4.3 Perceptions of Responsibility for College Supports at Garden

Garden exhibited a shared sense of responsibility for college supports. This was reflected through counselors, leaders, and teachers formally and informally supporting students with various aspects of the college-going process. When asked whose responsibility it was to assist students with college planning at Garden leaders George and John stated "everyone" was responsible. Sara, also a leader at Garden, said that everyone helped students with college planning at Garden, but she felt that:

> in a wonderful world it would be the counselors [assisting with college planning] in all honesty, but it becomes everybody's initiative…I can't help them as much as I would like to help them. But I do think that it, it ends up lying more on the counselors, but if we actually hear a child that's struggling with something, that's why I'm gonna probably be after school tomorrow helping certain children because I know that they're struggling with the [college-going] process or they're struggling with scholarships and things of that sort. So it's helping them. If Mr.

> John [assistant principal] hears that they need help or [another assistant principal], we all kind of swoop in and we don't just say, okay, "that's not our problem."

Similarly, John acknowledged that:

> All of us [are responsible for assisting students with college planning]. When it comes to positions, that's specifically, you know, our counseling department. They really navigate and work hand in hand with the students along that journey. But all of us [assist]…if you're a mentor to a student, if a student needs help registering for ACT…

Like Woodlot's and Forest's staff, Garden's staff believed that everyone should have a responsibility in supporting students with college, but counselors are formally responsible for offering college support, with leaders and teachers as supporting actors. However, Garden differed from Woodlot and Forest in that their perceptions of college planning support as a collaborative process generally aligned with the way they carried out their college-going practices school-wide.

Gardens' teachers had a more defined role in college supports compared to Woodlots', Orchards', and Forests' teachers who would or would not provide college supports to students and in different ways depending on their desire to assist. Due to their family-like environment, Gardens' teachers were expected to informally assist students with the college application process, especially when approached by students. John discussed how students approached teachers and leaders for support throughout the school day:

> literally like during your lunch, like just during classes [students reach out for support] cuz sometimes, you know, they may not feel comfortable with their guidance counselor, or they may feel embarrassed to say, "Hey, I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to navigate this." Especially if it's a first- generation college student where it's like, "How do I do an application? What's next? What?" So they'll come to us and I know that they do it with a lot of teachers because some teachers say, "Hey, I haven't done ACT registration in a while, John was

> asking me how to do this. Can you show me so when he comes back to me, I know how to do it."

As described in Section 4.2.4.2, 12th grade teachers were expected to assist with College Application Day. Senior English teachers also supported students with writing college essays as part of their class curriculum. Ashley, a counselor and former Garden teacher, described how essays did not begin in 12th grade English, but started on a smaller scale in 9th grade English classes and progressed with each grade-level. As described in the previous section, teachers were also required to decorate their doors to provide students with information about their colleges and to spark conversations about college.

Furthermore, Garden's school-wide sense of responsibility for college supports intersected with their broader culture of collaboration. Leaders, teachers, and counselors emphasized the importance of relationships among teachers, leaders, and students as foundational to the schools' success. To illustrate this point, Sara said, "we all take the success of the students…personally. So, we're kind of "One band. One sound." She described Garden teachers and leaders as "vested" and "invested" in students' success and in the vision of the school with strong support from leaders and teachers throughout the school as well as the stability of their leadership team. Similarly, teachers, leaders, and counselors often described Garden as "close knit," like a "family."

Gardens' leaders and teachers also maintained relationships with students as mentors once they graduated. This was evident from my observations of alumni visiting the school and volunteering during the week I collected data. One alumni visitor was currently in law school but returned to visit. Margaret, a mathematics teacher, described how alumni visited her classroom throughout the year, formally through invitation by the counselors and informally, to give students advice about college. Sara spoke at length

about alumni during my interview with her, pointing to pictures of graduates hanging on her wall who went on to college or the military. She described specific instances of how she recently helped some Garden alumni who were in college to find internships or scholarships to study abroad. Compared to Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest, Gardens' leaders and staff discussed more specific examples of informal and formalized college-going support from adults, reflecting their shared sense of responsibility for college assistance.

Garden was a case of a strong college-going culture. This culture was shown through adults' high expectations for college attendance, cohesive college practices, a brokering approach (Hill 2008; 2012) to college-going support, and a shared sense of responsibility for assisting students with college planning. Garden's college-going culture intersected with a collaborative, family-like school culture which prioritized building relationships among teachers, leaders, counselors, and students. Overall, Garden focused on "leveraging" their school culture and high academic expectations to provide a supportive college-going culture.

## 4.3 Cross-Case Themes

As demonstrated above, schools differed in the strength of their college-going cultures, even schools with similar college enrollment rates [See Table 4.2 for a comparison of case study schools' college-going cultures.]. Garden and Forest, whose college enrollment rates were approximately 70%, did not have the same infrastructure for college-going support in their schools. Norms, cohesion in practices, and a shared sense of responsibility shaped the depth and strength of schools' college-going cultures.

While all four schools implemented similar practices supported by Louisiana's college and career readiness policies, schools differed in the level of cohesion among these practices/resources, including whether practices were interconnected, logically and strategically sequenced, and purposefully built on each other. Garden's practices were cohesive rather than isolated and focused more than Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest on concrete, individualized support with various aspects of the application process. Relatedly, Garden's college-linking strategies aligned with a brokering approach (Hill 2008; 2012). I identified the college-linking strategies at Woodlot and Orchard as clearinghouse (Hill 2008; 2012) due to the combination of numerous college practices/resources with less emphasis on strategic outreach to students and families pertaining to the college application process. Forests' college-linking strategies aligned with elements of both clearinghouse and brokering.

In my analysis, I sought to understand variation in schools' college-going cultures and the ways in which schools exhibited limited, moderate, or strong college-going cultures. I also wanted to explore how the college-going culture of charter high schools compared to that of traditional public high schools and the barriers to college-going culture across schools. Considering the data as a whole revealed relationships between college-going cultures and college practices and the broader contextual factors shaping schools' college-going cultures. To illustrate this overarching point, I discuss five themes below.

4.3.1 Schools with stronger college-going cultures had cohesive college practices.

Cross-case analyses demonstrated that schools with stronger college-going cultures had *cohesive college practices* that were interconnected and purposefully built on each other, leading students to engage in the college application process, rather than practices that were disjointed and lacked a connection with schools' broader goals and structure. Cohesive practices were woven into the existing organizational structure and culture of the school and were important to enhancing students' understanding of the complex, multifaceted college application process.

The clearest case of this relationship can be seen at Garden, which had a strong college-going culture and, relatedly, cohesive college practices. Garden focused more than the other schools on intentional, individualized support with each step of the college application process. While other schools focused solely on FAFSA completion as it was a graduation requirement, Garden also held a College Application Day to guide students through the application process and offered opportunities for additional support from counselors with applications after the event. John, an assistant principal at Garden, illustrated the interconnectedness of their college practices when he described how they strategically started with college door decorating, then hosted the college fair, held a College Application Day and incorporated college application essays in teachers' English classrooms as a "major culminating task." John also connected these practices to the broader culture of the school when he said "…it's just programmatically aligning so many things where it's like, "Whoa, this is just culture. So it's [college is] in our classes. It's in our counseling sessions. It's in our assemblies." Other Garden participants described the schools' strong emphasis on college attendance and the related practices they

implemented to support students with the college-going process. Garden teachers, counselors, and leaders were not only aware of the schools' college practices, but many of them contributed to these practices and described them in detail.

This differed from Woodlot and Orchard who had limited college-going cultures and college practices that were generally incohesive. Participants in these schools spoke of college practices separately or as isolated college services (Corwin and Tierney 2007) that served a small population of students, while emphasizing practices that were graduation requirements such as FAFSA or ACT testing. Woodlots' and Orchards' leaders, counselors, and teachers did not highlight how their college practices were aligned or how they fit in with the existing structure and priorities of the school. Woodlots and Orchard's staff also stated that many of their students did not understand the steps to apply to college.

With a moderate college-going culture, Forest had both cohesive and incohesive practices. For example, their school-wide college access program helped to bring cohesion to the schools' college practices through the activities implemented through this program. These activities, such as college tours and a panel discussion led by current college students, exposed students to college and helped them to understand what it takes to be successful in college. However, at the time of data collection, this program was not accessible school wide as it was only open to 9$^{th}$ and 10$^{th}$ graders. Moreover, many teachers I interviewed did not discuss this program in detail and an event I observed for this program was moderately attended by adults and students, suggesting that the program was not a major focus within the school. Cohesive college practices emerged as

vital to the strength and quality of schools' college-going culture, especially in a school's ability to engage more students in the application process.

4.3.2 Schools with stronger college-going cultures had a shared sense of responsibility for college supports.

Schools with stronger college-going cultures also had a shared sense of responsibility for college supports reflected through school-wide expectations for college attendance, a school culture that prioritized collaboration, and teachers with defined roles in college support. Woodlot and Orchard, schools with limited college-going cultures, did not have school-wide college expectations and very little shared sense of responsibility for college supports. Because of their large ELL and undocumented populations, Orchard and Woodlot participants stated that many students were not going to college and did not have college aspirations. Forest, with its moderate college-going culture, had school-wide expectations and some shared sense of responsibility for college supports. On the other hand, Garden, with a strong college-going culture, had high expectations school-wide and a shared sense of responsibility which was reflected in their "family-like" culture that prioritized relationships and collaboration for college and other non-college-related initiatives in the school.

Garden was the only school in this study where some teachers had defined roles in college supports. For instance, English teachers assisted with College Application Day, and they required students to write college essays in their senior English courses. As described in a previous section, other Garden teachers and leaders supported students formally and informally with various facets of the college-going process and referenced

their school's strong collaboration and desire to help students where they could as a driver of their sense of responsibility for college supports. Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest teachers described their involvement in college supports as mainly informal and not required by leadership using words like "unofficial" and on their "own time." Jennifer, an Orchard teacher who implemented various college supports within her classroom such as a senior exit project and the college information corner was not sure if other teachers were doing the same things. Furthermore, some participants in these schools described being unsure of how to support students with college in their classrooms, other than teaching their required content.

### 4.3.3 A greater level of school-based autonomy from district oversight intersected with a stronger college-going culture.

A third cross-case theme suggested that a greater level of school-based autonomy from district oversight intersected with a stronger college-going culture. Garden, a non-network charter, had the greatest autonomy to make decisions at the school-level, and they used their autonomy and numerous resources to change or enhance their school-wide practices. For instance, George, the principal, talked about the autonomy they had as a "standalone charter" to change the entire school curriculum. John described this change as increasing rigor so students could be "sustainable" and persist through college.

On the other hand, Orchard, a TPS, and Forest, a network charter, described how school governance often dictated their college-related practices and structures within their schools. For instance, Forest participants described pressure from network leaders to push college even as some adults felt that all students were not "college material" or some students did not want to go to college. Moreover, Orchard's principal said that district

leaders wanted schools to focus on certain college practices that were "SPS-related" to "get you points," like DE and CLEP testing. Although Garden implemented similar practices as Orchard, Woodlot, and Forest, they did not discuss pressure from the district— NOLA-PS—in implementing college practices, even practices tied to their SPS scores. In interviews, Garden participants did not discuss the role of NOLA-PS in their college-related practices at all. On the other hand, Forest described pressure from network leaders to focus on college as they were a "college readiness network." While Forest participants discussed the role of network leaders often in their college practices and in shaping broader organizational structures in their school that intersected with their college-going culture, participants did not mention the role of NOLA-PS.

While autonomy intersected with a strong college-going culture, with Garden having the most autonomy, I do not have evidence that supports school-based autonomy as the reason for the strength of Garden's college-going culture. Further research is needed to explore this relationship.

#### 4.3.4 Adults' deficit raced and class-based perceptions of students' college aspirations and ability to access college supports intersected with a weaker college-going culture.

A fourth cross-case theme relating to the strength of schools' college-going cultures indicated that adults' deficit raced and class-based perceptions of students' college aspirations and ability to access college supports intersected with a weaker college-going culture. For example, Woodlots' and Orchards' staff members often spoke about the large "Hispanic" and "undocumented" populations their schools served as having no college aspirations. Teachers and leaders in these schools described the

barriers to college for these students, such as no social security number or not able to speak English, as making college impossible for these students. Participants in these schools did not give many examples of how their schools worked to address these barriers other than a few instances such as the case of the Woodlot teachers who drove a student to an out-of-state college due to the parents being undocumented.

On the other hand, many Gardens' leaders, counselors, and teachers spoke of their students in positive terms. Some leaders explicitly stated that they believed their students could succeed in college, despite their socioeconomic status or their race. John, an assistant principal, discussed how their school builds students' racial identity and ensures that their students can "sit next to anybody and be…college ready and sustainable" as their students were "inferior to no one."

Class-based perceptions of students' ability to access college supports was reflected in how participants across all schools discussed after-school jobs as limiting students' ability to take advantage of college supports. These conversations occurred less often at Garden with only one teacher describing students as having "adult" responsibilities and not doing homework. At Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest, leaders and counselors often spoke of students having after-school jobs that hindered access to academic activities. Some participants even spoke in terms of students not wanting to take advantage of college resources and choosing their jobs over these opportunities. For instance, Teresa, Forest's senior counselor, talked about after-school jobs hindering students from attending ACT bootcamp and how students should speak with their employers about taking off from their jobs to attend bootcamps. There was not a discussion of how to make ACT bootcamp more accessible for students who needed to

maintain consistent employment to support their families. Participants in all schools, especially Woodlot, Forest, and Orchard, spoke at length about students needing or wanting to make money now to support themselves and their families and focusing less on college as a postsecondary goal.

#### 4.3.5 The lack of accessibility to academic support contributed to a weaker college-going culture.

Participants across all schools described students' academic challenges, especially how low ACT scores hindered students from attending college, being eligible for TOPS scholarships, or taking advantage of DE. However, schools varied in their approaches to supporting students with low ACT scores and provided different levels of access to these resources. Gardens and Forests' teachers and leaders talked about ACT bootcamps being accessible to all students. During my visit to Garden, leaders were planning to hold the bootcamps after school. Sara, an assistant principal, coordinated the bootcamps and discussed how she previously held ACT prep as part of her class as a teacher at Garden. Roy, a science teacher, also talked about the different ways Garden offered support for the ACT both during the school day and after school.

On the other hand, at Orchard, Robert discussed how they typically focused on encouraging "bubble kids" to participate in ACT bootcamps as their scores were closer to improving their scholarship or DE status, while some students with lower scores did not get the opportunity to attend ACT bootcamps if resources were limited. Woodlot's staff did not discuss ACT prep. Forests' counselors discussed how ACT tutoring was held after school and was accessible to all students, but as stated above, many students with

after-school jobs would not attend. Garden also provided after-school ACT bootcamps, but they also incorporated ACT preparation in their classes during the day and, like John highlighted, enhanced their curriculum school-wide to be more rigorous to prepare students for college coursework.

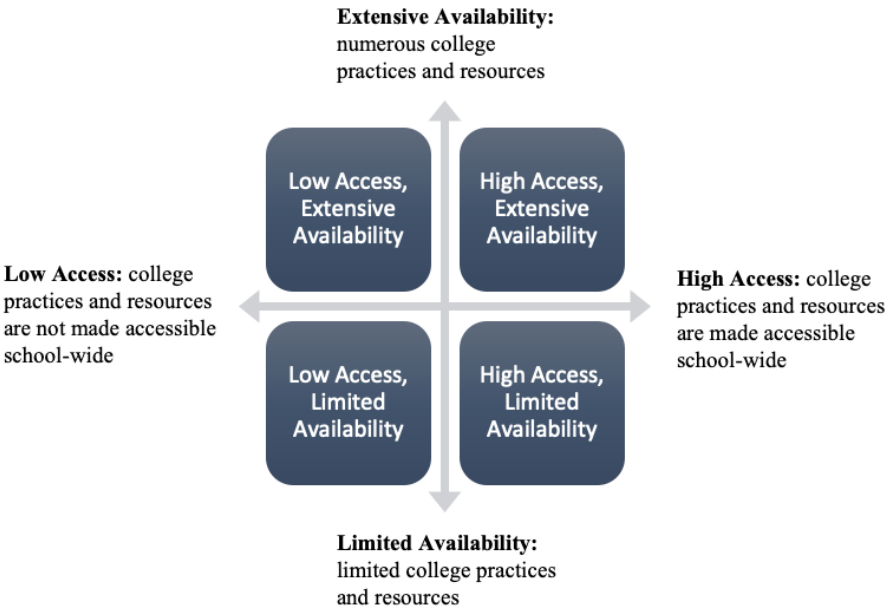
## 4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described schools' college-going cultures and examined the ways in which schools exhibited limited, moderate, or strong college-going cultures. I also explored how the college-going culture of charter high schools compared to that of traditional public high schools and the barriers to college-going culture across schools. Although all schools had many resources for supporting college attendance due in large part to Louisiana's college readiness policies and support, case study findings indicate the ways in which contextual factors contributed to variation in schools' college-going cultures. Woodlots and Orchard's college-going cultures were *limited* as the schools lacked school-wide college expectations and had incohesive practices and a clearinghouse approach to college supports. Forest's college-going culture was *moderate* with evidence of school-wide college expectations, both cohesive and incohesive practices, and both clearinghouse and brokering approaches to offering support. In contrast, Garden's college-going culture was *strong* with high college expectations, many cohesive practices, and a brokering approach to support.

This early schema helped me to categorize and write about schools' college-going cultures using existing literature. This also led to visualizing accessibility and availability of practices in the following manner.

FIGURE 4.1

A PRELIMINARY FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING COHESION IN COLLEGE-GOING PRACTICES AND RESOURCES




In this chapter, I discussed cohesion in college practices. Extensive availability and high accessibility of college-going practices and resources are two critical components of cohesion in this area. All four schools in this study had a wide range of college practices and resources to support students in transitioning to college. However, all schools did not make those supports accessible school wide. To illustrate, Orchard and Woodlot fell in the upper left quadrant of Figure 4.1. While Orchard had extensive college practices and resources, they did not focus on widely offering college opportunities to students, and instead, focused on "bubble kids" (described by Booher-Jennings 2005 as "those on the threshold of passing the [standardized] test" (p. 233), but in this study it also includes students who are close to meeting college admissions

requirements, especially ACT test scores) and students they perceived as college material. Participants in these schools discussed the pressure from district leaders to report on college-related measures of the top students in their schools. This contributed to a culture where college resources were directed towards a select group of students perceived as college material.

On the other hand, Forest and Garden were located within the upper right quadrant with Forest located closer to the center or midway point of the accessibility line. While Forest had more availability of college resources than Garden, due in part to Garden's limited AP course offerings, Garden exhibited higher levels of accessibility to practices like ACT preparation and individualized support with college applications. Higher accessibility was one factor that distinguished Garden and Forest's college-going cultures and contributed to Garden's brokering strategy in providing information, resources, and concrete support to students.

This framework is a useful starting point for understanding the interconnectedness of accessibility and availability of college practices as it relates to this notion of cohesion. However, it is only one element of college-going culture and does not explain how other aspects fit together to form a *cohesive college-going culture* that connects students with the resources they need to complete the college application process.

Furthermore, how should we think about the relationship among Hill's (2008) college-linking strategies and college-going culture? These findings make clear that extensive availability of resources and access to resources alone do not create a school-wide culture that supports students in making the transition to college. This chapter adds multidimensionality and nuance to how we should think about college-linking strategies

relating to college-going culture, highlighting the ways in which accessibility and availability of resources/practices are connected with each other and with other components of college-going culture. In total, these findings point towards cohesion as the defining characteristic of a stronger college-going culture.

One main contribution of my findings, as elaborated on in Chapter 6, is a conceptualization of college-going culture that considers the various spaces where cohesion contributes to the quality and depth of college-going culture across multiple dimensions, namely in schools' college norms, practices/resources, and in the involvement of various school stakeholders. Thus, the contribution of this chapter is not just an in-depth description of each high school's college-going culture as limited, moderate, or strong. One critical takeaway is that while all schools had relatively extensive college practices and resources, they differed in how accessible practices/resources were made to students. Access and availability do matter, *and* they are a part of a higher level of cohesion in college-going culture.

So, how do we move beyond a focus on accessibility and availability? Part of the answer is through the important roles of individuals within schools who work to provide college-going support within these contexts—especially counselors—and the organizational conditions shaping counselors' work, the focus of Chapter 5. Then, building on Chapters 4 and 5, Chapter 6 advances a theory of cohesive college-going culture that considers the collective influence of school, district-level, and state contextual factors on college-going culture.

# CHAPTER 5. COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE AND COUNSELOR ROLE EXPECTATIONS: HOW MULTIPLE CONTEXTS SHAPE COUNSELORS' COLLEGE-RELATED WORK

## 5.1 Introduction

High school counselors are viewed as having one of the most critical roles in schools' college-going cultures (Belasco 2013; Perna et al. 2008; Robinson and Roksa 2016). Counselors are expected to provide guidance on college preparatory coursework, support students with college and financial aid applications, and facilitate access to external resources that encourage a successful transition to college. However, the roles and responsibilities of school counselors have continued to change and supporting students with college is just one aspect of a counselor's job. High school counselors engage in both school-centered and student-centered tasks including creating the master schedule, coordinating standardized testing, and providing social/emotional student supports (Blake 2020). School-centered administrative tasks, which tend to dominate counselors time (Blake 2018), are heavily influenced by the school contexts in which counselors conduct their work. This includes how leaders, teachers, students, and parents view counselors' roles. These tasks are also shaped by contexts external to the school such as the expectations of district leaders and state and district policies (Blake 2018; Perna et al. 2008). These competing expectations increase counselors' responsibilities, often contributing to confusion in counselors' roles and conflict with their ability to provide college planning support or to lead the way in establishing a high school's college-going culture (Blake 2020; McDonough 1997).

In this chapter, I draw on the concepts of role conflict and role incongruity to examine how various organizational contexts—state, district-level, school—shaped high school counselors' work in the college-going cultures of charter and traditional public high schools considering their broader role expectations. Role conflict occurs when there are numerous expectations for counselors' work from people at various levels of the educational system (Freeman and Coll 1997). Relatedly, role incongruity happens when there are "conflicts between assigned tasks or roles and the resources to support completion of related assignments" (Freeman and Coll 1997:36). Both emerged as central explanations for the challenges counselors faced in enacting a college-going culture.

I present the findings of this cross-case analysis in four main sections. The first three sections—counseling department structure, counseling department resources, and college counseling norms—describe counselors' role expectations and provide evidence on how individual *high school contexts* shaped counselors' work in schools' college-going cultures and their work more broadly. I found that the school context, especially the structure of schools' counseling departments and the non-counseling supervisors that counselors reported to, influenced counselors' ability to help students to navigate the college-going process, especially to provide individualized college counseling. Furthermore, counselors' broader roles, responsibilities, workload and the opportunity to work collaboratively with other counselors were all impacted by the structure of and the resources within their counseling departments (i.e., whether counselors had lower caseloads, manageable workloads, administrative support, and a separate college counselor).

The last section highlights evidence of *district, network, and state-level* influences on counselors' college-related work using the lens of role conflict and role incongruity. In addition to factors within the school context determining counselors' work, the district, network, and state contexts also shaped counselors' workload and the tasks counselors focused on as they navigated and grappled with competing expectations and directives from district leaders, meeting students' immediate needs, and providing college-going support. These broader hindrances to counselors' perceptions of effectiveness and their reports of having limited time for direct student support and mounting paperwork provided further insight into the role of counselors in schools' college-going cultures.

While existing research tends to examine school, district-level, and state contexts in isolation, I found that the intersection and interaction of multiple contexts contributed to counselors experiencing role conflict and role incongruity not only in their college-related work, but also in their broader roles and responsibilities.

## 5.2 Findings

### 5.2.1 Counseling Department Structure

The structure and organization of counseling departments, namely, student assignment to counselors and task allocation, shaped counselors' ability to provide students with college-going support, especially effective and efficient one-to-one college counseling. Table 5.1 summarizes the organization and structure of each school's counseling department.

TABLE 5.1

SCHOOLS' COUNSELING DEPARTMENT STRUCTURES (2019-2020)

| | Forest Charter | Garden Charter | Woodlot | Orchard |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total Students | 1000 | 1000 | 1300 | 1400 |
| Seniors [a] | 275 | 250 | 275 | 300 |
| Student Assignment to Counselors | Cohort Model [b] | Even-Spread Model [c] | Cohort Model | Cohort Model |
| Academic Counselors | 4 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| College & Career Readiness Counselor | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Secretary | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Testing Coordinator | No | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Counselors Supervised by Non-Counseling Staff | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |

[a] All numbers are approximated to protect schools' identities.
[b] Students were assigned to counselors by grade-level. Counselors followed this cohort of students through graduation.
[c] Students in tenth through twelfth grades were divided by last name and split evenly among two counselors. Ninth grade students had a different counselor.

During the 2019-2020 school year, each school had four full-time counselors. However, schools differed in how counselors were assigned to students, which can have important consequences for the quality and effectiveness of college counseling (Culbertson et al. 2019). Tenth through twelfth grade students were assigned to two of Gardens' four counselors by their last name, and ninth grade students were served by a different counselor. Garden also had a separate college and career readiness counselor who worked with students across grade-levels. I refer to the structure of Garden's counseling

department as the *even-spread model*. Students were assigned to Forest, Woodlot, and Orchard's four academic counselors based on students' grade-level. These counselors worked with a different grade-level each year but followed their cohort of students through graduation. I refer to this structure as the *cohort model*.

The structures of the counseling departments at all four schools changed within the last two to three years. Garden, Orchard, and Woodlot principals made the changes to their schools' counseling departments, while network leaders were responsible for changes to the structure of Forest's counseling department. In prior years, Garden had no college counselor and caseloads were split with 9th and 10th grades being supported by one counselor and 11th and 12th grades having another counselor.

Prior to the cohort model, Forest's counseling department implemented the even-spread model with three counselors assigned to students by last name across all grade levels, leaving each counselor with an even distribution of students. Forest also had a college counselor whose sole responsibility was to support students with various aspects of college planning. Forest participants believed that network leaders may have eliminated the college counseling position due to budget cuts.

According to Sheila, Orchard's principal, students were previously assigned to counselors by last name. Sheila changed the department structure to counselors supporting grade-levels without moving with their students to the next grade (i.e., grade-level model). Then she made the change to counselors following their grade-level cohort through graduation (i.e., cohort model). Orchard counselors had been moving with their students since the 2017-2018 school year. Sheila described the reason for the changes to their counseling department in this way:

> maybe two years ago, we decided that we were gonna start following the students. But before then, we had also kind of grouped them together where they had alphabets, but I think following them from grade to grade is better than the alphabet…Part of it too is that now there's so much to do with the seniors, you literally get burned out.

Woodlot's counseling department experienced the same changes as Orchard's. The current principal changed the department from the *even-spread model* to a *grade-level model* where counselors would remain with the same grade-level supporting a different group of students every year to the current *cohort model*, where counselors were responsible for a different grade-level each year as they moved with their students through graduation.

Participants at three of four schools generally expressed positive views about their current counseling departments' structure and organization. Tina, Garden's college and career readiness counselor, thought their department "had a good setup" for their school stating that the addition of a college counselor was a great resource for their department in terms of having someone to support students specifically with college and career planning. Tina said:

> "before I got into this position, we [all counselors] would do all the [college] applications, work with FAFSA and it was a lot. So once this position was created, it kinda took some of the load off of the other two [academic counselors] because… we have a lot of Dual Enrollment… students here."

Woodlot and Orchard counselors and leaders generally expressed positive views about the cohort model that allowed counselors to focus on one grade-level at a time *and* follow a group of students to the next grade until graduation. For example, Lisa, Orchard's junior counselor, who had her students for three years and is moving with them as senior counselor next year, likened her role as cohort counselor to that of a "mother,"

saying, "…they like my babies, and I know them very well… they travel with you, we grow old together. I like that idea that they get to know me…the rapport is so established that it's like a mother role almost." Similarly, Kevin, Woodlot's junior counselor, said the cohort model is "cool because you get to know…who your students are…I know every one of them by name and face, having them from freshman year." Moreover, Robert, Orchard's freshman counselor, said that he appreciated being able "to learn every step of the process as they [students] go through high school." He also felt that students had an opportunity to establish a level of comfort with their counselor over four years, a benefit of the cohort model.

In contrast, Teresa, Forest's senior counselor who had over 20 years of experience in school counseling and six years at Forest, had very strong disapproval for changes to the structure of their department from the even-spread model to the cohort model as it created an uneven distribution of students per counselor and hindered relationships with students and parents, which she described as vital to understanding students' needs, and limited counselor collaboration (discussed in the following section). She was so frustrated with the switch from the even-spread model—counselors' caseloads divided by students' last names—to the cohort model that she considered not returning to her position the following year. Teresa described the changes in this way:

> So they [network leaders] told us last year, we would rotate… with our kids. So since I was the most vocal and didn't know if I was gonna come back this year. That was like over my limit. I told them I would take the seniors. That way, I wouldn't start a grade level and leave. Now, when we were alphabets… I had all the kids from O through Z and I stayed with O through Z [for] 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th. I got to know the parents…I knew what they needed, I knew where they were, I knew how they came in. I could see their growth over the course of the year. Oh they say "well you can do the same thing with you picking up the whole cohort." But you're picking up say it's 298 kids and for 9th grade, the [counselor

caseload] lift is not gon' be as heavy as for 12th grade and then 10th grade… Teresa's opposition to the change of the counseling department's structure highlights the importance of schools' organizational context in the nature of counselors' day-to-day work.

While most leaders and teachers expressed positive views about the structure of their counseling departments, evidence from interviews and observations suggests the two counseling department structures—cohort model and even-spread model—contributed to differences in the perceived effectiveness and level of perceived personalized college-going supports students received from counselors. The cohort model hindered Forest, Woodlot, and Orchard counselors' ability to focus on college planning and especially to provide one-to-one college support for two main reasons. First, cohort counselors tended to work in isolation as their tasks were grade-level specific and rarely overlapped across counselors in the department. Working in silos led to a lack of regular counselor collaboration and contributed to the second reason for counselors not providing one-to-one college support, namely, a largely held informal view of the senior counselor as college counselor within the departments and across the three schools.

On the other hand, the structure of Garden's counseling department—even-spread model—with two counselors serving 10$^{th}$ through 12$^{th}$ grade students, a separate 9$^{th}$ grade counselor, and a college and career counselor provided multiple opportunities for counselor collaboration as three of four counselors supported juniors and seniors in some capacity. More than one counselor supported students with college and postsecondary planning, which is a vital component of an effective college-going culture (McClafferty

et al. 2002; Corwin and Tierney 2007) and especially important for first-generation college students. I elaborate on these themes in the sections that follow.

#### 5.2.1.1 Counselors Working in Isolation vs. Collaboration

Findings from Chapter 4 align with conceptualizations of college-going culture that emphasize the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in preparing students for college (Corwin and Tierney 2007). In this section, I provide evidence that counselor collaboration is critical to a school-wide emphasis on college attendance. The cohort model often led to counselors working in isolation with tasks allocated to counselors based on the grade level served. In contrast, the even-spread model, in which most students were assigned to counselors by last names, provided more opportunities for counselor collaboration in college planning and overlap in tasks due to multiple counselors serving the same grades.

With the cohort model, Woodlot, Orchard, and to a lesser extent, Forest counselors worked separately to complete grade-level specific tasks that rarely overlapped with other counselors' duties. This was evident in how counselors, leaders, and teachers in these schools described the disparate responsibilities of cohort counselors. For instance, when asked approximately how much of a counselor's time is devoted to college counseling or college-related activities, Ralph, Forest's principal, responded, "My senior counselor, imma [sic] go out on the limb and say 70 to 80 percent of what they do. Junior [counselor] it's probably 60 percent... Sophomore and freshman is really just trying to acclimate them and get them ready for high school." Similarly, Sheila, Orchard's principal said the senior counselor devotes a "whole bunch" of time to college counseling

while “everybody else's role is making sure that they're on track and taking the courses that they need. But the senior counselor, that's [college is] all you talk about.” These responses illustrate how, when asked about college supports among counselors in general, principals delineated among grade-levels, indicating that college supports are not the responsibility of all counselors, but are isolated (somewhat) to the 11th grade counselor, and (overwhelmingly) to the 12th grade counselor, a theme that will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Across all four schools, the role of the freshman counselor was generally described as getting students acclimated to high school, especially through providing social/emotional and academic supports to ensure a smooth transition into high school. These discussions often focused on coursework and passing classes and lacked a connection to college or included a brief mention of college or postsecondary support, specifically among Woodlot and Orchard—traditional public schools (TPS)— leaders and counselors as well as Ralph, Forest’s principal, as described above. For example, Sheila said, “because so much is scripted for freshmen… the only choice they get is whether they want band, PE, or ROTC. Other than that, you have to take the prescribed courses, so there's not really a lot to talk about.” Moreover, Lisa, Orchard’s junior counselor, who was two years removed from her role as freshman counselor and was preparing to serve as senior counselor, could not fully remember the responsibilities of the freshman counselor, providing evidence of the isolated nature of cohort counselors’ roles and responsibilities:

> so I think um the freshmen counselor as I can remember, that was kind of like the get-to-know-me, kind of… like the meet-and-greet stage so getting them ready

> for, like, letting them know that this is the most important year of your life, like most people think that the senior year is the most important year, but really, this is the year where you will earn credits, and if you fall behind, you might not graduate on time. So my job is to continuously encourage you to stay alert and aware that… it's so easy to fall behind.

There were differences in how charter and TPS participants described freshman counselors' roles and responsibilities. While charter school counselors and leaders (Garden and Forest) discussed freshman counselors' role in getting students acclimated to high school, they also, with the exception of Ralph, Forest's principal, highlighted freshman counselors' role in college and career readiness. Doris, Forest's ninth grade counselor, described her role in three domains: social/emotional, academic, and college and career readiness due to her coordination and implementation of a school-wide college access program that focused on early and ongoing college exposure beginning in 9th grade (see Ch. 4 for more on this initiative):

> what I primarily focus on with the social emotional is helping them [9th graders] to transition into high school because they still, a lot of them have the middle school mindset of "If I don't like the teacher, I don't like, you know, what's going on. Just change it. Just make it go away, and do it for me"…I teach them how to advocate for themselves. Academically, it's pretty much setting the foundation for what we do here. So a lot of it is like, look, this is your fresh start. You know… colleges are not looking at what you did in middle school. So if you made some mistakes, this is your time to start again…And so just kind of getting that programing into them so that they don't feel like they're being judged for what they did…at a previous school… We also monitor their grades and their performance, even behavior in the classroom and intervene when we need to…

Likewise, Ashley, Garden's ninth grade counselor, spoke of her role in facilitating 8th graders "transition into high school" during their summer freshman orientation in the following way:

> After students have been admitted to our school…they come and do a two-to-three-week summer with us where they learn English, math, and study skills… it's a

> smaller environment so that they won't be so overwhelmed the first week of school. They get to learn the layout of the building, meet their teachers… this helps cut down on the feeling of being lost when you have a thousand students in the building.

Moreover, when asked about the mission or vision of the school and its leadership, Ashley spoke positively about her process for helping students to navigate career readiness pathways, which provided students with opportunities to receive workforce credentials:

> We have these career pathways that the students can sign up to be a part of. And that's where I come in… first I do a series of group counseling sessions with them where I'll go over in their classroom. I go over the career pathways that we have available here. Then I come in another time where I have them take an interest inventory so they can get an idea of what they might be interested in. Then we sit down one-on-one and we look at where their interest lies and then we talk about what career pathway they might want to go into.

The responsibilities of sophomore counselors were not described in much detail among Forest, Woodlot, and Orchard participants. From what was discussed, sophomore counselors' primary tasks were similar to that of freshman counselors including scheduling courses (with a few additional 10$^{th}$ grade elective options available to students), testing and getting students ready for pre-ACT, helping students select a graduation pathway, and other administrative duties.

In terms of college supports, TPS sophomore counselors, like freshman counselors, did not have a clearly defined role in college planning other than supporting students with navigating pathways. However, across all four schools, the vast majority of students were on the TOPS University track, also referred to as the college-bound pathway (see Ch. 3 for a more detailed discussion of graduation pathways). Lisa,

Orchard's junior counselor, described sophomore counselors' work as "kind of easy, it wasn't that hard. Tenth grade is basically "Hey, you're getting ready to be a junior now. You need to get ready to determine whether you want to be a TOPS tech student, or a TOPS university student." In contrast, Forest's sophomore counselor played a more hands-on role in college access than Orchard's and Woodlot's sophomore counselors as he helped coordinate ACT with the senior counselor and collaborated with the freshman counselor on their college access program. Since the program was in its second year of implementation, the sophomores were included, and each year an additional grade-level would be added to the program.

Like other cohort counselors, scheduling and testing played a major role in junior counselors' responsibilities. Regarding scheduling of college prep coursework, Kevin, Woodlot's junior counselor, said that students were "encouraged…to take college classes if they're eligible…for Dual Enrollment classes." With testing, students were required by the state to take the ACT in the 11th grade. Kevin discussed the roles of counselors primarily in terms of scheduling and testing. He briefly mentioned mental health counseling and a few college-related roles like preparing students for ACT and getting students "ready and thinking about college" in 11th grade. He described counselors' roles and responsibilities in general in this way:

> We do a whole bunch of things as a school counselor. Aside from the mental health aspect, we end up doing scheduling. I have about 270 students on my caseload… I'm responsible for their schedules. I'm responsible in getting them prepared for college… we're basically test administrators, we…handle everything for testing, whether it be ACT, um LEAP, WorkKeys. We do all kinds of testing for the students at Woodlot. We're also in charge of holding parent nights, we do about eight parent nights a year or at least we attempt to. I know I'm leaving some stuff out, we do a whole bunch of stuff.

Similarly, Lisa said they were responsible for:

> scheduling students, counseling, which is our mental health piece that we do, um, I [as junior counselor] also have the duty of working with students in the in-school suspension. A lot, a lot of paperwork. [laughs]… I think basically, our role is academic, being an academic counselor. And so just making sure that students are on track to graduate and making sure that parents are informed where their children are. Students are informed, enlightening students on courses that they need…by the state of Louisiana… to walk across the stage. And so just trying to keep them abreast of that information.

In summary, the cohort model contributed to counselors often working in isolation as they focused mainly on their respective grade-levels. While counselors across all grade-levels engaged in the tasks of scheduling and testing, there were differences in the scheduling and testing needs of students across grade-levels, as described above. For instance, juniors took the state mandated ACT and took it a second time their senior year, if they needed to. Freshman and sophomore counselors typically did not coordinate things like ACT, except at Forest where the senior counselor collaborated with the sophomore counselor on ACT testing due to the overwhelming responsibilities of the senior counselor and the collaborative nature of their department. Senior counselor roles and responsibilities are discussed in the following section. While there were other exceptions of counselors working on college activities such as Jessica, Orchard's sophomore counselor, maintaining her role as Dual Enrollment coordinator because of the relationships she established with college representatives over the years, counselors at TPSs, which implemented the cohort model, mainly focused on their caseloads and the needs of their grade-levels.

Working in silos contributed to a lack of regular counselor collaboration in college supports (Corwin and Tierney 2007), which was often the case in TPSs in this

study and was evident to a lesser extent at Forest. For instance, Lisa and Kevin, Orchard and Woodlots' junior counselors respectively, had difficulty articulating how current and former senior counselors supported students with college planning and the college application process. When asked in general how Woodlot supported students with college applications, Kevin stated that he did not know how prior senior counselors have supported students with college applications as he has not served as the senior counselor yet and that there was "a senior counselor on campus…to assist the students with the application process." Similarly, Lisa said:

> I don't know what the previous counselors have done in order to support them, but I've seen them help them with their application. I've seen them, help them finish their FAFSA application, helping them to get the ACT score up, you know, providing them with tools, and little workbooks that they could use. So, things like that.

Both counselors had been at their respective schools for more than four years, and neither counselor expressed ownership of supporting students with college applications as junior counselors, nor did they provide concrete examples of how prior senior counselors assisted students with college planning. This signals a lack of ongoing counselor collaboration at Orchard and Woodlot in their college readiness work and in their view of college planning supports within their departments.

The lack of regular meetings with other counselors provides further evidence of counselors working in isolation. Teresa, Forest's senior counselor, lamented the limited opportunities for informal meetings where counselors could "bounce ideas off each other." She went on to explain how counselors' lunch periods were no longer aligned since grade-levels ate lunch at different times. Teresa preferred the former structure, the even-spread model, where counselors:

> carved out time during the three lunch periods where…we would take 30 minutes and… all sit down and eat together [and] talk about, 'okay we've got this coming up, how we want to handle it? what we want to do?'… [with the cohort model] we don't get a chance to do that anymore.

While Forest counselors did not get to meet as often as they used to with the even-spread model, interviews with counselors and observation in the counseling suite and in other areas of the school suggested that their department was generally collaborative as they worked together on some college access initiatives such as their college access program, college tours sponsored by a LOSFA grant, ACT testing, and in other aspects of their day-to-day work. This collaboration was informally facilitated by the senior counselor, who had the most counseling experience. She took a leadership role in the department, finding grant opportunities, delegating tasks, and facilitating communication among the counselors in the department.

Having a counselor serve as a leader in the department distinguished Forest's counselor collaboration from that of Woodlot and Orchard. While Jessica, tenth grade counselor at Orchard, spoke of her role as lead counselor because she had been at the school the longest, it was not evident from other Orchard counselors or leaders that there was a lead counselor or someone who brought counselors together to provide college supports at this school. Likewise, although one teacher mentioned a new lead guidance counselor at Woodlot, no specific person was identified at Woodlot as the lead counselor.

In contrast, Garden's even-spread model with three academic counselors and a separate college counselor, provided multiple opportunities for counselor collaboration. Three of four counselors supported juniors and/or seniors with scheduling, testing, and providing college-going supports. All four counselors reported assisting students with

career exploration in some manner. Having more than one counselor to support students with college and postsecondary planning provides an opportunity for students to connect with multiple counselors and is vital to establishing a community of college-going support, which is especially important for first-generation college students. In describing how Garden's counselors provided collaborative college-going support, Tina said:

> I think we're fortunate in the event that when Ms. Sally and [the other 10th- 12th grade counselor] talk to them, then I have a chance to talk with them. So it's not like just one person, like they just have their own counselor talking with them.

Counselor collaboration was also evident in how Garden's counselors referred to each other and to the roles of other counselors and staff members in making sure students were on track to graduate. Much of counselors' college-related work was done in collaboration with other counselors and staff members. For example, John, an assistant principal at Garden, discussed guidance counselors' "tracking model" where they "look at kids, who may not be doing so well, or just checking in with them to see if they're still on progression towards graduation." Similarly, Sally, a tenth through twelfth grade counselor, described in detail how a team of counselors and staff members met with students and parents periodically, especially those who were at-risk for graduating. Overall, Gardens' counselors used "we" very often to describe what they were currently working on and to discuss counselors' general roles and responsibilities.

Counselors working in isolation compared to counselors in departments with higher levels of collaboration were not haphazard. Each was a function of the school and district-level contexts that counselors were embedded in. These contexts ultimately shaped the structure of counseling departments (even-spread versus cohort models),

which influenced the opportunities counselors had to work together to provide school-wide college planning support.

#### 5.2.1.2 Senior Counselor Viewed Informally as College Counselor

A second major theme expressed by participants in relation to the structure and organization of counseling departments was informally viewing the senior counselor as also the college counselor and the influence of this view on senior counselors' enactment of dual roles. To illustrate, Albert, an Advanced Placement teacher at Forest, explicitly described the structure of Forest's counseling department as having four counselors where "the senior counselor also serves as *like* a college counselor." Viewing senior counselors as college counselors largely isolated college planning, especially support with the college application process, to one counselor who did not have time to provide the one-to-one guidance that students needed in addition to fulfilling their responsibilities as academic counselors. This was often the case at Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest, which all implemented the cohort model. For example, Robert, an Orchard counselor, described the duality of the senior counselor role in this way:

> The senior counselor just serves way too many roles in one because… you not only just making schedules and serving as a regular academic counselor who's checking up on your progress every quarter. You're also calling in students and say okay, "well, you made these grades the first quarter, are you starting to apply to colleges? You're looking at scholarships? Did you fill out your FAFSA?

This quote further illustrated the isolated nature of the work of cohort counselors, especially the challenges senior counselors faced in trying to occupy multiple roles as academic counselors and college counselors.

At Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest, senior counselors also working as college counselors was a balancing act with the scale often tilted in the direction of school-centered, administrative tasks. As academic counselors, senior counselors were responsible for scheduling and making sure students were eligible to graduate, testing, providing mental health counseling, and other administrative duties for their respective grade-levels. As college counselors, they were also responsible for ensuring that students had all their course credits for college admission and implementation of school-wide postsecondary planning activities such as FAFSA completion, ACT, college applications, scholarships, and college fairs, with many of these college activities required by the state's accountability system. Susan, Orchard's twelfth grade counselor described the various responsibilities of senior counselors in assisting students with postsecondary planning:

> as a senior counselor, specifically, there's a lot of focus in the fall during orientation about the ACT and trying to make sure all of those students have either taken ACT or have taken it a second time. And, you know, making them aware of the fact that if you qualify, you can take it free… FAFSA, meeting with the kids to discuss what their goals are, once they graduate, putting students in touch with our military recruiters and, and setting them up because they have to take a test… before they can get accepted into the military… notifying the kids that you know, the schools have deadlines and setting up their account… for FAFSA because that's a process in itself…senior meetings about various different things, making sure that the kids have all of their EOC testing requirements… or their Carnegie units taken care of. Those are the… main responsibilities.

The notion of "senior counselor as also college counselor" contributes to what Corwin and Tierney (2007) called "isolated college services" (p.9) as the responsibility for college assistance falls on one college counselor, in this case, the senior counselor. When college planning assistance is the responsibility of one counselor, not only do schools lack a strategic school-wide approach to supporting students with college

planning, but senior counselors tend to experience burnout, stress, and overload in a career field already characterized by ambiguous roles, myriad tasks, and multiple work expectations (Blake 2020). This was the case for Woodlots', Orchards', and Forests' counselors. When discussing the role of senior counselors with leaders, counselors, and teachers at the three schools, words like "overwhelmed" and "burned out" were emphasized. Due to the workload associated with the senior counselor position, counselors and leaders across the three schools talked about senior counselors needing a break from that position. It is important to note that a senior counselor acting as a college counselor differs from having a dedicated college counselor who works alongside academic counselors to provide college support. Senior counselors were tasked with enacting both roles simultaneously with little or no support from other counselors in their departments.

The isolated nature in which cohort counselors worked was related to the added stress that senior counselors faced in ensuring that students had taken and passed all necessary coursework for graduation. Since the school recently moved from a *grade-level model*, where counselors served the same grade-level each year and did not move with their students, to a *cohort model,* where counselors served a different grade-level each year as they followed the same group of students through graduation, senior counselors still had issues with prior grade-level counselors not making sure that students passed the coursework associated with their grade-levels. This sounded like a straightforward process, but, Helen, Woodlot's senior counselor who had recently returned to Woodlot, expressed frustration with prior grade-level counselors as she navigated the process of tracking down students and parents to complete courses.

> if they fail a course in that first semester then that counselor should be responsible for seeing that child complete that… course that year because when they move up to the next counselor, then now the next counselor have to deal with it… then by the time they get to me as senior counselor, I'm hustling and bustling and trying to get the kids to finish it and it's a lot…you're up late at night. You know, you're calling parents. You're talking to kids. It's a lot especially when you have a family of your own.

McClafferty et al.'s (2002) conceptualization of college-going culture calls for a comprehensive counseling model where all counselors work as college counselors, acquiring the skills and training to support students with college planning and ensuring that time is devoted to group and individualized college counseling. This does not downplay or negate the role of having a dedicated college counselor but emphasizes the importance of collaboration across counselors to ensure students have college-going support from multiple counselors.

Of the three schools, Garden's counseling department, a school I identified as having a strong college-going culture, was the closest to this ideal. Since three of their four counselors supported seniors, all three counselors assisted students with meeting the coursework and testing requirements for graduation as well as supported students with the college application process. This was evident in Garden's intentional, systematic, and cohesive approach to college supports described by a Garden leader as "programmatically aligning" their college supports to allow for all-hands-on-deck (See Chapter 4 for more on Garden's programmatic alignment. Cohesion will be discussed more in Chapter 6).

As described in Chapter 4 and elaborated on in Chapter 6, Garden's cohesion in college practices and in the support that counselors offered was evident in the sequencing and connection among practices. After holding a college fair, counselors collaborated

with English teachers to implement College Application Day where counselors encouraged students to research admission requirements for their top college choices and provided individualized assistance to students in completing at least two applications. English teachers also required and supported students with completing college application essays.

Senior counselors acting as college counselors did not provide the opportunity for a comprehensive counseling model with collaboration across counselors and other staff members, but instead contributed to senior counselors providing isolated college supports and feeling overwhelmed and burned out. This theme will be revisited in the role conflict and role incongruity section.

### 5.2.2 Counseling Department Resources

The structure and organization of schools' counseling departments had implications for college counseling resources. In this study, caseloads, administrative support, and a separate college counselor emerged from interviews with teachers, leaders, and counselors across all four schools as vital to counselors work in establishing and enacting a culture of college attendance.

#### 5.2.2.1 Caseload

In addition to one counselor primarily responsible for providing college supports, another characteristic of isolated college services was counselors being "overburdened" with high caseloads, which hindered opportunities for one-to-one meetings and individualized college planning support (Corwin and Tierney 2007). My findings suggest

that caseloads were important as they shaped counselors' college-related work in terms of being able to meet with students individually. However, the workload assigned to cohort counselors contributed to inequalities in counselors' workload across different grade levels due to the various tasks associated with each grade. Senior counselors had the smallest number of students in their caseloads due to student attrition, especially at Woodlot and Orchard, but they had greater roles and responsibilities than other cohort counselors as they supported students with high school graduation *and* students' postsecondary transitions.

The cohort model impacted counselor caseloads and college counseling at Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest as there were a different number of students in each grade-level due to student attrition. Louisiana state policy[7] mandates a high school counselor to student ratio of no more than 1:450, which is above the national average of 1:424 for the 2019-2020 school year according to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). This is almost double ASCA's recommendation of 1:250 (American School Counselor Association 2021). In this study, TPSs and charter schools differed in how they met these goals.

According to data from the Louisiana Department of Education, in 2020, Orchard's counselor caseloads exceeded ASCA's recommended ratio for every grade-level, exceeded Louisiana's 1:450 ratio for 9$^{th}$ grade, but met it for 10$^{th}$, 11$^{th}$ , and 12$^{th}$ grades. Woodlot's counselor caseload came close to exceeding the state-required ratio for their freshman class and surpassed ASCA's ratio for all other grades. TPSs, Orchard and Woodlot, had the most student attrition than charter schools in this study. Forest Charter,

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which had less student attrition than Orchard and Woodlot, did not have caseloads above Louisiana's 1:450 ratio for any given grade level, but surpassed ASCA's 1:250 for its freshman, junior, and senior classes. Garden Charter, who implemented the even-spread model, had the least student attrition of the three schools, had a similar number of students across each grade, and had a counselor caseload that met ASCA's recommended student-counselor ratio for 9th grade with less than 250 students per counselor. Because the 10th through 12th grade students were split among two counselors, the ratio exceeded 1:250 students across those grades. However, Garden had an additional college and career counselor who led the college planning efforts and who collaborated with the other 10th through 12th grade counselors on various academic and college-related tasks. This lessened the workload of the other counselors and contributed to greater collaboration within the counseling department.

The cohort model at Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest led to an uneven distribution of students among counselors leaving freshman and sophomore counselors with higher caseloads compared to junior and senior counselors due to student attrition, and even less time to meet with individual students across the board. Of the three schools, Orchards' counselors, teachers, and leaders spoke more often about the negative impact of high counselor caseloads on counselors' ability to hold one-to-one meetings with students for mental health support, academic assistance, and college planning. Robert, an Orchard counselor, said, "Last year was a challenge because I had 500 kids so I didn't even make it through on my initial interviews to meet with every single" student "which stings because that's what I like to do." Similarly, when Lisa was asked whether she had an opportunity to meet with her students one-to-one, she said,

> I mean, to be honest with you…you're really so busy throughout the day, it's really difficult to meet with each and every one of them…But um, I, I would truly meet with students who were like, in a crisis. Or if… the teacher emailed me and said, they had a concern academically speaking. But it was not like I had to individually meet with every child…I can't reach almost 300 kids, you know. I mean, we only have 365 days in the year. So even with trying to reach…one, that would be difficult.

In addition to Orchards' counselors' remarks about caseloads hindering one-to-one meetings, some Orchard teachers also recognized how high caseloads hindered counselors from having time to meet with students individually, especially for college counseling. When asked how counselors supported students with college planning, Donald, a social studies teacher at Orchard, said, "So one thing I'm really frustrated with is… I always feel so bad for our counselors, because we only have four…counselors for 1500 kids…the counselors are spread so thin." These remarks from counselors and teachers illustrated how high counselor caseloads made individual meetings with every student nearly impossible. Teachers recognized the demands of the school counseling job and the large number of students that needed support. Counselors expressed disappointment in not being able to meet with all their students as they described the tension they faced in balancing the demands of the school counseling job with their own expectations for their work as professionally trained counselors, a theme that is discussed in detail in a later section.

The uneven distribution of students per counselor was an issue at Forest as well. One of the main reasons that Teresa, Forest senior counselor, did not like network leaders' decision to switch from the even-spread model to the cohort model was that it increased the caseloads of freshman counselors and their ability to provide academic support to students who were making the transition into high school. Teresa said, "If I

got, say 100 kids in 9th grade and 20 of them are failing. It's a lot easier for me to contact 20 parents, stay on those parents…" On the other hand, "if I have 300 and I have 75 failing, then it's going to be a lot harder to contact 75 parents staying on them about their kids failing…" Teresa recognized the unique challenges of the freshman class as they adjusted to the rigor of high school work and the need to maintain contact with parents and students who were in danger of failing. She knew the cohort model would make it difficult to maintain the contact needed with a larger caseload of ninth graders and candidly expressed her opposition to the changes of Forest's counseling department structure.

At Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest, the freshman class was often the largest with seniors having the least number of students, but far more responsibilities compared to other cohort counselors, due to their dual roles as academic and college counselors. For example, when asked approximately how many students each counselor had in their caseload and whether counselor caseloads were the same, Principal Sheila said, " No, it's not. It's so unfair…the seniors is the smallest group, but because of the work you do with seniors, you're out working the rest of them…" Alternatively, "You're looking at almost 500 freshmen. So the freshmen counselor has more students." This leader, like many other Orchard and Forest leaders or counselors, brought attention to the challenges the cohort model presented in terms of increasing caseloads for some counselors and not allowing for individualized college conversations. However, the focus was often on the benefits of the cohort model's approach to following students through graduation rather than specific ways to address the higher caseloads of the freshman and, in some cases

sophomore counselors, to allow for more individualized student support earlier in students' high school careers.

Teresa is an exception as she felt the even-spread model, giving each counselor an equal distribution of students across all grade-levels, with a separate college counselor, was a better approach. Woodlot participants spoke less about student-counselor ratios hindering individualized college counseling and more about counselor workload leaving little time for individualized college supports, especially one-to-one meetings with students.

In contrast, Gardens' counselors, leaders, and teachers did not express issues with caseloads hindering one-to-one meetings with students. With low student attrition, caseloads less than 375 students per counselor, and their counseling departments' primarily even-spread structure, counselors generally did not express feeling overburdened when it came to the number of students that each counselor served. These organizational arrangements created the conditions for the enactment of a college-going culture where many students received the encouragement and assistance needed to pursue college. As discussed in Chapter 4, Garden had more formal mechanisms for college counseling and individualized college supports. The even-spread model with a 9$^{th}$ grade counselor and a college and career counselor helped facilitate such activities as senior interviews and College Application Day.

#### 5.2.2.2 Administrative Support

A second resource that shaped counselors' ability to provide college-going supports was administrative support within counseling departments (Corwin and Tierney 2007;

Hill 2012). When counselors are expected to do their jobs without the help of support staff such as a secretary, a clerk, or a school test coordinator, counselors can experience even greater role conflict, ambiguity, and overload as they spend additional time on administrative tasks and less time on direct student support such as college planning activities (Blake 2020). ASCA, in their list of "inappropriate activities for school counselors," advises against counselors engaging in tasks such as data entry, building master schedule, coordinating testing, and paperwork for new students. Instead, counselors should spend at least 80% of their time providing direct or indirect services to students (ASCA N.d.). Similarly, Louisiana's policy (Bulletin 741) mandates that "school counselors should spend the majority of their time on providing direct counseling related to students" and "shall not include… administrative clerical duties" (Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education 2020:34).

As indicated in Table 5.1, three of four counseling departments had a secretary and a school test coordinator, who was not also a school counselor. With no secretary or test coordinator, Forest was the only counseling department that functioned without administrative support. Garden, Woodlot, and Orchard each had a counseling department secretary and a test coordinator. An assistant principal or another staff member served as test coordinator at these schools.

Prior to the 2019-2020 school year, Forest had a secretary, but this position was eliminated due to the school's budget cuts. No administrative support at Forest led to mounting paperwork, incomplete tasks, and an even heavier counselor workload. Teresa was the most vocal in the counseling department about how the lack of clerical assistance

this school year affected counselors day-to-day work, including their ability to counsel students.

> We had a secretary, which was awesome. She did requesting of the records, gave us the records, did the folders….When the ACT scores came in, she sat down and did the spreadsheet and then she gave us the spreadsheet…If we was having parent meetings, she would make all the copies. She did all of the paperwork related to our jobs. And we were able to see more kids, bring them in if they were failing [and] actually have counseling sessions with them.

In other words, not having a secretary was a resource issue that contributed to a more reactive approach (McDonough 1997) to college counseling, with counselors spending little or no time counseling students.

One would expect that having support staff (e.g., secretary, test coordinator) would lighten counselors' workload in terms of administrative duties, but this was not exactly the case at Woodlot, Orchard, and Garden. Counselors at these schools still felt burdened by clerical and administrative work, especially tasks deemed by the ASCA and Louisiana state policy as unacceptable for counselors, as these tasks were often assigned to counselors by their non-counseling district-level or school supervisors. While one Garden counselor appreciated having a secretary and a dedicated test coordinator, she acknowledged that the school counseling profession is plagued by paperwork and described counselors as "paper pushers." For instance, in describing the audit the Garden counseling department was preparing for, Sally, a tenth through twelfth grade counselor said the secretary could not help with gathering documents for the audit because:

> it's just not something [the secretary is] able to pull cuz it's coming from all different departments, so it's not something she can pull. And then like she can't print a transcript. So we had to have a transcript for everybody in the folder. Um, we had to get the parents to sign the IGPs, the students to sign the IGPs. So we kind of did that probably all of September getting that.

When asked what occupied most of their time, counselors across all four schools responded, “paperwork.” Jessica, an Orchard counselor, even said, “Yeah, paperwork that quite frankly…takes up so much time...you're not able to be in classrooms” and “you're not able to really sit down and have those conversations with… kids.” These discussions are illustrative of the tension that counselors faced in fulfilling student-centered and school-centered roles (Blake 2018) from various sources. While Forest did not have administrative support and the other three schools did, participants’ responses to questions about counselors’ workload and time devoted to college counseling suggested that the presence of administrative support was helpful, but not sufficient enough to provide the time counselors needed to support students in navigating postsecondary planning. Many counselors, teachers, and leaders admitted that counselors did not have sufficient time to provide effective one-to-one support due to overwhelming administrative duties. This is unfortunate given that most students in this study—African American, Latinx, and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds— rely on their schools, especially their counselors, for support in navigating high school and post-secondary planning.

#### 5.2.2.3 A Separate College Counselor

While Corwin and Tierney (2007) and McClafferty et al. (2002) argue that college counseling should be the responsibility of the entire counseling department, Corwin and Tierney (2007) also advocate for “a college counselor whose sole charge is the coordination and provision of college preparatory information and services” (Corwin and Tierney 2007:16). Across all schools in this study, counselors and teachers identified a

separate college counselor as helpful to providing effective, ongoing college counseling as counselors were overwhelmed with responsibilities, especially senior counselors, in providing social, emotional, academic, and postsecondary planning support. As described in a previous section, Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest did not currently have college counselors. Forest had a college counselor in prior years, but the position was eliminated due to budget cuts. Garden was the only school with a designated college and career counselor and a full college and career readiness department.

Forest teachers and counselors discussed the lack of a college counselor and how eliminating the college counseling position left many students without the individualized college support that they needed. Rose, a Spanish teacher at Forest, described it this way:

> So before we had someone specifically designed to be the college advisor to help the seniors… go from one transition to the next. Unfortunately, that position does not exist… they shifted that responsibility to just regular counselors who were more involved with scheduling and things of that nature, which has become a problem because they don't know how to provide the right resources to the seniors, and…they don't have enough time because [they're] trying to balance both, And I really think it's only one counselor whose been given that kind of responsibility on top of all the other things, so I'm not really sure how effective it's been.

Rose distinguished academic counseling from college counseling and highlighted counselors' time and resource constraints in balancing academics and college readiness. Moreover, she felt that counselors did not have the right skill set to "provide the right resources" to students because of their focus on scheduling. Teresa said this balancing act was not an issue when the department had a college counselor who:

> did all of the college visits [and] the college applications. We would print the transcript, we would or the secretary, to give to him [the college counselor]. The fee waivers, the secretary would give to him and then he would send all of that out. Or [the secretary] would help send all of that out.

At Woodlot, Orchard, and to a lesser extent at Forest, the senior counselor was responsible for all college planning activities and support. As discussed in a previous section, the senior counselor who was viewed informally as also a college counselor, was problematic with school-centered administrative tasks taking precedence over postsecondary supports, especially in schools with larger caseloads and less emphasis on college attendance, like Woodlot and Orchard who I identified as having limited college-going cultures. Not having a counselor dedicated to college planning contributed to Forest counselors having to "switch gears" multiple times throughout the day and not having the time to meet with students one-to-one.

Woodlot and Orchard had not had a college counselor, but they felt that the addition of one would be beneficial for their large high school due to their caseloads and vast counselor responsibilities. Susan, senior counselor at Orchard, was aware that schools in nearby districts had college counselors and felt that a college counselor could benefit their school but acknowledged that this was a district-level decision.

> Some schools do have a separate college counselor, you know, some high schools that they have that in their budget. I don't know if that's necessarily in [this district], but I know in maybe other districts. So the college counseling piece at a large school, I would say it's a job in itself, because we have typically have between 280 to 300 seniors and we only have one senior counselor, now we all, all of the counselors try to assist the kids with different things. Like we divide them up and the responsibilities as it pertains to like the FAFSA, things like that if they have questions, so everybody's available.

Similarly, Robert thought an additional counselor focused specifically on college was a necessity to counseling departments meeting the various needs of students as "regular school counselors" are juggling numerous job responsibilities.

> You know, I really think that job [senior counselor] needs a separate person too, and I've been saying that for years, but I know that's a money thing too. Just to have an extra like scholarship coordinator or somebody that really focused on getting the kids into college because your regular school counselor job is a lot… in addition to… making the schedules, we got to follow up on all the kids at the end of every quarter and checking their report cards, calling in the kids we're worried about in addition to keeping your door open for emergencies.

Because Woodlot and Orchard counselors often worked in isolation as cohort counselors and viewed senior counselors as largely responsible for college supports, counselors felt that an additional counselor was needed to "take a load off" of the senior counselor. When asked whether there was anything the school needed to support students in going to college, Kevin, a Woodlot counselor, also said "the scholarship coordinator is the number one thing because our senior counselor is, you know, massively overworked every year. I think that would really help take a load off of her or me for next year." Across the board, counselors and some teachers expressed that a separate college counselor could be beneficial to their departments and to the availability of college counseling school-wide, lessening counselor workload and allowing for more individualized supports.

On the other hand, school leaders at Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest did not discuss the addition of a college counselor or the need for one, even with the state policy focus on college and career readiness that requires high school students to take the ACT their junior year and complete FAFSA applications prior to graduation. While school leaders acknowledged counselors' heavy workload, they typically expressed that counselors get the job done. For instance, after Sheila discussed counselors' myriad responsibilities and high counselor caseloads, she said that although counselors have "a lot to deal with… they make it happen."

As shown in Table 5.1, Garden was the only school in this study with a college counselor. Garden's college counselor collaborated with other academic counselors, supporting students with FAFSA completion, college applications, and career exploration. As noted above, Garden counseling department's primarily even-spread structure facilitated greater counselor collaboration as three of four counselors supported juniors and seniors with scheduling, testing, and college attendance. Because more than one counselor supported the same grade level, counselors' roles and responsibilities overlapped as students had similar needs based on the grade they were in. In interviews, counselors discussed how they collaborated with each other, often mentioning the roles of other counselors in the department in various college initiatives. A separate college counselor at Garden seemed to lighten academic counselors' load, while also providing students with multiple opportunities to engage in college talk with more than one knowledgeable counselor. College culture research suggests that early and ongoing communication about college requirements from multiple staff members contributes to whether students take the steps to apply and enroll in college and a separate college counselor can play a critical role in facilitating school-wide communication efforts (McClafferty et al. 2002; Roderick et al. 2011).

### 5.2.3 College Counseling Norms

Consistent with the literature, my findings reveal that schools' norms around college counseling were exhibited through the *time counselors devoted to meeting one-to-one with students* about college and the application process (McKillip et al. 2012, Engberg and Gilbert 2014) and *student-initiated versus counselor-initiated outreach* for

college planning support (Hill 2012). Schools differed in their approaches to college counseling as their ability to provide individualized college counseling was shaped by counseling department structure and resources as well as the overall organizational context and the college-going cultures of the schools (i.e., limited, moderate, strong) (See Chapter 4 for findings on college-going culture).

#### 5.2.3.1 Time for One-to-One College Counseling?

Much of college counseling at Woodlot, Forest, and Orchard occurred in large groups, providing college information in classrooms and at assemblies, with limited or no time devoted to one-to-one college counseling due to the cohort structure of their counseling departments, limited resources (e.g., high caseloads, lack of administrative support at Forest), and overwhelming counseling roles and responsibilities related to both structure and resources. For instance, Walter, an assistant principal at Woodlot, said that one-to-one conversations about college are "probably more of a struggle" as he does not "see them happening at the level that they probably should." He goes on to say that he did not "even know if the time is there to put in… the type of counseling time that will be needed." Walter recognized that college counseling required a different "level" of support and acknowledged that Woodlot counselors were not engaging in college counseling given various constraints on their time.

Overall, Woodlot and Orchard counselors often discussed paperwork, scheduling, and testing as barriers to providing the type of one-to-one college counseling that their students needed. When asked how much time counselors devoted to college counseling, Susan, Orchard's senior counselor, said, "I would say not as much as I would like to see,

because a lot of our work is tied into paperwork or testing or other things. So it's difficult to find that balance…to do the college planning." This counselor's comments reflected her understanding of the value of college counseling, while acknowledging the contextual constraints to actually engaging in it.

Heather, a dual enrollment teacher at Woodlot, and Kevin, a counselor at Woodlot, also expressed that there was no time for counselors to focus on college prep as they spent a significant amount of time on scheduling and testing. Describing the conflict with testing and college supports, Heather explained, "…counselors are inundated with testing nowadays. So even if they wanted to do more college prep, their time is absorbed with testing." Kevin described the constant "cycle" of scheduling, testing, and mental health support, with scheduling and testing taking precedence over one-to-one college counseling:

> not a whole lot [of a counselor's time is devoted to college counseling]. Because… you're pretty much dealing with scheduling and testing and all that so… I may say maybe 25%, tops…At the very beginning of the year, you're doing everything scheduling. This lasts pretty much for the … first three weeks after it [the school year] starts, then… September, October, maybe early November is kind of your time to talk to the kids… about college, kind of… gear them up. Any kids who are having mental health issues, that's kind of the time to see them because once late November hits, early December, … you're in LEAP test mode. And when you get back in January, we have four new classes so you're back to doing scheduling again. And it's pretty much rapid fire all the way through the year because after scheduling is over, you pretty much have to prepare them for the ACT test, which is in March, then you have a whole nother [sic] round of LEAP testing, and then scheduling again. So it's … the whole cycle of scheduling, break, testing, scheduling, testing, scheduling.

In describing counselors' yearly work cycle, Kevin illustrated *how* testing and scheduling—school-based administrative duties and state accountability measures—

occupied most counselors' time, leaving little time for direct student services like mental health and college counseling.

Principal Sheila's (Orchard) perception of counselors getting an opportunity to meet one-to-one with students slightly differed from other Orchard and Woodlot participants. She said, "Oh, yes, every counselor gets an opportunity [to meet with students one-to-one]. They have office hours. Sometimes they go out and work in groups because if I'm a freshman counselor…it's pretty hard to see all 500." While this leader said that counselors had an opportunity to meet with students individually, this did not seem to be the case in practice, according to counselors and teachers, due to large counselor caseloads and a heavy workload.

In sum, many Orchard and Woodlot counselors and teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that counselors did not have time to provide individualized college counseling and felt that this was largely attributed to school and state contextual factors (i.e., scheduling and testing) shaping counselors' ability to provide such support.

As discussed above, with the cohort model contributing to the senior counselor also serving as a college counselor, the senior counselor's responsibilities were multiplied leaving very little time for one-to-one college support. When asked approximately how much of a counselor's time was devoted to college counseling, Walter candidly responded:

> about 10%, [Interviewer: 10%? even the senior counselor?] "20%" [Interviewer: So what are they doing? You can just tell me about their job.] Walter: Just all of the procedures and the requirements, the stuff that's required to get a kid out of high school, that takes all their [senior counselors'] time, from tracking and testing, you name it.

According to Walter, counselors were so consumed with making sure students graduated on time, he said "so many other things come up that… conversations just about college, it's just not there."

Garden's counselors were more intentional and strategic with their approach to individualized college counseling. They had more concrete examples of one-to-one or individualized college and career counseling compared to the three other schools, and this was a function of their counseling department structure and the overall school environment, in particular, how various department activities and initiatives were "programmatically aligned" and how their collaborative, "family-like" culture guided their college practices (See Ch. 4). While Garden counselors utilized opportunities to meet with students in whole groups in classrooms and assemblies, counselors also followed up with one-to-one meetings through formal activities such as senior interviews, College Application Day, and individualized conversations about career pathways. For example, Tina, Garden's college counselor described the senior interviews in this way:

> We sit down with the students, give them a career interest inventory, [and] ask them where they're thinking about going? What would they like to do? [We] tell them to research three colleges, and just have a general conversation about their grades, about the ACT score, if they're eligible for TOPS, [and] give them scholarship information. So that's a conversation that [all three counselors supporting juniors and seniors] have with them [students].

Tina also provided a more detailed example of how she provided one-to-one support to a student needing assistance with the common application.

> I had a student who was having problems with the common app…Schools like Vanderbilt uses it… LSU jumped on board this year or last year with the common app. It's really lengthy… sometimes it could get confusing for the students and sometimes it's confusing for us, but you know, we've learned how to navigate it. But a student had an issue with the common app. So I sat here and started helping

> her fill it out and everything and she told me what school she wanted to go to and sometimes we just got to write down the steps for the students. “Okay, this is what you need to do now. This is what's going to happen next… you're gonna start getting emails from these colleges,” and we always tell them constant[ly], “once you start this process, you have to look at your emails.” Cause a lot of times they [colleges] don't send the paper, you know. Normally a lot of times it's by email. But that was one experience.

Tina’s interaction with a student navigating challenges with the common application, telling the student to check her email and writing down steps for students, indicated how counselors can serve as cultural guides, helping students to navigate and understand the unspoken rules and processes governing institutions (Lareau 2015). In other words, counselors who have the opportunity for one-to-one meetings with students can contribute to an increase in students’ college knowledge in terms of understanding how college, as an institution, works (Holland 2019; Lareau 2015). Secondly, counselors navigating application processes alongside students can increase counselors’ knowledge of college admissions and cue them in to the common questions students will have and areas students will need additional support.

#### 5.2.3.2 Student-Initiated vs. Counselor-Initiated College Support

As a result of most school counselors in this study having little to no time to devote to individualized college counseling, students were tasked with reaching out to counselors for college-going support, often leading to less contact with counselors and lower rates of students making the transition to college, like students at Woodlot and Orchard. Counselor-initiated outreach is important in connecting students and families with available college resources (Hill 2012). The provision of college resources, interpersonal relationships that translate resources into students taking steps to apply and

enroll into college, and counselor-initiated outreach make up what Hill (2012) described as a *brokering approach* to college counseling. While most participants discussed the various resources available in their schools and expressed that counselors were more than willing to meet individually with students, one-to-one counselor-initiated contact was hindered by school (e.g., counseling department structure), district (e.g., school-based autonomy), and state accountability contexts (e.g., testing which contributes to the SPS), providing less opportunities to get college resources in the hands of students and families. At all four schools, there was some level of responsibility for students to reach out to counselors if they needed one-to-one support with any aspect of the college application process. This was the case to a great degree at Forest, Woodlot, and Orchard and to a lesser extent at Garden. For instance, while Walter discussed the willingness of counselors to meet with students individually, he said that counselor-initiated college counseling at Woodlot is basically non-existent in the school and that students would need to seek out counselors for assistance:

> They [students] can request, they can definitely ask and the counselors will avail themselves for it. I mean… we have college information all around the counseling suite. From…the little college banners for universities from all across the country and we have the college fairs and all of those other different types of things that's available for them. But no one is going to call them into the office and say "Okay today is the day that we meet with you to talk about your your next steps after high school. What are you planning on doing? Are you going to college? What college are you going to? Oh, you're going to LSU. Have you visited the campus? No, you haven't visited the campus. Let's see if we can schedule a visit for you…Have you taken the ACT? What was your score? What were your strengths? What were your weaknesses? When [are] you taking it again?" You know those conversations are not happening like that. So that conversation might be a whole, you might have half the class in the cafeteria when that type of conversation go on.

Walter's remarks were reflective of a *clearinghouse approach* to college counseling, which aligned with Woodlot's limited college-going culture. He expressed his understanding of multiple aspects of college counseling, including informational resources and exposure to colleges as well as sitting down with students one-to-one to provide in-depth support with each step of the college choice process, especially given that many Woodlot students would be the first in their families to attend college. However, placing the onus on students to reach out for individualized college assistance hindered students from reaping the full benefits of the resources available to them (Hill 2012). Other Woodlot staff members discussed how counselors would avail themselves to students, when needed, but acknowledged that time was limited for one-to-one college counseling (See the previous section for more on one-to-one college counseling.).

Orchard's approach to college counseling was also reflective of a clearinghouse strategy with numerous resources available to students, but limited counselor-initiated outreach. Counselors were willing to help students and would provide information in large groups, but this strategy was often less effective when the goal was to make college information more accessible to diverse groups of students, especially first-generation college students. Susan described their approach to college counseling, stating:

> so everybody's available. You know if a student wants to talk to a counselor about college, but we do the best that we can to have events or group related themes to assist students. And then… individually they set an appointment. There's a sign in sheet. So last year… I would make an announcement or would have them to make an announcement of "if you need assistance with whatever, then… sign the sheet on the front counter." And so when they would sign a sheet on the front counter between our various responsibilities, you know, I would call them in, or I would call them in to come and assist them or answer questions that they would have…

Lisa, another Orchard counselor, discussed giving her contact information to students if they needed help with anything, even urgent matters unrelated to college support:

> Students also have my contact information. So if they did have a concern or they didn't get a chance to see me at school, they were able to contact me and say, Hey, Ms. Lisa, I need to meet with you tomorrow. Can you call me down? It's, you know, it's something urgent. So…I don't think, I know a lot of people don't do that. But I found it has benefited me quite well.

Likewise, Helen, Woodlot's senior counselor, also gave students her phone number to reach her and said that students typically only contacted her when they really needed to.

As noted above, Teresa, Forest's senior counselor, acknowledged that there was not sufficient time to provide individualized college counseling due to the new counseling department structure and the lack of a college counselor, but if students needed support or had specific questions about college "then they just come. They'll come in." This counselor would do her college-related work in the college room and students could come in to use the computers and get support. The college room was a sizeable space with computers and college information posted around the room. The counselors kept this space designated for college even after the college counselor position was eliminated.

As stated, student-counselor interactions were more frequent and intentional at Garden with senior interviews, College Application Day, career pathway meetings, and at-risk for graduation meetings. However, students seemed to be responsible for initiating contact with counselors for additional support in navigating complex college choice and application processes. Students seemed to take advantage of the opportunity to meet with counselors at Garden. One counselor discussed the student sign-in sheet in the counseling suite and how students were in and out of counselors' offices for various reasons.

Students could meet with counselors during lunch or during class if they had permission from their teachers.

In summary, all four schools' counseling departments took a student-initiated approach to one-on-one college counseling to varying degrees as counselors and leaders encouraged students to reach out to counselors if they needed help. Although Garden had more formal mechanisms for counselor-initiated contact, the expectation outside of the opportunities discussed above was for students to visit the counseling suite if they needed further support with college.

### 5.2.4 Role Conflict and Role Incongruity

Role conflict (i.e., multiple expectations for counselors' work from different sources) and, relatedly, role incongruity, which includes tension between assigned tasks or roles and the resources needed to complete such tasks (Freeman and Coll 1997) emerged as important explanations for counselors, leaders, and teachers' descriptions of the challenges counselors encountered in supporting the establishment of a college-going culture in schools. Evidence of role conflict was exhibited through counselors' response to the expectations of students, parents, district, CMO, and the state accountability system, in particular, how counselors perceived and enacted their jobs. Based on counselor interviews and an analysis of documents, professional counseling norms and counselors' expectations for their work were often in conflict with school and district leaders' expectations for counselors work as well as state policy addressing school counselor roles and responsibilities. Similarly, role incongruity emerged when counselors did not have the resources (e.g., administrative support or supervisors who were trained

school counselors) to fulfill multiple roles and responsibilities as academic advisors, mental health providers, and college and career counselors. As a result of role conflict and incongruity, many counselors, especially senior counselors, expressed feeling burned out, stressed, unappreciated, misunderstood, and disrespected.

#### 5.2.4.1 Public School Counselors as "Paper Pushers"

Overwhelmingly, counselors across all schools felt overloaded by paperwork that often related to the demands of the state accountability system. Lisa, Orchard's junior counselor, said that counselors were "always working," and, especially on paperwork. When asked what the paperwork was associated with, Lisa replied:

> So there's a drop list, filing, transcripts, putting in grades. We have our little mini tasks that we do every year: balancing classes, moving students out of this class to another class. What else? helping students apply for college, helping students to get ready to take the ACT, and we have our… counseling meetings and stuff like that. So, the day is extremely busy…There's never any downtime, so much so that you might catch us in our offices the whole time, like we're eating lunch in our office, like, there's no time to actually go out and get some fresh air. So you're always working.

Even at Garden, where counselors had administrative support and formal opportunities to meet with students about college and where collaboration among teachers, leaders, and staff was a large part of their school's culture, paperwork was identified as occupying the majority of counselors' time. For instance, during my visit Tina, Garden's college and career counselor, showed me her tracking sheet documenting students' completion of the FAFSA application and indicating which students still needed to complete it. Tina worked her way through more than 200 seniors on her list as FAFSA completion is a graduation requirement according to Louisiana's college readiness policies. Like

counselors and leaders at other schools in this study, Tina described the process of tracking students and parents down to complete FAFSA as time-consuming and onerous, especially because some parents had reservations about completing the FAFSA as it required them to provide personal financial information. Similarly, Sally, a 10th-12th grade counselor at Garden, described how various Garden departments were collaborating and preparing paperwork for a district audit, saying: "We're paper pushers. Like right now we… have an audit… that's really… consuming all of our time because we're trying to get ready when they come in so we can be compliant." Sally also said, "…most times you're really just kinda pushing paper. Although we see kids a lot…and we, you know, do the college stuff, but it's still… it's probably more paperwork."

Compliance emerged as central to counselors' work across all four schools whether it related to submitting reports to the district to project schools' performance scores at Orchard or responding to issues like this one relating to an audit at Garden. Professional counseling norms were often in conflict with and took a backseat to district expectations for counselor's work, taking time away from direct student supports like college counseling, and as discussed in a previous section, state policy indicates that counselors should spend most of their time directly supporting students and not on clerical duties.

As a result, many counselors expressed conflict in being there for students (e.g., meeting with students to provide mental health support to help students "function") and navigating the administrative and clerical duties associated with the expectations from the state, their district, network, and school supervisors. Doris, Forest's freshman counselor, even stated that "… at the high school level, I find that I do less social emotional but that's what I really love to do." Jessica, an Orchard counselor, expressed frustration with

paperwork and various directives from school and district personnel. She explained how she wanted to be there for students, but the district assigned so much paperwork tied to the accountability system:

> Paperwork [takes up most of my time], paperwork that has nothing to do with students in terms of getting them emotionally, academically, and behaviorally ready for postsecondary life. We do a lot of paperwork on fixing transcripts. entering transcripts, doing error reports because the transcripts, something was entered in wrong. Um, how many kids got an IBC [industry-based certification]? How many kids still need LEAP [Louisiana Educational Assessment Program]?…balancing schedules, "Oh the numbers are too high, we need to move kids out of one class and put them in another class"…
>
> [We are not able to] pull groups of kids in and say, "…your grades are slipping, you're falling, and so I'm going to be monitoring you like white on rice to be sure you get it up." You don't have time to do that because you know, the people at central office are running behind you about a spreadsheet of how many points each kid is projected to get when they graduate… you put in the classes and potential for earning whatever points. So, this child has Dual Enrollment, okay, they had a CLEP score. Okay, they have an IBC. So this child is going to give a 110. Oh, this kid might give us 150. We have to do those spreadsheets and if a child is only projected to get 100, what are you doing with scheduling to possibly get them to 110? Are they going to get an IBC? Are you going to schedule something for them so they can potentially get the 110?
>
> [Interviewer: So this comes from central office? Someone at central office that you all report to?] Yeah, yep. So between directives from your school staff, you got people at central office sending down directives as well that get filtered in that.

The "sending down" of non-counseling directives from district and school leaders created conflict for school counselors for two reasons: one, school counselors were trained to spend most of their time directly supporting students, and two, school counselors tended to have little agency over their work as they had to push aside what they deemed as appropriate tasks to respond to what non-counseling administrators needed them to do. Even teachers acknowledged the challenge counselors faced in wanting and needing time

to provide support to students, but not having the time. Kenneth, an ESL teacher at Orchard, said:

> …if you say that there are 1500 students registered in the beginning of the year, and… over 300 students per counselor, it's not enough, it's not enough time. The counselors are doing the academics, then you're asking them to be part time counselors… really it's like, administrative duties because they're administering the information. But then I also want them to do the counseling, [which] is partly psychological… And I don't see that those four individuals have the time to meet all of that load because these students require or they deserve or they need that support, that emotional support

In sum, counselors seemed frustrated with how much paperwork occupied their time and wished they could do more counseling. Two counselors who previously worked in private schools in the area even pointed to the public school system as requiring more paperwork compared to private schools, who get the opportunity to focus more on meeting individually with students and building relationships. Robert said:

> since I worked at a [private] school and a public school, I can kind of tell you that [private] schools are kind of much less paperwork oriented. So, from a counseling standpoint, from somebody who really wants to get into it [school counseling] to be able to have good relationships with the kids and calling kids as many times as you want to per day, that the [private] school is the place to be. And as much as we like to do that, and I think everybody [who] works in a public school system would love to do that, too…You know, and of course, if an emergency comes in, you put it [your work] aside for a second, but that's probably the biggest difference from public school and [private] school.

This comparison among public and private school counseling gives insight into the issues facing access to individualized college counseling in both types of public schools in this study. Counselors in TPSs and charter schools alike felt burdened by paperwork, even in a school with a strong college-going culture like Garden.

5.2.4.2 Job Burnout and Stress Among Senior Counselors

As described in a previous section, the informal expectation that senior counselors act as college counselors *and* academic counselors also contributed to role conflict and role incongruity among counselors at Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest. The workload for senior counselors was so heavy that Robert said:

> Nobody wants to be senior counselor for more than one year at a time… once every four years is good…in addition to looking at the grades every quarter, you're making sure they're applying to colleges, applying for scholarships…The biggest pain in the butt that I dealt with [as senior counselor was]… the FAFSA graduation requirement…I remember probably from January through March, that was like the number one thing I was focused on with the seniors.

The above excerpt is one of many examples of how counselors and leaders at Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest lamented the senior counselor job and their enactment of dual roles with limited resources to do so. Sheila summarized why the senior counselor job is so demanding, further illustrating role conflict among these counselors:

> Part of it is… that now there's so much to do with the seniors, you literally get burned out. So if you've been the senior counselor, you need like, Mr. Robert told me, he needed time for his hair to grow back from senior year because he pulled it all out. So I understand that because everything that goes with the senior, the filling out the financial aid, getting them to make sure they have ACT scores, and helping them apply for school, all of that falls on the senior person…making sure they have what they need [to graduate], tracking them down and making them take courses that they failed. And, you know, making them come to school, because attendance is always an issue. So there's a whole bunch that goes into that. So that person, they need a break.

Senior counselors were responsible for a lot and felt that they were constantly switching gears to meet the demands of their schools, districts, network, and the state. According to Kevin, eleventh grade counselor at Woodlot, senior counselors were "massively overworked."

One consequence of role conflict among senior counselors was feeling stressed and burned out. All senior counselors in the three schools that implemented the cohort model—Orchard, Woodlot, and Forest— expressed some level of frustration, burnout, and stress as they were already overloaded as school counselors, due to the ambiguous nature of the school counseling profession (Blake 2020). Research indicates that experienced counselors with larger caseloads and many non-counseling duties report greater burnout (Butler and Constantine 2005; Holman et al. 2018; Kim and Lambie 2018). This was the case in this study as all three senior counselors met one or more of these criteria. Helen, Woodlot's senior counselor, who had several years of experience as a senior counselor described how overwhelmed she was:

> I'm tired. I'm stressed out. I have to dye my hair pretty often. [Interviewer: Why? What's stressful about being a senior counselor?] Oh my gosh. Trying to get the kids to follow through and complete their coursework…from 9th to 11th grade if they failed a course and they never did it on Plato and just being pushed up, all the work from their last three years to the senior person who have to see to those kids graduating on time. That's the hardest part. And I'm still pushing to this day trying to get kids to finish Plato coursework that they've been in since September.

Teresa, Forest's senior counselor, also expressed frustration with being a school counselor in general, especially feeling like the position was not understood or respected by network and school leaders.

> And sometimes I really feel unappreciated, disrespected because you [network and school leaders] don't respect the position, because you don't know the position. You haven't worked in the position. You see it from a distance. And like Ms. Doris said you delegate to us stuff. Who do we delegate to? The buck stops here. So you can tell us you want this, this, this and this and I'm putting all this on my plate with what else I have. Who do I give something off of my plate to? There is nobody. So you keep dumping and dumping and dumping.

As illustrated above, counselors, especially senior counselors, felt like the dumping ground for various tasks from school and district leaders. For instance, senior counselors were responsible for making sure students had the required coursework for graduation and, since Woodlot and Orchard counselors often worked in isolation, senior counselors had to do the work of previous counselors who sometimes did not ensure students passed their courses. In contrast, Garden, a standalone charter, did not have network directives to adhere to and the district's involvement seemed limited and mainly related to compliance-related matters. Although Gardens' counselors expressed paperwork as occupying much of their job, the lack of an additional layer of accountability from a network or direct supervision from district leaders did not contribute to the level of stress that the other three school counseling departments described.

#### 5.2.4.3 School-Based Autonomy, Non-Counseling Supervisors, and Inadequate Resources

Role incongruity was connected to the level of school-based autonomy schools experienced, and autonomy intersected with school type (Bulkley et al. 2021). In terms of changing the counseling department's structure or adding counselors or support staff, Forest, a network charter with a moderate college-going culture, appeared to have the least amount of autonomy compared to the other three schools. Forest leaders could not change the structure of the counseling department nor hire additional personnel like a secretary for their department. These decisions were made by network leaders. Woodlot and Orchard were traditional public schools and had similar levels of autonomy. As noted in a previous section, TPS leaders in this study had the autonomy to implement the cohort

model. However, leaders could not hire additional counselors. The budget for staffing was controlled by the district central office and was based on student enrollment.

As a standalone charter school, Garden had the greatest ability to make school-based decisions compared to the other schools. They could hire another counselor or support staff member. George, Garden's principal, even attributed their autonomy to make decisions at the school level to being a standalone charter school. The other three schools in this study did not have the school-based autonomy to address the organizational issues that hindered direct student support provided by counselors.

Network or district leaders heavily influenced counselors' day-to-day work through how they structured counseling departments, removed key resources such as support staff, and appointed non-counseling administrators as counselors' supervisors. In this way, college supports especially individualized college counseling at Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest was, for the most part, reactive and student-initiated (Hill 2012; McDonough 1997). In other words, counselors typically provided individualized college support when students reached out for help.

Evidence of role conflict and incongruity were also exhibited through "conflicts with the structure of the system" with counselors being supervised by non-counseling staff and, therefore, not able to carry out the tasks they preferred like social, emotional, and postsecondary planning support (Freeman and Coll 1997:36). At Woodlot and Orchard, counselors reported directly to an assistant principal who was not trained in school counseling. Forest's counselors did not discuss being directly supervised by someone at their school, but there was a district supervisor at the network level who had experience as a college counselor but was no longer working in this position. Garden's

counselors did not mention any district-level supervisors, but they discussed collaborating with the twelfth-grade assistant principal, the school leadership team, and with other counselors in their department.

Two Orchard counselors and one Forest counselor candidly described how supervision by non-counseling staff members hindered direct student support like mental health and college counseling. The main reasons noted were non-counseling supervisor's lack of understanding of the school counselor position including the multiple roles counselors enacted, their heavy workload, and administrative duties, often tied to the state accountability system, which creates tension with "being there" for students. For instance, as described in previous sections, Teresa, Forest's senior counselor, expressed frustration with the network's decision to change the structure of their counseling department. When asked who made the decision to change their department's structure to a cohort model, the counselor said that "higher up [network leaders]" wanted their high school counselors to focus on a grade level at a time and move up with their cohort through graduation. Teresa went on to say:

> So somebody who… don't know, never been [a school counselor], made the decision that we just gon' do grade level. Ya'll don't need a secretary because they didn't know the volume of work that comes through here. If you look outside, you saw those folders. All those are new that we do not have records for. And then they started the new process. So it's just.

Similarly, Robert described the limited time Orchard counselors had to meet one-to-one with students stating, "But for the most part, we don't get to kind of freely choose to call in as many kids as we want because here you work kind of directly under an assistant principal and… if they say do this today, you got to do it." This further illustrates how

counselors' day-to-day work is impacted by various demands on their time by non-counseling supervisors.

Finally, Jessica, who had been at Orchard as counselor for over three years, described the challenges with being supervised by non-counseling administrators, saying:

> The AP [assistant principal]… is not a counselor, never been a counselor, and doesn't understand counseling, and does not understand that it's "we fight the battle of paperwork and being there for my student." If a student comes in my office and they're in crisis, or they're having an issue or they need, they need Ms. Jessica to help them work through whatever it is they working through so they can be functional, I'm not going to turn them away because you coming at me with a deadline about some paperwork. But of course, it's… "get it done" because that's the way the district has to quantify what counselors do. "Oh… give them a bunch of paperwork. They not in the classroom." Yeah, but at Orchard our kids are always in and out of our offices because we make ourselves available to them and I want that. That's the thing. They need to be in and out my office coming to me for support, coming to me for guidance, coming to me for assistance on whatever because that's our job.
>
> We're here to academically, emotionally, and behaviorally prepare you for postsecondary options. So yeah, if you're struggling with planning, time management and understanding proper behavior in the classroom, yeah, that's what I'm here for. I need you to come to me, but that often gets lost in translation, or not even lost in translation, that often gets pushed to the side. Because all this paperwork deadlines. The AP, I'm not gonna say he don't care, but he got his directives that he has to follow. Ya'll have to do it.

Furthermore, counselors often reported to supervisors at the district or network level who also were not trained as school counselors. Jessica also stated that their district supervisor did not have a counseling background,

> She was an AP [assistant principal]. And that has been the ongoing battle with the counseling department. Because people who were over counselors, were never freakin' [sic] counselors. We had one person who was a counselor who oversaw counselors and I'm not sure what the hell happened or what, but I miss her because even though she never was a high school counselor, she was a middle school counselor, she was a counselor. So, she understood, you know, kids and

> their needs, and them coming to you and a lot of times you're the only sound person that they can talk to, bounce ideas off to get, you know, some focus, some clarity on whatever life issue they may be having, that's preventing them from functioning in the classroom. These people at central office have no clue.

Overall, these remarks signal counselors' lack of control over external demands, which is one important characteristic of job burnout (Holman et al., 2018; Sauter and Murphy 1995). In other words, counselors were frustrated with the lack of agency over the tasks they could focus their time and attention on due to the demands and expectations of their school, network, and district supervisors who did not have intimate knowledge of or experience with school counseling. Counselors grappled with the various expectations from assistant principals and district leaders and often responded by completing the administrative and clerical duties assigned to them while "making time" for students who needed their immediate attention.

Role incongruity was also evident in the discrepancies among the tasks counselors were assigned and the resources counselors had to complete such tasks. At Woodlot, Orchard, and Forest, counselors either had high caseloads or did not have administrative support and therefore could not adequately counsel all their assigned students, nor provide the college planning assistance students needed.

## 5.3 Conclusion

College-going culture research highlights the involvement of multiple stakeholders in supporting students with completing the steps towards college enrollment (Corwin and Tierney 2007; Roderick et al. 2011). However, high school counselors are viewed among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike as taking a leading role

in supporting students with the transition to college, especially first-generation, Black, Latinx, and low-income students (McClafferty et al. 2002; McDonough 1997; McDonough 2005; Perna et al. 2008).

This chapter has focused on the various organizational contexts that shaped high school counselors' college-related work and their broader role expectations in four charter and traditional public high schools serving low-income, African American, and Latinx students. In particular, I examined how individual school contexts (i.e., counseling departments' structure, resources, and college counseling norms), district (i.e., charter vs. TPS, school-based autonomy), and the state policy context (i.e., counselors' role expectations, college and career readiness policies, state accountability system) shaped college counseling and college-going supports more broadly including how counselors navigated expectations from these multiple sources.

I found that counselors' ability to support students with their transition to college is often limited by the proximal and distal organizational contexts in which counselors are embedded, namely schools, districts, networks, and the state. In this study, the structure and organization of schools' counseling departments shaped whether and how counselors were able to support students with college. The structure of counseling departments and, relatedly, the workload assigned to counselors were often determined by district-level leaders and state policies. For instance, counselors in schools with more direct oversight by district or network leaders—lower levels of school-based autonomy—like Forest, expressed greater role conflict and role incongruity because many of the decisions that impacted their work were made at higher levels of the educational system.

The cohort model—counselors supporting one grade-level at a time and moving with that group of students through graduation—often limited counselor collaboration and the frequency of college counseling as one counselor, the senior counselor, was primarily responsible for the college-related activities in schools. Cohort counselors tended to work in isolation, and the workload of senior counselors was greater as they enacted dual roles as academic counselors and informally as college counselors. On the other hand, the even-spread model—counselors supporting a similar number of students across grade levels—facilitated more opportunities for college-related support because multiple counselors worked with students across grades. This also led to increased opportunities for counselors to collaborate with each other as their roles and responsibilities overlapped.

The structure and organization of schools' counseling departments also had consequences for the resources available to counselors in their departments. Caseloads were found to be an important, yet incomplete indicator of counselors' ability to lead college planning efforts. The more students that counselors were responsible for supporting, the less time counselors had to meet individually with students for college planning. However, the workload assigned to senior counselors contributed to greater inequities in cohort counselors' roles and responsibilities despite the differing caseloads among these counselors.

Other resources—administrative support and a separate college counselor—also emerged as organizational factors shaping counselors' ability to work with students to plan for college. Forest lacked a test coordinator, a secretary, and a college counselor, which increased counselors' workload. Orchard and Woodlot had secretaries and test

coordinators for their departments, but not a separate college counselor, which some counselors discussed as necessary to adequately support students through the college application process. Garden had a test coordinator, a secretary, and a college counselor, which helped the department to provide more targeted and intentional college-going support than the other schools.

Finally, the structure of counseling departments and the level of resources influenced the norms counselors established for college counseling. At Orchard, Woodlot, and Forest, counselor-initiated college counseling was for the most part non-existent. Counselors did not have time, capacity, or the bandwidth to initiate individualized meetings with students to assist with college planning. Students would mainly initiate those meetings, and counselors would "avail" themselves. Garden had more counselor-initiated college counseling, but student-initiated college counseling was primarily the way students received college-going support across all four schools. This lack of counselor-initiated support reflected the overwhelming counselor workload writ large due to mounting paperwork and the amount of clerical and administrative tasks counselors engage in. Role conflict and role incongruity helps to explain the plight of counselors across all four schools in this study.

In closing, what can we learn from these findings? I draw a few related conclusions. First, school, district-level, and state contexts *determine* the structure, resources, and college counseling norms that are enacted in schools, and these contexts *collectively* have a bearing on whether and how counselors support students throughout the college-going process. Research on counselors and college access has typically treated school, district, and state contexts as separate. As illustrated in Figure 2.1,

counselors do not operate outside of these contexts. They all influence what counselors are expected to do, and these expectations originate from multiple levels of the system.

My study affirms and builds on existing literature that context is a huge determinant of counselors' roles and responsibilities. As described in this chapter, organizational context determines, for example, the potential for counselors to work collaboratively or if their job is relational and they get to meet one-to-one with students to assist with various aspects of college attendance. Context also determines collaboration among counselors. At Forest, Orchard, and Woodlot collaboration was limited as counselors' tasks differed by grade and they generally focused on work specific to the grade levels they supported at that time.

Second, the consequence of school, district, and state contexts determining counselors' capacity for college support is that counselors are facing role conflict and role incongruity due to the interaction of these contexts. Naming it as such helps us to better understand the ways in which counselors report being stressed, overwhelmed, burned out, and pulled in different directions (Holman et al. 2018), especially as college access policies become institutionalized and part of school accountability systems across the United States. It is in the intersection of these organizational contexts that conflict arises.

In conclusion, the findings I present in this chapter offer evidence on how role conflict and role incongruity operate across multiple levels of the educational system while having a direct bearing on counselors' college-related work and their role expectations overall (See Figure 2.1 for an illustration of this relationship.). Counselors, teachers, and leaders across the four schools in this study expressed that counselors were

not able to provide college planning support, especially the type of individualized support students really needed to complete the college application process because of the various roles and responsibilities assigned to them. And counselors lamented meeting multiple demands and directives from school leaders, district personnel, and in the case of Forest, network leaders as they desired to provide individualized academic, behavioral, and emotional support as counseling professionals (role conflict). Furthermore, many counselors lacked the resources needed to carry out these expectations effectively, a byproduct of role incongruity.

# CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

So, why do organizational contexts matter? In what ways do state, district, and school contexts shape college-going culture? How do counselors work within these contexts to provide students with the support that they need? And what does it mean when there is no cohesion across these contexts? My dissertation addressed these questions through a multiple case study approach and a conceptual framework derived from existing definitions of college-going culture and concepts from role theory. I examined how high schools' organizational contexts shaped the college-going cultures of four Greater New Orleans charter and traditional public high schools serving minoritized students from low-income families. And I found that cohesion is essential across these contexts to have a strong college-going culture that supports students through the complex, multifaceted college-going process.

In my dissertation, findings were presented in Chapters 4 and 5. In Chapter 4, I examined the college-going culture among four high schools including schools' norms, practices, resource structures, and the involvement of various staff members in college supports. I utilized Hill's (2008) college-linking strategies— traditional, clearinghouse, brokering— to describe the relationships among schools' practices and college-going norms. I found that schools varied in the enactment of their college-going cultures, even when college-going rates were similar. At Garden Charter and at Forest Charter, approximately 70% of students attended two-year or four-year colleges. However, Garden had a stronger college-going culture due to functions and support structures that were not present in Forest, which I identified as having a moderate college-going culture.

On the other hand, Woodlot and Forest, both traditional public schools, exhibited college-going cultures consistent with a limited approach.

In applying Hill's framework, I found it to be limited in describing college-going culture more broadly. In relation to my study, Hill's framework mainly sheds light on the availability of a limited number of resources/practices and some insight into accessibility as one focus of the study was about understanding outreach and variation in access to resources by race/ethnicity and SES. For instance, minoritized students were less likely to attend schools identified as brokering. In sum, Hill's college-linking framework helps to explain just one piece of this puzzle.

Examining the variation in college-going culture across the four schools led me to theorize about potential relationships among the various components of college-going as well as the role of the aforementioned contexts in shaping these relationships. It also led to questions about the ways in which context shaped the roles of individuals enacting college supports, especially counselors.

Thus, in Chapter 5, I investigated how the state, districts, and schools shaped counselors' ability to support students with college planning given their broader roles and job responsibilities. Counselors, teachers, and leaders alike reported high levels of burnout and stress among counselors, especially senior counselors. My research found that counselors' stress and feelings of being undervalued and misunderstood as counseling professionals was associated with various organizational factors (e.g., high caseloads and limited resources, lack of administrative support, structure of counseling departments hindering collaboration) influencing their work.

Counselors across all schools, despite school type or the strength of college-going culture, named paperwork and school-centered administrative tasks as hindering them from providing direct student support. I found that the intersection and interaction among state, district, and school contexts contributed to counselors experiencing role conflict and role incongruity in their college work and beyond. In other words, conflict arose from a lack of cohesion across contexts, not just within the various domains of college-going culture. Furthermore, role incongruity emerged from limited resources available to counselors to provide the college-going support students really needed.

Extending the findings from Chapters 4 and 5, I further develop my theory of cohesion in college-going culture. I argue that cohesion influences the quality and depth of schools' college-going cultures and is shaped by the overlapping state, district, and school contexts that schools are embedded within. Naming cohesion as an important component of college-going culture means that we do not treat the various domains, especially college-going practices, as characteristic of college-going culture. We should not conflate college-going culture with availability of various practices. In doing so, we reduce a holistic culture to just a checklist of practices. My research provides a logic for how the various domains work together to support a culture that normalizes college attendance *and* provides the support and opportunity structure to meet this goal.

## 6.1 Contributions to the Literature

In the following sections, I discuss two main contributions of this study: 1) cohesion in college-going culture and 2) how contexts collectively shape college-going culture and counselors' work.

### 6.1.1 Cohesion in College-Going Culture

My dissertation contributes a theory of cohesion to existing conceptualizations of college-going culture. As described in Chapter 2 and illustrated in Chapter 4, existing definitions of college-going culture emphasize availability of and school-wide access to college practices and resources. These dimensions are foundational to a college-going culture, and without them, a strong and effective college-going culture does not exist. However, it is not enough for schools to engage in college-going practices and to present students with numerous resources, and therefore, it is also not enough to categorize schools as limited, moderate, or strong, as depicted in Chapter 4.

There is another dimension to college-going culture—cohesion— that emphasizes the importance of the practices and resources being interconnected, built on each other, and logically sequenced to establish a more holistic college-going culture in which students can understand *how* the various aspects of the college planning process lead towards college attendance. Furthermore, a higher level of cohesion that integrates all aspects of a college-going culture strengthens schools' efforts to make college accessible and an attainable goal for students who primarily rely on school-based support to navigate college search and application.

This notion of cohesion has not been widely adopted in the literature on college-going culture. This was surprising to me because I found cohesion to be crucial in taking schools from simply offering college resources (a clearinghouse approach as described by Hill 2008) to a school-wide college-going culture as conceptualized in this dissertation. One exception is dissertation research by Foster (2014). Foster's conceptualization of

cohesion highlights the "centrality" of a college-going message in schools. Like Foster, I argue that you cannot have a strong college-going culture without cohesion. Beyond this similarity, my approach to cohesion considers college-going culture and counselors in light of the interaction of various contexts that impact schools.

We can think about cohesion in college-going culture in two ways. First, cohesion acts as a glue that connects accessibility and availability of college practices and resources with schools' college-going norms and the involvement of multiple stakeholders. This emphasis on *interconnection* solidifies the relationships among each component of a college-going culture and provides a foundation of support to students in their transition to college.

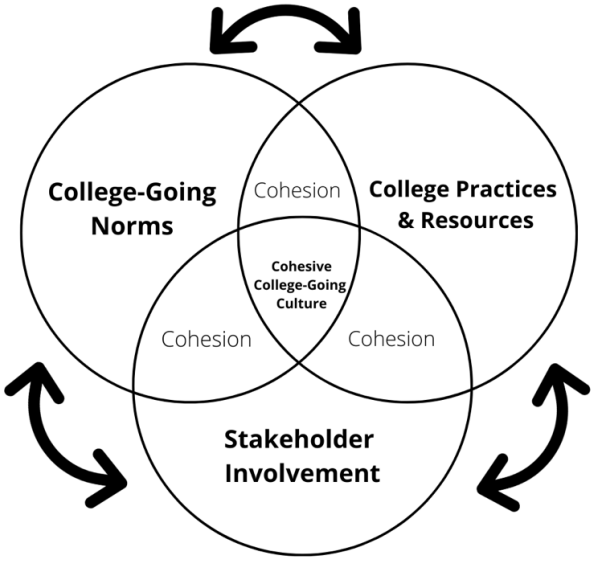
Secondly, cohesion in college-going culture can be viewed as pieces of a puzzle coming together allowing the bigger picture to be seen and in full view. Schools may have the pieces of college planning support, like the schools in this study who helped students complete FAFSA applications or provided free ACT testing, both practices tied to college readiness and accountability policies, but the puzzle is often not complete. This leaves many students without an understanding of what it takes to finish the college application process and ultimately not taking the steps to apply. Schools are responsible for helping to connect the pieces for students as the college application process is complex and multifaceted.

So how do these metaphors of cohesion as adhering things together like a glue or fitting the pieces of a puzzle together help us to further understand the ways in which cohesion strengthens college-going culture? Figure 6.1 represents how various domains should be interconnected to not only attend to the isolated parts of college-going culture,

such as schools' college practices as discussed in Chapter 4, but that brings these parts together to form a holistic, cohesive college-going culture.

FIGURE 6.1

DIAGRAM OF COHESION IN COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE




My dissertation contributes a multidimensional conceptualization of cohesion comprised of three levels: cohesion *within* a domain of college-going culture, cohesion *across two* domains, and a higher level of cohesion *across all* domains. Figure 6.1 depicts both cohesion across two categories and a higher level of cohesion in how college-going norms, practices/resources, and stakeholder involvement converge to form a cohesive college-going culture. The double-headed arrows represent cohesion as a cyclical, dynamic process of integrating each domain, especially as schools adopt new policies, resources, and initiatives to support college-going.

Garden Charter possessed a cohesive college-going culture as staff worked to intentionally and strategically connect their norms, practices/resources, and stakeholder involvement to support students with the college-going process. Gardens' leaders, teachers, and counselors collaborated often on college initiatives, could articulate the work of their colleagues in college supports, and, for the most part, had clearly defined roles in the schools' college-going culture. On the other hand, Forest Charter, who had similar college-going rates as Garden (approximately 70% enrolled in two- and four-year colleges), had a weaker college-going culture because they had cohesion in some areas and not others. Forest's cohesion lied within certain categories (e.g., in some of their college practices) and did not translate across domains towards the whole college-going culture. This lack of cohesion was shaped, in part, by the oversight of network leaders who influenced the day-to-day work of counselors in important ways as described in Chapter 5.

In the following sections, I delineate cohesion within each domain, briefly illustrating how two schools with similar college-going rates, Garden and Forest, can have different support structures and cultures around college attendance. I also situate Orchard and Woodlot within this discussion to show how the lack of cohesion within and across many areas led to a limited college-going culture. This discussion points to additional questions, implications for policy and practice, and directions for future research.

#### 6.1.1.1 Cohesion in College-Going Norms

To have cohesion in norms, there must be school-wide expectations for students attending college. First, adults must be in alignment regarding their college attendance goals and in how they communicate those goals to students. Moreover, adults and students must be in one accord in terms of college expectations. An environment where adults expect students to go to college, but most students do not believe that they are college material represents a lack of cohesion in college-going norms. At the same time, cohesion in college-going norms does not mean that everyone has exactly the same beliefs about college attendance or that all students in a school are going to college, but that everyone works toward the goal of making college accessible and a viable option for students, with adults cultivating and supporting students' college aspirations. To illustrate, Garden's leaders, teachers, and counselors generally held school-wide expectations for college attendance among their students. Although they did not believe that their students needed to attend college to be successful, they presented college as a viable option, and they were in alignment with their vision and mission of preparing students for postsecondary success. Alternatively, Orchards' and Woodlots' staff members did not express school-wide expectations that students go to college and therefore lacked cohesion in college-going norms. The belief was that higher-achieving students were college bound. Lower achieving students, which often included undocumented students and English Language Learners (ELLs), were not widely viewed as aspiring or planning to attend college because of academic challenges and the barriers they would face in the application process.

6.1.1.2 Cohesion in College Practices and Resources

Following from cohesion in college-going norms, there must be cohesion in the practices that schools engage in to support students' college transitions. School staff must first be in one accord about college as a goal. Then, school leaders, counselors, and teachers must think strategically about how to offer practices and resources that align with this goal. In this study, I categorized schools' college practices in three main categories: academic preparation, information and exposure to college, and concrete support with the college application process (See Table 4.1 for a summary of case study schools' college practices).

All four schools provided numerous practices geared towards academic preparation, resources that offered information, and some opportunities for exposure to college experiences. However, there was less of a focus in Forest, Orchard, and Woodlot on concrete support with the college application process, except for assistance with FAFSA applications, which was tied to gaining school performance points. Garden, on the other hand, provided the most opportunities to students in terms of individualized assistance with college applications through College Application Day and an opportunity for students to follow-up with counselors or teachers for further help, if needed. However, all schools heavily relied on student-initiated contact with staff for assistance.

Accordingly, schools must not only provide college-going practices/resources but be strategic in connecting the various practices and make resources accessible school wide. As discussed in Chapter 4, cohesion in practices means that there is accessibility *and* availability of a wide range of practices. It is not enough to have numerous practices. State policy tends to focus on providing more resources without considering schools'

context and how that shapes the accessibility of resources. When practices are made available *and* accessible, schools communicate to students that college attendance is a school-wide goal and not just reserved for a select group of students. The relationship between availability and accessibility explains how norms and practices reinforce and are in relationship with each other.

Another component of cohesion in practices is logical sequencing of practices so students can understand and progress through the steps towards college application. Garden provided the clearest case of this when John, an assistant principal, stated that they first focused on visuals related to college through door decorations displaying staff members' colleges. Then they progressed to the college fair, and then to College Application Day, etc. This sequencing of events was not haphazard, but part of leaders' plan to connect their college practices for students, guiding them ultimately towards application and enrollment.

#### 6.1.1.3 Cohesion in Stakeholder Involvement

Cohesion within the domain of stakeholder involvement requires that school leaders and staff first recognize that all staff members within a school play a key role in building a school's college-going culture (Corwin and Tierney 2007; McClafferty et al. 2002). Thus, stakeholders within a school such as teachers and counselors must have clearly defined roles in college support. Teachers having a formalized role was not the case at Forest, Orchard, and Woodlot, and only partially the case in Garden. I found that teachers were least likely to know how to support students with college outside of teaching their courses and helping students to pass standardized tests. At Garden, teachers were involved in College Application Day, and they would support students formally

with college essays as part of their English courses and informally with college applications, scholarships, and letters of recommendation due to the strong relationships in the school. But, outside of those efforts, no formal role was mentioned.

In total, cohesion within each category of college-going culture or across two categories does not necessarily translate to a cohesive college-going culture if all domains are not working together to provide an infrastructure for college-going support. Schools must have school-wide college norms that intersect with accessible college practices in an environment where all stakeholders are responsible for supporting students with college and have clearly defined roles in doing so. And schools exist within broader district-level and state contexts which influence their resource and opportunity structures and the way schools can establish cohesion within their college-going cultures. Thus, in the following section I discuss the role of context in college-going culture.

### 6.1.2 How the Intersection and Interaction of State, District, and School Contexts Influenced College-Going Culture

Cohesion within and among the three domains of college-going culture (or the lack thereof) helps us to understand *how* the contexts in which the case study schools were embedded shaped their college-going cultures. Policies and practices relating to college readiness and accountability, test-based accountability, and school-based autonomy and various contexts collectively determining school structures and resources provided explanations for the role of context in college-going culture.

In the last decade, we have seen significant shifts in the emphasis on college attendance at the K-12 educational level. States have changed their accountability

systems to include college indicators. Districts have enacted college readiness measures by requiring schools to track and report various practices like FAFSA completion. College accountability is part of a larger system to hold schools accountable for student achievement and outcomes and puts pressure on schools to not only increase test scores but increase postsecondary outcomes, especially the number of students who enroll in college. To accomplish this, schools must normalize college attendance through developing students' college aspirations, relaying messaging around the value and importance of college, providing numerous resources to support the college-going process, and providing individualized college support with concrete aspects of college search and application process, all elements of a college-going culture.

However, my research has found that federal and state college readiness and accountability policies have not led to the establishment of college-going cultures but constrains schools in their ability to create a college-going culture and narrows school practices to those giving the "biggest bang for their buck" in terms of SPS points, as described by the principal of Forest. Creating a college-going culture requires a shift in schools' priorities and practices writ large to provide the support that is needed, but this shift must be in alignment with the external entities that have bearing on how schools implement such policies. I also found that college accountability conflicted with test-based accountability (Welton and Williams 2015) as standardized test scores comprised a significant portion of schools' performance scores and tended to get more time and attention from teachers and counselors.

I found that college accountability indicators put pressure on case study school leaders and staff to engage in *some* college practices that were directly measured (and

perhaps attainable) like FAFSA completion. Most interviews that discussed college practices and counselor support discussed FAFSA completion as a primary focus of a senior counselor's job. As a result, schools did not engage in other practices that may not have been attainable yet like TOPS applications, which can be done in lieu of completing FAFSA applications according to state policy. Across all four schools, most students did not make the ACT score to qualify for TOPS, so the lower hanging fruit was FAFSA applications. School counselors also focused less on individualized college counseling due to resource and time constraints, often citing navigating expectations from school and district leaders (role conflict) and paperwork tied to test-based accountability as the reasons. Furthermore, school counselors had the most negative perceptions of accountability systems compared to teachers and leaders and felt that their work was constrained by the reporting requirements of test-based and college accountability systems.

In this study, school-based autonomy from district and/or network oversight intersected with school type and played a key role in college-going culture. My research found that greater autonomy intersected with stronger college-going culture at Garden, a non-network charter school, while network oversight at Forest Charter and the district's oversight of Orchard and Woodlot, TPSs, dictated many of the college practices these schools focused on. Aligning with anecdotal discussions of charter schools having a greater emphasis on college attendance, the charter schools in this study indeed focused on college attendance more than the TPSs in this study. They also had higher college attendance rates and stronger college-going cultures. I do not claim a causal relationship among school type and college attendance, but I do call for more qualitative and

quantitative research to explore this relationship. Furthermore, while school-based autonomy was not a main focus of my study, examining differences in college-going culture among charter and traditional public schools raised additional questions about the role of school governance in postsecondary outcomes. Future research should explore this relationship.

Throughout the writing of this dissertation, I kept asking myself what hindered the establishment of a stronger college-going culture among certain schools in my study? In analyzing participant responses, I kept returning to the complex interplay among test-based accountability, college accountability policies, and challenges tied to expectations at multiple levels of the educational system filtering down to schools.

## 6.2 Implications for Educational Policy and Practice

So, what are the implications of this research for educational policy and practice? Specifically, what are the implications of a lack of cohesion in college-going culture and across contexts 1) for establishing a college-going culture for first-generation and minoritized students from low-income families who look to their high schools for much of their college-going support and 2) for counselors' college-related work and other roles and responsibilities? Finally, how do we develop cohesion across contexts to support cohesion in schools' college-going cultures? I address these questions in the sections that follow.

### 6.2.1 Implications for Establishing a Strong College-Going Culture for Underrepresented Students

As argued throughout this chapter, a strong college-going culture requires cohesion. In a school that lacks cohesion, students will not understand the multifaceted college application process nor receive the necessary support and guidance. This limits access to college among students who may already struggle to pursue postsecondary education. Roderick and colleagues (2008; 2011) and the Consortium on Chicago School Research laid the foundation for a positive relationship between college attendance and college-going culture. My study built upon this important work to reconceptualize college-going culture by highlighting the importance of cohesion, namely intentionality, accessibility, and alignment among college practices, resources, and adults' guidance.

Similarly, a lack of cohesion across contexts hinders establishment of a college-going culture in that schools, especially those with lower school performance scores or ratings, focus on what is directly measured and tied to high-stakes accountability. The attention is not on establishing a system of college support where all stakeholders play a role. For instance, prioritizing "bubble kids" who are on the "threshold" for scoring at certain levels on standardized tests is harmful and perpetuates inequality (Booher-Jennings 2005) and access to college support. Likewise, prioritizing students perceived as "college material" versus those who are not also hinders access to college (Achinstein et al. 2015; Nienhusser and Ives 2020; Oakes 2003).

On the other hand, when cohesion *is* present, students receive messages that college is for them (Noll 2021) coupled with access to information, resources and concrete support. Furthermore, in alignment with prior conceptualizations of college-

going culture, college planning support is thoughtful, intentional, and ongoing starting in 9th grade and progressing through 12th grade and, in some ways, beyond that (McKillip et al. 2013).

So, what is needed to bring cohesion to college-going culture? It starts with school leaders and staff engaging in strategic planning (Corwin and Tierney 2007), considering how they can address SPS goals *and* develop a supportive, cohesive college-going culture? Due to the various contexts impacting college-going culture, communication and development of these plans must also be informed by people from multiple levels of the system (states, districts, networks, schools). This could look like meetings that include stakeholders from each level like principals, counselors, district leaders, and state leaders. Schools need resources and accountability measures that support school-wide strategic planning so this would have to be prioritized, first, at state and district levels and operate in collaboration with school staff.

### 6.2.2 Implications for Counselors' Work

My research not only has implications for establishing a school-wide college-going culture, it also has consequences for individuals who lead college planning efforts in schools, specifically counselors. Across all four schools, participants named counselors as primarily responsible for providing students with college-related guidance and support. Participants also described the challenges counselors faced in their work (e.g., large caseloads, no time for individualized college counseling, and multiple roles and responsibilities). As a result of these challenges, counselors felt overworked, misunderstood, burned out, stressed, undervalued, and underappreciated. Counselors

highlighted the mounting paperwork that dominated their work and the lack of direct student support they could provide. These findings are worth the attention of policymakers and district leaders who also view counselors as primarily responsible for providing college support. Counselors need structures in place to protect their time and outlets that elevate their voices in school decision-making, especially in decisions that directly affect their workload and available resources. For instance, changes to the counseling department structure or, as in the case of Forest, getting rid of a department secretary and college counselor hindered effective college support. Counselors' ability to provide individualized college counseling and other college support is dependent upon the time and resources they have at their disposal.

As stated above, my research suggests that college readiness policies focused on providing additional school-based resources do not necessarily translate into stronger college-going cultures. And a strong college-going culture is associated with students taking the steps to apply and enroll into college (Roderick et al. 2011). Focusing more on accessibility of college practices in addition to availability in conjunction with understanding the ways in which contextual factors shape policy implementation is key. Policymakers should work to consider the role various contexts play and the individuals affected as college readiness and accountability policies are implemented in various types of public schools serving diverse school populations.

## 6.3 Directions for Future Research

Future research should employ different methodological approaches, engage other theoretical and conceptual perspectives, and further examine contextual factors shaping college-going culture.

Future research should incorporate students' perspectives alongside adults to understand how a cohesive college-going culture is experienced by students. It is one thing to cultivate a college-going culture *for* students, and it is another to be on the receiving end. Thus, future research should focus on interviews with students and ethnographic observation in school environments. In addition, longitudinal studies of college-going culture would give insight into the long-term influences of enacting college-going culture as schools serve students who aspire to attend college and those who do not.

Quantitative research would also be beneficial to moving this body of work forward. A study of the effects of the variation in college-going culture on college outcomes could help us to understand the types of school contexts that positively impact college enrollment and persistence. Furthermore, an analysis of survey data such as the High School Longitudinal Study 2009 could provide insight into school context and college-going culture in a nationally representative sample of high school students across the United States.

In addition to examining these dynamics using other qualitative and quantitative methods, future research would benefit from applying additional conceptual and theoretical tools like concepts from organizational theory, critical perspectives, and broader school culture literature. Organizational concepts such as institutional logics

would contribute an understanding of the ways in which symbolic valuation of college attendance among school personnel is or is not manifested in schools' behaviors and practices. Organizational brokering (Small 2009) is another lens that could provide insight into the ways in which high schools broker (or do not broker) access to college opportunities and resources (Duncheon and Relles 2018).

Critical perspectives on college-going culture like critical race theory or cultural relevance would provide insight into broader structures of inequality, address questions of the purpose of schooling, and provide strengths-based approaches to understanding students' college choices. It would also question how establishing a college-going culture may ostracize students who may not desire to pursue postsecondary education or those who struggle to access college like the undocumented students attending Woodlot and Orchard. We need more research to understand the barriers undocumented students face in accessing college.

There has been some research on culturally relevant or responsive college-going culture. Knight-Manuel et al. 2019 defined a

> culturally relevant, schoolwide, college-going culture as: recogniz[ing] the importance of including students' cultural backgrounds and references in all aspects of learning, particularly as related to preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in college, or what we refer to throughout this text as engaging in the college-going processes (Knight and Marciano 2013:37).

This definition lacks attention to state and district contextual factors impacting college-going culture like college accountability.

Noll's (2021) work considers college accountability and contributes a definition of cultural congruence stating,

> Cultural congruence integrates Bourdieun theory and cultural strengths frameworks to understand how students are differently equipped with dominant and nondominant resources to act effectively in particular contexts, with critical attention to institutional standards (Lareau and Weininger 2003; Yosso 2005). My findings contribute further evidence that even in schools with caring and committed staff, college-going cultures are limited in their ability to advantage nondominant students by transmitting dominant cultural resources (e.g., Achinstein et al. 2015; Cipollone and Stich 2017:25).

Adding to this emerging body of research would center the agency of students in the college-going process and take a strengths-based approach to the college choices of first-generation, minoritized, low-income, and undocumented students.

Although my research suggests that broader school culture shapes college-going culture, future research should explicitly study this relationship. Research on college-going culture generally does not draw a connection between schools' college-going culture and elements of broader school culture. We know very little about the ways in which broader school culture influences schools' ability to support students' school wide through the college process. Some scholars have begun to examine the intersection of indicators of school climate and college-going culture (e.g., Knight and Duncheon 2020) and instructional interactions and college-going culture (e.g., Athanases et al. 2016), but this research is limited.

Finally, research should further examine contextual factors shaping college-going culture. For instance, the intersection of school accountability and college-going culture is an important area needing further investigation. With federal and state K-12 education policies holding schools accountable for postsecondary outcomes, we need to understand how these policies are shaping school practices and students' long-term trajectories. In addition, future research should examine the intersection of market-based educational systems and college-going culture and whether/how families high school choices are

associated with schools' ability to provide academic college preparation and to support students through the college application process. Understanding the mechanisms through which contextual factors external to schools shape what happens in schools can contribute to more discussions on how to enhance cohesion across educational contexts to provide all students with the educational experiences they need and deserve.

# APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COUNSELORS

In this study I am examining the culture and climate around college attendance among high schools. I want to learn about school norms, strategies, and practices that support college attendance at your school.

**Individual Background**

1. Please describe your professional position and roles/responsibilities at this school. How many years have you been a counselor?
2. Educational background: where they went to college? Highest degree level attained? [If the counselor was a teacher, ask] Traditionally certified or alternatively certified?

**School Context** [mission, core values, vision of school leadership]

3. What would you tell a parent about this school who is thinking about sending their child here? [to get at the mission/core values of the school]

   For TPS: How would you describe the mission or the core values of this school [to a family who plans to send their child to the school next school year]?
4. What is important to the people who work in this school?
5. What is important to the principal (or leaders) of this school? What do you think they are trying to accomplish? [to get at the vision of school leadership]

**Perceptions of College Culture & Importance of College Attendance**

6. What are the expectations in this school around college attendance? [to get at norms relating to college-going culture]
   a. If I asked students the expectations in this school around college attendance, what do you think they would say?
   b. Is it the expectation among staff that all students go to college? What are your thoughts on this?
7. In what ways do you think college attendance can benefit (or not benefit) students in the future?
8. What **barriers** exist for students in attending college? What are the main reasons why students choose not to go to college?
9. Is there pressure at this school for students to go to college? Why/why not?
10. Do you think this school successfully prepares students for college?
11. At this school, do you think students' expectations about their college choices and college plans are realistic? Do students who aspire to attend 4-year colleges typically go to 4-year colleges and stay? Do students go to colleges of their choice?

**College-Related Practices**

12. What does this school do to provide student support with college attendance? When/Why were those practices implemented? For example, who decided that it was important for students to take Dual Enrollment courses?
    a. Academic practices? (e.g., dual enrollment?)
    b. Practical assistance with college enrollment?
        i. Assistance with college applications?
        ii. FAFSA completion?
        iii. College search?
    c. One-with-one support with college planning from faculty & staff?
13. Whose responsibility is it to assist students with college planning?
    a. Do you think your views on this are shared among other teachers and leaders in the school? Why? Why not?
14. The **state accountability system** has changed in recent years to capture measures of college and career readiness (e.g., requiring ACT and FAFSA completion). How does the accountability system shape college-related practices as this school? How have these requirements impacted what you are doing in your school?

**Support from Counselors**

15. How is the counseling department structured? Why is the counseling department structured in this way? Who decided on this structure and why?
    a. How many counselors are on staff at this school? [student-counselor ratio]
    b. What are the roles/responsibilities of counselors?
    c. Approximately how much of a counselor's time is devoted to college counseling?
        i. What is the nature of student-counselor interactions about college-related topics? In other words, what types of things do students ask questions about? What types of things are discussed? Do students schedule meetings with the counselor? Is that the expectation? Do counselors have regularly scheduled meetings with students? Why were certain practices implemented?
        ii. How do you keep track of who completed FAFSA? Do you keep track of who completes college applications?
16. How do counselors support students with future plans? How often do students discuss future plans with counselors?
17. How do counselors support college planning?

   a. In what ways do counselors provide individual, one-with-one support for students in pursuing their college plans?
   b. Describe a time when you provided one-with-one college support to a student or counseled a student about college.

18. Do you or other school staff keep track of how many students go on to college from year to year? Do you maintain data on alumni?

**Resources and Opportunity Structure**

19. What college-related opportunities are available to assist students with college planning and preparation? Opportunities that provide exposure to college and offer information about college requirements, scholarships, deadlines, etc.?
20. What school resources exist at the school for college attendance (planning, preparation)?
    a. Course advisement? Financial aid information or resources to help students understand college costs?
21. Are there any resources outside of the school that students can access to support college planning? And who decides which resources are available? How are these decisions made? [community resources and support]
22. Are there any college programs that students can participate in (e.g., Gear Up, Upward Bound, etc.)?

**School Environment [observation]** Now we will discuss the school environment if I were to visit your school.

23. Are there **signs/posters around the school** publicizing college-related information (e.g., application deadlines, scholarships, FAFSA information, ACT information)? Where is this information posted?
24. **College banners** around the school? Where?
25. **College pamphlets** or promotional materials? Where are those kept?
26. Are there any **assemblies/group events** that occur at the school focused on college? Had any events (or planned to have) any events this year?
27. Where is the counseling office located?

**Family Support & Involvement**

28. How are families notified about college opportunities? How often?
29. How are families involved in college-related activities at this school?
30. What is the expectation of parents in terms of supporting their children to attend college?

**Support from Teachers**

31. How would you describe student-teacher relationships at this school?
32. In what ways do teachers assist students with college planning? Why do you think they do those things?
33. Do teachers feel it is part of their job to assist with college preparation and planning? Why/why not?

**Curriculum**

34. In what ways does the curriculum focus on preparing students for college? How are those decisions made? Provide specific examples.

**Other**

35. [demographics] Please state your race, gender, and age or age range, if you would like.
36. Where are you from?
37. Are you a first-generation college student?
38. Do you have any final thoughts or comments that you would like to share with me?
39. Ask if they have any college-related promotional materials to share?

# APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LEADERS

In this study I am examining the culture and climate around college attendance among high schools. I want to learn about school norms, strategies, and practices that support college attendance at your school.

**Individual Background**

1. Please describe your professional position and roles/responsibilities at this school.
2. Educational background: where did you go to college? Highest degree level attained? Traditionally certified or alternatively certified?

**School Context** [mission, core values, vision of school leadership]

3. What would you tell someone about this school who is thinking about sending their child here? [to get at the mission/core values of the school]

   For TPS: How would you describe the mission or the core values of this school [to a family who plans to send their child to the school next school year]?
4. What is important to the people who work in this school?
5. What is important to you as the principal (or to the leadership team) of this school? [to get at the vision of school leadership]

**Perceptions of College-Going Culture & Importance of College Attendance**

6. What are the expectations in this school around college attendance? [to get at culture around college attendance]
   a. If I asked students the expectations in this school around college attendance, what do you think they would say?
   b. Is it the expectation among staff that all students go to college? What are your thoughts on this?
7. In what ways do you think college attendance can benefit students in the future?
8. In what ways do students not benefit from going to college? In what ways do you think college attendance **does not** benefit students in the future?
9. What **barriers** exist for students in attending college? What are the main reasons why students choose not to go to college?
10. Is there pressure at this school for students to go to college? Why/why not?
11. Do you think this school successfully prepares students for college?

12. At this school, do you think students' expectations about their college choices and college plans are realistic? Do students who aspire to attend 4-year colleges typically go to 4-year colleges and stay? Do students go to colleges of their choice?

**College-related Practices**

13. What does this school do to provide student's support with college attendance? When/Why were those practices implemented? For example, who decided that it was important for students to take dual enrollment courses?
    a. Academic practices? (e.g., dual enrollment?)
    b. Practical assistance with college enrollment?
        i. Assistance with college applications?
        ii. FAFSA completion?
        iii. College search?
    c. One-with-one support with college planning from faculty & staff?
14. Whose responsibility is it to assist students with college planning?
    a. Do you think your views on this are shared among other teachers and leaders in the school? Why? Why not?
15. The **state accountability system** has changed in recent years to capture measures of college and career readiness (e.g., requiring ACT and FAFSA completion). How does the accountability system shape college-related practices as this school? How have these requirements impacted what you are doing in your school?
16. What is the focus right now? How have you had to adjust your practices during this current climate? Are you doing anything now to assist students with college planning?

**Support from Counselors**

17. How is the counseling department structured? Why is the counseling department structured in this way? Who decided on this structure and why?
    a. How many counselors are on staff at this school? [student-counselor ratio]
    b. What are the roles/responsibilities of counselors?
    c. Approximately how much of a counselor's time is devoted to college counseling?
        i. What is the nature of student-counselor interactions about college-related topics? In other words, what types of things do students ask questions about? What types of things are discussed? Do students schedule meetings with the counselor? Is that the expectation? Or do

counselors have regularly scheduled meetings with students? Why were certain things implemented?

18. How do counselors support students with future plans? Do students discuss future plans with counselors? How often do counselors meet with students one-with-one?
19. How do counselors support college planning?
    a. In what ways do counselors provide individual, one-with-one support for students in pursuing their college plans?
20. Do you or other school staff keep track of how many students go on to college from year to year? Do you maintain data on alumni?

**School Environment [observation]** Now we will discuss the school environment if I were to visit your school.

21. Are there **signs/posters around the school** publicizing college-related information (e.g., application deadlines, scholarships, FAFSA information, ACT information)? Where is this information posted?
22. **College banners** around the school? Where?
23. **College pamphlets** or promotional materials? Where are those kept?
24. Are there any **assemblies/group events** that occur at the school focused on college? Had any events (or planned to have) any events this year?
25. Where is the counseling office located?

**Resources and Opportunity Structure**

26. What college-related opportunities are available to assist students with college planning and preparation? Opportunities that provide exposure and offer information?
27. What school resources exist at the school for college attendance (planning and preparation)?
    a. Course advisement?
28. Are there any resources outside of the school that students can access to support college planning? And who decides which resources are available? How are these decisions made? [community resources and support]

**Support from Teachers**

29. How would you describe student-teacher relationships at this school?
30. What is the role of teachers in students' college planning? In what ways do teachers assist students with college planning? Why do you think they do those things?
31. Do teachers feel it is part of their job to assist with college preparation and planning? Why/why not?

**Family Support & Involvement**

32. How are families notified about college opportunities? How often?
33. How are families involved in college-related activities at this school?
34. What is the expectation of parents in terms of supporting their children to attend college?

**Curriculum**

35. In what ways does the curriculum focus on preparing students for college? How are those decisions made? Provide specific examples.

**Other**

36. [demographics] Please state your race, gender, and age or age range, if you would like.
37. Where are you from?
38. Are you a first-generation college student?
39. Do you have any final thoughts or comments that you would like to share with me?
40. Ask if they have any college-related promotional materials to share?

# APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR TEACHERS

In this study I am examining the culture and climate around college attendance among high schools. I want to learn about school norms, strategies, and practices that support college attendance at your school.

**Individual Background**

1. Please describe your professional position and roles/responsibilities at this school.
2. Educational background: where did you go to college? Highest degree level attained? Traditionally certified or alternatively certified?

**School Context** [mission, core values, vision of school leadership]

3. What would you tell someone about this school who is thinking about sending their child here? [to get at the mission/core values of the school]
4. What is important to the people who work in this school?
5. What is important to the principal (or leaders) of this school? What do you think they are trying to accomplish? [to get at the vision of school leadership]

**Perceptions of College Culture & Importance of College Attendance**

6. What are the expectations in this school around college attendance? [to get at culture around college attendance]
    a. If I asked students the expectations in this school around college attendance, what do you think they would say?
    b. Is it the expectation among staff that all students go to college? What are your thoughts on this?
7. In what ways do you think college attendance can benefit students in the future?
8. In what ways do students not benefit from going to college? In what ways do you think college attendance **does not** benefit students in the future?
9. What **barriers** exist for students in attending college? What are some of the main reasons students choose not to go to college?
10. Is there pressure at this school for students to go to college? Why/why not?
11. Do you think this school successfully prepares students for college?
12. At this school, do you think students' expectations about their college choices and college plans are realistic? Do students who aspire to attend 4-year colleges typically go to 4-year colleges and stay? Do students go to colleges of their choice?

**College-Related Practices**

13. What does this school do to provide students support with college attendance? When/Why were those practices implemented? For example, who decided that it was important for students to take dual enrollment courses?
    a. Academic practices? (e.g., dual enrollment?)
    b. Practical assistance with college enrollment?
        i. Assistance with college applications?
        ii. FAFSA completion?
        iii. College search?
    c. One-on-one support with college planning from faculty & staff?
14. Whose responsibility is it to assist students with college planning?
    a. Do you think your views on this are shared among other teachers and leaders in the school? Why? Why not?

**Support from Teachers**

15. How would you describe student-teacher relationships at this school?
16. In what ways do teachers assist students with college planning? Why do you think they do those things?
    a. Do teachers feel it is part of their job to assist with college preparation and planning? Why/why not?
17. Do students come to you for specific support with college?

**Curriculum**

18. In what ways does the curriculum focus on preparing students for college? How are those decisions made?
    a. Provide specific examples.

**Support from Counselors**

19. How do counselors support students with future plans? Do students discuss future plans with counselors?
20. How do counselors support college planning?
    a. In what ways do counselors provide individual, one-on-one support for students in pursuing their college plans?

**Resources and Opportunity Structure**

21. Do you think students understand the steps to apply and enroll into college? Why/why not?
22. What college-related opportunities are available to assist students with college planning and preparation? Opportunities that provide exposure and offer information?
23. What school resources exist at the school for college attendance (planning and preparation)?
    a. Course advisement?
24. Are there any resources outside of the school that students can access to support college planning? And who decides which resources are available? How are these decisions made? [community resources and support]

**School Environment [observation]** Now we will discuss the school environment if I were to visit your school.

25. Are there **signs/posters around the school** publicizing college-related information (e.g., application deadlines, scholarships, FAFSA information, ACT information)? Where is this information posted?
26. **College banners** around the school? Where?
27. **College pamphlets** or promotional materials? Where are those kept?
28. Are there any **assemblies/group events** that occur at the school focused on college? Had any events (or planned to have) any events this year?

**Family Support & Involvement**

29. How are families notified about college opportunities? How often?
30. How are families involved in college-related activities at this school?
31. What is the expectation of parents in terms of supporting their children to attend college?

**Other**

32. [demographics] Please state your race, gender, and age or age range, if you would like.
33. Where are you from?
34. Are you a first-generation college student?
35. Do you have any final thoughts or comments that you would like to share with me?
36. Ask if they have any college-related promotional materials to share?

# APPENDIX D: CASE PROFILE TEMPLATE

[School Pseudonym]
Case Write-Up Template

**Individual backgrounds of interviewees: n=___**

| **Name on cleaned transcript (Teacher 1, etc.)** ***Don't use real names in this document.*** | **Description of interviewees (subject taught, years teaching, certification, where from? First-gen status? etc.)** |
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1. **School Context** [mission, core values, vision of school leadership]
    a. Mission/core values
    b. Vision of school leadership
    c. Leader roles/responsibilities
    d. Vision/mission of district/CMO leadership
2. **Choice**
3. **State accountability system (positive and negative perceptions)**
4. **Autonomy (school-based)**
5. **Innovation**
6. **College persistence**
7. **Perceptions of College-Going Culture**
    ***a. Expectations in the school around college attendance***
        *i. Pressure in attending college?*
    ***b. Barriers to college attendance:***
    ***c. Beliefs around school preparing students for college***
    ***d. Beliefs around students expectations being realistic***

   e. ***Beliefs around whose responsible for assisting students with college planning***
8. **Importance of College Attendance**
   a. ***Personal beliefs about the importance of college attendance:***
      i. *Advantages of college attendance:*
      ii. *Disadvantages of college attendance:*
9. **College-related Practices**
   a. ***College practices to expose students to information***
   b. ***Practical assistance with college planning*** *(e.g., assistance with FAFSA, college search, applications, scholarships)*
   c. ***Academic practices*** *(e.g., AP, dual enrollment)*
10. **Resources and opportunity structure**
   a. ***Formal supports***
      i. *School-community partnerships geared towards college attendance: college programs [ex., Upward Bound, NACAC?? Partnerships, LOSFA, etc.]*
      ii. *In-school supports/programs*
   b. ***Informal supports***
      i. *College advising from non-counseling staff*

11. **Support from Counselors**
   a. ***One-on-one college related support:***
   b. ***Whole group assemblies:***
   c. ***Structure of counseling department*** *(e.g., counselor roles/responsibilities, workload, time devoted to college counseling)**:***
   d. ***Support from counselors with future planning:***
   e. ***Tracking graduates***
      i. ***maintain data on alumni or contact with alumni***
      ii. ***any discussion of alumni experiences in college***
      iii. ***any discussion of alumni views of HS prepared them for college***
   f. ***Support with future planning***
12. **Support from Teachers**
   a. ***Teacher actual roles/responsibilities***
   b. ***Student-teacher relationships***
   c. ***Teacher assistance with college planning***
   d. ***Teacher perceptions of responsibility for assistance with college planning***
   e. ***Discussion of alumni postsecondary experiences***
13. **Family Support & Involvement**
   a. ***Communication with families about college opportunities*** *(how info is communicated, what is communicated)*
   b. ***Family support with college (i.e., How are families supporting their students with college?)***
14. **Curriculum/courses** *(AP, dual enrollment, or any discussion of how curriculum/courses prepare for college)*

15. **School Environment [from observation or interviews or website/media data collection]**
16. **Future planning** *(Jumpstart, TOPS, future career)*
17. **Themes around race**
18. **ESL** *(college supports, other supports)*
19. **COVID & college access**
20. **Other [anything not discussed in the above sections like SPED/504 accommodations]**

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