


Spring 5-14-2021

## Impacts of Concurrent Enrollment Offerings on Minnesota High School Programming: A Qualitative Exploration of High School Administrator Perceptions.

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Impacts of Concurrent Enrollment Offerings on Minnesota High School Programming:

A Qualitative Exploration of High School Administrator Perceptions.

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A Dissertation Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF EDUCATION**

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May 2021



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### **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to all the professionals in both P-12 and higher education who spend their hours working for the betterment of all of children; for those who view education as the greatest equalizer and provider of opportunity our world as ever known. May your work continue to grow, nurture, and inspire those around you.

Secondly, I would like to thank my family: Nick, Zoe and Sam for your support and encouragement throughout this journey. Without your understanding and at times, help, I would still be deciding if I should sign up for this program.

Finally, I need to say thank you to my professional family: Marcius, Ginger, Anne, Mike and MSUM Cohort 2 members for your guidance, support, and unwavering faith. You have been the wind in my sails and your words of support have never been far from my mind. Thank you.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Dr. Michael Coquyt, Dr. Boyd Bradbury and Dr. Ximena Suarez-Sousa for the opportunity to study at MSUM for this Doctoral program and for your guidance, support, and amazing teaching. I know that I am a better scholar from your ministrations, better leader from your examples, and better professional from your confidence in my abilities. Thank you.

I would like to thank my committee members for their thoughtful feedback and outside observations of a program that can be as nuanced as our students. I would also like to thank the participants of this study for their candid conversations and allowing me to learn from their experiences.

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### **Abstract**

Concurrent enrollment plays an increasingly important role in dual credit program options throughout Minnesota public schools. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to discern any shared phenomenon among public high school administrators in schools where concurrent enrollment is offered. This dissertation was framed by two research questions: 1) Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses. 2) From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

A qualitative, constructivist, phenomenological study was conducted using semi-structured interviews across a mix of seven rural and urban Minnesota school districts. The participants included seven administrators with job titles ranging from Counselor to District Superintendent. The study's theoretical framework was grounded in Perna & Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success (2008), which incorporates schools as a component of the framework's integral contextual layers through which students integrate and navigate. This model assists in providing a visual framework of the ingredients necessary for student success during and after, high school (Taylor, 2015). The findings yielded that participants perceived: a) concurrent enrollment provides students with access and opportunity to college-level rigorous coursework and that exposure of that level of rigorous coursework better prepares a student for success after high school, regardless if college credit is earned while taking the course, b) that offering concurrent enrollment was necessary to the financial viability of the school, and c) there is a direct impact on accreditation and staffing resources when offering concurrent enrollment.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Background of the Study**

Across the nation, high school students have been granted the opportunity to experience college coursework during, most commonly, their junior or senior year. This opportunity allows the student to earn credit that is counted at both the high school and college level. This is commonly known as “dual credit” or “dual enrollment” programming. Dual credit/enrollment courses are most commonly known in high schools throughout the United States as AP, International Baccalaureate (IB), Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), or concurrent enrollment. One of the fastest growing dual credit/enrollment programs across the United States is concurrent enrollment. This program is defined by the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment (NACEP) as “...a subset of dual enrollment courses taught by college-approved high school teachers...bringing college courses to students in urban, suburban, and rural high schools and secondary career centers. It differs from other models of dual enrollment because high school instructors teach the college courses.” (NACEP, 2020, p. 1). According to Cowan and Goldhaber (2015), over two million students annually participate in dual credit/enrollment programs. Giani, Alexander, and Reyes (2014), state dual enrollment is often touted as an opportunity for students to get a head start on a college degree, help student prepare for the rigors of the college classroom, and save money on tuition. Most often, high school students do not pay for the college tuition for dual enrollment programs. Funding often comes from state legislatures or from the school districts.

There is a growing body of research, primarily quantitative in nature, surrounding the impact dual enrollment participation has on the high school student, most commonly explored at a state-specific level. A review of literature on this topic broadly illustrates that there is an

overall positive correlation between participation in concurrent enrollment programming versus no participation (Blankenberger, Lichtenberger, and Witt, 2017; Grubb, Scott, and Good, 2017). However, the literature is divided on its impact state-by-state because "...models vary by region and state, so it is difficult to paint a clear overall picture..." (Tinberg, H., and Nadeau, J., 2011, p.708). Further, Taylor (2015) states "...the proportion of high school students taking college courses is increasing and state and local policies are expanding, yet little is known about the effect of dual credit policies on key educational outcomes, including the effects for low-income students and students of color" ( p.355). Bruininks, Keeney, and Thorp (2010) found that in 2008, sixty percent of new entering freshman to the University of Minnesota system were bringing in some form of college credit. In Minnesota, concurrent enrollment is the one of the fastest growing dual credit program in public high schools. Concurrent enrollment has seen a 58% increase in public school student participation between fiscal year 2011-17 (MDE, 2018). While these are impressive numbers, they illustrate that with that growth comes impacts felt across the high school. Examples of these increases include: a shift in enrollment of traditional classes, such as an English class, to concurrent enrollment courses whereby student participation is based on a student meeting admission standard of the institution hosting the concurrent enrollment course. Other impacts include a shift in allocated funding to cover the costs of concurrent enrollment courses, and a change in the staff labor credentials so that a high school can meet the accreditation standards set by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment (NACEP). These impacts can affect the ways in which an administrator navigates policy and may reveal themselves as structural barriers within a school system. As stated by Chase, Down, Pazich, & Bensimon (2014), it is the role of policymakers and educational leaders to become aware of structural barriers in the educational system, in order to better understand how those

barriers may cause inequities in access and opportunities for educational programming for students.

Perhaps one of the most noticeable barriers is resource allocation needed to provide concurrent enrollment opportunities. With the standards framing concurrent enrollment programming set by both the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), high schools must ensure they have the resources within their programming to meet those standards. This can prove difficult, as was recently discovered when in 2017, HLC updated their guidelines for determining qualified faculty to include language that stipulates teachers in dual credit courses or programs meet the same level of credentials and qualifications that are required for faculty teaching regular higher education courses. For the schools partnering with MinnState institutions, this change now requires high school teachers to have an earned master's degree in the subject area they are teaching, or a minimum of 18 graduate credits in the subject field. For Minnesota, this change impact 319 school districts and 38 partner institutions of higher education, and approximately 74,059 concurrent enrollment courses (MDE, 2018).

The position of this study argues that it becomes necessary to examine the impacts of offering concurrent enrollment through a qualitative lens, searching for common phenomenon, in order to get a more holistic picture of how Minnesota public high schools are managing the pressures of offering concurrent enrollment courses. Designed from the constructivist lens and utilizing Giorgi's (1975) Phenomenological method, this study aims to discern any natural or common phenomenon experienced by high school administrators when managing concurrent enrollment programming. A phenomenological example would be concurrent enrollment causing

unintended consequences in the availability of resources or the opportunities for student to have enough flexibility to participate in a wide variety of subjects or extra-curricular programs.

Giorgi's (1975) method is an ideal choice for this research in that it allows for the phenomenon to reveal itself naturally, through interviewing others. This method also allows for the interviewer to approach the research subjects as equal, such that the framework of the research is cooperation to learn something new about a shared experience among research subjects. Finally, Giorgi's (1975) method is preferred since the aim of this research is to fill a void in the literature. Therefore, the quality of the data is emphasized (over the quantity) and the ability for this type of research to be replicated or run as an experiment is difficult. Additional information will be written about the methodology used for this research in the Research Design section later in this chapter.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Resource allocation to programs through which students navigate in their school settings is one way to examine the impact of concurrent enrollment programming across a wide field of school settings. Perna and Thomas Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success (2008) was selected as the theoretical framework for this study because the model hypothesizes that student success is based on a continuum of student engagement experiences, with student engagement occurring on four layers. These layers are the context of the internal voice of the student (layer 1), family/social context (layer 2), context of school resources available to the student (layer 3), and context of external education factors such as policy (layer 4) (*see figure 1*). Examined more deeply, the levels are described as:



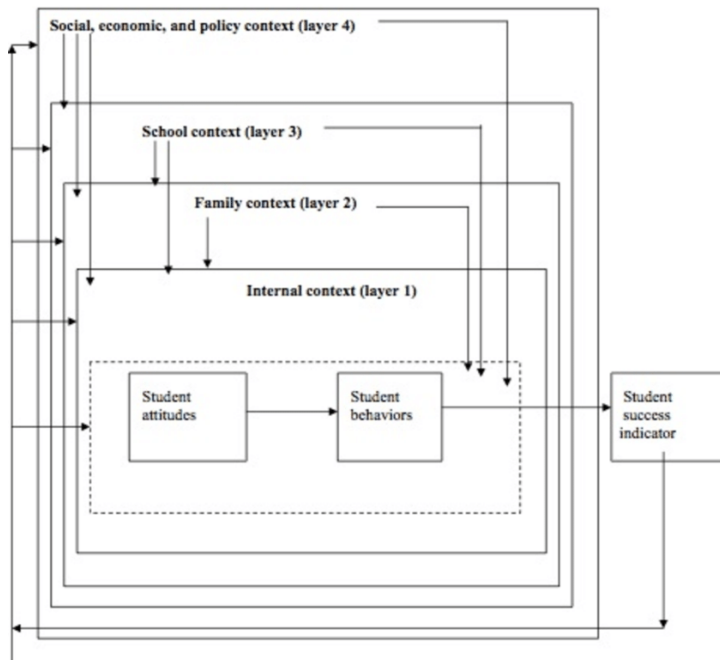
Level 1- Internal Layer. This is the student’s intrinsic nature, beliefs, attitudes, personality. Level 2- Family Context. This level reflects the factors both inside and outside of the home that may guide, or manage, a student’s experience and promotion of success.

Level 3- School Context. This level frames school resources as one measure impacting student success, by specifically “identifying and understanding the compounding effects that determine the educational resources, academic preparation, and educational orientations that subsequently determine success at the college level” (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.44).

Level 4- Social, Economic, and Policy Context.

**Figure 1**

*Perna and Thomas Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success*



For the purposes of this research, Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success is most relevant framework to use, paying close attention to Stage 3 of the theoretical framework, context of school resources. This stage "assumes the context of the school attended...influences student success...through the ways that K-12 schools...structure educational opportunities for students" (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.50). Resource allocation impacts programming and ultimately, student choice of programs. These student-based choices in turn, will affect student outcomes and success (Perna & Thomas, 2008). The foundational context of school resources as a component of student success is accounted for in the Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success as it provides the groundwork for determining the design of interview questions around high school programming and concurrent enrollment offerings, with the aim of uncovering shared phenomenological experiences among Minnesota high school administrators. The Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success also connects the aim of the researcher to employ a descriptive phenomenological study through posing the interview questions around the theme of resources and rationales of their use.

### **Statement of the Need for the Study**

Concurrent enrollment programming is rapidly growing throughout Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Education reported in 2018 that as of the 2016-2017 academic year, 31,971 students participated in some form of concurrent enrollment course. The largest demographic increase is found in students of color, whose participation from 2011-2017 has increased 184%, or from 1,781 students in FY 2011 to 5,059 in FY 2017.

Currently there is a dearth of research specifically focused on the impact concurrent enrollment programming has on high school programming at public schools in Minnesota. The significance of this research relates to the review of public policy to programming that appears to

be in the best interest of the high school student. An in-depth study and analysis of the impact of concurrent enrollment offerings on high school programming for Minnesota would begin filling a gap in the research. Examined through the lens of the administrator, reviewing shared phenomenon could assist school districts, colleges/university stakeholders and policymakers as to the individual effectiveness each unique concurrent enrollment program offers.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

Minnesota is considered a pioneer in its offering of concurrent enrollment programming. Minnesota began offering high school students the opportunity to take courses at the college campus and counting the credit for both high school and college, in 1985, as per Minnesota State Legislation, Chapter 12-H.F. No.3, Article 5, Access to Excellence, section 1 [123.3514] [Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Act]. This act paved the way for a national movement of PSEO programming. Since then, the concept has morphed from the idea of students taking classes on a college campus into a more robust and comprehensive assortment of programs designed to provide access to college credit for high school students without leaving their high school campus.

In Minnesota, dual enrollment programming is offered through several different programs. Defined by the Minnesota Department of Education as Post Secondary Enrollment Options (traditional PSEO, Early/Middle College, CTE enrollment for 10<sup>th</sup> graders), Advanced Placement (AP), Concurrent Enrollment, and International Baccalaureate (IB). Collectively, this is known as PSEO programming.

Post Secondary Enrollment Options encompasses the following programs: Traditional Post Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), where a student takes courses on the campus of a

college or university (open to juniors and seniors); Early/Middle College Program, a partnership between a college/university and a high school which allows the student to earn a college credential and high school diploma simultaneously; PSEO for 10<sup>th</sup> graders in Career and Technical Education courses (CTE). AP and IB courses are administered by both the CollegeBoard and International Baccalaureate, respectively, and are delivered within the high school classroom.

Concurrent Enrollment is a program where a college course is delivered specifically to a high school class with the college or university faculty and high school teacher work in partnership on course curriculum and delivery. The standards framing concurrent enrollment programming are set by both the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP). The HLC has jurisdiction over the criteria for faculty qualifications, both at the college level, and for high school teachers who are teaching concurrent enrollment courses. NACEP determines the standards and rigor of the specific concurrent enrollment courses in order to ensure that the courses meet the same standards as their counterparts taught with the college or university.

Recognizing the responsibility of the Department of Education to spend public funds wisely as well as to adhere to the high standard of education held within the State, it is vital to review the all PSEO programming for its effectiveness. Additionally, K-12 school districts also share in the burden of all PSEO programming, both financially and from a student success perspective. School districts are often on the hook to ensure access as well as achieving high school graduation rates. If PSEO programming is cost prohibitive (preventing access) or is found to be ineffective in college preparedness and degree attainment (thus questioning the validity/rigor of high school curriculum), therein lies an opportunity for improvement on several

different fields. Clearly, there is no simple answer within the tangled web of PSEO programming.

Concurrent enrollment programs require high schools to invest both time and local resources in order to provide concurrent enrollment courses. These attributes impact the overall programming of the high school and may even shape and frame future programming for high school students. As demonstrated by the brief literature review presented above, scant research is available regarding the impact on the school from an administrative side, particularly for Minnesota. It is important to examine concurrent enrollment offerings through the administrative lens to establish the framework of the high school landscape across Minnesota in order to determine how concurrent enrollment might be contributing to or driving change or evolution of the traditional high school class model and most importantly, to determine if concurrent enrollment programming causes any access and equity issues for students who are ineligible to participate.

Allocation of resources for concurrent enrollment is one major obstacle for schools. Currently, Minnesota public schools can be reimbursed for concurrent enrollment offerings, up to \$150/student. This funding is available through a state appropriation budget of four million dollars (MDE, 2018). While this may help schools offset the cost of offering concurrent enrollment courses, there is no research that examines the impact this appropriation has on overall high school programming. Administrators can utilize Perna and Thomas' Conceptual Model for Student Success as one tool to holistically review their resource management as a contributor to student success. The Conceptual Model for Student Success states that students are successful when they are prepared for college, can graduate college, and earn high incomes. Through a series of levels, ranging from the student's intrinsic nature to education policies, the

Conceptual Model for Student Success argues that student success cannot be tied directly to one or two key factors. Rather, it is a combination of factors that sets the stage for student success. Within schools, level 3 highlights the context of the school. This stage “assumes the context of the school attended...influences student success...through the ways that K-12 schools...structure educational opportunities for students” (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.50). Circling back to the state allocation dollars for concurrent enrollment, the allocation raises a few questions, such as, does this allocation offset the cost to the school? Is it utilized for continuing education for high school teachers? Studying the phenomenological effect of concurrent enrollment offerings on high school programming becomes key to help answer those questions.

The impacts of concurrent enrollment on public high school programming is important to me on both a professional and personal level. From my administrative role supervising the credit transfer process for undergraduate students at Minnesota State University, Mankato, I see the direct impact(s) transferring in college credit earned in high school has on students. These include assisting a student with matriculating through college faster to dealing with frustrations of credits not being suitable for specific majors.

The desired outcome of this research is to gain insight into the factors and themes that administrators believe are impacted by concurrent enrollment offerings within their schools. From a personal perspective, I have witnessed how the local high school in the school district where I reside, has changed its programming (students only attending classes at the high school three days a week while having alternative learning days online, issues with hiring qualified teachers). As a parent with two children approaching high school age, I am interested in learning more about the culture of high school programming. As a scholar, I wonder if concurrent

enrollment has an impact on that culture. As a citizen of Minnesota, I am interested to learn how tax dollars are utilized for our public schools and their programming.

Another aspect of concurrent enrollment that interests me is the recent HLC faculty credentialing requiring the high school teacher to have completed a master's degree or 18 graduate credits in the specific subject they are teaching by 2022. This change has caused a ripple of angst through both the high schools and the partnering colleges and universities as both entities have been working collaboratively to ensure that the high school teachers are able to meet the new standards. It is learning of this change in credentialing standards and hearing of its impact(s) from local school board within the district of my residence, as well as from the Minnesota State University, Mankato's office of Concurrent Enrollment and PSEO that sparked my interest in this topic.

From here, it will be important to synthesize the results of my study in order to have a clear, holistic picture of concurrent enrollment and its impact on the landscape of high school programming. These results may also provide incredible insight for both the public school and colleges/university administrators, by providing data that may help colleges and universities better support their partnering high schools. Ultimately, data from this study provides an opportunity for conversation between public school administrators around the evolving nature of high school programming and its impact on school culture. I would be interested in further research surrounding school culture and its impact on students from a holistic lens.

There is a bias constructed into this body of research that an "administrator" has a good understanding of concurrent enrollment and high school programming. Time and response rates may also come into play as a limiting factor. It will be key as part of the pilot test group, to ask a

question indicating the busiest time of their year, in order to establish a time frame of when one might expect to receive survey questions back.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to discern common phenomena that exists across Minnesota public high schools that participate in concurrent enrollment programming. The voice of the administrator is paramount to this body to research. To capture this voice, the study is designed around Giorgi's phenomenological method (Whiting, 2001), utilizing the constructivist lens. Giorgi's method is preferred since the aim of this research is to fill a void in the literature by uncovering shared phenomenon. This methodology places an emphasis on data quality over quantity, which is an appropriate emphasis for the field of qualitative research in education (Creswell, 2018).

Research will be conducted through semi-structured oral interviews of public high school administrators (or their designees) on the impact that concurrent enrollment participation has on their school's programming. Through the coding of themes that emerge from the interviews, this research aims to identify previously unknown or undocumented phenomena that impacts high school programming as a result of concurrent enrollment participation. Interview question development is based off Perna and Thomas' (2008) Conceptual Model of Student Success. This model hypothesizes that student success is based on a continuum of student engagement experiences. Specifically, the interview questions align with level 3 of the model, the context of school resources available to the student. For the purposes of this research, interview sub-questions are developed to help discern the types of school resources are impacted by concurrent participation.



Data collection from participating schools will begin January 2020. Schools selected for participation will be identified from the Minnesota Department of Education's *Rigorous Course Taking* report to the Legislature (2018). A total of 6 schools districts will be used, 3 from urban districts and 3 from rural districts. The definitions of urban and rural are taken from the U.S. Census Bureau. Urban is defined as a population centers of greater than 50,000 people. Rural is defined as population areas outside of the 50,000 population center. School principals will be invited to participate through email and with a follow-up phone call. The sample size will be up to 20 schools, representing a mix of urban and rural districts. Interviews will be conducted orally and recorded for later transcription and review of the conversation. Review of the interview transcripts and notes allows for themes to emerge, from the "natural" through to the "central" (Whiting, 2001, p.67), and following the work of Whiting, the central themes can then be expressed as structural phenomena.

A pilot test group consisting of high school administrators and teachers of concurrent enrollment classes in South Central Minnesota public schools commenced in fall 2019. From this pilot group, semi-structured interview questions were refined to focus on the overarching questions and additional sub-questions.

### **Research Question(s)**

The overarching questions for this research are:

1. Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses.
2. From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

The above research questions are designed to provide the groundwork for future research surrounding the following themes:

A. What impact does concurrent enrollment programming have on low-income students and students of color, across Minnesota? There is limited research on this subject and none that I have found specific to students in Minnesota. While this has always been vital information, it is especially germane in today's educational climate as Minnesota experiences a sharp increase in traditional minority and marginalized populations.

B. Is there a difference in college persistence and degree attainment for students who participate in the traditional PSEO program vs. those students who only participate in the dual/concurrent enrollment programs? What is the rate of remedial course enrollment in college for those students who participate in concurrent enrollment programming?

C. What impact does concurrent programming have on students in rural vs. urban districts? More specifically, does concurrent enrollment programming have a greater impact on students in one setting or another? Are students in rural districts more likely to persist into college than those in urban areas? What percentage of teachers in a specific high school have 18 graduate credits or a master's degree in a specified subject area? Is there any correlation to location of school and that percentage?

The research into the phenomenal around high school programming and concurrent enrollment participation should help define an understanding of reality whereby these themes can be more deeply researched.

### **Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

#### **Assumptions**

One methodological assumption made by that nature of this qualitative research is that the truth will be shared during interviews with research subjects. This study assumes that the high school administrators have a reality which is shared through the interview process. The epistemological perspective is that the interviewer and interviewee mutually influence one another during the interview process. This study reflects the ontological perspective that reality may be different for each individual and those differences will be illuminated through the interview process.

Another set of assumptions contained in this study is my own values and experiences with college student matriculation. My experience is that there is not a one-size-fits-all model that describes the nuanced process in which a student transitions from high school to college. I understand there are always a variety of factors that determine courses a student may take, either in high school or college. A qualitative design assumes the nuanced voice of administrators are heard.

Finally, the selection of Giorgi's phenomenological model as the theoretical framework for this study assumes that each research subject provides an individual reality that when examined, yields a shared phenomenon. The dearth of qualitative research on the topic of concurrent enrollment illustrates the need to provide this shared phenomenon as a starting point from which further research on specific ways concurrent enrollment affects high school programming can be conducted.

### **Limitations**

Limitations to this study have been established prior to conducting the research. They are:

1. Participants in this study are volunteers;

2. The schools researched are public high schools in Minnesota;
3. The sample of high school administrators may include individuals with different roles within the school, therefore interview question responses may be varied based on the specific role & responsibility the interview subject has with regards to high school programming and concurrent enrollment.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms common to this research:

Concurrent enrollment: High school students taking college level classes, taught by the high school instructor, in the high school and earning both high school and college credits.

Concurrent enrollment programming: The offerings of concurrent enrollment courses within a high school.

Dual enrollment programming: When a high school student earns college credit while in high school. Can be earned through a variety of programs and may be earned both at the high school or on a college campus.

High school programming: The structure of a high school program, including curricular and extra-curricular activities.

School location: Rural and Urban geographic locations within Minnesota, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau, based on population areas.

### **Summary**

Chapter One provides the reader with the background of dual/concurrent enrollment programs. While much research has been dedicated to the impact that dual/concurrent enrollment

programming has on students across the nation, there is a dearth of research specific to the impacts concurrent enrollment has on high school programming in Minnesota public schools. Further, much of the current body of literature is quantitatively based and examines student engagement in dual/concurrent enrollment programming. There is little research examining dual/concurrent enrollment programming through the lens of the high school administrator. Chapter Two provides the literature review describing the concepts of dual/concurrent enrollment programs, how those programs have grown nationwide and identifies specific trends in Minnesota. Chapter Two also introduces the Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success, designed by Perna and Thomas (2008) and described by Taylor's (2015) research on the alignment of dual enrollment participation and school policy, and how those factors influence student college persistence. Further research illustrates the impacts this programming has on student matriculation through high school and persistence in college.

Chapter Three contains the process for conducting this qualitative study. This chapter, Research Method, includes the pilot interview and main interview questions that were administered to the high school administrators selected for the sample. Chapter Four contains the findings of this study, and Chapter Five summarizes the research process, conclusions, and recommendations. The bibliography and appendix complete the study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This literature review examines the concepts of dual enrollment programs in high schools across the United States and provides the background for illustrating how data collection and

research on this topic have been primarily done through the lens of student participation and engagement and the impact those programs have on the matriculation process into college.

High schools must invest both time and resources for concurrent enrollment courses to be taught. These attributes impact the programming of the school and may even shape and frame future programming for high school students. Decisions on resource allocation and the trickle-down impact(s) the availability of those resources may have on an entire student body is a key component in the decision-making process of the high school administrator. Effective program evaluation is necessary in determining budget and resource allocation, as per Sorenson & Goldsmith's Integrated Budget Model. As administrators and other stakeholders within Minnesota's high schools review concurrent enrollment programming within their districts, it is imperative that this research acknowledge the backbone of high school programming is at its core, defined and molded by student success. Focusing on impacts concurrent enrollment has on high school programming is an important step in filling the research gap around concurrent enrollment programming. Scant research is available regarding the impact on the high school from an administrative side, particularly for public schools in Minnesota. This field of research is important for several reasons.

First, concurrent enrollment programs are not available to every student in a public high school. For a school to meet the program requirements for accreditation by the National Alliance for Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), it must have "...a process to ensure students meet the course prerequisites of the college/university." (NACEP, 2017, p.5). For Minnesota public high schools, this represents a total of 31,971 students enrolled in concurrent courses (MDE, 2018). Concurrent enrollment offerings can become an issue when examining educational programming through the lens of access and equity. Out of all the dual credit

programs offered in Minnesota, (PSEO, AP, IB), concurrent enrollment only enrolls 18.1 percent of students in low SES, compared to 29.4 percent for IB and 22.9 percent for PSEO. Only AP is lower, at 9.2 percent (MDE, 2018). It behooves policymakers and administrators to understand the limitations to access some students may face if concurrent partnerships are created with highly competitive colleges/universities. Additionally, policymakers and program administrators should ensure that other educational opportunities for all students are not sacrificed in order for concurrent enrollment programming to occur, due to limited resources within the school.

Secondly, taxpayers in Minnesota support concurrent enrollment programming through both the Minnesota Department of Higher Education's Concurrent Enrollment Grant program (MDHE, 2018) and their local public school district, which must pay for concurrent enrollment course offerings. According to the Minnesota Department of Education, in 2018 Minnesota had allocated total net aid of \$3,999,945.91 in State aid to public schools offering concurrent enrollment courses. The number of public school districts eligible for that aid totaled 319. While the vast majority of research indicates that earning college credits in high school is a benefit to students, it should be understood by policymakers as to how taxpayer dollars earmarked for concurrent enrollment programs are being allocated within a school and what impacts that resource allocation has on other aspects of high school programming.

Third, NACEP has adopted new accreditation requirements from the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), effective 2021-2022, that "All concurrent enrollment instructors' area approved by the appropriate college/university academic leadership and must meet the minimum qualifications for instructors teaching the course on campus." (NACEP, 2017, p.2). For public schools in Minnesota, this means that all high school educators teaching concurrent enrollment courses must meet the HLC's Minimally Qualified Faculty requirements, which states to

“...establish their credibility as content experts and thus their competence to teach that content in the classroom...faculty credentials in higher education include holding a degree in at least one level above the program in which they are teaching. If a faculty holds a master’s degree or higher in a discipline other than that in which he or she is teaching, that faculty member should have completed a minimum of 18 graduate credit hours in the discipline in which he or she is teaching” (HLC, 2016, p.3). This stipulation presents a special challenge for high schools. Many teachers may not be able to return to the college classroom to earn a master’s degree in a specific field due to financial or personal constraints. Initial data gathered from the August 2019 pilot study (Johnson, 2019) indicated that some districts may be well positioned financially to support their teachers in furthering their education while others may not. Minnesota is fortunate to have three million dollars in Legislative funding support for increasing high school teacher accreditation eligibility (MN H.R. Continuing Education Program, HF 3326, 2016) however the funding may not be enough to cover every teacher in the State who would need it. This study is designed to lay the groundwork for future examination of access and equity resource allocation and availability to school districts to continue offering concurrent enrollment, and to examine any resource discrepancies between rural and urban districts.

The review begins with the comprehensive illustration of dual enrollment trends across the United States, followed by an in-depth review of different types of dual enrollment programs that exist in public schools throughout the United States. Prior quantitative research on dual enrollment program participation illustrates the benefits of participation students receive across all demographic categories. While this information is beneficial for dual enrollment program review, it reveals a gap in the literature surrounding the impact of both research on *concurrent enrollment* programs and a dearth in qualitative research on this topic. The review then connects



prior research utilizing the Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success designed by Perna and Thomas (2008) and described in quantitative research by Taylor (2015), to this study's phenomenological exploration of the lived experiences of high school administrators around the intersection of concurrent enrollment and high school programming, utilizing a semi-structured interview format.

### **Methods of Searching**

The use of the terms *dual enrollment* and *concurrent enrollment* interchangeably illustrates the difficulty in a basic search of prior research done on concurrent enrollment. Many states identify any program offering high school credits and college credit at the same time as *dual enrollment* (Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos, 2009; Klopfenstein & Lively, 2012; Klopfenstein & Thomas, 2009; Pretlow & Patteson, 2015). A number of past research papers blend together any manner of program offering (Advanced Placement, IB, taking courses at a college campus, etc.) for the purposes of examining the impact these programs as a whole have on college matriculation (An, 2012; Dare & Nowicki, 2015; Pretlow & Patteson, 2015). Limited research in the field of P-12 education is available when searching the term *concurrent enrollment*. Searching under the term *concurrent enrollment* most often leads to studies in the medical field, examining patients enrolled concurrently in everything from treatment trials to types of insurance.

Utilizing the search terms of *concurrent enrollment* and *high school plus Minnesota* returns few results (Boswell, 2001; Minnesota Department of Education, 2018; Staats & Laster, 2018). For Minnesota-specific searches, utilizing the term *post-secondary education* returned a few more results related to the exploration of college credits earned while in high school

(Bruininks, Keeney, and Thorp, 2010). No results were found when searching under the terms *administrative, concurrent enrollment programming, high school programming* in unison.

This literature review is built around peer-reviewed articles and studies. The databases utilized for the research include the EBSCOhost, Minnesota Department of Education Reports, SAGE Journals, National Student Clearinghouse, SpringerLink, Project MUSE, Wiley Online library, and ERIC.

### **Theoretical Orientation for the Study**

The theoretical orientation for this study draws from Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success (Taylor, 2015). The model was developed by Perna and Thomas in part, to aid in the decision-making process for education policy makers. The model "attempts to bring order to the unwieldiness of...multiple...approaches" for examining student success (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.10). The aim is to provide policymakers with a sound model in which to evaluate a program's contribution(s) to student success by creating a moral framework which identifies the multi-layered factors that students may experience or work through when making determinations for persistence into college.

The model defines student success as the implication that "all students should enroll in college, persist to program or degree completion, enroll in and complete advanced degree programs, and earn high incomes" (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.6). The authors' definition is built around ten key indicators of educational attainment that serve as the standard measures for policy accountability and coincides with the findings of "appropriate indicators" of student success by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2006). This model frames school resources (Layer 3) as one measure impacting student success, by specifically "identifying and

understanding the compounding effects that determine the educational resources, academic preparation, and educational orientations that subsequently determine success at the college level” (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.44).

The model hypothesizes that student success is based on a continuum of student engagement experiences, with student engagement occurring on four layers. These layers are the context of the internal voice of the student (layer 1), family/social context (layer 2), context of school resources available to the student (layer 3), and context of external education factors such as policy (layer 4). Level 1- Internal Layer. This is the student’s intrinsic nature, beliefs, attitudes, personality. Level 2- Family Context. This level reflects the factors both inside and outside of the home that may guide, or manage, a student’s experience and promotion of success. Level 3- School Context. This level frames school resources as one measure impacting student success, by specifically “identifying and understanding the compounding effects that determine the educational resources, academic preparation, and educational orientations that subsequently determine success at the college level” (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.44). Level 4- Social, Economic, and Policy Context.

For the purposes of this research, Perna and Thomas’ Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success is most relevant framework to use, paying close attention to Stage 3 of the theoretical framework, context of school resources. This stage “assumes the context of the school attended...influences student success...through the ways that K-12 schools...structure educational opportunities for students” (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.50). Resource allocation impacts programming and ultimately, student choice of programs. These student-based choices in turn, will affect student outcomes and success (Perna & Thomas, 2008). The foundational context of school resources as a component of student success is accounted for in the Integrated

Conceptual Model for Student Success as it provides the groundwork for determining the design of interview questions around high school programming and concurrent enrollment offerings, with the aim of uncovering shared phenomenological experiences among Minnesota high school administrators. The Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success also connects the aim of the researcher to employ a descriptive phenomenological study through posing the interview questions around the theme of resources and rationales of their use.

## **Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

The desire to offer high school students opportunities to earn college credit while still in high school has long been part of the fabric of both secondary and postsecondary educational practices. For many students, it has served as a steppingstone into higher education, and with impressive results. While there is some debate over whether a student participating in dual enrollment/concurrent programs fares better at a community college or four-year university, most of the research illustrates dual enrollment participation yields overall persistence into higher education (Martin, 2013).

### **Concurrent and Dual Credit Enrollment Across the United States**

In 2010, Bruininks, Keeney, and Thorp found that as of 2008, sixty percent of new incoming freshman to the University of Minnesota System were bringing in some form of college credit. The authors utilized data from the National Student Clearinghouse and enrollment from a concurrent enrollment program unique to the University of Minnesota system, College in the Classrooms (CIS), to examine enrollment trends. Further examination of data provided by the Minnesota Department of Education reported in 2018 that from 2011-2017, concurrent

enrollment participation in public schools has grown from 20,282 students to 31,971 students. In Minnesota, Jensen, Mattheis, and Loyle (2012) found that by 2010, the University of Minnesota's CIS program grew to offer 30 courses and partner with over 300 high school teachers in over 100 schools across Minnesota. Between 2011-2012, 46,849 college credits were earned through the CIS program. Nationally, the dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment trend mirrors what Jensen et al. (2012) found; dual/concurrent enrollment continues to grow year over year.

The conclusions drawn by Bruininks et al. and Jensen et al. resonates with Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos (2009) who in their work on college pathways in high school found that as many as seventeen percent of high school students have earned some college credit when they graduate high school. Utilizing 2006 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which was the first national study to encapsulate the number of students enrolled in either exam-based or course-based college credit courses, the authors concluded that as of 2002-2003 there were approximately 1.2 million enrollments in dual credit courses. Note that this number does not equate to 1.2 million students. Students may have more than one enrollment in a dual credit course. Tracking accurate enrollment numbers is key to formulating a clear picture of total student engagement. One of the difficulties related to research is how best to capture student participation. Giana, Alexander, and Reyes, (2014) provide a method for tracking accurate student enrollment that differentiates their research from others within the body of literature. They follow a specific student cohort utilizing a student-specific Texas state ID number (every child is assigned a unique number at the point of enrollment in a Texas public school). The method of tracking a student based on the specific-student ID number becomes an important component to the accuracy of participation. However, it should be mentioned that

replication of a study at this level must include safeguards to ensure the confidentiality of the subjects within the sample size.

The research by Hoffman et al. (2009) focused on the types of program offerings in three states, Florida, New York, and North Carolina with the argument that college coursework offered to students in high school can look very different, however the impact those programs have on student enrollment, particularly into community colleges, is vital for degree attainment at either the two or four-year level. The authors also cited the U.S. Department of Education's findings that students who had earned approximately twenty college credits by the time they complete their first year of college are more likely to earn a college degree. There remains much debate and research on the impact of specific types of dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment participation and student degree attainment and persistence into college.

### **Participation in Dual Credit Programming and Degree Attainment**

Conventional wisdom, backed by numerous bodies of research, is that participation in dual credit/concurrent enrollment programs lead to student success, as measured by college enrollment and degree attainment, either at a two-year or four-year level.

A key to enrollment and degree attainment is college readiness. This also coincides with Perna & Thomas' (2008) definition of student success; that students will be ready for college and persist through college to earn degrees and subsequent high salaries. In addition to exposure and success in dual/concurrent enrollment coursework as a measure of preparedness for college, Martin (2013) examined the cognitive and non-cognitive college readiness of students in three concurrent enrollment programs. He found that enrollment and successful completion of concurrent enrollment courses leads to greater cognitive college readiness.

This finding is supported by the longitudinal study by Haxon, Song, Zeiser, Berger, Turk-Bicakci, Garet, Knudson, and Hoshen (2016). Their study found that roughly 80% of students enrolled in a dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment course had at least one term of enrollment at a college post high school graduation. A related study by Blankenberger, Lichtenberger, and Witt (2017) analyzed student enrollment data from Illinois, looking for enrollment in dual credit participation and its impact on postsecondary degree attainment. Looking at the 115,000 public school students who graduated in 2003, Blakenberger et al. (2017) found 10,987 students who had participated in a minimum of one dual credit enrollment course and matched 8,095 of those students to peers who did not participate in dual enrollment courses. The study utilized Cox regression models to identify factors that significantly relate to an increase in degree completion, be it from a community college or four-year degree. Blakenberger et al. found that "...the greatest improvement to degree attainment associated with dual credit participation...began their postsecondary careers at community colleges." (Blakenberger, Lichtenberger, & Witt, 2017, p.260).

Research illustrating students who participated in concurrent enrollment programs are more likely to be prepared and matriculate through college programs is a key driver as to why Minnesota public schools continue to build robust concurrent programming. These results are also a key component of the effectiveness of program offerings. Program offerings are tethered to the resources a school is able to allocate to concurrent enrollment programming. This perspective is examined by Cowan and Goldhaber (2015) and their focus on Washington state's dual enrollment program, called "Running Start" to see if there is a correlated impact of student participation on postsecondary enrollment and success in college.

The Running Start program allows high school juniors and seniors to take courses at any community college in Washington (tuition free), and only requires the Accuplacer/COMPASS, or other college-level English and math assessment scores for admission (Cowan and Goldhaber, 2015). The authors utilized data from the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) for Washington State, the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) as well as other state-specific education department data. This body of research suggests that students who participate in the Running Start program are more likely to drop out of high school or not earn a high school diploma, however those students may bypass the traditional high school diploma in favor of jumping right to earning a two-year degree (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015). Their research runs somewhat counter to conventional wisdom that *any* dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment program participation is a benefit to the student. Further investigation into this thinking found that research done by Kim (2014) examining the relationship between tech prep and dual enrollment credits confirms Cowan & Goldhaber's research position. This finding provides an important argument for the need of a phenomenological, constructivist qualitative study focusing on high school programming around concurrent enrollment. A qualitative study allows for the exploration of shared phenomenon among high school administrators, against the backdrop of a myriad of quantitative research that indicates, for the most part, concurrent enrollment programming is good for students. As illustrated by the works of Kim (2014) and Cowan & Goldhaber (2015), it should be argued that concurrent enrollment should not prevent or prohibit a student from completing a high school diploma. Framing the qualitative research around Perna & Thomas' Conceptual Model for Student Success in one way to gauge the factors at play for administrators in determining which concurrent programs to offer, by providing a starting



position to review all course offerings through access and opportunity to high school diploma attainment.

An alternative way to examine a correlation between concurrent enrollment participation was found in the research of Villarreal, Montoya, Duncan, & Gergen, E. (2018). They created a multifactor leadership questionnaire to administer to students in two Texas, Early College High Schools (ECHS). The focus of the study was to assess three different leadership styles of students which, according to Villarreal et. al (2018) can predict career readiness. The three leadership styles assessed are: Transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidance. The survey instrument was designed to categorize career readiness into the following categories: Basic skills (reading, writing, math), Thinking skills, Personal qualities, Resource management, Interpersonal skills, Information skills, Systems management, and Technology use. The research found that there are strong correlations between career readiness and college readiness, with high scores in those categories correlating to high scores in transformational leadership (Villarreal et al., 2018).

In the search for correlations between college readiness and retention and participation in tech prep and dual enrollment courses, one study stands out. Kim (2014) utilized an Input-Environment-Outcome (IEO) model as the conceptual framework for the research. The IEO model allowed for control for demographic variables (e.g. race, ethnicity, gender). Kim (2014) found that there was no significant relationship between tech prep and dual enrollment participation and total college credits earned. However, the author found that participation in tech prep coursework correlated to better college readiness in mathematics. Kim's (2014) study utilized student data from both Oregon and Florida. The main point from this research is to

provide data around the specific type of dual enrollment credit and its unique impact on college readiness.

Grubb, Scott, & Good's (2017) study looked closely at students enrolling in community colleges after participation in dual enrollment programming and found that those students were "9% times less likely to take remediation, 26% times more likely to graduate in 2 year, and 28% more likely to graduate in 3 years" than their cohorts who did not participate in dual enrollment programming (Grubb, Scoot, & Good, 2017, p.79). The study utilized Propensity Score Matching (PSM) to create a quasi-experimental comparison of students who did and did not participate in dual enrollment coursework. In their study, the authors attempted to answer two specific questions: Can a correlation be established linking dual enrollment participation to enrollment in remedial community college coursework? Second, is there a correlation between dual enrollment participation and on-time completion of a two-year degree? The study's findings were significant, in that "...over 30% of participants completed college in 2 years and over 45% finished college in 3 years" (Grubb, Scott, and Good, 2017, p.89). The authors' study provided important framework for understanding the impact dual enrollment participation has, specifically for on-time, two-year college completion.

### **Dual Enrollment Participation Benefits across SES**

Blakenberger et al. found a correlation to dual credit participation and an increase to postsecondary degree completion, particularly when the postsecondary experience began at a two-year college and if it began within seven years after high school graduation. Their research also displayed results that this construct was particularly true for low- income students. Taylor (2015) found that participation in dual enrollment programs had a positive effect on all students,

however the “...difference in...enrolling in college and completing college was between 4 and 8 percentage points lower for students of color and low-income students...” (Taylor, 2015, p.372). Enrollment in dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment is important to track, equally important is how those credits taken in high school are transferred to a college or university.

Chase, Dowd, Pazich, & Bensimon (2014) looked at the impact transfer policy has on “minoritized” students. From that study they concluded that within their sample, most transfer policies do not specifically address marginalized groups. Rather, the outcomes of the policies record the data on specific groups. This is an important point to consider, since the strongest area of growth in concurrent enrollment programming in Minnesota has been with students identifying as Black and residing within urban districts. This demographic has seen a 257% increase in concurrent enrollment participation, with an overall increase in participation of 184 % percent for students of color since 2011 (MDE, 2018). If growth occurs within groups that have traditionally been identified as marginalized, coupled with the assurances (via policy) that courses will transfer, it behooves leaders from both high schools and post-secondary institutions to ensure that school trust in the concurrent enrollment program remain strong. Taylor (2015) echoed this sentiment in his research to “determine the potential differential effects of dual credit on postsecondary access and success for low-income and students of color” (Taylor, 2015, p.356). Taylor also indicated that there is a substantial lack in the literature on how dual credit policies affect different groups of students.

While there are differing versions of dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment programs, one unique version, spearheaded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is Early College High Schools (EC’s). The concept of this program is to allow any student access to concurrent enrollment coursework, tethered with intentional college transition supports, such as financial aid

counseling, college application assistance, and other college transition support. The goal of this program is that by offering programming to all students, the EC's "improve underrepresented students' likelihood of earning a college degree while...in high school and can receive support from high school staff." (Haxton, Song, Zeiser, Berger, Turk-Bicakci, Garet, Knudson, & Hoshen, 2016, p.410). In their research into the impact EC's have on students' college enrollment, Haxton et al. (2016) found that "...EC impact on college degree attainment was significantly stronger for minority students than for White students...minority students were nearly 10 times as likely to obtain a college degree as control students....low income students were approximately 8.5 times as likely to obtain a college degree as low income control students." (Haxton et al., 2016, p.422). This research mirrors the research of Cowan & Goldhaber (2015) as they examined Washington State's Running Start program. The authors noted that Running Start students were more likely to enter any college for at least one year after high school graduation, however the program participants "...had substantially better academic high school performance...and were less likely to participate in...bilingual education, Title I, and/or federal free and reduced lunch" (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015, p.438). Pretlow & Patteson (2015) found that many dual enrollment programs first require a student to be eligible for the program. This generally means that students from underrepresented populations do not qualify for the program (Haxton et al., 2016).

Another factor related to access and eligibility of concurrent enrollment programs is whether or not students had parents who had earned college degrees. Students who have parents without a college degree tend to be low-to mid-level SES and thus, more likely to be eligible for federal free-and reduced lunch (An, 2013, Klopfenstein & Lively, 2015). A study by Herman, Huffman, Anderson, & Golden (2013) amplifies the research findings that students with low-

SES's are less likely to persist into college. Their research of rural, ag-intensive counties in North Carolina found that the majority of students in those counties earn ACT scores lower than what is needed for college acceptance, compared to the mid-to high-SES counterparts, An (2013) also found data that illustrates that students who have parents that went to college are more represented in dual enrollment courses than students whose parents did not attend college (first-generation college students). The first-generation college student who participates in a dual enrollment programs have a first-year college GPA of 0.11 points higher than first-generation college students who did not participate in dual enrollment programming.

Participation in concurrent enrollment programming may also be attributed to leadership styles of students, as suggested by Villarreal, Montoya, Duncan, & Gergen (2017). Their research suggested that leadership style plays a more significant factor in determining college readiness over gender, year in school, or course offerings, when measured against concurrent enrollment participation. Ozmun (2013) suggests that success in dual enrollment programming is also tied to student self-efficacy and that participation in dual enrollment programs builds a student's self-efficacy, which is considered a predictor for college academic success. Dare & Nowicki (2015) also found evidence that high-ability, high-achieving students tend to seek out opportunities for acceleration, defined as "progress through educational programs either at rates faster than or at ages younger than conventional" (Dare & Nowicki, 2015, p.249).

Access and success in concurrent enrollment programming is important, since it serves as a driver for college entrance and appears as a major influence on college persistence and degree attainment. Since college degree attainment is linked to socio-economic status (SES), as the Conceptual Model of Student Success defines, policymakers and administrators must be able to review concurrent enrollment programming through the lens of access and equity. Understanding

both the quantitative data available, combined with a qualitative narrative of shared phenomena provides stakeholders with a much more robust picture of how concurrent enrollment programming intertwines with regular high school programming.

### **Context of College Programming Within the High School**

An over-arching theme related to concurrent enrollment programming is that higher educational institutions must be adaptable and flexible enough to support concurrent enrollment programs for the purposes of sustaining enrollment. Policymakers and other stakeholders in higher education must be prepared for the incoming wave of students with pre-existing college credits. In Minnesota, state legislation exists to ensure that “rigorous coursework” and funding is available to high school students (MDE, 2018). The justification for program offerings is provided by research on the benefits to students of dual credit/concurrent enrollment participation. In 2018, the Minnesota Department of Education’s Concurrent Enrollment Grant program was awarded \$340,000 for concurrent enrollment programming. The grant program specifically mentions “...these programs strive to enhance and diversify high school curricula, increase access to higher education, and improve high school and college relationships” (MDE, 2018, p.4).

Bruininks et al. argue that the volume of students with pre-existing college credits puts extra pressure on institutions for retention, and as identified by Kuh (2008), these factors include programming (ie: First Year seminars, learning cohorts, intentional advising sessions) that institutions must dedicate resources to in order to be effective. Additionally, the authors note that institutions must be able to reform their curricula in a manner that both preserves academic rigor and meets the needs of students entering college with pre-existing college credits.

Utilizing Perna and Thomas' Conceptual Model of Student Success to examine the context of school resources, high school administrators of concurrent enrollment may be better able to communicate their needs to their concurrent enrollment college/university partners. Collaborative program design also builds up non-tangible resources, such as trust and leadership capacity. Related to the study by Bellibas and Liu (2016) on leadership styles of school principals, and tied to the construct that human capital is an important resource of a successful concurrent enrollment program, sits the notion of collective student trust, defined as "a stable group property rooted in the shared perceptions and affect about the trustworthiness of another group or individual that emerges over time..." (Adams, 2014). Here Adams states that a school can have access to all the resources in the world, however if there is an overall lack of trust in the school by the students, those resources are all for naught. As cited by Adams, "Tangible resources are inconsequential if the internal capacity within the students is not developed" (Adams, 2014, p. 139). Another non-tangible resource is the notion of mutual respect within a school's climate. Bellibas & Liu (2016) examined this concept by looking into the effects a principals' perceived leadership practices has on their perceptions of school climate. Their research found that school leaders who perceived to have instructional leadership and distributed leadership styles were more likely to work in a culture of mutual respect. This is important point to consider as administrators navigate the various policies and regulations around concurrent enrollment programming. While a successful concurrent enrollment program is determined by several factors, the ability of the school administrator and the teaching faculty to collaborate is key. Mutual respect and a positive school climate are two strong foundations that need to be working for positive collaboration to exist.

The non-tangible resources are just as important for further development and growth of concurrent enrollment since the entire paradigm of the program rests on the trust that courses taken in high school as concurrent enrollment will successfully transfer to the student's institution of higher education. Once administrators and policymakers have a solid understanding of the resources needed for concurrent enrollment offerings, their focus can turn to maintenance of those programs. This can be difficult, due to a variety of factors.

Woziak & Palmer (2013) examined stakeholder perceptions of barriers to postsecondary enrollment offerings and found that the primary barrier was school funding. Participants in this study cited the decline of state-allocated funding as the main funding barrier. This sentiment was echoed by Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa (2017) citing "increasing financial support can help K-12 schools implement proven reforms...and expanding the availability of high-quality...education" (Leachman, Masterson, & Figueroa, 2017, p.1). For Minnesota, the majority of the concurrent enrollment program funding is funneled to the postsecondary institutions through the approval of the MinnState (or private institution's) Board of Trustees, or the Board of Regents for the University of Minnesota, as "boards hold the essential legal authority for the university...and as a result...boards are increasingly challenged by diverse interests of society" (Beeny, Garvey-Nix, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2008, p.174). To this end, it is vital that any conversation furthering the development of concurrent enrollment be brought into the framework of the governing structures for the postsecondary institutions so that not just the schools offering the programs are working in cooperation, but the very systems governing the schools are operating in harmony, as these systems create policies & procedures that touch each and every student in Minnesota.



Additional questions that arise around concurrent enrollment options generally surround the standards or rigor of the courses taught in the high school. Tinberg & Nadeau (2011) highlight that while standards exist to control for curriculum, faculty/teacher credentialing, student admittance and student assessment, these standards tend to be fairly generic in nature and infer that the standards were developed within a high school context "...of high school students taking college courses taught by high school teachers during the typical high school day" (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2011, p.709). Thus, it is right that question if the concurrent enrollment course truly meets the same rigor and pedagogy as the same course taught at the college level.

With a focus on concurrent enrollment programming in Minnesota, Jensen, Mattheis, & Loyle (2013) examined the differences in the offering of an Anatomy & Physiology course in a university setting. Their study found that university courses tend to be offered as a lecture- the instructor verbalizes what should be known, compared to a constructivist classroom found within a high school, one where the instructor promotes cognitive disequilibrium in order to spur motivation for learning new ideas and concepts. Because courses are taught in different ways, Jensen et al. (2013) states that concurrent enrollment "...partnerships can be beneficial...if they focus on realistic goals, such as offering developmentally appropriate coursework and promoting student-centered pedagogy" (Jensen et al., 2013, p.163.).

Another angle on the debate of standards and rigor is around the gap in the literature addressing the subjects-specific curriculum of concurrent enrollment courses and the outcomes those specific courses have on a student's persistence in a postsecondary institution. Giani, Alexander, & Reyes (2014) attempted to answer this question, utilizing statewide longitudinal data from the state of Texas. Their research utilized a comprehensive, Propensity Score Matching (PSM) statistical strategy to predict the probability that a student would be enrolled in

dual enrollment courses, and then employed both multi-level logit models and separate data analyses on university outcomes, to determine if students would persist and attain a university baccalaureate. The sample size included 38,002 students who attended a district that did not offer dual enrollment courses, and 55,885 student who attended a district with dual enrollment offerings. Their results found that specific subjects are important to the directions and persistence of a student into postsecondary education. The study found that core subjects, such as English, Math, Science, and Social Studies were more likely to predict that students would enroll in a college or university (vs. technical or vocational-based course subjects). Interestingly, math dual enrollment courses appeared to be the biggest influence on baccalaureate degree attainment. Kim (2014) echoed the findings in a study looking at the relationship of tech prep and dual credit to college readiness and retention. Kim states "...academic dual credit hours earned had a significant positive relationship with college readiness in math..." (Kim, 2014, p.344). While student participation in concurrent enrollment math course appears to be a strong indicator for college degree attainment, more research looking at the specific math courses are needed, as well as the demographic information of the students taking the course.

Taylor's (2015) study on the inequitable effects of dual enrollment credit obtainment is perhaps one of the most robust studies to examine how dual enrollment policies influence college access and completion. This body of research utilized propensity score matching with a large body sample size of 41,727 students who completed high school in 2003 within the state of Illinois. The methodology, a quasi-experimental approach estimated the influence that dual credit (college courses taken within the high school) participation has on a student's ACT score, when taken as a senior in high school. The study tested across, and for, all demographics. The methodology integrated 26 independent variables, which Taylor (2015) drew from the previous

research of Perna and Thomas (2008). These variables were used to generate the propensity score. Taylor (2008) designed a survey component to the research in which 25 of the 26 variables were self-reported. The only non-reported variable was the ACT score. This is important, because part of what Taylor was looking for was what influence a student's personal narrative (student self-reported answers) tied into college persistence after dual course participation. Taylor's research examines a critical piece of dual credit programming- the nature of the policies and their uneven impact on various student demographic groups.

### **Synthesis of the Research Findings**

The terms *concurrent enrollment* and *dual enrollment* are used interchangeably throughout K-12 and higher education to describe opportunities where students earn college credit while also earning high school credit. The lack of a national, uniform definition of programming leads to various interpretations of programming by researchers. While the content of the studies remain relevant, it is important to acknowledge the validity of past research may in question when attempting to pursue future research on the subject.

Numerous bodies of research have examined the pros and cons of concurrent enrollment and dual credit programming (Blakenberger et al., 2017; Dare, & Nowicki, 2015; Giani et al., 2014.) and most often from a student-centered lens. Other researchers have focused on the impacts of concurrent enrollment policy across student demographics (Beeny et al., 2008; Chase et al., 2014; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015). Studies examining the specific student demographics has been the key focus of most of the published research. Taylor (2015) echoed this sentiment in his research to "determine the potential differential effects of dual credit on postsecondary access and success for low-income and students of color" (Taylor, 2015, p.356). Taylor also found that

there is a substantial lack in the literature on how dual credit policies affect different groups of students. Additionally, the lack of literature on research focused on the impacts of concurrent enrollment of high school programming at public schools in Minnesota prevents stakeholders from seeing concurrent enrollment programming through a holistic lens, thus leading to potential gaps in access and equity for students.

### **Critique of Previous Research Methods**

Blankenberger et al. analysis of student enrollment data from Illinois utilizing the Cox data regression model was research was comprehensive and drew a strong connection between high school dual enrollment participation and college-level degree attainment. However, the research did not provide clear information on how they matched the 8,095 students to their same high-school, non-dual enrollment participants, nor did the authors elaborate on how they obtained permission for student-specific linked data.

Like other studies found in the body of research, the study conducted by Cowan and Goldhaber (2015) did not link student-specific data at both high school and postsecondary enrollment. The body of research is somewhat light and the methodology is weakly represented in this article. More research would need to be constructed to test the validity of their study.

As discussed earlier, attempting to discern the true participants of dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment programming can be difficult. While many studies contain sample sizes that encapsulate some level of accuracy in the identification of students engaged in dual enrollment/concurrent programming, many do not. The study of Early College High Schools (EC) by Villarreal et al. provides strong correlations between participation in college prep coursework, career readiness, and college degree attainment and provides interesting

discussion points, it lacks in substance and fails to include a true representation of a diverse population. Closest to the mark of accuracy would be the research of Giana et al., (2014). Utilizing student-specific state assigned identification numbers allows the researchers to capture multiple data points on students. However, as with most published studies, there is limited explanation as to how subject confidentiality was maintained. This calls the validity of the research into question. Ideally, a qualitative study that illuminates the shared phenomenon of high school administrators will enable future research to orientate towards specific programming issues, rather than specific student demographics. It will allow for an alternative way to examine dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment programming and its impact on high school programming, which ultimately leads to student engagement and choice.

### **Summary**

Reviewing the impact that concurrent enrollment programming has through the lens of student success is complex and more often accomplished through quantitative studies. These studies provide an in-depth look into how specific concurrent enrollment programs interact with specific student demographics. Some research provides an examination across a variety of factors, including socio-economic status (SES), course offerings, or student ACT scores. Little to no research can be found specific to the impact that concurrent enrollment programming has on high school course offerings through a qualitative lens. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the existing body of research utilizing the Conceptual Model of Student Success designed by Perna and Thomas (2008) as the framework for developing interview questions following Giorgi's Phenomenological method.

The Conceptual Model of Student Success allows for an examination of student success through four stages of contextual engagement, ranging from the internal context of the student to the external context of educational policy. Specifically, stage 3 is designed to review student success through the lens of education resources of the school. School resources can be defined as financial (budget), physical (rooms or building), but it also includes the culture, programs, and even the trust the student may have in their teachers and educational system as a whole (Bellibas & Liu, 2016). Chapter 3 of this study will provide an in-depth exploration of the methodology used for the qualitative, phenomenological research of the impacts concurrent enrollment course offerings has on public high school programming.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **RESEARCH METHODS**

##### **Introduction**

The decision to offer concurrent enrollment programs can be a difficult one. High schools must invest significant time and resources for programs that may only be available to a small percentage of the student population (Minnesota Department of Education, 2018). By diverting resources towards concurrent programs there is an assumption that concurrent enrollment programs therefore impact high school programming (ex: classes, extra-curricular activities) for all students by shaping and framing what program(s) might be available to them, based around any constraints or opportunities that arise from offering concurrent enrollment programs.

This chapter will further define the purpose of the study, relating this purpose to the research design and methodology. The design of the study will be explained and includes participant selection and the procedures for selecting and communicating with participants. Next, data collection procedures and instruments will be discussed. Initial data analysis methodologies

for interviews will be defined as outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Giorgi (2012).

Finally, ethical considerations and a statement on trustworthiness concerning this study will be discussed.

### **Purpose of the Study**

While much of the research around concurrent enrollment is quantitative in nature and designed to measure impacts program offerings & participation on students (An, 2013; Chase et al., 2014; Cowen & Goldhaber, 2015; Fowler & Luna, 2009; Gaini et al., 2014; Taylor, 2015) scant research is available regarding the impact incorporating concurrent enrollment programs into a high school has on the overall programming structure for a high school. In order to glean this information, the focus of this study is to examine these impacts through the perceptions of the high school administrator. This study argues that the perspectives of the high school administrator is a key ingredient necessary for examining the pressure points concurrent enrollment places on high school programming due the administrator's unique position within the school setting as steward of school resources. The link of administrator to school resources grounds this study around Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success (2008). The model defines student success as the implication that "all students should enroll in college, persist to program or degree completion, enroll in and complete advanced degree programs, and earn high incomes" (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.6). This model frames school resources as one measure impacting student success, by specifically "identifying and understanding the compounding effects that determine the educational resources, academic preparation, and educational orientations that subsequently determine success at the college level" (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.44).

For the purposes of this study, the subjective voice of the administrator is captured through a qualitative research design using a constructivist, phenomenological approach. Data is gathered through semi-structured interviews of three rural and three urban administrators of Minnesota public high schools that offer concurrent enrollment. Each interview subject has extensive knowledge of concurrent enrollment at their school and has identified key components of how the integration of concurrent enrollment meshes with the overall programming of the school. The nature of the phenomenological framework of the study is to illuminate and weave together the subjective voices of the study participants in order to discern the existence of any shared phenomenon. Interview responses will be coded and linked to discover themes and individual perspectives may also be included to add context to the responses.

### **Research Question(s)**

This study utilizes two primary questions:

1. Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses.
2. From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

Each question is designed to be open-ended, clear, and written in a manner that allows the subject to answer in a way that satisfies the phenomenological, constructiveness nature of the research design.

### **Research Design**

This qualitative, phenomenological study uses the constructivist epistemology interpretive framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018) in order to get better understanding of how concurrent enrollment offerings affect overall high school programming. The study is designed around Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success (2008). The model



defines student success as the implication that “all students should enroll in college, persist to program or degree completion, enroll in and complete advanced degree programs, and earn high incomes” (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.6). As explained in chapter two, the authors’ definition is built around ten key indicators of educational attainment that serve as the standard measures for policy accountability. The definition coincides with the findings of “appropriate indicators” of student success by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2006) and explains that student success attainment hinges on four levels: Level 1- Internal Layer, Level 2- Family Context, Level 3- School Context, and Level 4- Social, Economic, and Policy Context. This research study utilizes the assumptions of Level 3- School Context as the basis for its framework because this level is explicit in highlighting school resources as one measure impacting student success, by specifically “identifying and understanding the compounding effects that determine the educational resources, academic preparation, and educational orientations that subsequently determine success at the college level” (Perna & Thomas, 2008, p.44).

While quantitative data on Minnesota high school participation is readily available (MDE, 2018), this study aims to uncover the lived experience of the high school administrator as shepherd and umpire of the concurrent enrollment program within the school. While there are other qualitative methods available for the design of this study, such as case study or ethnography, none are as appropriate within their design and nature, in their ability to bring forward the lived realities of the high school administrator (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The constructivist perspective of the research design provides the groundwork of assumption that there is no single reality or truth. Each individual voice provides their lived truth, which is

exposed through the interview process and subsequent coding of themes post-interview (Giorgi, 2012).

### **Participant Selection**

This study will interview six administrators at public high schools in Minnesota that offer concurrent enrollment programs. This is based on Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation of an interview sample size between five and 25 participants. The diverse sample size will include three individuals from urban school districts and three from rural school districts. Utilizing the definitions provided by the United State Census Bureau (2020) urban districts are defined by the researcher as districts which reside in population areas at or greater than 50,000 people. Rural districts are defined as districts which reside in population areas outside of 50,000 people. The diverse population sample for research subjects are based on a data set provided by the Minnesota Department of Education (2018) of public high schools in Minnesota that offer concurrent enrollment. Focusing on both the urban and rural districts will provide a foundational understanding of concurrent enrollment impacts across the spectrum of district types in Minnesota.

### **Procedures**

#### **Participant Selection**

A phenomenological study is designed to "study several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 78). Following this framework, this study is designed to uncover those shared or common experiences around concurrent enrollment offerings through the lens of the high school administrator. Selection criteria begins with review of Minnesota public high schools districts that offer concurrent enrollment courses. This information is found in a data set provided by the Minnesota Department of Education (2018).

From there, the schools are reviewed against the definition for urban and rural locations. Finally, utilizing convenience sampling, participants are invited to participate in the study from a randomized list of districts based on location definition (three urban and three rural).

### **Protections of Participants**

The informed consent document will be sent electronically to the high school administrator, who is the main participant of the study. If the administrator delegates to another program administrator within the school, that participant will also receive an electronic informed consent document. This document outlines the rights of the individual to freely participate and withdraw their participation, that they will be recorded, and the recording destroyed after the research is complete, a pseudonym used for each participant and the district, and they may ask questions at any time. The convenience sample method only provides the researcher with leads to contact, not to share any information on who was actually contacted.

### **Expert Review**

A pilot test of survey questions was conducted in August, 2019 at the Concurrent Enrollment Professional Development Day sponsored by Minnesota State University, Mankato. Participants were asked samples of interview questions around the impacts concurrent enrollment offerings has on their high school programming. Answers were recorded and reviewed for clarity, line of questioning, and ability for the participant to answer in a manner that satisfies the phenomenological, constructiveness nature of the research design. From this pilot group, the main two research questions were designed.

### **Data Collection**

A semi-structured interview process will be the primary method of data collection for

this phenomenological study. The questions were developed using an interview protocol and pilot test and are the same for all high school administrators. The semi-structured interview process permits follow up questions and conversation between the researcher and participant to understand the perspectives of the administrators and to clarify concepts and for participants to reflect on emerging themes (Creswell and Poth, 2018; Hawkins, 2018).

Once participants are contacted and agree to participate in the study and be interviewed, the informed consent form will be sent and received via email. The participants will be emailed the questions ahead of time to prepare for the interview. Participants will be interviewed synchronously via a web-based video conferencing tool such as Zoom, with password protected session admission. If agreed upon by the participant, web-based video conferencing will be recorded by screen casting on a personal, password protected computer, or the audio recorded on a nearby personal, password protected electronic voice recorder or computer. If preferred by the participant, the interview can be conducted via a phone call. Phone calls will be recorded by putting the participant on speaker phone in a private room and recording on another device such as a nearby personal, password protected computer or voice recorder. The interviews will last approximately one hour. The data will be stored on password protected devices, and destroyed by the end June of 2021, after the entire research process is completed.

While face-to-face interviews are a preferable method for researchers to gather data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Giorgi, 1985, 2012) because the researcher is able to view the participant in a natural and comfortable setting, video conferencing technology such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams has become a new normal in research due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This research study is taking place during a paradigm shift in face-to-face contact amid safety

protocols set forth by the United States Centers for Disease Control and the Minnesota Department of Health. Due to these health safety protocols that must be adhered to, the main format of interviews will take place over video conference or phone call. While not ideal, Hawkins (2018) highlighted the benefits of virtual interviews. Virtual interviews can increase participation of research subjects by providing opportunities for more flexible scheduling, reduction in geographical or financial barriers that the researcher may face, and in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity for the research to be fully carried out in the face of unprecedented social disruptions.

Data collected in the interview process will allow the researcher to create a rich, thick description. This description, followed by collaborating with participants falls into the recommendations of Creswell & Poth of utilizing "...at least two...validation strategies." (2018, p.259). While the authors state that there are a number of validation methods for qualitative research, they highlight the importance of the researcher to find the types and strategies that they are most comfortable with. For this study, discerning themes and shared phenomenon is most accurately met by utilizing the rich, thick description because "...the researcher provides details when describing a case or when writing about a theme" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 259). This description can provide abundant details about physical descriptions, activities, movements. More importantly, related to this study, the description describes interconnecting details, strong action verbs, quotes, and moving general ideas to narrow ideas. The second validation strategy, collaboration with participants, is more nebulous. The authors provide some guidance stating that it is permissible for participants to contribute to data analysis and interpretation. However, the degree to which the participants are involved is up to the researcher. This study will engage participants through clarifying

questioning and interpretation of results in order to assist the process of finding emerging themes and shared phenomena.

### **Data Analysis**

For this study, the main source of data that will be collected are interviews. The interviews are gathered from the high school administrators of public schools offering concurrent enrollment in Minnesota. Following the guidelines described by Moustakas (1994) and further refined by Creswell and Poth (2018) the analysis begins by reviewing the interview transcripts to find significant statements, trends, repeating patterns, which are then clustered into major themes and categorized on a separate document, as well as being color-coded by emerging themes on the transcription. Categorical themes will be named based on descriptions provided by the participants, the researcher's experience and reasoning, or other sources from the literature review or theoretical framework. Categories may be linked or refined through drawing of diagrams, color-coordinating, or utilizing a spreadsheet for ease of data review (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data collected in the interview process will allow the researcher to create a rich, thick description. The data is reviewed and a textural description is created. This is the "what" of the phenomenological experience of the study participants. This portion of the analysis is heavily supported by quotes, as it most accurately reflects the lived experience of the participants by removing the voice of the researcher, thus reducing bias and limiting the researcher's interpretation of meaning within the data. Following the textural description, a structural description is created. This represents that "how" the participants experience the phenomenon. Finally, by combining the textural and structural descriptions the researcher provides the "context" of what the participants experienced in relation to the phenomenon and

presented in paragraph form. All documents used are stored on a password protected computer or in a locked file in the office of the researcher.

Following the recommendations of Creswell & Poth, "...at least two...validation strategies." (2018, p.259) should be utilized to establish validity of the research. The rich, thick description, followed by collaborating with participants meets the requirements for validity. While the authors state that there are a number of validation methods for qualitative research, they highlight the importance of the researcher to find the types and strategies that they are most comfortable with. For this study, discerning themes and shared phenomenon is most accurately met by utilizing the rich, thick description because "...the researcher provides details when describing a case or when writing about a theme" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 259). This description can provide abundant details about physical descriptions, activities, movements. More importantly, related to this study, the description describes interconnecting details, strong action verbs, quotes, and moving general ideas to narrow ideas. The second validation strategy, collaboration with participants, is more nebulous. The authors provide some guidance stating that it is permissible for participants to contribute to data analysis and interpretation. However, the degree to which the participants are involved is up to the researcher. This study will engage participants through clarifying questioning and interpretation of results in order to assist the process of finding emerging themes and shared phenomena.

## **Instruments**

### **Role of the Researcher**

A unique feature of a phenomenological research study is that the researcher plays a primary role in data collection and analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It is therefore important

the researcher having a sound understanding of one's own ontological and epistemological orientations to the phenomenological subject of the research and how these paradigms impact data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

### **Previous Knowledge and Bias**

My professional career has spanned records & registration functionality at both a public, charter high school and for the past 15 years at both two-year and four-year public higher education institutions in Minnesota. A major component of my work encompassed transferring in college credit that had been earned by students while still in high school. As these numbers steadily grew, I began to hear anecdotal comments by college advisors and faculty members highlighting the frustrations felt by many students; that they had earned credit, however that credit may not have been applicable to a specific major, or may not be the correct course to meet pre-requisite requirements for admission to majors. During a doctoral course on qualitative research, I practiced interview methodology by asking college advisors their perceptions of transfer work earned by high school students. The over-arching theme from that exercise was that concurrent enrollment is growing and it is impacting students in a major way, good and bad. As I dug a little deeper into concurrent enrollment numbers and research, I learned that while much has been studied regarding its impact on students, little to no research has been done on how it impacts high school programming. After speaking with a board member on my local school board, the concurrent enrollment director and faculty at a local four-year public university who work with schools to deliver their college course concurrently, a repeating comment was that high schools have to make major adjustments in order to offer concurrent enrollment courses. I realized that the perspective of the high school administrator is a vital piece of the concurrent enrollment picture that is missing from the



body of research.

While biases are important to factor into qualitative research, it is also important for the researcher to not impose their own biases throughout the research process. This can be accomplished following the "...bracketing out of one's own views before proceeding with the experiences of others" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p.60). As a researcher my biases of understanding the credit transfer process and professional experiences in both P-12 and higher education is important in researching literature related to concurrent enrollment and can be useful during the interview process with regards to clarifying questions, and even within the collaboration for validity. However, I would need to bracket out my biases when recording the interview answers, relying on the verbatim transcripts for coding of themes, rather than use my own understanding of terminology or experience. Not to do so would inhibit the individual voice of the participants to be heard. Therefore, there will be multiple formats for collection the data, including recording the interview on screen capture during the virtual face-to-face interview, recording the interview on a cell phone, and taking written notes. Recorded data will be stored on a password protected computer with physical documents stored in a locked office.

### **Qualifications**

This study relies on the collection of semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. The interview is the primary data collection tool. The interviews will be conducted over a synchronous video conference tool such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams, with phone interviews being conducted in video conferencing is unavailable.

My personal experience and training for conducting research interviews stems from classes I have taken as part of the Doctor of Education program through Minnesota State

University, Moorhead. Interviews conducted for this program were used for field research. Supervision and guidelines for the process was contained in the course requirements and learning outcomes. To further enhance my research interview skills, I have relied on the works of authors I have consulted containing interview skills include Briggs, Coleman, and Morrison (2012), Hawkins (2018), and Creswell and Poth (2018). These authors have suggested the types of interview to use, collection and transcription methods, and data analysis.

I have also received numerous trainings in interpersonal and intercultural communications through my work in P-12 education and as a supervisor within the MinnState System. These trainings have taught skills in active listening, how to refrain from judgement and bias elimination techniques, and types and lines of questioning. While this is my first research study utilizing interviews for data collection, I feel that my background in education, human resource management, and prior course work has provided me with a quality foundation necessary to conducting qualitative research.

### **Ethical Considerations**

During the development and design of this study I have been following the framework designed by Creswell and Poth (2018) framework for considering ethical considerations. I have obtained IRB approval for this study from the Minnesota State University, Moorhead, IRB board. I have developed an informed consent form which outlines the following for participants: freedom of participation and rights to withdraw from the study at any point in time, the purpose of the study and corresponding details of the study, role of the participant, details of the interview procedures, and contains the statement of no harm. The informed consent form also ensures the confidentially protection of the participant through securely storing the data, using pseudonyms and destroying all data at the end of the study.

I have ensured that I have no conflicts of interest with any of the potential research locations. Ethical practices will be adhered to during the data recording and analysis, and during the publication period.

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) define the elements of trustworthiness in qualitative research as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (p. 300). Several research techniques have been incorporated to establish the trustworthiness of this qualitative research project. The first of these techniques was member-checking.

The researcher partnered with participants who offered their personal insights in an interview setting. In order to present their constructed meaning as clearly as possible, member-checking was utilized to ensure credibility. Participants from each interview are given the opportunity to read the findings and clarify meanings prior to publication.

The concept of transferability in qualitative research differs from that of quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained,

Thus the naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility. (p. 316)

Introductory vignettes precede each case finding along with brief descriptive vitas of the interview participants. These descriptive elements offer readers the opportunity for transferability.

Creswell (2018) reminded, “The naturalistic researcher looks for confirmability rather than objectivity in establishing the value of the data. Both dependability and confirmability are

established through an auditing of the research process” (p. 265). The dependability of this qualitative research is established through oversight and audit by its research advisor and committee.

Confirmability is also established through triangulation techniques. Triangulation refers to viewing something from multiple angles to ensure accuracy. Stake (2006) defined its purpose, “to assure that we have the picture as clear and suitably meaningful as we can get it, relatively free of our own biases, and not likely to mislead the reader greatly” (pp. Kindle Locations 1754-1756). In this research, findings and assertions are based on multiple data sources. Further, the data itself is of various types, including interview and documentary analysis.

Finally, positionality enters into the trustworthiness of this research. The researcher clearly positioned herself as a participant in not only the research, but also the topic being studied. As a professional of both P-12 and higher education, the researcher clearly has a stake in the success of the concurrent enrollment program. The goal of the researcher is clearly stated, to propose best practices in the field of concurrent enrollment.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study is to capture the lived experience of public high school administrators in districts that offer concurrent enrollment. This qualitative study is grounded in the theoretical framework of Perna and Thomas’ Conceptual Model of Student Success, of which an emphasis is made that the context of a school plays an important role in the ability of a student to be prepared enough to persist and matriculate into a higher education setting. The voice of the high school administrator is vital to filling a gap in the literature around the phenomenon of offering concurrent enrollment programs. With concurrent enrollment found in nearly every district in Minnesota, it is one of the fastest growing, tax payer funded, dual

enrollment program available to students in public schools. From an equity lens, it is imperative that policymakers and stakeholders of concurrent enrollment offerings have an understanding of what impacts this program has on programming at the high school level, in order to ensure that resources used to support concurrent enrollment doesn't negatively impact equity and access to education for all students within a district.

Data for this study will be collected using semi-structured interviews of administrators at public schools in Minnesota offering concurrent enrollment. The use of interviews to gather the collective, lived experiences of the participants follows the guidelines of Creswell & Poth's (2018) design for a constructivist, phenomenological study. Convenience sampling will be used to identify the school districts for this study. Identification of districts that offer concurrent enrollment programming is available from a public data set provided by the Minnesota Department of Education (2018). Administrators at three rural and three urban public schools in Minnesota offering concurrent enrollment will be invited to participate in this study. The determination of rural and urban districts is made by the researcher using the population area definition provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (2018).

Interviews will be conducted through video conference software and stored electronically on a password-protected computer. Interviews may also be recorded on a hand-held, password protected cell phone. Hand-written notes will be stored in a locked, private office. Data will be transcribed and coded to themes and used to write textural and structural descriptions. These descriptions are then combined to develop a contextual description which yields the essence of participants' experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Validity testing is maintained through a rich, thick description of each interview and collaboration with participants.

IRB approval has been granted by the Minnesota State University, Moorhead IRB board. Participants will be provided an informed consent form detailing their rights and the safeguards of the participants, which includes the confidentiality of their identities and any revealing information. The form also discloses minimal risk, and the protection of the data on secure electronic devices and in a locked, private office. Following the standards of ethical research practice, the researcher will bracket out biases by not asking leading questions or corroborating with the participants.

Chapter four, Findings, will provide details regarding the actual obtained data sample. It will also explain the how the research methodology prescribed by Giorgi (1985) and Crewell and Poth (2018) was applied to the data. Finally, data and the results of the analysis procedures will be presented.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

### **Introduction**

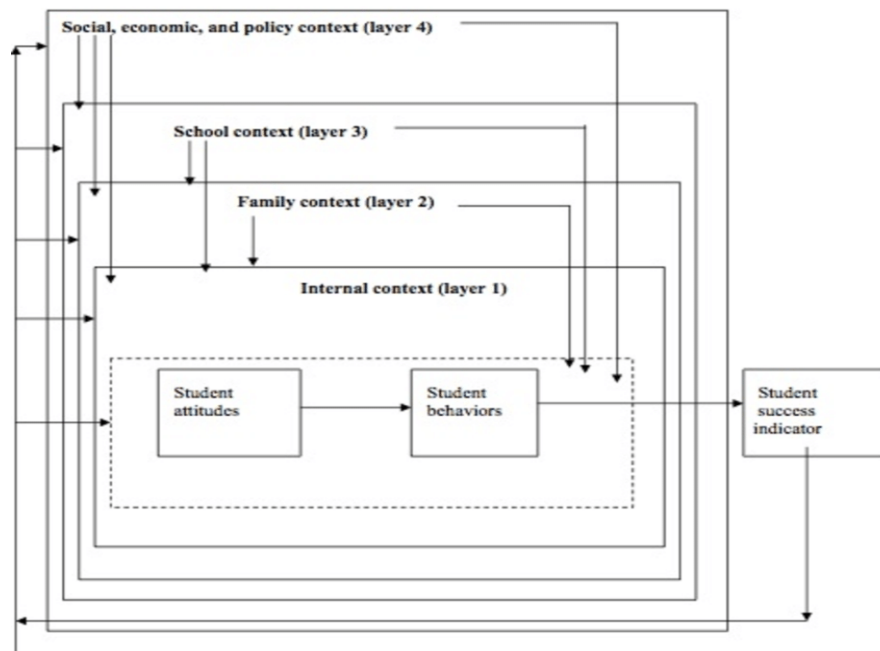
With a focus on the impact concurrent enrollment plays in programming across Minnesota public high schools, the purpose of this study attempts to discern any shared phenomena that high school administrators may experience when integrating concurrent enrollment programs in their school. This study was framed around two research questions:

1. Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses.
2. From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

The goal of this study is to provide a starting point for examining the impact concurrent enrollment programs have on high school resources, through the eyes of the school

administrators. The study sample included seven administrators from a mix of rural and urban districts. Job titles ranged from Counselor to District Superintendent. The study was grounded in Perna & Thomas’ Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success, which incorporates schools as a component of the framework’s integral contextual layers through which students integrate and navigate. This model assists in providing a visual framework of the ingredients necessary for student success during and after, high school. As illustrated in Figure 1, the school context within this framework takes into account aspects of culture, resource allocation, academic rigor, teachers, courses, extra-curricular options, and other fundamentals of school structure (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

Figure 1 *Perna and Thomas’ Integrated Model for Student Success (Perna & Thomas, 2008).*



This study utilized a semi-structured participant interview format. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted via Zoom video conference technology. One interview was conducted over the phone via the speaker, while utilizing the video conferencing software to by the researcher to record the full interview into Zoom software. The participant responses were

transcribed and coded in order to find common ideas, with a focus of discerning any differences between participant answers. The responses were then grouped into larger thematic categories as well as particular, common sub-categories that emerged during the coding process. Participant responses provided validity to the existing body of research and offers unique insights into the logistical operations of concurrent enrollment programming across the state of Minnesota.

### **Researcher's Role**

As a trained educator in P-12 education and a professional in higher education, with nearly two decades of experience with credit transfer and course enrollments, I have witnessed how concurrent enrollment has both enhanced and hindered college persistence. This both strengthens and jeopardizes the objectivity I bring to this study. I work closely with students and college faculty when evaluating college credits earned in high school and how those credits are applied to the college major. Having seen where students are able to progress through their college career quicker than regular incoming freshman, or being told they have not met pre-requisite requirements and working with these students retracing their high school course enrollments, provides me with a deep understanding of how credits earned through concurrent enrollment impact a student's persistence through college and drives student success outcomes. This knowledge imparts strength to this study. Additionally, my experience as a trained P-12 educator and professional in a Minnesota public high school provides a depth and breadth of knowledge and understanding of high school programming and its interface at both colleges and universities across Minnesota. These experiences provide a context in which to discern commonalities and nuances within participant responses.

However, my experiences within P-12 education and student-specific interactions in higher education are a snapshot of experiences found within a large and diverse pool of



programming spanning over a decade across the entire state. With this understanding of my own positionality within the body of research, care has been taken to preserve the integrity of this study through the mitigation of implicit and explicit biases.

My professional experiences working closely with individual students and college faculty and participation with statewide credit transfer policies, corresponding procedures and subsequent implementation, has afforded me an advantage of understanding the nuances of college credit transfer and college persistence across the landscape of higher education. Through my formal doctoral studies I have gained knowledge and experience in qualitative research methodologies and application of these methods for conducting research that preserves data integrity and researcher objectivity. Additionally, my experiences with one-to-one work with students and faculty provide a strong foundation that enhances my ability to conduct a phenomenological study utilizing a semi-structured interview methodology. My formal doctoral studies in qualitative research methods combined with my professional background and skillset maximizes the depth, strength, and meaning behind this study.

### **Description of the Sample**

The sample population for this study focused on a randomized sample of districts offering concurrent enrollment based on district location; rural or urban. The description of district location was obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau (2020) definitions of rural and urban. Districts that offer concurrent enrollment were obtained from the Minnesota Department of Education (2018)'s roster of advanced coursework programs. From this list, districts were divided into rural or urban sub-group and a random sample of districts were selected for participation from each sub-group. Since this study is to discern the shared phenomena of high

school administrators across Minnesota public schools, it was important to ensure that a good representation from both urban and rural schools was present within the sample size.

In line with Creswell & Poth's (2015) recommendations for a phenomenological study sample size of between 5-25 participants, seven participants were selected for this study. Three of the participants are administrators of a school within a rural district and four are administrators of a school within an urban district. The study contained the following job descriptions: Associate Vice-Principal, Counselor, District Superintendent, and Principal.

This phenomenological study was designed to discern administrator perceptions relating to concurrent enrollment within the context of their high school programming. In order to gain meaningful results, this study utilized a constructivist approach to gathering participant perceptions. Each participant engaged in a 2-question semi-structured interview; all participants both began and finished the interview in one session. Interviews were originally designed to be conducted in person, however due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted via Zoom video conferencing software, and recorded at the discretion of the participant. Responses were transcribed, reviewed for content and accuracy, and then coded into common themes in order to examine how individual participant responses compare to one another. Differences in perceptions were also noted and coded in order to demonstrate the objectivity of both the sample population as a whole, and between individual participants.

Participant perceptions in the form of direct quotations were separated into different sections that matched the common themes found in the participant responses. The themes used to gather participant perceptions were created in direct correlation with this study's research questions. These were identified based on the common perceptions among study participants. After participant responses were organized into themes, a deeper analysis relating to the shared

phenomenon among the administrators could be conducted. The analysis and reporting of participant responses meets the larger goal of this study- to provide a broad view of the impacts concurrent enrollment offerings have on high schools across Minnesota.

### **Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis**

Key functions to the integrity of the data analysis process for this study include analysis framework and constructivism observance. Following Giorgi's (1986) phenomenological psychological methodology, the framework for analyzing qualitative semi-structured interview was used. This methodology is designed to capture "...as closely as possible the manner in which the phenomenon under investigation has been experienced by the participants" (Isabirye, A. & Makoe, M., 2018). This methodology provides structure to the context around the coded and grouped participant responses. Participants were allowed to share their own perceptions as it related to the research questions, thus ensuring that constructivism was observed.

Giorgi's (1986) psychological phenomenological framework indicates the procedures that the researcher follow in order to properly analyze interview data and draw conclusions:

1. Understand the data: Read/listen to the entire transcript several times in order to ascertain the *essence* of participant perceptions. It's important at this stage for the researcher to "bracket" one's personal views/ biases/ pre-conceptions about the phenomenon.
2. Identify meaningful units: Finding the words/phrases or non-verbals that provide unique and coherent meanings.
3. Re-group the meaningful units into common clusters: This stage provides a clearer and rich understanding of shared responses. It is permissible that these common clusters may not be explicitly expressed by the participants but can be intuited through the descriptions of their lived experiences (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2003).
4. Transforming the common clusters into descriptive expressions: This step provides the mechanism for the researcher to code the meaningful units into specific themes, which moves the individual's lived experiences into a cohesive, shared phenomenon.
5. Synthesis and Integration: Draw conclusions based on the themes found within the participant responses.

### **Transcription Review**

As described in step one of Giorgi's (1986) psychological phenomenological framework, upon completion of participant interviews the interviews were transcribed and reviewed for both researcher and participant accuracy and content. After transcription review, many similar patterns of thought emerged and the essence of participant perceptions became clear, as the common themes appeared in both of the answers to the specific research questions, and also indirectly from conversation and questioning that bore no specific connection to the main research questions. The essence of participant responses were natural and whole, and allowed for the free expression of the participant's lived experience with the phenomenon.

In step two of Giorgi's (1986) psychological phenomenological framework the researcher approached the review of respondent analysis in two ways. First, transcriptions were read separately from one another – this ensured that each interview and the respondent creating the context for the interview, maintained its own individuality by maintaining constructivist themes to be considered for later analysis. Once a thorough, objective understanding of each interview was established, the researcher began linking meaningful units across interview responses. This satisfies the phenomenological methodology of this study; the analysis of individual experiences that appear across multiple subjects and expose common attitudes.

Step three of the data analysis framework, Giorgi (1986) stipulates the researcher move the meaningful units found between participant responses into common clusters. These clusters must work to transition the meaning of responses from an individual, focused on one participant construct, to a blend of responses that share commonalities between all, or most, respondents. Common clusters emerged after reviewing participant perceptions, providing the mechanism for moving the participant responses from the individual to the group, or common clusters.

In the fourth step of Girogi's (1986) psychological phenomenological framework, the researcher must ground the analysis around the constructivist nature of participant responses. That is, moving the implicit ideas to the explicit. This is necessary to add credibility to the research results and conclusion. Moving themes from implicit to explicit is accomplished by reviewing characteristics such as professional title or set of job responsibilities, years of experience, or depth of experience with concurrent enrollment. Many factors work to support themes beyond simply identifying similarities within the participant responses; these factors should be highlighted and made explicit in order to make the thematic connections deeper as a result of comparing constructivist similarities with perceptual realities. This analysis considered participant traits and attributes when coding responses into themes. For example, consideration was applied when the participants identified their years of experience with concurrent enrollment, professional titles and work experience, or even person experiences with concurrent enrollment. The constructs of these attributes combine to identify what considerations should be applied when drawing conclusions respective to study data.

The final step in Girogi's (1986) psychological phenomenological framework states the themes are reviewed and reasonable conclusions are drawn, while maximizing credibility and external validity. The conclusions relating to administrator perceptions around concurrent enrollment in this study were based on the participant responses overarching thematic ideas, as well as on the similarities and differences between the individual constructs as they relate to the viewpoint of the participant.

Utilizing Girogi's (1986) psychological phenomenological framework to analyze the results of this study provided an effective structure to organize the data obtained from this study. Careful consideration of each step in the analysis process was maintained to ensure elements like

external validity, credibility, and reliability were all both observed and satisfied. The results of this study offer a more enriched understanding of the impacts concurrent enrollment plays on high school programming, from the school administrators. This study presents itself as a valuable tool for those wishing to explore the intersections of concurrent enrollment and resource allocation, or high school programming and its impact on student success as well as to offer a baseline from which future research may be conducted around other specific aspects of concurrent enrollment.

### **Research Participants**

The following provides a brief background and summary of each research participant. Many had different roles, such as District Superintendent, Counselor, Assistant Principal and Principal. The average range of time spent in the professional field ranged from approximately one year to over 10 years. The school enrollment populations ranged from 200-1,200. The schools were located in either a rural or urban setting, as defined by the Census Bureau (2020). The names of the participants have been changed to protect their identity. Some administrators were able to provide the actual number of students participating in concurrent enrollment (head count). Others were able to provide the number of *instances* students were enrolled. For example, one student taking three concurrent enrollment courses would count as 3 instances of concurrent enrollment. The instance figure is drawn from the number of concurrent enrollment courses offered plus the number of students enrolled in each course.

#### **Adam.**

Adam is the Superintendent of a large, urban school district. Adam has been in this role for eight years. Prior to that, Adam served as an Assistant Superintendent at a large, urban district and Principal at a smaller urban high school. Adam's current district is comprised of over 10,000

students in P-12 and houses two high schools. The district student demographic make-up is: 52% students of color, 48% White, non-Hispanic; 60% Free-Reduced lunch. Adam's perspective of his current district is that "it is an island amongst this rural area" in Minnesota.

**Jamie.**

Jamie is the new Superintendent of a moderate-sized urban district. Jamie has been in this role for less than one academic year. Prior to this position, Jamie served as superintendent for five years of a neighboring rural district with approximately 640 high school students. Of that, about 80 were eligible for concurrent enrollment or other dual-credit program offerings. Jamie was also that high school's principal for 11 years. Jamie's answers were framed around the experiences as superintendent within that smaller district. That rural district demographics were 25% students of color and 75% White, non-Hispanic; 35.6% Free-Reduced lunch.

**Peter.**

Peter is the Principal for the middle & high school in a small, rural district in SW Minnesota. This is Peter's second year as principal. Prior to serving as principal, Peter was the school's social studies teacher, and had been directly involved with concurrent enrollment through teaching Economics and Political Science concurrent enrollment courses for about five years. Peter's district is comprised of approximately 1100 students in grades P-12. The student demographics include: 45% Free-Reduced lunch; 69% White, non-Hispanic and 31% students of color. Peter mentioned it was around the mid-to late 2000's that the district began to grow its concurrent enrollment offerings to where it is today, which is now around 40 credits per year.

**Julie.**

Julie, high school Counselor, works for a larger-sized rural district. The school demographic includes: 23% students of color, 77% White, non-Hispanic; 42% Free-Reduced lunch. The

overall district population of 4,853 students. Julie has been with the district for approximately seven years. In addition to the counselor responsibilities, Julie is now the main concurrent enrollment coordinator for the high school.

**Michael.**

Michael is the Principal for a large high school in an urban district and has been in this role for a little over a year. This district has a total student population of 18,270. Student demographics include: 20.4% Free-Reduced lunch; 30% students of color, 70% White, non-Hispanic. Prior to his current appointment, Michael was principal at a smaller, more rural district for approximately five years. Michael stated that school “had extensive concurrent enrollment” options He also served on a concurrent enrollment/PSEO advisory board with the local community college that served this school’s primary concurrent enrollment and PSEO college partner. Michael’s interview provided insights on concurrent enrollment programming from both districts.

**Emerson.**

Emerson is the Principal at a medium-sized rural district that sits just near the boundaries of a couple larger, urban districts. Emerson mentions that “no one that lives here [in the district] works here. We even have kids that come from 45 minutes away. We have parents who work for companies like BestBuy, UnitedHealth, Target Corp. They are highly educated and want for their kids what is offered at the other large, wealthy districts.”

The total high school enrollment is 650. The school demographics include: 14% students of color, 86% White, non-Hispanic; 21.3% Free-Reduced lunch. The school has approximately 169 instances of students taking concurrent enrollment per year. Emerson has been Principal at this school for a little over five years and serves as the primary administrator for concurrent enrollment programs. Prior to serving as Principal, Emerson was the Athletic Director for the



school. The school has been offering concurrent enrollment programming for the past 10-11 years.

**Kris.**

Kris is the Associate Principal at a large high school within a large, urban district. Kris' main responsibilities are to deal with the HR, class scheduling, and the general operations side of the school. The school has approximately 1,800 students. Student demographics include: 38.4% Free-Reduced lunch; 42% students of color, 58% White, non-Hispanic. Kris has been with the school for 10 years, which is the same length of time concurrent enrollment programming has been in place. About 400 students participate in concurrent enrollment annually.

**Presentation of Data and Results of the Analysis**

The findings detailed in this section provide insights of high school administrators' perceptions around concurrent enrollment and its impact on their high school's programming. School resources, as a part of the school context framework, plays an important role in determining student success (Perna & Thomas, 2008). The context of a school setting is a complex organization that intertwines multiple resources whereby a student may find success, or struggle, depending on a myriad of factors. As concurrent enrollment opportunities grow, school administrators must continue an ever-more complex dance with financial, cultural, and academic resources within the quest of providing every student the opportunity of discovering and becoming their best.

**Themes**

Participant responses have been coded into three primary themes – each theme is based on satisfying the research questions driving this study. The research questions this study explored are:

1. Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses.
2. From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

Table 1 illustrates which qualitative data points each participant perceived as highly important.

**Table 1** *Rationales for Offering Concurrent Enrollment Perceived as Important to Participants*

	Saving money for students	Access & opportunity for college-level rigor w/in support structure of high school	Community expectation	Fiscal necessity for schools	Opportunity to earn college credit
Adam		X			X
Emerson				X	X
Jamie	X		X		
Julie	X	X			
Kris		X			X
Michael				X	
Peter		X		X	

Table 2 summarizes the major themes that were revealed during the coding process.

**Table 2**

Participant	Phrase	Theme
Adam	It provides access and opportunity to college-level courses.	Access and opportunity
Jamie	We're making decisions because we feel these opportunities for kids are going to propel them or prepare them to get a head start.	Access and Opportunity
Julie	Students see where they can be after high school.	Access and Opportunity
Kris	We started looking closely at what personalized learning means.	Access and Opportunity
Emerson	School is a business.	Financial viability
Michael	We were literally losing the State aid appropriation for a student (through PSEO).	Financial viability
Peter	To remain viable we needed offer coursework which is at (students) level.	Financial viability
Emerson	We are not able to help them (teachers) financially to get the credits (for certification to teach concurrent enrollment)	Accreditation and staffing

Kris	There is a cost for getting our teachers trained.	Accreditation and staffing
Peter	It's been very burdensome to our teachers.	Accreditation and staffing

**Research Question 1:** Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses.

The first research question was designed to provide the participant an opportunity to share their perspectives in the most open manner possible. Administrator perceptions were gathered using semi-structured interviews that allowed for participant autonomy respective to question responses. While this research question assumes the participant has an understanding of the rationale for why their school offers concurrent enrollment, the assumption was both supported by a thick body of research and proved a safe assumption; each participant acknowledged their own experiences with concurrent enrollment, often integrating their *whole* professional experience, not just at their current school.

**Theme 1: Access and Opportunity For College-Level Rigor Courses Within the Support Structure of the High School.**

Each participant stated that concurrent enrollment provides both access and opportunity for students to get a head start on college within the support structure of the high school. Study participants unanimously asserted the importance for students to have exposure to rigorous coursework as a mechanism by which a student can challenge themselves, irrespective of earning college credit.

When speaking to the rationale to offer concurrent enrollment, Adam stated, "...we're talking about (concurrent enrollment) helping or decreasing the achievement gap." He grounded his rationale on the notion that by instituting concurrent enrollment programming exposes students to new horizons within post-secondary enrollment, stating:

Students who are first-generation or from another country, or have heard all their life that, I can't, I'm not supposed to, or, this is how we've always done it and it's what you're supposed to do, are now thinking, Why not me?. It's exposure...that's the starting point.

Kris explained how they looked at concurrent enrollment opportunities:

We really started diving in and looking at what personalized learning means. We realized when we saw who was signing up [for concurrent enrollment] that there was actually a social-economic piece for our kids who wanted the college experience but couldn't provide their own transportation [to the community college]; they couldn't afford bus fare or couldn't drive. So we saw [concurrent enrollment] as a piece of the socio-economic puzzle.

We really looked at [demographics] who was taking these courses and it became clear that Black students and students of color...started taking these classes because they have access them, where they didn't always feel like they could be in AP classes. We really make [concurrent enrollment] accessible...we built a system around getting into these classes.

Adam added that students tend to feel safe and/or have an increased sense of security when taking concurrent classes with their classmates inside the high school. He described his perceptions of how concurrent enrollment impacts the student body as a spill-over effect. When students see their friends participating in concurrent enrollment courses, then those students want to join.

Michael added:

We need to be asking ourselves if we should be preparing every kid for say, Harvard. Or do we need to be preparing them for the next chapter in their life? I think there is a high degree of value in being able to imagine you can transfer in 15 credits, especially for our students who might be first-generation college goers, or who are trying to be the first generation college-goers.

Michael continued:

Concurrent enrollment is a way to expose kids to [academic] rigor without having it high stakes. Take IB or AP, it's a win-all or lose-all exam. There's something to be said about some kids that don't test well. I feel that we're teaching to a test, and I'm not convinced that it matches the rigor of a college or university class. I believe that we're [closer with concurrent enrollment] in trying to teach kids how to think and apply their thinking to learning.

Julie argued that access and opportunity to concurrent enrollment provides students with the chance to grow:

They get exposure to high level, college level classes...whether or not they're taking it for college credit, it's important for them to be able to see their success in the class to help project them into life after high school.

Peter's perceptions resonates with Julie's. Peter states:

We want to make sure that if a student is choosing to not go to college it is not because we didn't provide them the opportunity...we want them to make an informed decision about what's right for them. And you can only do that with experience.

Jamie indicated that viewing concurrent enrollment through the lens of access and opportunity is another tool a school can utilize to bolster student success. "From an administrator perspective...at the core, we're making or helping to make decisions because we feel as if those sorts of opportunities for kids are going to help propel them, or prepare them...to get a head start."

Connected to access and opportunity is that support structure the school can provide students since concurrent enrollment courses are offered within the school. Peter elaborated the importance of the relationship between student and the high school teacher offering the concurrent enrollment course. "...they are learning the content from teachers that they know. That's vital...the ability to be challenged at their level while also experiencing high school".

Julie supported Peter's comments. She mentioned the opportunity to take concurrent enrollment provides students "...the safety net of...being supported by their teachers that they're normally connected with." Michael reinforced that thought arguing that concurrent enrollment provides students "...with a college experience within an environment that's familiar with them, with staff they know and trust, and they can begin to accumulate that learning experience that can then migrate into their next college experience."

Kris summed up this perspective stating:

We know our kids deeply...as their teachers are also their college professors; they can say if a kid is ready or not. So it's a way to protect students from maybe getting a D...or fail a course. That would mess up their post-secondary success. So these are some parameters to make sure they're safe.

Emerson's rationale of offering concurrent enrollment was more nuanced:

We strive to push our students to become better students and to perhaps study areas they maybe otherwise would not. Here they can have actual high school teachers they know and they have a relationship with, helping them during those credits at the college level.

Emerson continued with an example:

We had a junior last year take PSEO. He did so poorly now he's not welcomed back there [at the community college where the student took PSEO]. It was just way too much free time to take everything online through [the community college]. And here, if he was starting to struggle in that class, we would have had a conversation with his parents. At [the community college] they don't have that conversation, which is another one of those reasons why I think concurrent enrollment over PSEO is the way to go.

Emerson also mentioned a very specific impact this opportunity had on one particular student:

This is one of our success stories. We have one of our Hispanic students, a young man, who took our Intro to Ed class last year. He earned 8 credits at [the community college] and then realized that education might be what he wants to do. But he still needs to stay close to home because they don't have a lot of money. So he's going to attend [the community college] and living at home; he's going for Elementary Ed. At [the community college] they have access to the partner university Education program there. So I mean, there's a kid who we opened the door for, and now I think, is the first person to ever go to college in his family. He'd never done PSEO and he had never thought about doing it. That's one of the powers of concurrent enrollment...exposing some students to things they may ever be otherwise.

## **Theme 2: Financial Viability of the School.**

Generally speaking, all participants felt very strongly that offering concurrent enrollment was a necessity for the fiscal health of the school. Most commonly mentioned was the loss of per-pupil funding schools experienced when students opted to earn their college credits through the PSEO program at a local community college or university. Emerson argued, "School is a business. We don't want them (students) to leave for PSEO...we lose our funding." Michael's school felt this loss of revenue to PSEO rather acutely as the local community college was located directly across the street from the high school.

We... lost a lot of revenue because a lot of kids going off-campus for PSEO... we were literally losing the State aid appropriation for that student. And we were just paying the tuition bill straight to [the local community college].

Peter highlighted the challenge that many rural schools face, declining enrollment, and how those numbers impact the school's bottom line. Peter's district is located far from any college or university, so PSEO options require students to physically re-locate or take college courses online. While those choices may not be optimal for students, many would select to enroll full time in PSEO because it was their only access to college-level courses. Peter stated:

We're rather geographically remote. We knew that to remain viable to students we needed to offer coursework...for students who were ready for college-level rigor...otherwise we were not going to continue to be viable as a school.

Peter's school has intergraded concurrent enrollment so deeply into overall high school programming, students can now earn up to 40 college credits through the program. This was an increase from 12-18 credits to 40 credits over a seven-year span. This illustrates the close connection that program/course offerings play with regards to school budget and resource allocation.

Declining enrollment can also be an issue for schools located in urban centers.

Competition for market share is in the forefront of many programming choices made by districts. For Kris, capturing market share for the high school begins at kindergarten and increases in the middle school due to the fact there is only one, large middle school that serves the district. Students then face a choice of which high school to attend. Concurrent enrollment programming plays directly into the marketing aspect around school choice. Kris argues:

At the end of the day our parents, when they come and shop for schools, between us, the private schools, the charter schools, they look for options, knowledge-based options in school. That was a big piece of the puzzle [for offering concurrent enrollment]...we say, Hey, Welcome! Here's why you should choose us. It is part of our district language and it's in our marketing videos. The idea is when a kid comes into kindergarten we can tell

families, here is your whole path to post-secondary. This was more like a community plan, in that, we're all in this together, even though it's really supporting our kids, all kids.

Emerson echoed Kris' sentiments:

Given our location and with virtual education for colleges, if we don't offer it (concurrent enrollment) our kids are going to get it somewhere else. We want to keep our kids in our building and give them the opportunities to excel without having to leave our building or stay at home.

Emerson continued,

It's certainly more expensive to offer concurrent enrollment than offering some of our other classes. But again, it's a balance sheet because if we don't offer those classes there's a number of our kids that are going to go PSEO. As example, our general threshold for offering a class is around 22 student enrollment. But we don't have a threshold in our concurrent enrollment courses. If there are seven students that want to take Spanish 5, we're offering Spanish 5.

### **Theme 3: Accreditation and Staffing Resources**

Minnesota's concurrent enrollment program requirements are recommended by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), accredited by the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), and regulated by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE).

In September 2019, NACEP received evidence from the HLC to revise the standard which stipulates the qualifications a high school teacher must have to be eligible to teach concurrent enrollment courses. This change states "All concurrent enrollment instructors are approved by the appropriate college/university academic leadership and must meet the minimum qualifications for instructors teaching the course on campus" (NACEP, 2021, p.2). For Minnesota schools, this change means that all high school teachers who teach concurrent enrollment courses must have earned a masters in the designated field, or have a masters' degree plus 18 credits in the content area they wish to teach. While is some legislative funding available



to teachers who wish to pursue the additional 18 credits, many districts highlight the strain this change in accreditation standards has placed on their schools.

Michael, whose school sits within a large, urban center, highlighted the staffing challenge facing his school:

The roadblock I see for a school like mine in pursuing more concurrent enrollment is most of my staff is going to be mid-career or higher. And as a result, they're already at the top [of their lanes]. The idea of even getting free credits isn't something that my staff are going to pursue.

Emerson adds that the accreditation requirements have:

Limited us in some areas because our goal is to have at least two [concurrent enrollment] courses in each of the core subject areas...and it's because of our staff. We're not able to help them financially to get the credits. It's a hurdle.

Kris noted that because their district is fiscally sound, they are able to pay for teachers to take credits to get them to the 18 additional needed in specific content areas. As Kris described, this is a short-term impact on the budget for a long-term gain:

Our biggest cost comes if we have to pay per credit; the cost of getting teachers ramped up and trained, and in paying them to take courses...but our district has made that decision...those are the pieces of the puzzle.

Julie added what many administrators realize; concurrent enrollment classes may be lost due to retirement or teachers switching districts. Julie's school is looking at the educational awareness they need to provide to their staff. Julie stated:

Our teaching staff has to know what it's going to take for them to get those 18 [credits]. Also, they have to consider the purpose of why they are taking those classes. We have one teacher who didn't chose to pursue the +18 credits, so that concurrent enrollment course is going away next year...which is too bad because we will potentially lose those kids to PSEO.

Peter's perception is that concurrent enrollment is important enough to find a way to certify teachers:

Our approach has been to help teachers get certified. We actually offered to pay for teachers to get their credits...whether that be a master's or for the plus 18. We helped each teacher kind of create a path...that worked within their discipline, and we reimburse for those credits and then we offer a small stipend per college course that somebody teaches because of the extra coursework that it is for the teacher.

Peter added:

It's been very burdensome to our teachers. It is making them better, I think. They are certainly deepening their knowledge pool for their curriculum, which is a positive. And we're getting through it, but it's been a challenge, especially now of course (due to the pandemic).

Adam highlighted some of the course scheduling challenges, which most often arise when there are not enough teachers designated as qualified by the Higher Learning Commission or partnering college for the course to run. He suggested one way to help solve that challenge is to utilize technology by offering a course virtually and bringing in students at the second of two high schools in the district. Adam commented, "We struggle with having (classes) that kids would be interested in with (staff) that can actually teach it. In the new HLC rules around having to have either a master's degree or the 18 plus credits...we're managing so far."

While districts wrestle with how to assist or work with existing teachers in meeting the new NACEP requirements, schools also consider teacher credentials when adding new staff members. Julie mentioned staffing conversations occurring within her school. "I feel like we're adding new staff. I know that [credentials] are on our Principal's radar. We've had the conversations around new programs that we're looking at implementing".

Concurrent enrollment programming is reflected in high school programming through the opportunities and challenges found in managing school resources. Peter explained that offering

near forty (40) college credits hits one school resource, course scheduling, the hardest. He stated, “our challenge is that once we decide to offer the course, there are certain things we have to do because the college is tell us (to)”. Peter provided an example of a college-level biology course:

This has always been a full-year course. Now it’s a semester-long course, because the college offers the course in one semester. So it’s all possible, but it changes the mind-set... from our scheduling standpoint and those are things we have no control over because the college tells us we need to teach it this way. We understand that from a scheduling perspective.

Peter then mentioned how the COVID-19 pandemic played into the scheduling structure:

This year, related to the pandemic, we made a decision locally to switch to an all-block schedule. So are only in four courses in the fall and four in the spring. This is a little more limiting...but it provides a balance for some of our students, but it’s a lot of time to dedicate to one course.

Block schedules are better for students (because) they grasp the content more in-depth...and we feel it creates a more authentic college experience because typically, college classes are over an hour long, especially the entry-level ones. It’s not realistic to have (college courses) every day for only 45 minutes.

Peter added that it becomes challenging to meld the college course model to the high school block model. In doing so, the school realized that there were some college courses that perhaps would not be a good fit for the students. One of those courses was Calculus, which was being offered as a nine-week course by the college. “We felt like that was unrealistic (for our students) and we didn’t want to set our students up for a lack of success.” Therefore, the school decided not to offer Calculus through concurrent enrollment this year. Overall however “we try to offer courses that fit the general education categories, so when a student goes to a four-year university or a two-year college those classes are out of the way.”

Kris’ school determines what concurrent courses to offer. The school runs on trimester and currently offers approximately nine concurrent enrollment courses. Kris says that when building the pool of course offerings one determining factor is examining what courses can assist

students in “ramping up their strengths” and that having an understanding of a student’s individual strengths is accomplished by having a solid understanding of the students.

Emerson reiterates how course scheduling can impact students and the courses they have to select from:

Our goal is to have at least two concurrent enrollment courses in each core subject area and then it would be nice to have some of our elective areas to be the same. We’re heavy in English classes, but our students could leave here with like 42 earned college credits without leaving the building.

One of the challenges that it creates for us is scheduling. There’s only seven periods in the day...we have a really good music program, and so for some kids they have to make a hard decision...to decide what’s more important, to take this college credit class or their music. It comes down to planning for the kids...and being purposeful and not just grabbing credits because they are credits. We are constantly educating...mental health and well-being are more important than getting more credits.

Emerson continued that while the school strives to offer a wide variety of concurrent enrollment courses, the key to its success is staffing:

Any of these classes is going to drive enrollment, but where the kids decide to come to it or not depends on the staff. If the kids hear it’s awful, they are not going to enroll. We’re a small school and kids talk.

The success of these classes, from Emerson’s perspective, is the strength of the relationship between the high school and the college delivering the concurrent enrollment course. Citing the above example, Emerson mentions:

The folks at the university and college [we partner with] are great...I mean phenomenal. But also it’s our teacher mentors, especially in math. They are either current math teachers or retired, but still involved in the program and come out to the schools. And that really makes a difference. They understand the college side of it, the concurrent side, but they also understand the high school side of things. And I think that’s really important. Communication is key in it. And we’ve been really fortunate. We’ve had good people.

### **Summary of Research Question One.**

Study participants uniformly agreed that concurrent enrollment provides their students with the access and opportunity to engage in college-level rigorous coursework. Participants demonstrated differing perceptions on the how much of an impact actually earning the college credit had, when compared to the overall opportunity for students to be challenged academically. However, each participant identified that earning college credit, was a strong motivator for student participation in concurrent enrollment. Participants also noted that a value-add for the concurrent enrollment program is its ability to serve as a “safety-net” for students. Since the classes are taught within the school, students are more likely to be supported by teaching and school staff if they experience challenges with the course. Several participants cited this safety-net as not just a retention and success tool for high school, but also serves as a persistence and success tool for the student once they enter college. The college transcript they provide will be more academically sound (little to no failing/low grades) and the student potentially will be more emotionally resilient for the rigors and challenges of college.

Most participants were quick to mention that if concurrent enrollment were not available, students would seek college-level coursework directly from colleges and universities through the PSEO program. These enrollments have a direct impact on the fiscal health of schools, with schools seeing a loss in per pupil state allocated funding for each student who was enrolled PSEO courses. While many participants indicated that offering concurrent enrollment was still costly, they indicated it was still more affordable than losing the per pupil state allocation aid.

Participants indicated the most difficult balance in providing concurrent enrollment is having teachers that meet the new NACEP credential requirements. The impact of this new rule is forcing many districts to pivot or reallocated resources to either assist teachers in the college tuition needed to earn their 18 credits in a specific content area, or to examine

how to offer college-level rigorous courses that may not be as transfer-friendly as concurrent enrollment. Others commented that the new requirements become part of the candidate evaluation process when considering new hires.

**Research Question Two:** From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

While study participants were able to share their perceptions relative to the rationale of why concurrent enrollment is offered, it is imperative to hear the administrator's beliefs as to *how* concurrent enrollments impacts their students because the school administrator is in the unique position to examine offered programs across all spectrums of the student demographic. Their perceptions of how one program can impact the student body as a whole provides insights into opportunities and challenges districts face when deciding what programs to offer.

Participants identified two primary themes of how concurrent enrollment impacts their student body. 1) Exposure to life after high school and, 2) contributing to the fabric of the high school. Examining the context of these themes will provide clarity around how districts which differ from each other have common similarities in the responses.

### ***Exposure to Life After High School***

Many of the study participants mentioned that concurrent enrollment provides students with the opportunity to be exposed to thinking about what comes after high school, regardless if the student is enrolled in a concurrent enrollment course, or if the student is earning college credit for that course.

Adam's perspective of being an "urban district island" surrounded by rural communities noted that many of the students enrolled in the district would be considered

first-generation college students. For many, concurrent enrollment serves as an early conduit to high education opportunities. Adam summarized, “it’s a pathway, a connection. Students are being exposed to [community college] and [local university]. It’s exposure to start thinking about life after high school”. Adam added his perceptions of how concurrent enrollment impacts the student body as a spill-over effect. When students see their friends participating in concurrent enrollment courses, then those students want to join.

Julie also stated that exposure was an important factor as it “...helps project them [students] into life after high school”. Julie continued that concurrent enrollment courses have an impact on student schedules and their overall development, both academically and personally. While concurrent enrollment is a benefit to students for a variety of factors, Julie mentions:

I think the very big reality that is one of the cons [of concurrent enrollment] is [its impact on] a student’s mental health. If they are taking say three concurrent classes for a semester and we are on a four-period block schedule, many are having a hard time juggling that. So we have to think how we can provide some balance.

Michael summarized that it isn’t about how many classes or credits a student leaves with. What matters is “helping kids to visualize...where they want to go in life, and helping to guide them a little bit in terms of what’s important to them and what their career interests might be”.

Emerson provided an example of a student who before concurrent enrollment hadn’t thought about college as a viable option. Emerson summarized,

That’s one of the powers of concurrent enrollment, exposing some student to things they may not every be otherwise. He’s one student we’ve opened the door for and now he’s going to be the first person in his family to ever go to college.

This sentiment was similar to the response Michael provided. Michael described the school’s student body as “a changing demographic; not a lot of middle class, but upper middle class and the working class.” Michael continued that concurrent enrollment provided

“a value-add for all our families” as many students were now earning around 15 college credits. Consequently, earning these college credits provided families with exposure to the college opportunities their students may have after high school.

### *Fabric of School Culture*

Many of the participants indicated in their responses that concurrent enrollment weaves itself into the culture of the school. Some, like Adam, mentioned how concurrent enrollment is subtly impacting school culture through the process of student engagement. This observation is connected to how resource allocation around the confluence of concurrent enrollment and high school programming shapes and informs the culture of school, both within the school and across the community. Adam said:

There are ramifications you have to navigate in order to offer these programs. You have to reallocate resources to other places...this may change the traditional feel (of the school) and some staff will say, well, you're getting rid or changing my department.

It's the mindset that somebody thinks that you're taking away from somebody to offer or potentially offer this program. And it's your building belief, your district...and sometimes it rolls over because you will have some people in your community asking what you are doing here.

Julie's response focused on how concurrent enrollment can impact a student's ability to select or plan for courses. Julie mentions that the administration is more aware of this impact and “has done a nice job of building a schedule to try to lessen the [schedule] conflicts, especially if there is a larger amount of students wanting to take a specific course.” Jamie responded that adding concurrent enrollment impacted the school culture of being known “as an AP” school. Jamie elaborated:

AP was just kind of in the water...and [concurrent enrollment] was not an overly hard topic to bring up to kids or their families, but it was different [with teachers and staff] because it isn't a one-to-one change. We had to make sure that people didn't feel like they were going to be losing in this shift.



The impact of offering concurrent enrollment on the student body was found across the fabric of the school culture and course offerings. Jamie's previous district "...had been a very heavy Advanced Placement district; multiple courses, multiple grade levels". Adding concurrent enrollment into existing high school programming caused a cultural shift within the school. The change that impacted the students most were the subjects that were now available as concurrent enrollment classes. Jamie elaborated:

Making the transition from an AP course wasn't...an overly hard topic to bring up, especially when people saw what the value would be to them...I think we had like 13 AP courses. Once we decided to move further, we started offering concurrent courses that we didn't even offer in AP. We didn't have any decrease in the number of kids served. (Concurrent enrollment) was like...high school seniors taking a first-year college speech class in the high school. So in that case, it expanded the number of kids taking upper level courses.

However, offering concurrent enrollment did raise concerns from the standpoint of student guidance and program planning. Since concurrent enrollment admission requirements are governed by the college teaching the course, access to more rigorous curriculum can be limiting. Jamie explained:

If a student wanted to take...AP government one year and it was going to be an absolute train wreck for that student, like they are barely getting by in high school, our philosophy was, okay, look, the water's warm, it's going to be hard. But if you feel as if this is something you want to give a shot to, getting hard-earned B minus or C, but you like the content, the rigor, the overall experience of an AP class, that's going to be good for you.

When we shift into concurrent enrollment, higher education has just different requirements. There were those times where kids wanted to take, say, Intro to Comp, but they didn't meet the requirements, so they ended up being a senior in English. That was the difference between AP. It was like, ok, come on in and we'll see how this goes.

When asked about how the district is preparing students for concurrent enrollment, Jamie said that programs such as AVID are in place. But what is lacking, and what could possible reach

more students, is early preparation and pathway planning, especially within the middle school years. Jamie stated simply:

Sixth grade courses lead to seventh grade years, seventh grade tees up your eighth grade experiences. And so if you're able to raise the rigor, raise the expectations through programs like AVID, and you stick with us here, you're not only going to be eligible, you're going to be successful. That doesn't mean it's going to be easy, but there are going to be supports in place and you're going to have the opportunity to do things that maybe you weren't thinking about in these ways.

Similarly, Peter implied the impact that concurrent enrollment programming has on students is perhaps most profoundly felt across the student body from the aspect of school culture. By creating a concurrent enrollment program that, as Peter explained "...provides a rigorous education for our highest achieving students", students stay within the school.

By keeping them in our doors so they can add to the fabric of our schools...and they can be part of what we do as a school. We want to keep all of our students together through graduation, to the best of our ability.

### **Summary of Research Question Two:**

Building off research question one, question two seeks to better understand how administrators perceive concurrent enrollment's impact across the entire student body, not just limited to those students who are enrolled in concurrent enrollment courses. Participants agreed that concurrent enrollment integration within broader high school programming provides many students with exposure to college or what life may be like after high school.

Participants also gave varying examples of how concurrent enrollment is woven into the cultural fabric of the school. Some schools are seeing growth in concurrent enrollment from students encouraging others to register for these classes. Other administrator's mentioned their school is deliberately building concurrent enrollment courses strategically into their master schedules in order to broaden the subject matter and lessen the conflict of classes for the juniors

and seniors. Other participants mentioned the cultural norms that have/had changed within their schools as concurrent enrollment is incorporated. Some mentioned their teachers felt threatened by the change, others mentioned having to explain their rationale for adding concurrent enrollment to the school community.

### **Synthesis**

The purpose of this study was to unveil high school administrators' perceptions respective to how concurrent enrollment impacts high school programming. This study explored the rationales around why administrators offer concurrent enrollment and the impact they see concurrent enrollment having across their study body. This study sought to establish a better understanding of where concurrent enrollment fits into the overall high school program and its interface within resource allocation, school culture, and student engagement.

Revealing the shared phenomenon concurrent enrollment brings to a school creates an opportunity for stakeholders to examine the multiple ways that concurrent enrollment programming impacts the financial, academic, and cultural aspects of a school. Statewide coordinators and lawmakers, in particular, should find the results of this study helpful, as it provides the unique perspective of the school administrator on a topic that reaches to every corner of the State and consequently, impacts every student enrolled in Minnesota public schools. This study was designed to yield highly generalizable results and conclusions, so as to empower stakeholders, irrespective of job title, to better understand the relationship between concurrent enrollment and high school programming.

This study was anchored by two research questions:

1. Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses.

2. From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

The findings presented in this chapter answer the research questions upon which this study was predicated. The findings are presented in the following categories:

1. Concurrent enrollment provides students with access & opportunity to college-level rigorous coursework, irrespective of college credit being earned and serves as a gateway for students to explore their options for life after high school.
2. Concurrent enrollment impacts the financial viability of the school and consequently, offering concurrent enrollment significantly impacts a school's staffing resources.
3. Concurrent enrollment programming is embedded within the culture of a school.

The above findings were generated from interview results that were analyzed, coded, and developed into themes to be presented as the results of this study.

**Category 1: Concurrent enrollment provides students with access & opportunity to college-level rigorous coursework, irrespective of college credit being earned and serves as a gateway for students to explore their options for life after high school.**

The first research question sought to reveal an administrator's foundational perceptions as to why their school offers concurrent enrollment programming. All study participants strongly affirmed that concurrent enrollment provides multi-faceted benefits for students throughout the school, and not predicated on the earning of college credit. While earning college credit was cited by participants as a value-add for students and their families, participant responses demonstrated that it was the exposure to the college-level rigor which allowed students to remain in the high school and provided students a mechanism in which to imagine their life after high school.

Participant responses indicated a key component related to students seeking to earn college credit through concurrent enrollment is the ‘safety-net’ effect- that students are more likely to seek or receive assistance if struggling with the rigor of the course, compared to taking a college-level course through PSEO at the college.

**Category 2: Concurrent enrollment impacts the financial viability of the school and consequently, offering concurrent enrollment affects a school’s staffing resources.**

Study participants were overwhelmingly indicated that not offering concurrent enrollment had a negative impact on the school and/or district’s financial resources. The loss of per pupil allocated state aid due to students enrolling in PSEO programs caused many schools to review their curriculum and find methods in which to offer concurrent enrollment courses. While other college-credit programs existed in many of the schools (ie. AP, Project Lead the Way, IB), these programs did not provide the ubiquitous appeal and/or were more restrictive with their admittance procedures. Therefore, administrators began looking closely at mechanisms and resources necessary to provide concurrent enrollment in their schools. Study participants indicated that while there is a financial cost for offering concurrent enrollment, it is more affordable than losing the per pupil funding.

As unanimously expressed by the study participants, the new NACEP accreditation guidelines focusing on credentials high school teachers have in order to teach concurrent enrollment courses, has put pressure on schools to manage this new requirements from a variety of angles. These include the human relations (i.e. teachers) aspect, as well as structural (i.e. master course schedule) Administrators perceive several different impacts of this change, unique to their school. However, participant perceptions converge when considering the alternate reality that not following the new guidelines would mean no concurrent enrollment.

**Category 3: Concurrent enrollment programming is embedded within the culture of a school.**

Reviewing the entirety of participant answers to both research questions, all participants indicated that on some level, when concurrent enrollment is part of a school's programming, it becomes more deeply embedded within the school culture than it may outwardly appear. Some participants responded to shepherding a cultural shift in school identity among school staff. Others responded by illustrating that concurrent enrollment provides cultural connections to partners within the community, citing growing support from business and/or private citizens around referendums and community engagement. Some participants responded that the cultural impact was observed through student behavior; that of accepting the challenges of more rigorous coursework or encouraging their peers to enroll in concurrent enrollment courses.

**Conclusion**

This chapter details the findings of this research project grounded in illuminating a high school administrator's perceptions around the impact concurrent enrollment has within their school. This study's population consisted of seven participants – one counselor, two superintendents, two principals, and one associate vice-principal- each working in a public Minnesota high school. The school populations ranged from 200-1,200. The administrators were from three rural and four urban districts. The findings illustrate that while each administrator has their own lived experience working with concurrent enrollment programs, there exists shared phenomenological experience among all administrator, predicated around the concept that concurrent enrollment is paramount to student success.

Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success focuses on the school context as one layer of four, which directly impact student success. This study was

anchored in Perna and Thomas model to examine the administrator's perceptions of why or how the school context is impacted when concurrent enrollment is part of the school's programming. This examination of administrator perceptions provides a deeper understanding of the intricacies that emerge within the complex organizational structure of the public school. By utilizing Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success to frame this study, preliminary groundwork has been provided by which stakeholders may observe these intricacies through the shared phenomenal lens of the high school administrator, predicated around the interplay between concurrent enrollment and student success initiatives across a diverse student body.

The final chapter will offer a discussion and interpretation of the findings as they relate to the body of research that focuses on the impact the concurrent enrollment has on high school programming. Study limitations, opportunities for future research, and practical use of study results will also be discussed.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will offer a discussion and interpretation of study findings, as well as consider the ways in which the findings relate to research focused on concurrent enrollment. Contrasting the results of this study with pre-existing literature around the impacts of concurrent enrollment will help this study add to the body of research by providing a perspective that appears to be missing from the literature; that of the school administrator. In addition to outlining a discussion around concurrent enrollment and where it interfaces within the greater landscape of high school programming, this chapter will feature an analysis of the limitations of this study, considerations for future research on the subject, and an examination of the practical application

the findings of this study provide. This chapter is designed to offer closure on how this study's results satisfied the research questions and offers the opportunity to review limitations and opportunities for future research.

### **Summary of Results**

The need of this study was to look for any shared phenomenon among high school administrators at public schools in Minnesota, around the topic of concurrent enrollment and its impacts on their school's programming. A rich body of research exists that demonstrates the value and impact concurrent enrollment has on individual students, yet there is a dearth in research which provides the perspective of the school administrator. Given that major decisions around the allocation and use of school resources primarily fall on school administrators (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2018), it is imperative their perspectives be known, in order to provide a more clear picture on the state of schools engaging in concurrent enrollment programming throughout Minnesota. Given the breadth of research that examines concurrent enrollment and its impacts on student success and persistence in college, and the rate at which schools and colleges are adding concurrent enrollment courses to their schedules (Bruininks, Keeney and Thorp, 2010), this study was designed to focus on discovering what shared realities exist among administrators once concurrent enrollment courses are integrated within a high school and how this integration may manifest itself across the school resources.

Briefly, the literature reviewed for this study found limited research on shared phenomena of high school administrators. Therefore, literature was reviewed around three main themes commonly found in dual enrollment educational research. First, the framework for concurrent enrollment and dual credit programs across the United States, including types of dual credit programs (Hoffman, Vargas and Santos, 2009), student participation enrollment numbers



(Blakenberger, Lichtenberger and Witt, 2017; Bruininks, Keeney and Thorp, 2010; Haxon, Song, Zeiser, Berger, Turk-Bicakci, Garet, Knudson, and Hoshen, 2016; Higher Learning Commission, 2016; Minnesota Department of Education 2018).

Next, participation in dual credit programming and degree attainment were reviewed to discern how participation in programs lead to student success, as measured by college enrollment and degree attainment, either at a two-year or four-year level (Grubb, Scott, and Good, 2017; Kim, 2014).

Finally, the literature reviewed looked at dual credit participation benefits across SES (Taylor, 2015). Blakenberger et al. (2017) found a correlation to dual credit participation and an increase to postsecondary degree completion, particularly when the postsecondary experience began at a two-year college and if it began within seven years after high school graduation. Their research also displayed results that this construct was particularly true for low- income students.

This qualitative, phenomenological study uses the constructivist epistemological interpretive framework (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gigori, 2012) and was conducted within the context of Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model of Student Success. This model seeks to illuminate the multilayered pathways a student may navigate in pursuit of success after high school, with "success" most often understood as persistence into college (Perna & Thomas, 2008).

This study gathered the perceptions of MN public school administrators respective to concurrent enrollment programming within their school. The researcher was the primary instrument as data was collected through semi-structured interviews, conducted via web video conferencing or over the phone. Convenience sampling was used to invite participants to the study. The sample was generated from a randomized list of districts based on location definition

(three urban and three rural). All study participants were either district superintendents, principals, counselors, or associate-vice principals.

Data analysis followed the guidelines described by Moustakas (1994) and further refined by Creswell and Poth (2018). The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analyzed using a system of open and thematic coding to find significant statements, trends, repeating patterns. Categorical themes were named based on descriptions provided by the participants, the researcher's experience and reasoning, or other sources from the literature review or theoretical framework.

The findings indicated study participants uniformly agreed that concurrent enrollment provides their students with the access and opportunity to engage in college-level rigorous coursework. Participants also indicated the most difficult balance in providing concurrent enrollment is having teachers that meet the new NACEP credential requirements and that concurrent enrollment has a direct impact on the fiscal health of schools. Additionally, participants agreed that concurrent enrollment integration within broader high school programming provides many students with exposure to college or what life may be like after high school and indicated that concurrent enrollment affects the overall culture of the school, with varying degrees.

### **Discussion of the Results**

Principally, this study was based on two primary research questions:

1. Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses.
2. From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

The questions were designed to investigate the individual's rationale for offering concurrent enrollment and the individual's perspective for how concurrent enrollment participation impacts the student body.

The results of this study demonstrated support of the research questions, as participants clearly communicated the rationales of offering concurrent enrollment. This included access and opportunity to college-level rigorous courses, financial viability of the school and issues pertaining to class scheduling and teacher accreditation. The impact across the student body included examples of how concurrent enrollment factors into the school culture and the exposure it provides students, to realities that they may otherwise not otherwise engage with. Factors impacting the results will be discussed in detail in the interpretation of the results section of this chapter.

As is characteristic of qualitative studies, context is a factor which impacts results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Primary contextual factors included the length of time participants have had with concurrent enrollment programming and what level of engagement (MDE, 2018; Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2018). Participants who worked closely with the administrative aspects of teacher accreditation, course scheduling, and financial accountability (i.e. school or district operating budget) responded in more broad terms of operational infrastructure, while participants who engaged more closely with students responded in terms more akin to individual student learning outcomes and student achievement metrics.

### **Conclusions Based on the Results**

Conclusions based on the results of this research will be presented in two sections; Comparison of the findings within the framework and previous literature examines dual enrollment or dual credit programming research across the United States. It is examined through

two different sections: Overall impact of dual enrollment programming on students and on the resources of high schools. It is important to note that concurrent enrollment is a defined program within Minnesota, however it is one of many ‘dual enrollment’ programs found across the United States. Consequently, the literature review revealed limited research on concurrent enrollment programming within Minnesota.

The interpretation of the findings will highlight how and why the main themes from this study were discovered. Here again we see the nuances of Minnesota’s programming juxtaposed against the national framework of multiple dual enrollment program options.

### **Comparison of the Findings with the Framework and Previous Literature**

#### ***Dual Enrollment Program Impact on Students***

This study was concerned with discerning the voice of high school administrators specific to a dual enrollment program, concurrent enrollment, in Minnesota’s P-12 public education system and its impact on high school programming. Due to the dearth in research on this topic, the findings were first examined through the lens of student success and secondly, through the lens of school resource impact, as framed by Perna and Thomas’ Conceptual Model for Student Success, which serves as the theoretical framework for this study.

Perna and Thomas’ Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success indicates that the overall context of the school plays a significant role in student success. An overview of this model was provided in Chapter Two, but in short, it’s the substance of the school context through which a student navigates, that when combined with other factors in a student’s education and personal life, impacts the likelihood for student success. For this study’s initial investigation school programming opportunities and student mobility were all examined to gain a

broad understanding of how and why dual enrollment programs are integrated into schools and to provide a foundation from which conclusions could be drawn.

Study participants perceived there to be great value in providing concurrent enrollment courses to students. Furthermore, participants highlighted the need to consider college credit attainment not be the overarching rationale for offering concurrent enrollment classes. A strong body of primarily quantitative research exists validating the benefits concurrent enrollment offers students. However, there is limited research around how concurrent enrollment course participation benefits students if they do not earn the college credit associated with the course.

As summarized by Martin (2013), the vast body of research on dual enrollment indicates that the majority of students experience benefits from participation in dual enrollment programs. Grubb, Scott and Good's (2017) study looked closely at students enrolling in community colleges after participation in dual enrollment programming and found that those students were "9% times less likely to take remediation, 26% times more likely to graduate in 2 year, and 28% more likely to graduate in 3 years" than their cohorts who did not participate in dual enrollment programming (Grubb et al., 2017, p.79 (2002). More closely linked to the importance of concurrent enrollment engagement is Taylor's (2015) study which found that participation in dual enrollment programs had a positive effect on all students, however the "...difference in...enrolling in college and completing college was between 4 and 8 percentage points lower for students of color and low-income students..." (Taylor, 2015, p.372). Nationally, the dual enrollment/concurrent enrollment trend mirrors what Jensen et al., (2012) found; dual/concurrent enrollment continues to grow year over year.

Dual enrollment program expansion is an important point to consider, as the strongest area of growth in concurrent enrollment programming in Minnesota has been with students

identifying as Black and residing within urban districts. This demographic has seen a 257% increase in concurrent enrollment participation, with an overall increase in participation of 184 % percent for students of color since 2011 (MDE, 2018). Several participants in this study indicated how concurrent enrollment specifically benefits students of color and/or students from a lower/low-SES. Primarily, participants indicated it was the exposure to the highly -rigorous coursework, which served as the benefit, versus the earning of the college credit. While limited research was found around the concepts of rigorous course exposure versus earned college credit, the research done by Kim (2014) found that participation in tech prep coursework correlated to better college readiness in mathematics. Additionally, Ozmun (2013) suggests that participation in dual enrollment programs builds a student's self-efficacy, which is considered a predictor for college academic success.

An additional perspective mentioned by study participants is the “safety-net” effect concurrent enrollment provides students. Since the courses are taken within the high school, students have access to the high school support system. This sentiment is echoed in the research of Haxton, Song, Zeiser, Berger, Turk-Bicakci, Garet, Knudson and Hoshen (2016) around a dual credit program known as Early College (EC). Specifically, this study noted that EC programming “improve(s) underrepresented students’ likelihood of earning a college degree while...in high school and [EC students] can receive support from high school staff.” (p. 410) and that the:

...EC impact on college degree attainment was significantly stronger for minority students than for White students...minority students were nearly 10 times as likely to obtain a college degree as control students...low income students were approximately

8.5 times as likely to obtain a college degree as low income control students. (Haxton et al., 2016, p.422).

The findings from Haxton et al., (2016) mirror comments shared by participants in the study around college persistence related to concurrent enrollment participation; concurrent enrollment has provided students from marginalized groups a pathway to higher education.

### ***Dual Enrollment Impacts on the Resources of the High School***

While the body of literature examined for the purpose of this study did not explicitly highlight the impact that concurrent enrollment has on the financial viability of the school, the literature did reveal where “increasing financial support can help K-12 schools implement proven reforms...and expanding the availability of high-quality...education” (Leachman, Masterson and Figueroa, 2017, p.1) and that, when examined through the framework of Perna and Thomas’ Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success, program growth and sustainability is as much about the financial resources available to administrators, as it is to the both the leadership style of administrators as well as the trust and respect the administrator has with school staff. Study participants echoed the results found in the study by Bellibas and Liu (2016) on leadership styles of school principals, and that of Adams (2014), that a school can have access to all the resources in the world, however if there is an overall lack of trust and lack of mutual respect in the school by the students or staff, those resources are all for naught. Bellibas and Liu (2016) found that school leaders who perceived to have instructional leadership and distributed leadership styles were more likely to work in a culture of mutual respect. This is important point to consider as administrators navigate the various policies and regulations around concurrent enrollment programming. While a successful concurrent enrollment program is determined by several factors, the ability of the school administrator and the teaching faculty to

collaborate is key. Mutual respect between key stakeholders and a supportive school climate for concurrent enrollment courses are two strong foundations that need to be place in order for a positive collaboration to exist. Additionally, participants noted the need to have a positive, collaborative partnership with the colleges and universities providing the concurrent enrollment courses. This relationship was not explicitly mentioned within the research reviewed for this study, but as noted by study participants, if students hear or perceive a course to be not worth taking, many won't, even if college credits is available. Therefore, the inability for the high school/college to build a rapport conducive to supportive concurrent enrollment programming could cause a rift within the school culture which could impact the ability for the school to offer particular concurrent enrollment courses, thus limiting access to students.

This connection between program success, resource alignment and participant engagement found in the literature review is also germane to the success of a school having teachers who meet the new NACEP accreditation standards. Study participants indicated the burdens placed on them to either find staff who current meet the new accreditation standards or finds ways to have current staff trained to meet those standards. While some study participants indicated training current staff is a short-term expense for a long-term gain, others indicated the difficulty in convincing staff to self-select into accreditation programs. Even with proper accreditation credentials, Tinberg and Nadeau (2011) highlighted these standards tend to be fairly generic in nature and infer that the standards were developed within a high school context "...of high school students taking college courses taught by high school teachers during the typical high school day" (p.709). While some high school teachers may argue their courses are just a rigorous as if it were being delivered on a college campus, Jensen, Mattheis and Loyle (2013) found that university courses tend to be offered as a lecture compared to a constructivist



classroom found within a high school and because courses are taught in different ways concurrent enrollment "...partnerships can be beneficial...if they focus on realistic goals, such as offering developmentally appropriate coursework and promoting student-centered pedagogy" (Jensen et al., 2013, p.163). As illustrated by Jensen et al., (2013) the perceptions provided by the college faculty may be limited by their understanding of a particular school's culture. Given the new NACEP accreditation standards and the level of engagement between college faculty and high school concurrent enrollment teachers, more research is necessary around this topic to examine how these relationships may contribute to or hinder concurrent enrollment opportunities within the high school setting.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The findings will be interpreted through the context of the phenomenological study which yielded the themes and particular points in the prior research and theory that accounts for the outcomes of the study.

### ***Contextual Interpretations***

The findings of this study were impacted by the context in which the interviews occurred, which is indicative of the nature of qualitative studies. While not ideal, the interviews were conducted through video web conferencing technology which limited the ability of the researcher to observe the participants in their natural setting of the school building. Details such as office arrangements, observations of interactions between teachers, students, and school staff , and other germane details related generating a rich, thick details description of the interview were not available. The researcher needed to do as much observation through the video conferencing as possible. Additionally, the participants were interviewing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The

pandemic has caused significant disruptions to the school context: face-to-face classes moved to online, teachers having to pivot teaching methods quickly, reallocation or shifting in financial resources, etc. The disruptions also applied to higher education institutions. What is not taken into account in prior research but what must be mentioned, is that the findings of this study may be impacted by the attitudes and perceptions of the participants who are actively navigating school resources during uncommon times in our society. Previous literature and theories regarding dual enrollment programming do not take into account a global pandemic and its impact on educational systems. However, Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success identifies school context in broad terms, therefore it is permissible to utilize this model for the purposes of this study during the pandemic.

### *Interpretations from the Literature*

Study participants unanimously identified access and opportunity to courses designed as 'college-level rigor' as an integral component in incorporating concurrent enrollment into school programming. Concurrent enrollment courses delivered within the school provided administrators with the opportunity to curate resources such as schedules, teacher course loads, enrollment numbers and subjects offered, to target everything from specific student demographic groups to encompassing the entire student body. The study verified that access and opportunity is a broad definition and is open to interpretation of the individual (Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015).

The participants indicated that while earning college credit is important, a greater benefit for high school students is the opportunity to be academically challenged, mentally prepared for the next stage of their life post-high school, and exposure to options that may otherwise be unavailable to them. This result strengthens the research by Martin (2013), who examined that in addition to exposure and success in dual/concurrent enrollment coursework as a measure of

preparedness for college, enrollment and successful completion of concurrent enrollment courses leads to greater cognitive college readiness. Additionally, this finding is supported by the longitudinal study by Haxon et al. (2016).

Participants in this study indicated that concurrent enrollment plays a significant role on the financial viability of the school. This finding was not found within the literature review. This may be a unique phenomenon to Minnesota, due to the per-pupil state appropriated funding model and corresponding state aid that funds other dual credit programs such as PSEO as well as any additional resources that is spent on AP and IB programs (MDE, 2018; Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2018). Study participants indicated that by not offering concurrent enrollment, their student enrollment would decline, which could cause them to pay for other dual credit programs which may prove to be more expensive or more difficult for their students to access (i.e. AP/IB/PSEO). As one participant stated, school is a business, and therefore it is imperative that administrators allocate resources in a manner which supports the educational opportunities for all students (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2018). This theme grounds its validity in the professional experiences of the majority of the study participants around budget and resource allocation (Sorenson & Goldsmith, 2018). These are the people who have first-hand experience with finances and have a shared reality of how dual enrollment programs affect the bottom line of the school budget, regardless of the school being in a rural or urban population area.

A third finding from this study is that accreditation of teachers to meet NACEP guidelines places an undue burden on the school, through challenges found in existing qualifications of staff, to hiring new staff, or from managing a master schedule which encapsulates enough concurrent enrollment courses to meet the needs of the student body. The results of the study indicated the new accreditation standards were burdensome regardless of the

geographical location of the school and level and length of time the participant has had with concurrent programming. As with the findings around school financial viability, the literature reviewed for this study did not yield specific research around the NACEP accreditation standards and its impact on concurrent enrollment programming or on school resources. Related research by Woziak and Palmer (2013) found that the primary barrier to offering dual enrollment programs was school funding. Participants in that study cited the decline of state-allocated funding as the main funding barrier. While not explicitly related to the cost of teacher accreditation, Woziak and Palmer's study reinforces the need to examine school resources as outlined in Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success by all parties engaged in concurrent enrollment programming.

Although out of the scope of this study, research participants indicated a need for more in-depth research and engagement of longitudinal studies in Minnesota that track student participation in concurrent enrollment, college persistence and degree attainment. Study participants noted that such long-term data would provide a clearer understanding of how concurrent enrollment courses lead to college persistence and to what level, and thus would allow them to make better and more informed decisions around concurrent enrollment and other dual degree program opportunities within their schools. This sentiment is examined through the research of Cowan and Goldhaber (2015), Grubb et al., (2017), Haxton et al., (2016), and Taylor, (2015). While research provides varying levels of framework and methodologies necessary to conduct a long-range study on concurrent enrollment programming pertaining to Minnesota. At the time of this study, the participants and the researcher believe that no such study exists, thus leading to a key area for future research.

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study is that only administrator perceptions were considered. As this study demonstrates and scant literature on administrator perceptions highlights, administrator perceptions are an important consideration centering on the role concurrent enrollment plays in high school programming. However, many stakeholders hold a vested interest in understanding the many aspects concurrent enrollment has on high school programming. While the results of this study offer practical insight into the foundational issues facing administrators, adding student perceptions to the same research questions could offer contrasting, or corroborating perspectives. A strong body of research states students should be a partner when considering academic programming – this measure helps to ensure equity, as the student is able to offer direct feedback.

Another potential limitation is the existing lack of prior research done specifically addressing administrator perceptions of concurrent enrollment. Much of the research around the topic of providing concurrent enrollment courses stems from quantitative data observing enrollment trends, college persistence, and college degree attainment. Very little research exists that examines how concurrent enrollment impacts school culture. Additionally, there also exists a healthy body of research around dual enrollment programming, relating to marginalized populations and the struggles associated with achieving academic equity. As illustrated in Chapter Two, these studies rarely take school culture as a resource for students, into account. Access to a body of research focusing more on the narrative around the intersection of dual enrollment programs and school culture would have helped strengthen the external validity of this study.

Finally, this study was originally designed to be conducted by face-to-face interviews in order to provide the researcher with contextual setting in line with the recommendations for qualitative study as outlined by Creswell and Poth, 2018 and Giorgi, (1985, 2012). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted through a video, web-based conferencing application (i.e. Zoom) in order to maintain the health and safety of the research participant and the researcher. While Hawkins (2018) highlighted the benefits of conducting virtual interviews, such as an increase in participation of research subjects by providing opportunities for more flexible scheduling, reduction in geographical or financial barriers that the researcher may face, the original design of this study was for the researcher to observe study participants in the natural environments where they are most likely to experience the phenomenon.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations worthy of consideration include: a) the decision to focus on the administrator perspective and b) the number of participants chosen for this study. This study was predicated on gaining perspectives from seven participants. While this number is reasonable from a qualitative, phenomenological research standpoint (Creswell & Poth, 2018), having a larger number of participants could have resulted in study conclusions demonstrating more reliability amongst participants. This measure may have offered audiences a thicker set of results and recommendations upon which to predicate their own practices related to incorporating concurrent enrollment into their schools, or examining the pros and cons of state-mandated policies and procedures relating to funding, accreditation, and opportunity and accessibility initiatives.

Furthermore, this study's decision to focus on administrator perceptions omits the student perspective. Considering alternative and complementary perspectives (ex. students, families, college partners, state-level program administrators, etc.) might have added value to the results and conclusions of this study, particularly a deeper contextual consideration that could include perspectives outside of school personnel, which could offer the audience added value insofar as practical consideration and application.

### **Implications of the Study**

The implications of this study rest squarely on offering value and insights to public high school administrators, college partners, and state/regional program administrators, insofar as the ways in which they utilize data for the purpose of reviewing and implementing concurrent enrollment programming. As demonstrated by a robust body of quantitative research, utilizing data to provide the narrative to offer concurrent enrollment has become the norm across much of the educational landscape of the United States. Discerning the shared lived experiences of the high school administrator is necessary to fill the gap in this field of research as this data can be effective in creating more accessible programming, irrespective of earning college credit for college-rigorous coursework.

As demonstrated by participant responses and the dearth in the literature, there exists no particular data set which integrates the lived realities of school administrators into the planning and evaluation process around concurrent enrollment. The results of this study offers educational leaders within the sphere of concurrent enrollment, administrator perception data gathered directly from their peers – a shared reality designed to prompt reflection and consideration of alternative ways in which examine concurrent enrollment programming, specifically within Minnesota public high schools.

Furthermore, the theoretical foundation upon which this study rests – Perna and Thomas’ Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success – sought to help define for educational leaders, the tensions and synergy between the resources which are available to a schools and the allocation and utilization of those resources, to create a climate of opportunity and access to college-rigorous courses for students. While participants identified no discernable uniform solutions for around which data points may be more paramount when considering aspects of concurrent enrollment programming within a specific school context, a basis of considering student needs and the unique fabric of a specific school culture established and validated. This finding offers professionals in the field a peer perspective that recommends an intentional understanding of student aptitudes and academic goals, how school resources (tangible and non-tangible) are allocated and the synthesis of how these resources and academic needs are woven into the fabric of the school culture, before making decisions around the various aspects of concurrent enrollment.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Recommendations for further research include: a) broadening the sample size of this research, b) consider creating quantitative, long-range study following student concurrent enrollment participation, college persistence and degree attainment, c) design a qualitative study examining student perspectives of the impact of concurrent enrollment programming at their school.

The design of this study is sound, insofar as it achieved the goal of discerning administrator perceptions around the impacts of concurrent enrollment programming within their school. The sample size of seven administrators followed the recommendation of Creswell and Poth (2018). Replicating the study utilizing a different sample population should be conducted to



assist with the validation of this study's findings. This study could be replicated several times using different sample populations of administrators throughout Minnesota public schools.

However, at some point it could become difficult to maintain the confidentiality of the participants, given there is a finite number of high school administrators in Minnesota.

Additionally, it may be a benefit to conduct this study outside of a global pandemic, in order to compare results from this study, which occurred during a time of significant disruption to the educational systems of both P-12 and higher education across the United States.

As mentioned by this study's participants, designing a study long-range study to track student participation in concurrent enrollment through college persistence and degree attainment in Minnesota would be welcomed, if not necessary, to supply a broader understanding of how concurrent enrollment is affecting students. Armed with this understanding, study participants indicated an increased confidence in their decision-making around concurrent enrollment programming. Participants also indicated a curiosity to understand the mechanics of how concurrent enrollment participation impacts college persistence and degree completion, as well as an interest in understanding if/how concurrent enrollment participation is preparing students for a future beyond high school. In a nutshell, administrators want to know if what they are currently doing is working to move students towards a future of opportunities; does this work contribute to student success. Additionally, data gathered from a long-range study would also provide state lawmakers, colleges, and other stakeholders with more solid data on the nature of concurrent enrollment and its impacts on student success.

Finally, having the opportunity to conduct this study through the lens of the student perspective would yield another unique perspective on concurrent enrollment. Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success does provide a framework for this

study; that of the individual student (levels 1 and 2 of the model). A deeper exploration of this model and how to align it to the individual student perspective would need to be researched prior to designing the study. However, building this study within the same framework would also enrich the model and perhaps demonstrate ways in which the model could be adapted to examine how seemingly unrelated variables intertwine to promote or inhibit student success.

### **Conclusion**

This phenomenological, qualitative study centered on discovering any shared phenomenon experienced by Minnesota public high school administrators relating to how concurrent enrollment impacts high school programming. The study sought to produce results around: a) the rationale for why concurrent enrollment programs are offered, and b) the impact that concurrent enrollment has on the student body. This study was anchored by Perna and Thomas' Integrated Conceptual Model for Student Success. This model frames school resources as one measure impacting student success, by specifically "identifying and understanding the compounding effects that determine the educational resources, academic preparation, and educational orientations that subsequently determine success at the college level" (Perna and Thomas, 2008, p.44). The results of this study support the finding within the literature review that administrators perceive concurrent enrollment as a mechanism which provides students with opportunities and access to college-level rigorous coursework. However, study results prove inconclusive insofar as identifying data which indicates that impact concurrent enrollment has on high school programming places all students in a better position to be successful. This study found: a) participants perceived concurrent enrollment provides students with access and opportunity to college-level rigorous coursework and that exposure of that level of rigorous coursework better prepares a student for success after high school, regardless if college credit is

earned while taking the course , b) participants perceived that offering concurrent enrollment was necessary to the financial viability of the school, and c) participants perceived a direct impact on accreditation and staffing resources by offering concurrent enrollment.

The results of this study are aimed at offering high school administrators as well as other stakeholders, a generalizable set of peer perceptions and recommendations around which to critically examine data and programming models when considering concurrent enrollment. While there exists a limited body of research focused on the perceptions of the high school administrator, the results of this study demonstrate that a shared phenomenon around concurrent enrollment programming within a school exists. Consequently, stakeholders can use the results of this study to guide their efforts in ensuring concurrent programming doesn't negatively impact students who may not qualify to take college-level rigorous coursework. Rather, it may allow administrators and other stakeholders to more closely examine how other to better integrate programs geared toward student success into the existing fabric of their schools and to provide some guidance around designing long-range studies which can more accurately measure if and how these programs lead to student success.

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## Appendix A

### Research Questions and Semi-Structured Interview Questions

#### Research Questions

1. Share your rationale for why your school is offering concurrent enrollment courses.
2. From your perspective, how does concurrent enrollment participation impact your student body?

#### Semi-Structured interview questions include:

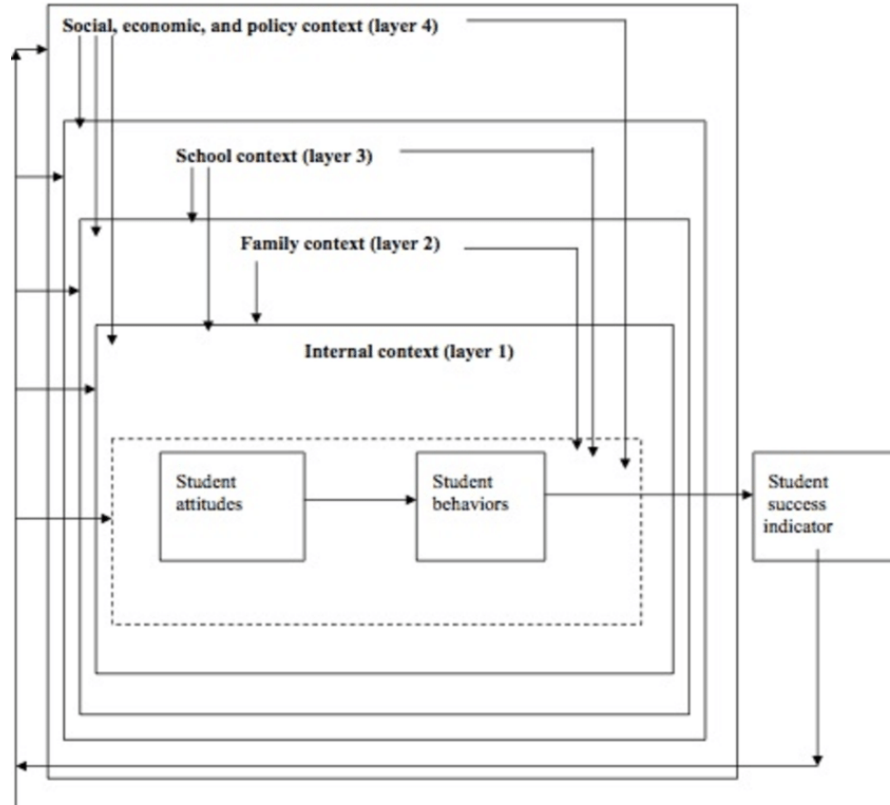
1. When did your school begin participating in the concurrent enrollment program?
2. What classes does your school offer through concurrent enrollment?
3. Explain how the concurrent enrollment program affects your school's budget.
4. What factors do you use to determine concurrent enrollment partner offerings?
5. Share what changes your school has had to make in order to participate in the concurrent enrollment program.
6. Looking ahead, what changes do you see on the horizon in high school programming (ex: class schedules, courses offered, cost, extracurricular, etc.)?
7. Please share any unintended consequences your school faces because of offering concurrent enrollment programming.
8. What types of data reporting does your school use for concurrent enrollment and why? Please explain the data sets.



9. What types of professional development or training does your staff involved with concurrent enrollment receive?
10. How you do define “success” of concurrent enrollment programming?
11. Do you consider your school to be located in a rural or urban setting and why?
12. Please share any other thoughts or comments regarding your school’s experience(s) with concurrent enrollment programming.

Appendix B

Perna and Thomas' Conceptual Model of Student Success



Source: Perna and Thomas (2008).

