

Fall 2015

## The Road Less Traveled: Alumni Perceptions of the Georgia Early College High School Experience

Tequila Tranise Morgan

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THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED: ALUMNI PERCEPTIONS OF THE GEORGIA  
EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

by

TEQUILA TRANISE MORGAN

(Under the Direction of Daniel Calhoun)

ABSTRACT

Despite the efforts of traditional high schools to educate all students, at-risk populations tend to lag behind their White and more affluent counterparts in educational achievement, high school graduation rates, and college attendance rates. Early College High Schools (ECHSs) were designed to attract and retain at-risk students through rigorous academic practices, strong support systems, and by providing free access to college credits while students are still in high school.

With the case study approach as a guide, this research used an open-ended interview protocol to collect data from a sample of 16 students who attended one ECHS in Georgia between 2006 and 2013. The research explored their experiences as ECHS students and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the early college model using the five core principles as a conceptual framework. Interviews were the primary method of data collection. Findings were reported by theme using participant vignettes to highlight key components of the data in relation to the four research questions.

The results indicated that participants believed ECHS prepared them academically for post-secondary education. Students cited strong academic support systems and meaningful relationships with the ECHS faculty as major reasons for their preparation.

Participants, however, unanimously believed that the early college high school did not prepare them socially for post-secondary education. They cited an absence of opportunities for social interaction at the high school, a lack of personal qualities paramount to success, and a lack of supervision on the college campus that resulted in destructive behaviors as major reasons for their lack of preparation.

INDEX WORDS: Early College High Schools, at-risk students, Relationships, Rigor, post-secondary education, student support

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EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

by

TEQUILA TRANISE MORGAN

A.S., Georgia Perimeter College, 2003

B.S., Mercer University, 2005

M.Ed., University of West Georgia, 2007

Ed.S., The University of Georgia, 2012

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

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EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

by

TEQUILA TRANISE MORGAN

Major Professor: Daniel Calhoun  
Committee: Teri Denlea Melton  
Jason LaFrance

Electronic Version Approved:  
Fall 2015

## DEDICATION

### *I DEDICATE THIS DISSERTATION TO*

*My Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ*

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Thank You for all You have done for me despite the fact that I did not always do what You expected of me. You saved me from myself more times than I can even remember. Now, I realize that everything You allowed to happen in my life was all a part of Your perfect plan!

*My Mother, My “Punkin,” My Best Friend, Alita Cosby*

Me and you! You are the epitome of what a woman should be and what she should be to her family. I love you more than words can ever express. You are my life! I could never have made it through without your infinite forms of support and your tolerance. You selflessly give to me without any hesitation. If I lived a thousand years, I could never repay you. May God bless you for all you have done for this family! Thank you for always being a part of my entourage! I can hardly wait to see your reward . . . you deserve it! Dennis, Thank you for loving my mommy and for being there for me as well! You have truly been a great addition to the family AND you can really cook!

*My Precious Grandmother, Josephine Borders*

Heeeyyy giirrrll! You are the sweetest person I have ever met in my life! Thank you for balancing me with your gentle spirit and for never turning a deaf ear to me in my many times of need. Thank you for being a part of my entourage! Your smile and your spirit are so very infectious. I am so blessed and honored to have the relationship the two of us share. God bless you! I love you!

*My Little-Big Brother, Desmond Morgan*

I know you still remember when I popped you the day you came home because you were taking my spotlight! Well, I'm willing to share now (smile). Please know that I am always here for you if you need me! I love you!

*My Daddy, Bernard Morgan*

Too many young people cannot say they grew up with their father in their household actively raising them to be the person God desired them to be. Thankfully, that's not me! You were the most involved father I knew. You have a big heart! I am glad I could share you with all my friends. Thank you for always being proud of me for what I have accomplished—the things that truly matter in life. I love you!

*My Former Students at DECA*

You all will never know how much you mean to me! We know we experienced some growing pains as we all tried to navigate the new path of Early College High School. I admire you all for staying the course and giving up your traditional high school experience to be a part of something so special. It was truly an honor serving as your graduation specialist. You made me the professional I am today. I am so proud of the things you accomplished as high school students and the things you continue to accomplish in adulthood! Thank you to the members of BOLD and LOD, Main Attraction, the Senior Class Committee of 2010, the M.U.S.I.C. club, and my mentees.

*APPRECIATIVELY, I THANK*

T. Andrews, J. Hodges, J. Love, S. Tolbert, S. Williams, T. Baker, A. Cuttino, D. Gill, M. Parks, A. Sanders, A. Worthy, M. Buggs, J. Colon, F. Davis, J. Denson, and



I. Henderson for your special support during this dissertation process! I love you all and definitely dedicate this dissertation to you!

*My Founding Principal at DECA, Dr. Brenda Emerson*

Thank you for having faith in me and for taking the time to nurture me as a professional. I value our relationship and I wish you happiness in your (semi) retirement!

*My Former Colleague at DECA, Dr. Lena Travis*

Thank you for being obedient to God and helping me to get hired at DECA. I also appreciate the listening ears over the years and wonderful personal guidance.

*My Friend and Former Colleague at GPC, Kathryn Hall*

You are awesome! Thank you for all of your assistance over the years and throughout this process! I miss and love you!

*My Former DECA Co-Workers*

Drs. A. McGlasker and A. Rutledge, Professors D. Armstrong, J. Butler, S. Gill, B. Napper, W.E. Plummer, V. Blue (Cargile), Buckley, M. Costa, H. Cruz, J. Gibson, Lewis, E. Marques, L. Ostrenko, D. Rock, and S. Thorne-Brackett! You all are the best! Those students achieved so much because of who you are and because of the phenomenal gift of education you all possess.

*My God Sister and Brother, Jenaé and Johnathan*

Jenaé Middlebrooks, you are my sister. You have been through so much in your young life, things you never should have had to experience. I admire your strength and perseverance tremendously. Thank you for always checking on me!

Johnathan Herndon, I've known you for as long as I can remember. You too have experienced great tragedy, but you have overcome. May God bless you always. Oh, and I

am still trying to figure out how you and Desmond got closer than you and me! Lol. I love you both.

*My Friends and Family*

The Cosby Family, the Morgan Family, Kimberly Tuff, Nina Archie, and Roschelle Miles (hang in there)! Thanks for your love, support, encouragement, advice, and listening ears!

*My Great-Grandmother “Granny,” Merdice Cosby*

I was blessed to have four generations alive until I was 30 years old, thanks to you. I am happy you are at peace. I love you always!

*My God-Mother, Pamela Herndon-Humphries*

I miss you dearly! I am so grateful for the times we shared together since I was 3 years old! I love you always!

*My Friends, Jermaine “Sweets” Dossie and Antron Terry*

Both of you were gone too soon, but your legacies remain! I love you!

*My Significant Other, Jermaine Williams*

Last, I express my gratitude and appreciation for you, the new (old) addition to my life. God was strategic when placing you in my life. He knew that I had to be ready to receive you. He also knew that you would have distracted me from this dissertation had you come any sooner! Lol. After all of the heartache I have endured in the past, I can truly say I am Free-man and ready for “us.” Thank you for loving me for who I am, flaws and all! I look forward to experiencing the remainder of this journey that God takes us on. I love you, baby!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### *MY DISSERTATION COMMITTEE*

*My Chair, Dr. Daniel Calhoun*

It takes a special person to agree to work with students on their dissertations, especially as their chairperson. This is an arduous and exhausting process, to say the least! I appreciate you for putting up with me and all of my mess since summer 2014! I know I can be pretty difficult to deal with at times, but I am glad you stayed the course. You are a wonderful person. I wish you and your family the best!

*My Methodologist, Dr. Teri Denlea Melton*

Thank you so much for filling in at the last hour to assist me with this process! You did not have to do that, especially with all you have on your plate! You have been kind, efficient, and extremely helpful and available to me. Additionally, I admire your wisdom and leadership.

*My Content Expert, Dr. Jason LaFrance*

I appreciate your willingness to remain on my committee even though you have now moved on from GSU. The sharing of your personal experience as a student in the early college process was invaluable; in fact, we share many similarities! Good interview protocol suggestions, too. Those adjustments helped yield some valuable data. Thank you also for introducing me to the auto-ethnography; that was the best assignment ever! Congratulations on your new gig!

### *MY GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY*

You gave me such a hard time! This has been a 17-year journey between us! I appreciate you accepting me way back in 1998 as an unassuming 17 year old freshman

who had not yet realized that I was not meant to be that far away from home! I sat in my room every day and cried, running up \$700 phone bills (before the days of unlimited cell phone minutes, of course) and watching the *Young and the Restless* and BET Music Videos! I also gained 15 pounds because I ate Krystal's chili cheese fries and Papa John's pizza every single day! Leaving there in the 1999 spring semester with a 0.6 GPA and cumulative 1.10 GPA was one of the lowest points in my life. I am extremely grateful to Georgia Perimeter College (A.S.), Mercer University (B.S.), University of West Georgia (M.Ed. and Leadership Certification), and the University of Georgia (Ed.S.) for redeeming me and rebuilding my educational confidence!

Now, (the real) GSU, here we are. We've come full circle! I proudly stand before you, gratified and humbled that you took yet another chance on me by allowing me to complete my terminal degree with you. I promise to represent you well in this world!

#### *OTHER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

My professional experiences and interactions that contributed to my growth

- ❖ *Huie Elementary School* (Hiring Principal and T. Scott)
- ❖ *Pointe South Elementary School* (Hiring Principal, C. Swafford, J. Tilley and S. Williams)
- ❖ *DECA* (Dr. Rhonda Jordan-Shinall)
- ❖ *Dunwoody High School* (R. Swanson, T. Watts, C. Gipson, and A. Love)
- ❖ *Lithonia High School* (A. Moton, Y. Peek, E. Hall, V. Haley, W. Corker, C. Powell, and the Class of 2016)
- ❖ *The Academy of Scholars* (Dr. W. Bouie, M. Reddick, T. Grant, and K. Gillis)

And now, the best high school in America, Arabia Mountain High School (Dr. Rodney Swanson and the best counseling department in town: Tammy Rogers, Meika Banks, Jennifer Roe, Keisha Bridges, and Mary Ham). Thank you for working with me to get this done! I appreciate the faith all of you had in me to do my job!

*MY STORY...WITH A LITTLE ADDED DATA*

For approximately 15 years of my 34 year existence, I have been in college. People assume that I just love school; however, that is not the case. I do love learning new things and surrounding myself with others who are smarter than me and further along in our profession. They are motivational to me. With this dissertation process, I just set a goal for myself and chose not to deviate from it. The worst disappointment, to me, would not have been the reaction of others, but the discontent I would have brought upon myself had I not completed this task. I could not justify putting myself through that type of agony, so I just stayed the course.

I acknowledge that this is the single hardest thing I have ever done! I guess if it were easy, everyone would do it. The National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) (2014) reported that a total of 52,760 people earned doctoral degrees in the United States in 2013, approximately 1.6 % of the nearly 317,000,000 people counted towards the U.S. population; 33,942 were U.S. citizens; 12.7 % of recipients had previously attended community college; 9.4% of doctorates were earned in the field of education; 7.2 % of recipients were divorced or widowed; and only 6.4% were African American (NSF & NCSES, 2014; USCB, 2015). Those are a lot of odds to overcome. I cried many days and many nights. For a long time, I completely went off of the grid and had very little contact

with the outside world, except the communication with my immediate family. I even strained my eyes to the point where I am wearing sunglasses at my computer while typing this! Regardless of it all, I did it!

There is something about achieving at this level that humbles you and makes you appreciate life in a totally different way. So I say to others that are going through this, and any other process that at times may seem insurmountable, “Keep the faith and persevere. You can do ALL things.” Also, “Don’t dream your life; live your dreams!”

Truthfully, I don’t want to see another school ever again . . . at least not as a student! I may however take up piano lessons. I have always wanted to master that beautiful instrument! I am just glad to have my life return to a place of normalcy!

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## CHAPTER ONE

### *INTRODUCTION*

In an ideal society, everyone would receive the same quality education, have an opportunity to work at the same caliber job, and be paid a salary commensurate with their needs and desires. Unfortunately, this is not the reality of our world today.

Noticeable gaps exist between certain demographic populations in the areas of employment, education, and life achievement. A 2010 study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) found that the percentage of Black and Hispanic students between age 18 and 24 attending college was 32% and 26% respectively while their White counterparts within the same age bracket attended college at a rate of 44%. This same study highlighted the correlation between level of education and unemployment rates, revealing an extensive gap between ethnicities. For Blacks, the unemployment rate was 9%, Hispanics 8%, and Whites 4%. Based on the data, it appears that the traditionally underrepresented populations appear to lag well behind their White counterparts.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 27.9% of Americans age 25 and above hold a baccalaureate degree. For one particular cultural cluster, Blacks, the unemployment rate without a high school diploma was 22%. That number lowers to 11% for those with a high school diploma, and drops to 4% for those with at least a bachelor's degree. Blacks account for 17.7% of baccalaureate degrees and 13% for Hispanics, compared to 29.3% of Whites (Ogunwole, Drewery, & Rios-Vargas, 2012). Hispanics continue to be the least formally educated ethnic group in the United States (Trevino &

Mayes, 2006). Another subgroup often overlooked within the educational setting is Native Americans. Startling statistics for Native American school completers were highlighted in a study conducted by Smith, Stumpff, and Cole (2012): in 2010 the graduation rates for Native Americans was 46.6%, and in one state in particular, Washington, the rates have steadily dropped to 37.9%.

The disparity in these statistics is cause for concern, especially for students within traditionally lower achieving (often referred to as at-risk) populations. Students deemed at-risk are often associated with certain identifying qualities. At-risk qualities can be grouped into categories such as background of the student, character traits of students, and student's environmental influences. More specific characteristics of at-risk students include: low socio-economic status (economically disadvantaged), parents who have minimal educational background, and a history of discipline and truancy problems that result in credit deficiency (Beach, 2013). Most at-risk students identify with multiple categories on this list.

At-risk students often face challenges in the areas of employment, health, and wages, and frequently have a higher level of involvement with the criminal justice system (Levin, Belfield, Muennig & Rouse, 2007). At-risk students often have difficulty finding employment and can only attain low paying jobs. In turn, these issues can result in an inability to afford quality healthcare and the development of a criminal record due to participation in illegal activities. Achieve (2012) reported that jobs requiring limited skills with sufficient pay to support a family have vanished and are being replaced by jobs requiring a higher level of education and skills or with menial jobs which have no

benefits, no opportunity for advancement, and no solid career potential. Jobs that require more than a high school diploma but less than a bachelor's degree make up only 50% of the U.S. workforce (Achieve, 2012). A possible means for at-risk students to avoid these plights and prepare themselves for the current economic situation could be tied to their retention and progression within the K-12 and higher education systems. In order to increase their chance for a more successful and productive lifestyle, it is important for these students to attend and complete both high school and some post-secondary education.

Unfortunately, at-risk students are often unprepared for the traditional school setting and ill equipped to grasp academic standards which results in a poor educational experience and limited academic success (Bulger & Watson, 2006). Programs providing opportunities for high school students to obtain college credit have been in existence for some time, but most are not designed to address the needs of at-risk learners. They are designed for high achievers with above average standardized test scores, students who are likely to enroll in post-secondary education after high school regardless of whether they participate in a college credit program during high school. Leaders within the education system have implemented programs that assist students with reaching their potential for college credit in high school. In Georgia, these options include several variations of the dual enrollment program and the Early College High School Initiative, which is geared towards the at-risk population in particular.

#### *Georgia Dual Enrollment Programs*

Georgia Dual Enrollment opportunities include Dual Enrollment, Joint



Enrollment, Articulated Credit, Move On When Ready, and two specialties: Residential Academies and Gateway to College. This section provides details regarding each of these dual enrollment programs. Dual Enrollment, in which students participate either part-time or full-time, allows students to satisfy high school graduation requirements and earn college credit simultaneously. In this program, only academic courses are eligible for funding which comes from three main sources: the Accel Grant, the HOPE Grant, and from the families of participants. The Joint Enrollment program differs from the Dual Enrollment program only by the method of funding. Joint Enrollment is funded by participating students' families and the HOPE Grant but not the Accel Grant. Move On When Ready (MOWR) is a third program that affords the same opportunity as the Dual and Joint Enrollment programs, but it is funded by state FTE dollars. Also, MOWR funding covers academic, elective, and Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) courses. Credit gained in these programs allows students taking high school classes to satisfy graduation requirements while simultaneously gaining college credit.

There are also special residential programs like those at University of West Georgia and Middle Georgia College. These programs allow high school students to live in dorms and take classes on the actual college campus (Lam, Caldwell, & Mealer, 2010). Another approach, the Gateway to College program, provides students ages 16 to 21 who have dropped out of high school the opportunity to go back to high school on college campuses in order to complete their diploma and possibly begin college coursework (Gateway to College, 2012).

### *The Early College High School Initiative*

The ECHS initiative was designed to provide at-risk students access to college coursework while still attending secondary school. In 2002, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation along with the financial support from the Ford, W. K. Kellogg, and Woodruff Foundations, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and a number of other local foundations, allocated more than \$114 million in grants to create ECHS programs (Wolk, 2005). By the following school year, 2003-2004, 17 ECHSs were open. The numbers increased subsequently: school year 2004-2005 (46), 2005-2006 (82), 2006-2007 (130), 2007-2008 (159), and 2008-2009 (201). ECHSs serve more than 80,000 students in 31 states and the District of Columbia (Jobs for the Future, 2009). Gates funding ended in 2009, by which time over 300 schools were operational (Leonard, 2013). A 2011 synopsis provided by the Office of Educational Access showed that Georgia has 11 of these schools.

Public attention tends to focus more on postsecondary admission versus postsecondary success which particularly affects the ECHS demographic of first-generation college goers, minorities, and economically disadvantaged students (Kazis, Vargas, & Hoffman, 2004). The primary goal of the Early College (EC) model is to increase the number of at-risk students who graduate from high school and attend and thrive in college. Therefore, long-term outcomes include an increase in high school graduation rates, a higher volume of enrollment from underrepresented groups in colleges resulting in a higher rate of college graduates (Bernstein et al., 2010). Early colleges represent school reform measures at work. Reports on the ECHS initiative present a

promising outcome for students who participate. An article in *Education Week* reported that during the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years, students accepted into the ECHS program graduated at a 5% higher rate than those who did not enroll (Sparks, 2013).

Some ECHS models began as small learning communities that became early colleges when they underwent reform efforts. These learning communities were typically smaller parts of a larger school setting. School-within-a-school model is the term used when more than one school is inside of a given space. According to an evaluation report released in 2010 by the American Institute for Research (AIR) and Stanford Region Innovations (SRI) International, 66% of all ECHSs were brand new schools; 22% of all ECs were existing small schools that became ECs; 5% were small learning communities created when a larger school was reformed; 5% were programs within existing high schools; and there were no data on the remaining 2%. During the 2007-2008 school year, the average population of an ECHS was 211 students (Berger, Adelman, & Cole, 2010). Additionally, strategically placed ECHSs that are on college campuses, or that provide students access to courses on actual college campuses, yielded positive results for students; it is a term referred to as “the power of place.” (Hoffman & Vargas, 2010) Today, most Early Colleges are designed to be stand-alone schools. Stand-alone schools are educational institutions that have their own building and student population and rely on their own resources and staff. Most traditional P-12 schools use this model.

A precursor to the ECHS, the University Park Campus School (UPCS) located in Worcester, Massachusetts, was founded in 1997 and partnered with Clarke University. While not an official Early College, it did serve as a catalyst for the current ECHS model

and is one of the most successful schools in Massachusetts with 95% to 100% college attendance rates for its four recent graduating classes. UPCS is a “learning laboratory” for school developers, leaders, and teachers to see how the proven instructional strategies are successfully being implemented in a school setting (Hoffman & Vargas, 2010). The school was also named the highest performing urban high school in Massachusetts and also appeared on the Top 2013 schools in the nation according to *Newsweek* (New England Association of Schools and Colleges, 2013 & *Newsweek*, 2013).

During the early years of implementation of the ECHS Initiative, all ECHS employees were required to attend on-site visits to the University Park Campus UPCS to observe the instructional strategies used by teachers in the classrooms and how the strategies impacted the students. I visited UPCS in 2008 and witnessed the implementation of the six common instructional strategies (discussed later) in classrooms throughout the building. Students appeared extremely engaged in the learning process, asking intelligent and thought provoking questions to spark appropriate conversations. The students and staff, who are accustomed to daily visitors, operated without hindrance and were even willing to answer questions in a debriefing following the visit.

Despite the fact ECHS is a fairly new concept to mainstream education and has been in existence for a little more than 11 years, the initiative has garnered the attention of key political figures including the President of the United States. In 2013, Barack Obama visited the Pathways in Technology (P-Tech) ECHS in Brooklyn, N.Y. with Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan. While there, the President stated,

This country should be doing everything in our power to give more kids the

chance to go to schools just like this; we should be doing everything we can to put college within the reach of more young people . . . P-Tech is proof of what can be accomplished, but we've got to have the courage to do it" (Obama, 2013, para. 7).

Early Colleges are successful because they accelerate the pace at which students can complete their education while being cost effective and affording a significant reduction in out-of-pocket expenses for families of students enrolled in these programs. Early colleges utilize the unique design of a small learning community and are based on a framework of rigor, relevance, and relationships. This design encourages underrepresented and at-risk students to complete both high school and college credit and enables them to become productive and self-sufficient members of society. These schools operate under the Five Core Principles which guide their practices (Berger et al., 2013).

#### *Statement of the Problem*

At-risk students who fail to progress through the education system face a number of life challenges. Unfortunately, these at-risk students are often unprepared for the traditional school setting and fail to meet academic standards. The ECHS initiative was created as a way to nurture and prepare at-risk students academically, socially, and professionally in hopes of providing them with tools to be successful. The individual units within each ECHS are designed to provide intense support to students in the areas of instruction, personal-social, and college and career readiness. The interconnected nature of the ECHS model means that if one or more areas are not implemented effectively, the whole process could fail resulting in continued attrition and failed progression into college for the students enrolled in the program. It is therefore

imperative to determine the effectiveness of the ECHS program.

A review of the existing literature on early colleges revealed paucity in the available research on this topic. Most of the current literature on ECHSs report on the achievements of the entire ECHS initiative or data is centralized in states where ECHSs are well established and have a strong presence. A plethora of literature is available from North Carolina (which has 76 Early Colleges), California (39 ECHSs) and Texas (21 ECHSs), but there appears to be no formal study on ECHSs in Georgia. While student perceptions have been chronicled in the existing literature, no research has studied Early College alumni extensively.

The research that has included ECHS alumni indicates that some ECHSs have not met their goal of preparing students for college readiness. In a report submitted by Edmunds et al. (2010), one former ECHS student stated:

We were not prepared for this school at all. We came here with good intentions because it was different . . . We were being challenged . . . and we just weren't prepared for it [the rigor of ECHS]. The majority of kids left in the beginning . . . It was just too overwhelming. (p. 29)

Another study based in Texas included the viewpoints of three ECHS alumni from three different high schools. The three students voiced concerns about some of the challenges they and their peers experienced as ECHS students. These included inappropriate behavior (including drug use and abuse) on the college campus, a lack of supervision, and other elements which, although not proven, were likely the cause of a large number of their peers not being able to be successful in the program (Woodcock &

Beal, 2013).

As a concept, the ECHS model has an admirable goal, but also an enormous responsibility to ensure that students receive support throughout their journey. This study highlighted the experiences of ECHS alumni regarding their perceptions of their time in the program. Hearing their perspectives could help educational leaders better understand what works and what does not work within an ECHS program. Given that multiple cohorts of ECHS students have matriculated through the program, it was through the alumni that we gained insight into the effectiveness of the model. Since college exposure is one of the goals of the ECHS model, the impact should be visible through the perceptions of former students and whether or not their experiences in ECHS resulted in their progression into post-secondary education. Simply stated, if the program works, then a number of former students should be enrolled in or should have completed college coursework after leaving the ECHS program. If educational success and college preparedness are the goals of the ECHS program, it is important to find out from graduates whether or not these goals are being successfully met.

### *Research Questions*

The overarching research question that guided this study was: How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia perceive the program prepared them for post-secondary education?

In order to address this question, the following sub-questions were answered:

- 1) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have completed post-secondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?

- 2) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have not completed post-secondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?
- 3) In what ways do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia believe the ECHS could have better prepared students for post-secondary education?

### *Significance of the Study*

This research provided insight into the experiences of some of the first alumni of Georgia's ECHS initiative. A review of their journey looking at the perceived challenges and strengths of the ECHS program will hopefully inspire Early College EC leaders to revisit policies, procedures, strategies, and practices to help increase the probability of student satisfaction and accomplishment. Additionally, this information can help current ECHS students in Georgia and their parents know what to expect after enrollment in the program. District leaders can use the findings from this study to gauge the effectiveness of their programs. The University System of Georgia may especially benefit from this study because there is currently no formal way to engage alumni post-graduation to learn about their experiences as EC students although informal attempts are being made through social media to determine the current academic/professional status of alumni. This study of ECHS alumni perspectives helped identify which organizational processes can be altered to improve the experiences of students. Another goal of the research was to identify areas of student satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

### *Limitations*

There were a number of limitations that existed in this study. First and foremost, one limitation was the possibility that during the interview process a participant could



have intentionally omitted information or forgotten the details of his/her experience over time. These gaps in memory could have caused inaccuracies in the interpretation of the data. Another limitation was a result of the sampling method used. Snowball sampling almost always guarantees that the sample set may not be as diverse as it could have been than if another method was used. It relies on the principle of each one reaching another. People tend to gravitate towards other individuals who share their beliefs, interests, and values.

### *Delimitations*

This study was delimited by the chosen research design. Since this was a case study at one ECHS in Georgia, it may have been impossible to have transferability based upon any findings derived from this study due to numerous variables experienced at different school sites. Simon (2011) described delimitations as those individualities which bind the possibilities and define the restrictions of your study. Delimitations are within the researcher's control. For this research, the number of participants was limited to 16. This meant that there were many students' perceptions that were unaccounted for.

I formerly worked at the Georgia ECHS chosen for this study and was, therefore, very familiar with the processes and students. This affiliation could be viewed as a bias in this study; however, it could have also been an asset to this case since it allowed me to gather information an outsider may not have been able to. Weiss (1994) was one researcher that addressed outsiders in gathering research. According to Unluer (2012), there are both advantages and disadvantages to being an insider-researcher. A couple of advantages include having a greater understanding of the culture and having an

established intimacy. Disadvantages can include a loss of objectivity and creation of a climate where incorrect assumptions may be made. I came to this research with a preconceived idea of student perceptions because of my previous professional affiliation and because of current personal relationships with many of the alumni. I was a Graduation Specialist at the ECHS site chosen for this study. As graduation specialist, I served as a liaison between the high school and partnering university to coordinate the transition of our students from high school to college. I have had direct conversations with ECHS students regarding their challenges and concerns with the program and its structure. Despite this familiarity, I approached the study with objectivity. I address this matter further in Chapter Three. Although these delimitations exist, the data should still be beneficial to other ECHSs.

#### *Assumptions*

In order for these results to be trustworthy, I assumed that students who attended this school were qualified to serve as experts regarding ECHS student experiences at the selected site; therefore, their feedback yielded accurate data regarding student perceptions. I also assumed that this school was the best possible environment in which to conduct the study because of its student success rate and numerous challenges which I personally witnessed.

#### *Definition of Key Terms*

Multiple definitions were essential to understanding the ECHS model for the purpose of this study. This section includes some key terms that were essential to understanding the ideas and concepts behind this research study.

*Accel Grant:* State money used for students at eligible high schools who wish to take college level coursework for credit towards both high school and college graduation requirements (Accel, n.d., para. 1).

*Carnegie Unit:* 120 hours of contact time with an instructor over an academic year that translates into one credit earned for high school students in a particular course (Silva, White, & Toch, 2015).

*COMPASS Exam:* A computer adapted test created by ACT which determines college placement by assessing the areas of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics (COMPASS/ESL and ASSET Preparation, n.d., para. 1).

*Early College Program Director (Liaison):* A person employed by the partnering Higher Education Institution who provides support and communication between the high school and college regarding matters pertaining to the EC students.

*Legacy Class:* A term used in ECHSs to refer to the first graduating class of a particular school (AIR, 2005).

*School of Choice:* A specialized school that allows students from all over the school district to apply to and attend the school instead of their home school ([www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/school-choice](http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/school-choice)).

### *Chapter One Summary and Organization of Dissertation*

Chapter One provided an introduction to the ECHS initiative and also gave the problem statement, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of key terms, and the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions associated with this study. Chapter

Two includes an in-depth review of the literature and previous research related to early college high schools.

Chapter Three begins with an introduction followed by restating the research questions. The researcher's lens is described including background, culture, major influences, and topics of interest followed by the epistemological and ontological perspectives. The research design is discussed and followed by the impact of the researcher's lens on the study, a description of the site selection and participants, and the participant selection process. The data collection instrument is explained as well as the procedures and role of the researcher. Last, data management, trustworthiness, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis are discussed.

Chapter Four begins with an introduction followed by a reiteration of the research questions, discussion of participants, participant demographics, and in-depth introductions of the participants. A discussion of participant narratives follows along with a discussion of themes, the summary of findings, and analysis from each of the four research questions.

Chapter Five provides a brief summary and discussion of findings and is followed by the implications of the research and suggestions for future research. Last, the researcher's reflection on the research process is given and the conclusion sums up the study

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

#### *Introduction*

With an increase in academic standards stemming from the recently adopted and rigorous Common Core Curriculum implementation, graduating from high school will continue to be a challenge for at-risk students in our nation's urban, rural, and less affluent communities. Kazis, Vargas, and Hoffman (2004) noted the quintessential culture of separating "college material" students from non-college material students during secondary schooling and providing each group with a different level of education, which mainly adversely affects minorities. According to data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for individuals with less than a high school diploma was 9% compared to 3.5% for those with a bachelor's degree (Ogunwole, Drewery, & Rios-Vargas, 2012). Therefore, specialty programs such as the ECHS initiative play a critical role in identifying, targeting, and serving these learners.

Growing pressure on young people to become work-ready is becoming more evident as we continue to experience an increase in basic living expenses. As the lack of job opportunities continues to exist for individuals with low skill sets, it will be increasingly more difficult for these young people to be self-sufficient. Furthermore, their odds of success decrease even more as educated individuals affected by the economy and are professionally displaced accept lower wage jobs just for survival. A high percentage of individuals with low skill sets include minorities. As of 2014, college-attending households could be described as follows: bachelor's degree recipients

were 23% White, 13% Black, and 7% Hispanic. Similarly, high school dropout statistics align by ethnicity: 5% White, 12% Black, and 32% Hispanic (Luo & Holden, 2014).

These statistics show a correlation between education and employment; therefore, it is mandatory that initiatives such ECHS maximize their services to these students and their families to increase their chances for a successful life.

### *Organization of Literature Review*

This literature review begins with a detailed description of the ECHS population, at-risk students. This is followed by an explanation of the foundation of the ECHS. In order to understand ECHS alumni's perception of ECHS, one must understand the foundation upon which the model is built. The first major concepts discussed in this chapter, after the detail of the at-risk student population, are the ECHS Core Principles. These principles outline the expectations of the program and establish how students in the program will achieve the goals set before them. An explanation of the instructional strategies used in the ECHS model follows. Delivery of effective instruction is critical in any school but especially at the ECHS site which tries to condense 3 to 4 years of instruction into only two years of high school.

The effective implementation of these strategies can be the difference between success and failure for students. The 3R Framework is included in the discussion because it is another cornerstone of the ECHS program, especially the relationships component (as will be detailed later). This section is followed by attributes of effective ECHSs. To have a baseline for readers to compare, it is necessary to describe the strategies that have worked in other ECHSs. Politics of education, more specifically,

those involving newer initiatives such as this one, affect student achievement more than most people realize. It is essential to know the entire background in order to make the necessary connections to alumni perspectives.

Information on other EC studies is included to provide the reader with a more comprehensive view of ECs since this study pertains to only one school. Finally, the progression and impact of the model is provided as part of the literature review. The evolution of the model and its impact on addressing at-risk students' needs is important to this study because it validates the purpose of such a school.

#### *At-Risk Students*

A thorough understanding of the at-risk student was paramount to this study. The ECHSI seeks to provide this population with quality instruction and access to college, in hopes of creating an innate desire in them to pursue post-secondary education and change their future outcomes for the better. In addition to the aforementioned characteristics, other factors common to at-risk students can include poor reading skills, boredom with school, drug use, and being at home alone more than three hours a day (Gavigan & Kurtts, 2010). These at-risk factors, along with the documented research on adolescent behavior and influence such as in the 2005 study conducted by Gardner and Steinberg that found significant evidence that peers took more risks in the presence of other peers versus when they were alone, show the need for specified and concerted efforts to offset this dynamic. Unfortunately, teachers are often not adequately prepared and lack sensitivity and awareness of the plight of at-risk populations, especially in pedagogical practices. This is a reality that needs adjustment since educators can lessen

the impact of social conditions on their at-risk students by recognizing the students' issues, creating classrooms that center around students, and by establishing trusting and caring relationships (McKinney, Flenner, Frazier, & Abrams, 2006). Trusting and caring relationships between students and staff is not the only type of supportive relationship that at-risk students need. The Pathways to College Network (2007) declared that positive peer support is an important strategy for facilitating academic persistence and in promoting college-going for underserved students. They continued with the fact that students who had the majority of their friends interested in postsecondary education were four times more likely to go to college than the adverse of that. ECHSs have adopted the Six Common Instructional Strategies as well as the 3R Framework of Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships to address the specific learning and coping challenges of the at-risk population. These two concepts will be discussed later in this chapter.

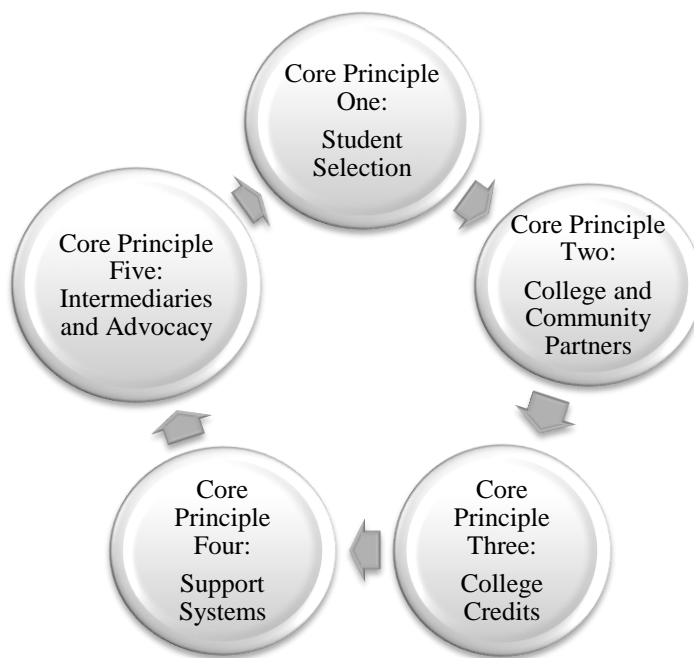
*Conceptual Framework: Five Core Principles of the Early College Initiative*

This study was framed using the 5 Core Principles of the Early College High School Initiative. These principles were created by the initiatives founders, benefactors, and partners and have been revised several times over the years in order to ensure that the principles are clear and comprehensive to all stakeholders. The principles can be used by leadership at both newly created and already existing schools, as a guide to judge institutional effectiveness and to ensure the ECHSs compliance with the initiative's mission. This study utilized these principles as a basis for the research questions as well as the interview protocol.

All Early Colleges operate under the 5 Core Principles, which outline the



initiative's expectations. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of these principles.



*Figure 2.1. Visual representation of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS initiative.*

These core principles are stated below and are followed by a detailed description of each principle:

- (1) ECHSs are committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education;
- (2) ECHSs are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success;
- (3) ECHSs and their higher education partners and community jointly develop integrated academic programs so all students can earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion;
- (4) ECHSs engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion; and,
- (5) ECHSs and their higher education and community partners

work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement (Jobs for the Future, 2009, p.2).

*Core Principle One: Student Selection*

Core Principle One is perhaps the most important of the five. According to Jobs for the Future, “ECHSs are committed to serving students underrepresented in higher education” (2009, p. 2). Founders Bill and Melinda Gates envisioned specific types of students would benefit from their efforts: the aforementioned at-risk population, young people who are the first in their families to attend college (first-generation college goers), students from minority backgrounds, English Language Learners (ELL’s), and low-income students of any background (Berger et al., 2010). In order for ECHSs to be in compliance with Core Principle One, they must practice strategic selectivity in the student selection process. Additionally, ECHS students must be prepared to take on the rigor of the initiative which could mean delayed gratification as most traditional elements of high school are not present in order for students to focus on their academics (McDonald & Farrell, 2012).

Some schools choose to use a lottery system while others require applications, written essays, or interviews to choose their cohorts (AIR & SRI, 2005a). For schools that require a comprehensive application process, one could possibly make the assumption that prospective students may have higher than average parental support than most at-risk students due to the extensive application process and the parental requirement involved. Follow up and transportation to interviews are just one example of the parental involvement required.

According to data retrieved from JFF (2009), the percentage of students by ethnicity enrolled in early colleges in 2011 was 29% Black/African American, 43% Latino, 21% White /Caucasian, 5% Asian, 2% Native American, and 1% Mixed/Other. In addition to revealing that 79% of students enrolled in ECHSs were people of color, these data showed that 61% of EC students were eligible for free/reduced lunch and nearly 50% were first-generation college students (JFF, 2009).

*Application process at selected site.* Since the ECHS program seeks a specific type of student in order to fulfill the intent of Core Principle One, the site selected for this case study has developed its own process to ensure that the program is compliant. First, the ECHS advertises the selection criteria (see Appendix E) in order to attract the appropriate population, then students are asked to complete an application. In addition to general application questions, a background section is included which asks questions such as: first generation college goer status, free/reduced lunch eligibility, and whether the student has identified special needs (IEP or 504). There are also essay and interview components. Berger et al. (2010) stated that the essay and interview components help ECHS staff form subjective opinions about students, especially since they are looking more at potential and less at evaluating academic skills. They referred to this process as finding a diamond in the rough. Administrators in this school also created a rubric for admissions purposes. Points are subtracted for students who do not meet the qualifications of an at-risk student. Refer to Appendices D and E, respectively, for admission criteria and the application.

*Core Principle Two: College and Community Partners*

Core principle two of the ECHS model states that “Early College Schools are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success” (JFF, 2009, p. 2). Each early college is paired with an Institution of Higher Education (IHE) in order for students to fulfill their collegiate requirements. During the 2007-2008 school year, 65% of ECs had community college (2-year college) partners; 24% of ECHSs had 4-year college partners; and 11% had both 2-year and 4-year collegiate partners (AIR & SRI, 2009). The college partner usually provides a liaison that works with the ECHS. At one ECHS, “the university liaison’s role in the process is critical in translating university policy and expectations and articulating the interests and needs” of the ECHS (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011, p. 50).

Some EC networks have developed partnerships that combine resources in order to address concerns indigenous to the demographics of their population. In North Carolina for example, only 19% of students complete a 4-year degree within 10 years after entering high school, and the high school graduation rate is 72%. Of the students who did proceed to higher education, 40% required remedial coursework (SERVE Center, 2010). This prompted creation of the North Carolina New Schools Project which is funded by the North Carolina General Assembly and the Gates Foundation. With the goal of increasing high school graduation and college completion, this project has created 76 ECHSs in the state. The North Carolina ECs even have their own variation of the five core principles which include: (1) Ready for college, (2) Powerful teaching and

learning, (3) Personalization, (4) Professionalism, and (5) Purposeful design.

Coursework (SERVE Center, 2010).

A study from this initiative has affirmed positive results in closing the gap between non-minority and minority groups pertaining to successful completion of algebra I in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In the North Carolina ECHSs, 79.4% of minorities and 81.5% of non-minorities passed algebra I in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, a gap of 2.1%, whereas a 13.6% gap existed for the control group of students who were not selected in the lottery process to attend the ECHS. Of the control group students, 57.3% of minorities and 70.9% of non-minorities successfully completed Algebra 1 in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade (SERVE Center, 2010). Other community partners may include Partners in Education, organizations that offer academic tutoring and support, and other stakeholders involved in making the school a success.

### *Core Principle Three: College Credits*

Core Principle Three of the ECHS model states: “Early College Schools and their higher education partners and community jointly develop integrated academic programs so all students can earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion” (JFF, 2009, p. 2). Schools are definitely making good on their promise to fulfill this core principle. Between 2007 and 2009, the percentage of graduates earning college credits was as follows: class of 2007 - 80%, class of 2008 - 88%, and class of 2009 - 91% (Webb & Mayka, 2011). Earning college credits requires a great deal of discipline on behalf of participants who are still fairly young. McDonald and Farrell (2012) referred to the concept of mirrored maturity. Because most ECHS are forced to

intertwine with older students at the college in order to obtain their college credits, some ECHS students were actually able to mature themselves faster by behaving in a manner that was not only displayed by their older college counterparts, but in the manner that was expected of them by those counterparts. As reported in a study by AIR and SIR (2009), 56 ECHSs reported that students earned, on average, 23 college credits by the time they graduated from high school and seven of the 11 most established ECHSs reported that during the 2006-2007 school year at least one student graduated with an associate's degree by the time of high school graduation; nearly half of the 4-year cohort graduates leave high school with a year of college credit (Berger et al., 2010; Webb & Mayka, 2011). Due to the different ECHS models—for example, some ECHSs allow students to take all four years of coursework in their buildings—not all students earn college credit.

#### *Core Principle Four: Support Systems*

Core Principle Four of the ECHS model states: “Early College Schools engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion” (JFF, 2009, p. 2).

Thompson stated:

If the vision of early colleges is to blend high school and college in a rigorous yet supportive program for vulnerable students who might be at risk . . . then consistent support structures should be established to bridge the move from the [high] school to the university. (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011, p. 53)

High School counselors play a major role in supporting ECHS students with the transition to college and subsequent earning of college credit. Kazis, Vargas, and Hoffman (2004) indicated that high school counselors often lack the focus on college-related issues. ECHS counselors must be different by focusing on not only the transition from high school to the partnering institution, but from the partnering institution to future postsecondary endeavors. Counselors and other staff members efforts would mean nothing if students do not attend school. As previously mentioned, one at-risk factor that prohibits students from succeeding in school is truancy. Data retrieved by AIR and SRI shows that the attendance rate of ECHS students during the 2006-2007 school year was 94% (Berger, et al., 2010). This alone is a major factor that can contribute to a favorable probability of student success.

Each ECHS student requires their own blend of competent and caring faculty at the secondary and postsecondary levels, within their families, among peers, as well as the probable and occasional safety net, to fulfill critical roles that aid in their successful matriculation through high school and college simultaneously. According to AIR and SRI (2013) the exposure to college and academic rigor are just the first step, ECHSs are expected to provide the ECHS students with the skills to manage college coursework and successfully complete it in a comprehensive academic and social support program.

The level of academic support varies from one ECHS to the next. While some schools have formalized tutoring or support expectations, others provide support on a voluntary basis (Berger et al., 2010). In addition, Berger et al. (2010) found that while plans may not have been in place initially for adequate support, over time and with

experience as well as increased funding more supports were put into place. During the 2007-2008 school year, 84% of ECHSs had formal tutoring programs available; most of them also offered support classes as part of the student's course load (e.g. college life-skills classes). Additionally, 89% of ECHSs reported on a survey that they provided seminars and academic support in the areas of literacy, research skills, and mathematics (AIR & SRI, 2005a).

Due to the level of rigor in ECHS and college classes, providing resources and ensuring that students take advantage of them is perhaps one of the most important jobs of an ECHS program/employee. Unfortunately, a 2007-2008 study showed that 66% of students did not take advantage of the supplementary supports. This dilemma detracts from the success of ECHS staff as they attempt to strike a balance between providing support to meet the expectation of the founders as outlined in the core principles and grooming students to take responsibility for their own educational experience. McDonald and Farrell (2012) highlighted the student's role in the success at the college through their study. Their study found that ECHS students had to maintain a commitment to their studies through self-regulation in order to be successful, so adult supervision was only part of the dilemma. They also referred to student being more autonomous and disciplined at the college, therefore being able to monitor, govern, and adjust their behaviors and study habits that could help them to be successful.

Although crucial, academic support is not enough to sustain an EC student. An ECHS student needs equivalent levels of social support in order to be successful. A study conducted by Woodcock and Beal (2013) surveyed three graduates from three different



ECHSs in Texas, all of whom received college credits upon graduation, and revealed many challenges encountered during their time as EC students. These challenges included a lack of preparation for the social aspect of the collegiate experience, a lack of time management skills once enrolled in college courses, and the fallout from a lack of supervision on the college campus which could have possibly thwarted negative behaviors such as skipping class and drug use. The researchers even noted that when the participants were asked what factors contributed to their overall success, not one of them mentioned an adult at the high school or college who provided support. However, lack of a mention of adult support does not prove that adult support and supervision were unavailable. Other social supports for students include the inclusion of extracurricular activities. One ECHS study revealed that 27% of students indicated that extracurricular activities or lack thereof was one of the main reasons for students to leave the ECHS because they were missing out on the traditional aspects of high school with sports, music programs, etc. (SERVE Center, 2010).

*Core Principle Five: Intermediaries and Advocacy*

Core Principle Five of the ECHS model states: “ECHSs and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement” (JFF, 2009, p. 2). JFF is the “Coordinary” for the ECHS, a term describing the various roles played by the organization which coordinates and acts as a superordinate intermediary. JFF identifies intermediaries and also provides them with technical assistance and spearheads efforts towards policy improvement for the initiative (AIR & SRI, 2005b). This principle

has yet to be explored through any formal literature and/or study (Berger et al., 2010).

For the Georgia ECHSI, the intermediary is collaboration between the University System of Georgia P-16 Office and the Department of Education (JFF, 2006).

### *Instruction in the Early College High School*

Since the target population of students served by ECs is not the high achievers, implementation of effective instructional strategies is paramount to the success of students who attend. Just as important is the presence of relatable content in the curriculum. Positive connections with the EC faculty and staff complete the formula for encouraging student outcomes.

### *Six Common Instructional Strategies*

Relatable content and positive connections with EC faculty and staff complete the formula for encouraging student outcomes. ECs across the country utilize six Common Instructional Strategies. These include: (1) Classroom Talk, (2) Collaborative Group Work, (3) Literacy Groups, (4) Questioning, (5) Scaffolding, and (6) Writing to Learn. The following six descriptions of the instructional strategies serve as the pedagogical framework for the initiative:

*Classroom talk.* Classroom talk creates the climate for students to articulate their thinking and strengthen their voice. It takes place in duos, groups, and entire classes. The more comfortable the students are with the process, the more the facilitator can engage students in higher levels of dialogue. Other related strategies include questioning, scaffolding, collaborative group work, and literacy groups.

*Collaborative group work.* Collaborative Group Work entails bringing students of varying academic ability together into small and strategically planned groups for learning engagement. This strategy utilizes questioning, scaffolding, and classroom talk, and also centers on the concept of the Literacy Group.

*Literacy groups.* Literacy groups offer students an opportunity to collaborate for better understanding of a variety of literature. Each student has a role and a defined purpose, which is the foundation of the process. The guidelines vary according to content area, length of the text, or student level of comfort with the procedure.

*Questioning.* Questioning is used to provoke thought in teachers and students. Effective questioning enhances conversations by facilitating in depth reflection. Teachers use this as an opportunity for students to analyze their thoughts, the thoughts of their peers, and the authors of the texts they read.

*Scaffolding.* Scaffolding helps students connect prior knowledge and experiences to new information. Teachers use the method to connect students with previously learned material. This strategy also allows students to realize and express their subjectivity.

*Writing to learn.* Writing to Learn is a strategy used to develop student ideas, critical thinking, and writing abilities through daily experimentation with written language, increasing their fluency and mastery of written conventions. This strategy can be used as formative assessment and as a way to scaffold mid and high stakes writing assignments and tests. (Jobs for the Future, 2009 , p.2)

According to JFF (2015), these strategies embed high expectations for all students by providing a classroom climate that is intellectually engaging and challenging for learners. Schools that have successfully integrated the common instructional practices also create an atmosphere for student recognition of the importance of the strategies. This is done by continuous referral to the strategy, an explanation of each strategy, and lastly, a demonstration of the use of the strategy across assignments and contents. Additionally, JFF (2015) reports that schools that have implemented these strategies with fidelity have experienced gains in student achievement, graduation rates, and student success in college level coursework.

### *3R Framework*

As stated earlier, Early Colleges use the 3R Framework as a guide to curriculum approach. The three components of the 3R Framework include rigor, relevance, and relationships (AIR & SRI, 2013). Created by the Institution for Educational Leadership in the early 1990s, the framework initially included only the concepts of rigor and relevance. More recently, with the addition of the relationships component, the framework has become a staple in educational reform (McNulty & Russell, 2007). Wagner (2002) believed that all students must learn to reason, communicate, problem-solve, and work collaboratively, especially since they will need these skills in college and work, but they are often not the skills being taught in many college-preparatory curricula. He says rigor must be connected to relevance; and above all, more small school communities must be created where caring adults are much more knowledgeable about and involved with all students' learning (Wagner, 2002).

### *Rigor*

Webster's Online Dictionary (2012) defines rigor as a condition that makes something challenging, difficult, or uncomfortable. In the case of ECHS, "rigor implies a challenging academic program and experience that prepares all students for college, work, and citizenship" (Ongaga, 2010, p. 376). Rigor is the principle that encourages students to reach beyond their perception of their own academic potential to a level that was never considered or possibly intended for them. According to the North Carolina Department of Education, "Students learn when they are challenged to use the full range of their talents and intellectual abilities to address authentic and complex academic tasks in professional and real life events" (Ongaga, 2010, p. 377). Students within classrooms want to know that the teacher believes in them academically. When this happens, they believe in themselves, and it is reflected in their academic performance on low- and high-stakes assignments and testing.

Students do not have to experience the rigor of the EC classroom in isolation. A report from JFF presented the following quote from an EC student at Wallis Annenberg High School (WAHS): "In here, you fall behind and they pick you up, they help you, like help you to go to your goal. They help you in everything, anything they can, so that's different like in other school, they really don't." (Wolk,, 2005, p. 8) Sentiments such as these are shared in many ECs. Dayton ECHS in Ohio has personalized learning plans for all students. The objective is to meet the student where they are. Students move at their own pace in accordance with content area strengths versus traditional promotion from grade level to grade level (Wolk, 2005). Rigor without support equals failure.

### *Relevance*

Relevance is defined as something with practical and especially social applicability, the ability to retrieve material that satisfies the need of the user (Webster's Online Dictionary, 2012). In reference to the ECHS, relevance includes studies which students find engaging and meaningful to their lives today and in the future; relevance is represented by instructional lessons that challenge students to address questions or problems with real-life applications (Shear et al. as cited in Ongaga, 2010). Engaging today's youth is no easy feat with all the technology and outside distractions they are subjected to; therefore, bridging the gap between academics and everyday life is the best strategy we can use to try to reach them.

### *Relationships*

A relationship is the connection or binding of participants, the state of affairs that exist between those having dealings, an attachment. Developing trust and sustaining trust is the first step to a productive relationship. Blankstein, Houston, and Cole (2008) stated that trust is an element of a culture's organization that is critical and often overlooked. That is not the case in ECHSs. Pathways to College Network (2007) indicated that the presence of school staff members who show concern for student advancement is a potent ingredient in nurturing their academic growth and achievement. ECHSs are organized around themes of trust, support, sharing, cooperation, and growth. Relationships speak to the close and supportive bonds between and among teachers and students, but they may also be extended to include the relationships between the ECHS and its school district as well as the community college or 4-year university it is paired with (Thompson &

Ongaga, 2011). Kuh, et al. (2006) reported that in general, the more interaction with faculty the better, especially the substantial out-of-class interaction, as it equates to their personal satisfaction; frequent dealing with faculty also seemed to positively influence student's educational aspirations and view of the institution.

Other important relationships include Administrator-Teacher, Parent-School, and even Peer-to-Peer. Parent engagement is considered one of the most critical areas in school success because of the parents influence over students. Offering parents social supports is one way some ECHSs reach their parent populations (AIR & SRI, 2005b). Peer Relationships are equally as important with adolescents. McDonald and Farrell (2012) highlighted the concept of Corporate Accountability, a corporate concept where students independently and interdependently work together to achieve higher grades and fulfill course requirements. The relationships in the ECHS are the cornerstone on which the schools are built. For example, in a professional symphony, certain musicians such as brass, woodwind, or percussion players are one-on-a-part performers, meaning their part is not able to be covered by anyone else. Therefore, the entire sequence comes to a halt when one player is not there to perform his/her duties (Cirone, 2011). Comparable to the inner-workings of a symphony which relies upon an assortment of instrumentation to be harmoniously responsible to a grandiose composition, the multiple agencies including local schools, school districts, institutions of higher learning, community partners, intermediaries, and contributors, as well as parents, staff, students, and administrators act in concert to ensure the success of the ECHS.

A 2009 study of one ECHS concluded that the focus on personalization translated

into academic achievement because students put forth more effort and had more motivation to succeed when they had caring relationships with the teachers in the building. Moreover, students felt safe in their environment for the same reason (Valdez, 2009). Students who believe their safety and personal/social needs are met are productive students.

Now that the Five Core Principles of the ECHS Initiative have been explained, it is important to summarize the research up to this point. Thus far, statistics regarding high school dropouts and their correlation to unemployment, lower wages, and a higher interaction with the criminal justice system have been introduced. Continuous school attendance and completion increases the chance of a better life for these students and the ECHS initiative exists to serve the needs of these students.

#### *Attributes of Effective Early College High Schools*

While the core principles are the underpinning of the EC model, the Initiative has identified several attributes of effective high schools that are also proving to be effective in ECHS's; additionally, they are also part of the goal of the foundation's high school reform efforts. AIR and SRI (2005b) quoted that these aspects include:

*Common Focus* - Staff and students are focused on a few important goals. The school has adopted a consistent research-based instructional approach based on shared beliefs about teaching and learning. The use of time, tools, materials, and professional development activities are aligned with instruction.

*High Expectations* - Staff members are dedicated to helping students achieve state and local standard; students are engaged in an ambitious and rigorous course of



study; and students leave school prepared for success in work, further education, and citizenship.

*Personalized* - The school is designed to promote sustained students relationships with adults where every student has an adult advocate and personal plan for progress. Schools are small. There is an emphasis on responsible behaviors and mutual respect in a safe and ethical atmosphere.

*Respect and Responsibility* - The environment is authoritative, safe, ethical, and studious. The staff teachers, models, and expects responsible behavior and relationships are based on mutual respect.

*Time to Collaborate* - Staff has time to collaborate and develop skills and plan to meet the needs of all students. Parents are recognized as partners in education. Partnerships are developed with business to create work-based opportunities and with institutions of higher education to improve teacher preparation.

*Performance Based* - Students are promoted to the next instructional level only when they have achieved competency. Students receive additional time and assistance when needed to achieve this competency.

*Technology as a Tool* - Teachers design engaging and imaginative curriculum linked to learning standards, analyze results, and have easy access to best practices and learning opportunities. Schools publish their progress to parents and engage the community in dialogue about continuous improvement. (AIR & SRI, 2005b, p.19)

AIR and SRI have collected data from the ECHSs related to these attributes and

what they look like when they are effectively integrated. Some of this data, such as common focus and collaboration, are related to one another in the sense that common language is spoken across content areas. Additionally teachers seek out other teachers for assistance with brainstorming. Similarly, high expectations, performance-based instruction, and technology as a tool are also related and can be addressed through targeted professional development. Respect and responsibility is shown through shared decision-making as a leadership strategy and gives all stakeholders tasks and input towards school objectives. Last, personalized instruction is the most positively recognized trait of the ECHS. This manifests through smaller class size, career and academic advisory, and round-table discussions between students and teachers about a student's needs. Carter (2012) also noted during her study the importance of an effective leader in ECHSs, which included individuals with the following characteristics: student-centered direction, collegial, personable, and collaborative.

### *Politics and the Early College High School*

Introducing a new idea to the mainstream is no easy task and the ECHS concept was no different. No one will disagree that there is a need for more minorities to attend and graduate from high school and college; however, preparing them to successfully attend and complete educational programs is a challenge for educators. Hoffman and Vargas (2005) identified several areas where policy could help support ECHSs. These areas include: (a) dual enrollment classes supplanting high school courses, (b) eligibility for college courses based on a student's proficiency in a particular subject area, (c) transferability of ECHS credits to 2- and 4-year institutions, (d) streamlined certification

processes so that professors are authorized to teach high school courses, (e) merged funding from both high schools and colleges, and (f) schools autonomy over decisions related to curriculum and finance.

In the matter of dual enrollment courses supplanting high school courses, staff working at the ECHS for this case study confirmed that during the first years of the program, a barrier existed with regard to seat time for Carnegie unit purposes and earning high school credit for students enrolled in college classes. The Legacy Class of 2010, during their first year at the college in 2008, had to take two college courses for every one high school course in order to graduate from high school. Not only was this a challenge for the students academically (because many of them were not high achievers), but it also impacted future scholarship monies, especially the HOPE scholarship for eligible students because they used a lot of their monies during their high school years. By the time the class of 2011 began college in 2009, this rule changed by their second semester. To date, students in all Georgia EC programs, including traditional dual enrollment, receive a one-to-one credit waiver so one college course between three and five credit hours can count as a full Carnegie unit of high school credit despite the college course not having the equivalent amount of seat time as high school courses (Barge, 2014).

Regarding requirements for college coursework for the selected site, the GPA requirement has been removed for ECHS student. According to Jobs for the Future, the state of Georgia waived dual enrollment requirements for ECHS students; in traditional cases, to qualify for dual enrollment, students had to be at least 16 years of age, have at least a 3.0 GPA and a 970 combined SAT score (JFF, 2006). However, according to JFF,

Georgia waived the GPA requirements for dual enrollment students. ECHS students, however, must pass the COMPASS exam in Math, English, and Writing in order to qualify for college coursework. For example, if a student passes the COMPASS math exam, which means he/she has tested out of learning support courses and into college level coursework, this student can take the appropriate mathematics and science courses; likewise, if a student passes both the reading and writing sections of the COMPASS exam, he/she is eligible to take the appropriate English, social studies, and social science related coursework toward degree requirements. Additionally, students can only take the COMPASS exam, for the first time, during the spring semester of their sophomore year for placement during their junior year. This ECHS site has decided that all students will take high school courses full-time during their freshman and sophomore years.

The issue of transfer credits has been an evolving process in Georgia as colleges become familiar with the concept of ECHS. Because the selected site's collegiate partner is a two-year college, some four-year institutions are selective about accepting the credits of graduating students, especially private institutions. However, ECHS students attending state schools, such as Valdosta, Kennesaw, and Georgia Southern, were allowed to transfer all of their college credits. This is because the University System of Georgia has uniform core curriculum across its campuses, enabling students to transfer from within the system to any school without any worries about credit acceptance (Hoffman & Vargas, 2010). The only issue for colleges was the status of incoming ECHS students and whether they would be considered a junior or a technical incoming freshman with transfer credits.

The partnering institution for the selected ECHS site offers a program specifically for students who wish to transfer called the Transfer Admissions Guarantee. This agreement was developed between the 2-year partner and other 4-year institutions in the state and offers reduced admission criteria for students who have accumulated at least 30 hours of credit. Since ECHS students are not required to meet the same standards as traditional dual enrollment or traditional college students at the partnering institution, this program helps tremendously with continuous post-secondary enrollment which is the cornerstone of the ECHS Initiative (Georgia Perimeter College, 2015).

Many ECHS students could benefit from one or more of their college professors teaching a class at their high school for college credit. While one challenge would be seeking professors who are willing to teach a high school course, the bigger issue is the Georgia standards for professional educators which prohibit such an agreement in Georgia's public schools. Georgia educators are required to be certified in their respective fields and they must pass the GACE Educator Assessment, complete the requirements of a teaching degree, and complete an internship before they can become a qualified educator. Some alternative programs exist for individuals with special qualifications, such as a degree in a content area, but who have not completed an accredited teacher education program. However, there are limitations on them until they complete all of the program requirements. Making exceptions for college professors, as long as they meet the qualifications to teach at their colleges, would benefit students by exposing them to college courses prior to their junior year and would give them the

advantage of learning the intricacies of college from a professor with firsthand knowledge of the partnering institution.

FTE, also known as full-time equivalent, is a unit of measure calculated from a formula used by the federal government to calculate the amount of money each high school will receive per student enrolled on a full-time basis (Barge, 2014). Once a student becomes dually enrolled and is on both the high school and college rosters, the question becomes who will receive financial credit for this student. In the case of the selected ECHS site, the partnering institution receives the FTE money for the EC students because they house them full-time even though the student is still enrolled at the ECHS and the high school is responsible for the student meeting graduation requirements. Rather than lose funding, at least one other ECHS in Georgia requires students to attend the ECHS full-time and take college classes in the afternoon and evenings. If Georgia developed a way to share the funding between the ECHSs and colleges, all stakeholders involved would benefit.

The last policy area mentioned in the introductory paragraph was autonomy. When the first ECHSs opened in Georgia, the school system, University System of Georgia, and the Partnering Institutions had to agree to abide by a set of guidelines in order to receive money for each ECHS. This agreement is referred to as a Memorandum of Understanding (see Appendix I). The start-up grant for ECHSs was \$500,000 per school over three years. Once this grant no longer existed, schools again fell under the jurisdiction of their surrounding district and, more importantly, had to rely on the district for continuous funding in order to survive. The selected ECHS site for this study was on

the list for school closure the year after the grant money was depleted because the district was experiencing budget issues and had to cut costs using a variety of tactics such as staff furlough days and salary adjustments for district personnel. The school was able to survive because of the students' academic achievements which brought positive notoriety to the district. Other schools did not have such a positive outcome and were forced to close when the district where they were housed decided the initiative could not be funded. District control over ECHSs could impact the schools by changing the dynamics of the enrollment process and stretching the boundaries of the initiative's smaller class size mandate. This situation occurred at the selected ECHS site.

#### *Other Early College Studies*

JFF, AIR and SRI International, and the North Carolina New Schools Project have conducted major research on ECHSs. There are, however, other researchers who have studied students attending ECHSs. A narrative study of ECHS students in Texas (the only study located which focused on alumni) addressed the academic and social experiences of ECHS graduates. This study revealed significant deficiencies in student support and monitoring on college campuses. Researchers noted that students at one ECHS rarely saw high school teachers or administrators after enrollment at the college (Woodcock & Beal, 2013). Thompson and Ongaga's (2011) study reported that the rigor of the ECHS model could be overwhelming for students and, as a result, many students failed to meet university requirements.

A 2010 study by Ongaga revealed that most students who attended a particular ECHS were forced to attend by their parents. The study also stated that one reason for

students' apprehension was a lack of extracurricular activities as well as social loss of friends who attended the home school. District-assigned boundaries determine which school—the home school—students will attend based on geographical areas. While the study did not reveal a correlation between the reason for attendance at an ECHS and student success (as it was not the focus of the study), it raises the question of whether these characteristics discourage students in such a way that they choose not to engage fully in the ECHS.

Three major themes evolved from another EC qualitative study: academic (readiness), social (learning community), and personal (identity). Productivity was the foundational concept for the three themes. Readiness included sub-themes of assessment, autonomy, discipline, responsibility, and time management. The learning community theme included sub-themes of social acclimation, accountability, and caring relationships. The identity theme encompassed sub-themes of anonymity, transitional tensions and triumphs, scholarly self, and maturity (McDonald & Farrell, 2012).

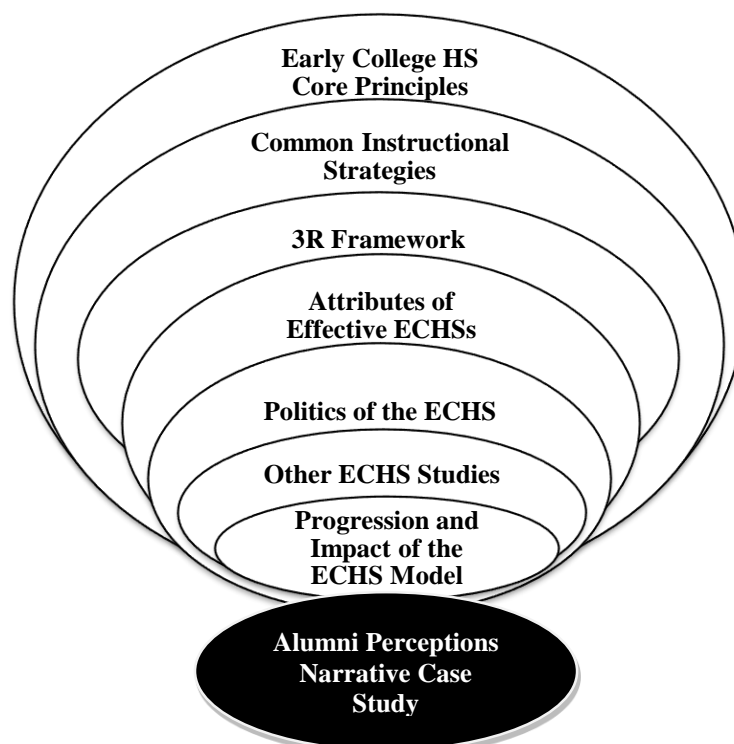
These are a few of the findings of various ECHS studies. While no studies were identical, these findings provided a range of outcomes to compare data to in order to identify similarities in ECHS student experiences across the nation.

### *Progression and Impact of the Early College Initiative*

At the beginning of the ECHS initiative, the 2002-2003 school year, only three ECs existed. Those three schools graduated 115 students according to a 2009 JFF report followed by 900 students graduating in 2007 from 18 ECHSs. Of those graduates, 85% earned at least one semester of transferable credit while 10% earned 2 full years of



college credit for an associate's degree (JFF, 2009). In 2009, 3,000 students graduated from 64 ECHSs that had been open at least four years, earning an average of 20 college credits. Forty-four percent earned at least a year of transferable college credits and 25% earned two full years of college credit or an A.S. degree. Eighty-six percent of students immediately enrolled in postsecondary education after graduation (Hoffman & Vargas, 2010). ECHS students graduate high school at a rate of 90%, and 94% earn college credit while dually enrolled in high school. ECHS students average 38 college credits earned while still in high school; 30% earn an associate's degree or some other form of post-secondary credential while still in high school; and, after graduation, 71% of students immediately enroll in college (JFF, 2015). Figure 2.2 shows a visual representation of the connection of the literature review to the study.



*Figure 2.2. Visual representation of the connection of the literature review to the study.*

### *Chapter Two Summary*

The literature described in this chapter provided an overview of the conceptual framework for the study, the Five Core Principles of the ECHS model. A detailed definition of the at-risk student targeted by the ECHS was provided. This chapter expounded upon the instructional framework called the six common instructional practices and detailed the 3R Framework of Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships which are both cornerstones of the ECHS model. This literature review included the attributes of effective ECHSs, politics surrounding the model at the selected site, and briefly addressed the progression and impact of the model on current and former students. The next chapter describes the research methods utilized in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will cover the methods associated with this study. I will begin by restating the research questions, previously introduced in Chapter One. I will then provide an explanation of the research design, followed by a description of the site selection and a detail of the participants and participant selection. Next, I will discuss the instrumentation being used to gather the data and I will give a synopsis of my role and the lens I will use as the researcher. Finally, I will outline my procedures, my plan to collect, analyze, and manage the data, and discuss issues of trustworthiness and ethics in regards to this study.

#### *Research Questions*

The overarching research question that guided this study was the following: How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia perceive the program prepared them for post-secondary education?

In order to address that question, the following sub-questions were answered:

- 1) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have completed post-secondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?
- 2) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have not completed post-secondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?
- 3) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia perceive the program could have better prepared them for post-secondary education?

### *Researcher's Lens*

In order to completely understand this study, readers should be aware of who I am personally and how that may have affected my research. I am the first born in my family and have only a younger brother who is five years my junior. I am very close to my mother and grandmother and was close to my great-grandmother and god-mother before they passed away a year apart in 2009 and 2010, respectively. Being close to mature women helped to shape me into the woman I am today, especially their independence and self-sufficiency which they modeled.

### *Background*

I grew up in a typical two-parent, middle class household in the suburbs of Metropolitan Atlanta. I was blessed to have a solid spiritual foundation which has helped me during times in my life when I was unable to control a seemingly insurmountable situation, just like this dissertation process seemed at times. Being raised in church set a standard for my life from which I have tried not to deviate.

A critical incident at my elementary school in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade which resulted in my suspension, forced me to realize that people self-preserve at the expense of others. As a person of integrity, that was a problem for me. I strongly believe that both educators and researchers have a duty to behave in an ethical manner.

Another piece of knowledge that I have gained over the years is the concept that people exist in concert with others around them. As a result, I have recognized and felt the importance of creating and developing relationships in all aspects of my life.

Those relationships are the motivation I used to complete this study. They are also

why I chose a case study method, using interviews and narratives, to express alumni perspectives.

### *Culture*

One of my biggest cultural influences is music. Growing up, most of the students in my community were in the band, but I intentionally chose to play the violin. I never follow the path taken by many; hence, the affectionate title of this study, “The Road Less Traveled.” Ideally, I would have liked to incorporate music into my dissertation; instead, a more thorough understanding of the dissertation process proved that was virtually impossible. Schools however, especially the selected site, have very similar characteristics to musical ensembles such as orchestras or bands. There is a conductor whose job is to oversee the orchestra and ensure that everyone is playing synchronously, very similar to the Principal at a school. There are instrument section leaders, just like the various department heads. Most importantly, all of these sections, no matter how small their parts are, are needed to complete the masterpiece, which is a beautiful culmination of everyone’s hard work, expertise and effort. As a researcher, I am fascinated by the intricate details of every working part of a group and how it relates to the larger whole.

### *Major Influences*

Georgia Southern University (GSU) was and continues to be a major influence for me. Many people do not know that as a freshman, I attended Georgia Southern and failed miserably, not because I partied, but because I was homesick. I returned home after a year and did not set foot into another school for two years. That failure, and my

need to finish what I started, motivated me to return to GSU and work towards this degree.

### *Topics of Interest*

For five years, I had the pleasure of working at an early college academy in the state of Georgia. The concept intrigued me from the moment I read about it. During my tenure as a Graduation Specialist, there was no blueprint of how to run this type of unique learning community effectively, so we were, as my founding Principal used to say, “Building the plane as we flew it.” This encouraged me to want to explore this phenomenon more through a formal study.

### *Epistemological and Ontological Perspectives*

Hatch (2002) refers epistemologically to the Constructivist researcher as collaborating with the participant in order to construct an understanding. This is the approach that my entire existence is built upon. As a counseling professional, I spend each and every day trying to develop an understanding of other people’s situations so that I can provide some type of guidance to and for them. It was only natural for that reality to translate over into my research. It affected my decision to do qualitative versus quantitative research. Since case study research is qualitative and relies upon the participant as the expert, and because I chose a narrative method to analyze my data, I am conveying my value of other’s opinions and the importance of allowing those individuals to have a voice in this society, where many may feel unheard, especially people in the minority.

This case study is bound because all of the participants attended the same school,

referred to here as the pseudonym Butler-Armstrong Early College High School. Since this study included multiple participants, multiple realities were discovered throughout the research process. In life, I realize and sometimes struggle with the fact that multiple realities exist. Everything is not black and white. There should be room for latitude.

It is my belief that I fit within the Constructivist paradigm, epistemologically, because I do believe that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world based upon their personal experiences and the reflection that comes after. Similarly, I believe an individual's existence, or where they see themselves in world, is directly connected to their understanding. This is my ontological view of social culture. This study is an insight into the understanding of the ECHS experience based upon the personal occurrences involving 16 former students who attended and a look into how those experiences ultimately affected their societal placement, whether that placement was asserted by others or perceived by the participant.

### *Research Design*

This qualitative study explored the ECHS student experience and its impact on college preparedness, as perceived by alumni and former students of the program. I chose to use qualitative research because it focuses on participant's perceptions and experiences as well as the outcome (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2011), quantitative studies draw general explanations for the relationships amongst the variables being researched; because of this fact, that method was not ideal for this study as I sought to understand the perceptions of the participants at one ECHS site and not to generalize the experience of all ECHS students.

### *Why a Case Study?*

For the design, I chose a case study approach, employing narrative methods. Case studies are more appropriate for how and why questions, according to Yin (2014). Case studies also contribute to our knowledge of groups or organizations. This study contributed to the knowledge of early college high schools in Georgia. Additionally, this approach allows investigators to focus on small group behavior and organizational and managerial processes, in order to retain a holistic perspective (Yin, 2014). The sample population for this study was the small group that provided a treasured understanding about the early college high school experience.

This case studied the experiences of alumni and former students from the classes of 2010-2013. This means that they would have been freshmen during the years of 2006-2010. Case studies are particularly useful when the goal is to understand a special group of people or a unique situation in greater depth, such as these early college students in this early college setting (Patton, 1990). Due to the selected site opening in 2006, these alumni represent some of the first who had the opportunity to complete the program. Therefore, there is a combination of eight years of diverse experiences during critical years of the school's establishment and operation. Patton (1990) would refer to this participant group as being, a few exemplars rich with information of the phenomenon in question; additionally, he noted that a great deal can be learned about how to improve a program by studying dropouts, failures, and successes. This study has all of the aforementioned qualities, studying the successes and failures of the participants in an effort to promote positive reform in early college high schools in Georgia and across the



nation.

The focus of a case study can be a topic, thesis, or proposition to be argued or defended; or, it could be a theme which emerged from the data analysis. Selecting the focus of a case depends on the audience the case is targeting. In this case the target demographic was educational leaders, more specifically, early college high school leaders. The focus of the case could also depict the message that the researcher wanted to convey (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). I wanted the reader to better understand the experiences of an ECHS student using the participant's own words.

Yin (2014) stated that exemplary case studies have four notable characteristics: (1) the case must be significant, meaning the case should be of general public interest and the underlying issues should be nationally important; (2) the case must be complete, meaning the researcher has given clear boundaries, including the distinction between the phenomenon and its context; (3) the researcher has exhausted efforts to obtain all relevant evidence to the subject matter; and (4) the researcher should have ensured responsibility to the subjects by designing a case that could be comfortably completed within time constraints, such as the conclusion of a semester, rather than being limited by them. According to these standards, this study should be considered exemplary. Additionally, through this case study research, I have provided findings that will later be presented, as well as an analysis of those findings, which have been grouped by themes.

#### *Why a Narrative Analysis?*

Narratives takes the participant's stories and retell them using time, place, plot, and scene, just as a in a novel (Liamputtong, 2009). Ochs and Capps (2001) detailed that

narratives of personal experience build dramatic tension that establishes information about entities, emotional dispositions, and specialized knowledge. They also stated that all narratives exhibit some tension between the desire to construct an overarching storyline that ties events together seamlessly and the desire to capture the complexities of events experienced, including the jumbled details and uncertainties. This is more so the case, in my opinion, when the researcher is invested in the topic of research, because you want to ensure that you are capturing every experience with full detail and, at the same time, giving each participant's story the attention that it deserves. Writing a narrative can be an exhaustive process for the researcher because the process takes an enormous amount of time and thought. This study and the derived narratives allowed the readers to experience the passage of the 16 participants through the ECHS initiative and the genuine emotion associated with their occurrences as students. The use of vignettes conveyed the feelings of the participants accurately and concisely; while the full narratives, discussed later, went into full detail about the entirety of their experience from freshman to beyond high school, which was my goal as the researcher. Hence, the combination of these two methods, case study and narrative, created a rich qualitative experience.

#### *Site Selection*

I selected Butler-Armstrong, an ECHS located in Emerson County, Georgia, to be the site for this study. There are several different ECHS models used by the schools in Georgia, but most have a general structure like this site, serving students in grades 9-12. Butler-Armstrong has been in existence since 2006. The first group of alumni graduated in 2010. They are also referred to as the Legacy Class, which is an early college tradition.

This school has been ranked as one of the top performing schools in the state, with a College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) score of 97.3% in 2014 for the 2013 school year and is a model school identified by the International Center for Leadership in Education (GaDOE; McKay, 2011). CCRPI replaced Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the previous evaluation system for Georgia schools which determine their effectiveness.

According to the Georgia Department of Education, this Title I high school serves grades 9-12 and has an average enrollment of about 300 students per school year; 93% of whom are minority and 59.4% are considered low socio-economic status. According to this model, students complete two years of high school (9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades) at Butler-Armstrong ECHS and then transfer to the partnering institution, Henry-Hall, for the remaining two years (11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades), in order to complete requirements for both high school and college completion.

Students planning to continue in the program must take a college placement exam, the COMPASS, in the areas of Writing, Reading, and Math, in order to place out of learning support classes and into college level coursework. At the time the study participants were enrolled at Butler-Armstrong, students who did not place into college level coursework had to return to their home (zoned or neighborhood) school to complete high school requirements, while those who were successful on the exam proceeded with college classes. Subsequently, after their time at Butler-Armstrong, the school has experimented with different models; including one in which students have the opportunity to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade classes on the high school campus, although I am not

sure if that plan is still being implemented to date.

### *Participants*

Creswell (2011) emphasized that, in qualitative research, the participants are the authority. In this study, the Alumni were the experts on ECHS. According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), the selection of participants necessarily will influence the findings in a study, meaning that the subjects of the study must be carefully chosen. In this case, participants will all be former students of Butler-Armstrong ECHS with first-hand knowledge of the school. According to Full Time Equivalent (FTE) data from the Georgia Department of Education, this school had a graduating class average of 30 students between the years of 2010 and 2013. These same classes started in 9<sup>th</sup> grade with an average of 71 students per class.

Patton (1990) stated that while there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry, what you want to know, what will be useful, the purpose of the inquiry, and what can be done with available time and resources should be factored in when determining sample size. In qualitative research, however, the goal is to achieve data saturation, better described as the place where a researcher gets when no more new information is seen or heard from participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, the validity, meaningfulness, and insights associated with qualitative research have more to do with the quality of information obtained from participants and the analytical abilities of the researcher, rather than with the sample size (Patton, 1990).

### *Participant Selection*

The participants were representative of the gender and ethnic majority of the

Butler-Armstrong population, which is mostly female and African American. I used two major sampling methods in order to secure participants. Using a single qualifying criterion of prior attendance at Butler-Armstrong ECHS, I used the convenience sampling process to initiate the selection of study participants. Creswell (2007) stated that criterion sampling works well when the participants studied have experience regarding the phenomenon being studied; likewise, he indicated that convenience sampling saves time, money and effort. There are many researchers who do not view convenience sampling as being a credible sampling method, like Patton (1990) who referred to convenience sampling as the “least desirable” sampling method and called it “neither purposeful nor strategic.” In this study however, convenience sampling was a preferred method because of my affiliation with many of the former students in the program and my knowledge of specific and diverse characteristics which made them valuable assets to this particular project. I contacted all of the former students for whom I had current contact information, and requested they complete an Initial Interest Survey and delivered electronically through SurveyMonkey©. The Initial Interest Survey was used to obtain demographic and additional contact information, as well as their availability for an interview (see Appendix C). I also asked them if they would be willing to contact additional former students/alumni who they thought might be interested in participation in this project.

This brings me to the second method of sampling used, snowball. Snowball sampling is a selection strategy that begins with an individual and uses his/her social networks to recruit similar participants. This sampling method can also be considered a form of convenience sampling, since the researcher is utilizing the people available to

them (Stover-Wright, 2013). According to Stover-Wright (2013), this method is effective in creating a level of social reward for the community which is being studied, because it provides them an outlet to express their perspective.

Robins-Sadler (2010) stated that there are both advantages and disadvantages to this method of seeking participants. An advantage of utilizing this technique is that it often shortens the time frame of selecting participants due to the personal aspect of the system (Robins-Sadler, 2010). Another advantage is that a sufficient size group can be gathered with minimal cost to the researcher (Robins-Sadler, et al., 2010).

One major disadvantage is that this method does not seek out a random sample of participants, which is not required in qualitative studies. A suggestion given was that a larger sample be identified initially, after which, the researcher can randomly select from the larger group, a pool of participants (Robins-Sadler, 2010). While potential participants were contacted through the Snowball process, only one former student ultimately participated as a result of that method, Maximillian Prufroy; so there was no larger pool from which to pull participants. All individuals who showed interest, and who followed through with scheduling and participating in an interview, were used.

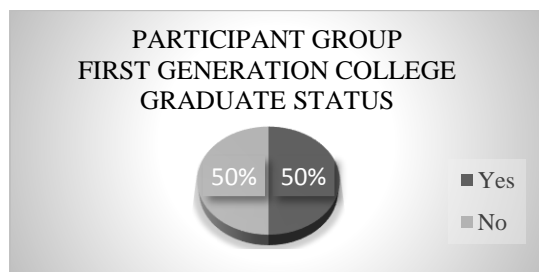
Additional demographic information was collected because of its connection to Core Principle 1: Student Selection. Those areas include low-socio-economic Status and First Generation College Status. This is a significant part of the research because it substantiates the students' participation in the early college initiative. For the purpose of this study, Low-Socio Economic Status is defined as those students who were eligible for participation in the Federal Free-Reduced Lunch price program. This information was

self-reported and was not verified through the school district. Eighty-one percent of participants ( $n = 13$ ) reported that they were eligible for free or reduced lunch while 19% of participants ( $n = 3$ ) reported that they were not eligible for free or reduced lunch. Figure 3.1 below shows the graphical representation of the Low-Socio Economic Status of participants.



*Figure 3.1: Graphical representation of the Low Socio-Economic Status of the Participants*

Likewise, First Generation College Status is defined as those students whose biological parent(s) did not graduate from a college or university. Students were counted as First Generation College students if their parent(s) attended, but did not graduate from college (see Figure 3.2). This definition may vary across the board with other ECHS's. Fifty percent of participants ( $n = 8$ ) reported that they were first generation college goers and 50% of participants ( $n = 8$ ) reported that they were not first generation college goers. Figure 3.2 below shows the graphical representation of the First Generation College Goer status of participants.



*Figure 3.2: Graphical representation of Participant's First Generation College Status*

### *Instrumentation*

A review of previous research revealed that existing interview protocols focused on ECHS personnel such as leaders and teachers; none were directed towards the students. As such I developed original interview questions for this study. I aligned the interview protocol (see Appendix A) directly with the Five Core Principles of the Early College Initiative (see Appendix B) and ensured that the questions were worded to encourage elaboration from participants with stories or anecdotes. The questions also addressed the ideas of peer influence on the early college experience. In addition they addressed whether or not the participants were aware of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS Initiative. Aligning the protocol with the Conceptual Framework allowed for the responses to be more relevant; likewise, asking for elaboration provided an opportunity for a deeper connection with the participants and a better understanding of their experiences.

### *Procedures*

As stated previously, this is a Narrative Case Study. I conducted interviews with 16 individuals who graduated from Butler-Armstrong between the years of 2010 and 2013, the first four cohorts of this school. Since I was seeking to gain more knowledge regarding alumni perceptions, qualitative methods were the best approach for this study. Weiss (1994) stated that through qualitative interviews, researchers have the potential to learn how people perceive their experiences and how they interpret those perceptions – their feelings and thoughts. Narratives, on the other hand, were used to account the participant's experiences with and their outlook on the effectiveness of the Early College



model. Linear narratives, such as these, have a sequence of temporary and causally ordered events organized around a point (in this case a theme), with a significant beginning and moves towards an end with some type of psychological closure.

This site was chosen for this study because of my prior affiliation with the school, and the success of the school based upon public data, including test scores and graduation rates. Since I used former students versus current students for this study, I did not need to obtain permission through the school district; however I did seek approval through Georgia Southern University's Institutional Review Board prior to the collection of any data (see Appendix G). After identifying the participants, I proceeded with scheduling interviews over the summer. Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point during the process, which no one did. Once the interviews were completed, I had the audio files transcribed. Upon their return I reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and began the interpretation and analysis of the data. Additional information regarding the process will be discussed in the role of the researcher, data collection, and analysis sections.

#### *Impact of the Researcher's Lens on Study*

The nature of qualitative research requires that the researcher's role be considered as an integral part of the research experience. The entire process from the development of the researcher questions to the analysis of the data is determined by the researcher's belief system. This is why it is important to thoroughly explain the researcher's lens. This lens affects the way in which the research process is approached and executed.

There is a term utilized to describe the awareness that a researcher's values, background, and previous experiences with the phenomenon can have an effect on the study; it is called reflexivity (Cope, 2014). My background has already determined the selection of methods, the content of the interview protocol, and even my interview location. My time as an employee at the selected site, has provide me access that outsiders would not have.

The creative side I have has been a disadvantage in this process because my natural instinct is not follow templates, but to create my own works of meaning and substance. A dissertation doesn't allow for much latitude. The choice to interpret my data through narrative writing was as creative as this process was for me.

The childhood stories and major influences, whether people or circumstances, have set the current direction of my life, especially the challenge of working towards a terminal degree. Through my life experiences, I learned patience, awareness, socialization skills, diligence, empathy, perseverance, and much more. All of these make me a better researcher and scholar. In conclusion, it is important to be aware of all things that impact my function as a researcher.

There could have been several ways to determine the effectiveness of the ECHS initiative at this school. Data such as graduation rates, college credit hours attained, and standardized test scores could have provided insight into whether the program is serving its purpose; however, my affiliation with this school and these students, made me want to explore from a more personal place through individual interviews, so that the data are attached to specific people and not generalized for the entire population of students. The

questions, even though they were grounded in the Core Principles of ECHS model, were created because of my personal interest in the answers to those specific questions, and more importantly, how the personal statements of the students can improve the school in the immediate future.

### *Role of the Researcher*

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is also extremely encompassing. In addition to formulating and designing the study, Creswell (2011) said that the researcher needs basic skills in analyzing qualitative text data and interview structure in order to complete a successful qualitative study. During the early summer I presented my proposal to Georgia Southern University's IRB Review Board. After making a few minor adjustments, they approved the study. I was then able to begin the data collection process.

First, I identified the participants. The specifics of this process were explained earlier in the chapter. I then coordinated separate interview times with each of them, at their convenience weekdays and weekends, mornings and evenings. When they arrived for their interview, I had them read over and sign the Letter of Informed Consent (see Appendix D) and asked them if they had any questions regarding the document. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2001), the way an interviewer acts, questions, and responds in an interview, shapes the relationship and subsequently the way that the participant responds and gives account of their experiences. I was responsible for making the participants feel comfortable in a climate controlled environment. I also offered a bottle of water in case their throats became parched during the interview. After that was

done, I notified them that I would be turning on both of the recording devices, my iPhone with the iTalk app and the portable handheld recording device. We then established introductions, date, and time. Afterwards, I explained the details of the study, including the Five Core Principles of the ECHS and my research questions. I also shared that their audio files would be transcribed by a third party and showed them the Transcriber's Pledge of Confidentiality (see Appendix H) document which the company would be signing off on to ensure their data remains confidential.

I began to use the interview protocol which was created especially for this study. Alvesson (2003) described establishing a rapport of trust with the interviewee, which I did. Even though there were set questions, I went where the participant lead me; if I was not getting enough information, I subtly and supportively asked them to elaborate a little more. Along the way, I made margin notes, detailing mannerisms, clothing, expressions, and things like that which I later use to introduce each narrative.

Once the last question was asked, each participant selected an alias. Some of them asked if they could use middle names and I told them that they should not use anything that is personally associated with them. They wrote their alias on the back side of the Letter of Informed Consent. I thanked the participants for their contribution and reiterated the fact that I was available to answer any questions they may have regarding the study, even though the interview process was over.

Lastly, I made a copy of the Letter of Informed Consent for their records and asked if they would give permission to provide their exact number of credit hours achieved while they were enrolled at Butler-Armstrong ECHS. While they self-reported

this information, I wanted the credits accurately verified, if possible. With a few follow-ups, I received 100% participation with that request. Interview data was reported in narrative form. This process will be described more thoroughly in the data analysis section.

### *Data Management*

The anonymity of each participant is paramount to the integrity of the study and the academic institution that approved it. The names of the participants will never be revealed, nor will they be associated with the narratives shared in this paper. After the interviews were recorded the audio recordings were locked in a fireproof file cabinet (only accessible by me) and only accessed when I had to work with them for reporting and analysis. I utilized a bonded company that guaranteed confidentiality to transcribe the audio files from each interview. Once that process was completed, all of the files were stored on a jump drive and secured. The recommended time frame to keep files is five years, after which I will discard all hard copies and audio files.

### *Trustworthiness*

Trustworthiness, credibility, and validity all seem to be synonymous in qualitative research. While the terms vary, they all provide failsafe stability to ensure that the researcher is acting with integrity during the research process. The first thing that was done to ensure the trustworthiness of this study was to ensure that the students did indeed attend the school site which the case is focused around. I, as the researcher, did know these participants personally; however, the students were also verified voluntarily through the associated college site. The Early College Program Director verified the

attendance years of the students as well as their credit hours attained while in the program.

Yin (2007) stated that in the instance of case study research, several types of validity are needed. The first type of validity is the extent to which a measure used in the study reflects the phenomenon being studied. The interview protocol, along with participant responses, reflect an in depth discussion of the early college high school experience at the selected site. The second type of validity is the extent to which the findings of a case study can be generalized to similar cases. Similar early college literature, such as those studies conducted by Thompson and Ongaga, did reflect many of the same student opinions and outcomes as described in this study. The third type of validity is the extent to which other researchers would arrive at the same conclusion using the same procedures as the researcher. While this would be true in a normal instance, I had an insider advantage to this study which I believed may have allotted for a slightly different outcome, including more details in the participant responses because they knew that I had familiarity with people, places, and incidents.

Another major task regarding trustworthiness was ensuring the authenticity of their sentiments. Therefore, upon the conclusion of the narrative writing, I sent each participant their narratives via email and asked them to check for accuracy. This process is called Member Checking. I also followed up the email with a text message to notify the participants to check their emails for their narrative. Member checking is a strategy that involves checking with participants, allowing them a voice in what the findings say, as well as an opportunity to correct any misinterpretations on the part of the researcher for

feedback or verification of interpretation, which is done to increase credibility and establish trustworthiness (Savin-Baden, 2013). Cope 2014 stated that member checking enhances the credibility of the research by providing participants with a summary of the themes; and if done with fidelity, the participant should draw the same conclusions as the researcher in the report interpretation. While I did not use member checking in the same manner, I had the participants review their narratives to ensure accuracy, also giving them an opportunity to make corrections to their narratives by clarifying their intentions and also to make suggestions for improvement (Gall & Gall, 2007). A couple of participants made clarifications and adjustments, which I corrected. A few participants were completely satisfied. Some participants chose not to partake in the Member Checking process, as determined by their lack of response to me. I have also secured all data collected during the process and have established a five year timeline for discarding the files, both physical and audio.

### *Ethical Considerations*

Guillemin and Gillam (2011) stated that there are two major dimensions of ethics in qualitative research: procedural ethics and ethics in practice. Procedural ethics for this study involved seeking the approval of the Georgia Southern Institutional Review Board after providing a copy of the intended methodology prior to beginning of my interviews. Once participants had been identified and Georgia Southern IRB approved the study, I proceeded with the study. In research, it is also important to be moral, fair, respectful, and honest as it pertains to participants (Gall & Gall, 2007). I achieved this by providing full disclosure of all possible risks associated with the study. There was a statement located in

the Letter of Informed Consent that each participant signed prior to participating in the interview.

A second procedural ethical decision was the choice to outsource the transcription process. I obtained the consent of my participants before allowing the third party to access the audio files from the interviews. Likewise, the third party signed a Confidentiality Agreement indicating that I was the only person to whom they would provide the written transcript data.

Ethics in practice involved anything else that could present itself throughout the course of the study. Some examples included, but were not limited to: the participant's disclosure of any information associated with them being harmed during their time at the school, or perhaps a participant who would rather have their real name in the final product versus a pseudonym, which I truly did encounter, but was able to divert (Guillemin & Gillam, 2011). I also ensured the anonymity of the selected site through the use of pseudonyms for both of the associated schools and all of the participants. Additionally, data is being protected by a secure file cabinet to which only I have access.

In research it is also important to be moral, fair, respectful, and honest as it pertains to participants (Gall & Gall, 2007). I achieved this by providing a full disclosure of all of the possible risks associated with this study in the Letter of Informed Consent that each participant signed prior to participation in the interview. I also ensured the anonymity of the selected site through the use of pseudonyms for both the associated schools and all of the participants. Additionally, data are being protected by a locked cabinet to which only I have access to.



### *Data Collection*

Data collection in case study research is known to be widespread and vast, “drawing on multiple sources of information, such as observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials” (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). Interviews are the most common method of gathering data for qualitative research. They are appropriate when the researchers want to take advantage of one-on-one communication in order to probe deeply into a participant’s experiences.

Interviewing is the most highly utilized and challenging data collection method in the qualitative process (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Data were collected through individual interviews, using open-ended questions, aligned with both the research questions and the Five Core Principles of the Early College Initiative. Weiss (1994) stated that interviewing sources allows a researcher to learn about a participant’s interior experiences, what they perceived, how they interpreted their perceptions, and how those events affected their thoughts and feelings. The interviews captured and highlighted former student’s perceptions of the program. Weiss (1994) indicated that interviewing opens up doors that may be closed to outsiders. However, Clandinin and Connely (2001) shared the idea that researchers who establish intimate relationships with participants, may find it difficult to conduct the interviews with those participants because it can turn into a form of a conversation. They also note that there is a possibility that the interview can be controlled by the participants, instead of the interviewer, which should be the case (Clandinin & Connely, 2001).

The interviews targeted individual experiences of former students in the ECHS program. Some documents were reviewed for this study, such as the school's application and admission criteria, demographic information from the Georgia Department of Education, the Memorandum of Understanding between the ECHS and the partnering college, and confidential student records of college credit hours. Furthermore, field notes were also gathered during the interview process and used as contextual information for detailed participant's descriptions and as supplemental information for the narratives.

Research interviewers should be cognizant of three major elements: (1) the social setting, which refers to both physical settings and the framing of the question, (2) the interviewee, namely their identity, reasoning, and connection to the outcomes of the study, and lastly, (3) use of language, which the interviewer could be communicating literally and subliminally, which affects how the participants receives the questions (Alvesson, 2003). My interview protocol contained 17 interview questions and five preliminary background questions, meticulously chosen to yield detailed and comprehensive responses from each participant.

Weiss (1994) suggested studying any organization requires that retrieving information from participants without the researcher being perceived as an intruder is required. My style of interviewing is what Alvesson (2003) referred to as Romanticism, which relies upon an already established rapport with the interviewee so genuine human interaction can exist, resulting in a deeper revelation of feelings from the participants. I used a collection of participants in touch with one another, but not necessarily as closely

linked as those who are currently within the organization (Weiss, 1994). Using former students provided this balance because they are removed from that environment on a daily basis; however, they still maintain contact with others from Butler-Armstrong.

Observations were also a part of the data collection process through field notes that included information about the participant's wardrobe, body language, and even the anomalies which occurred during the process of scheduling and executing the interviews. Those observations were included at the beginning of each narrative to help readers gain a clearer vision of the interview moments in their minds.

As part of the data collection, I also received permission from all participants to obtain their credit hour and attendance dates for the college. This information, combined with their responses to preliminary questions asked in the Initial Interest Survey was used to establish each participant a credible "character." Along with the participant's personal information, I also used data from the school profile to describe the site more thoroughly.

Lastly, the Transition Manual, created by me when I was the Graduation Specialist, that outlined the policies, procedures, expectations and also provided specifics regarding curriculum, program tracks, and support documents, was used to provide supplemental information for this study. The manual was a combination of specifics from the high school, the college, and other transition resources as a whole which were researched for that purpose of transitioning students from high school to college.

#### The Interview Space

Initially, I wanted to work with the school district to conduct interviews at Butler-Armstrong ECHS. I even considered asking the college liaison if she would reserve space

at Henry-Hall College. Ultimately, I made a decision to do neither. All interviews were conducted at my home. In making this decision, I took into consideration that: (1) My home would be a more intimate environment than either school, (2) I could control the environment to minimize distractions, and (3) I thought that my home would provide a more comfortable atmosphere for the participants to share their personal perspectives. (I utilized my formal living room for the interviews).

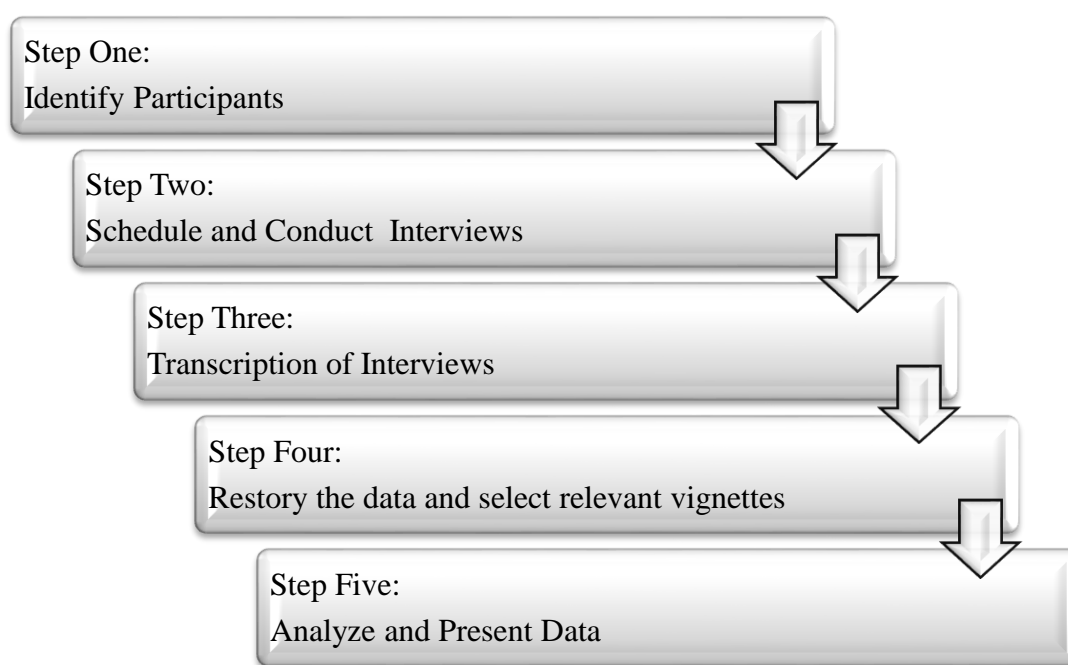
Adverse and unintentional effects of the location could have also been a possibility, although none were brought to my attention. I suppose participants could have felt that they were not on neutral ground and therefore may not have felt as comfortable being honest, especially if that honesty was considered an expression of disapproval towards me.

Within the room, I had three yearbooks on display which, collectively, contained all of the participating classes of 2010-2013. Many participants noticed them and picked them up, browsing them, and recalling even more moments during their time as early college students. They made remarks about how much they had grown and could not believe some of the quotes they made during that time. The presence of those materials brought that time of their lives closer to them, in that moment. I also had personal pictures of many of the students on display, which I shared and received similar reactions about from the participants.

### *Data Analysis*

Since I utilized a Narrative Case Study, I had a specific set of tasks that were a priority in analyzing the data. The selection of the participants was the first step of the

data collection and analysis processes, followed by the scheduling and conducting of the interviews. The interviews were only the first step in the data analysis process. I decided to use a transcription company, Verbal Ink, to transcribe my audio files. After the audio files were transcribed, I had to review and edit them. The data was restored, being placed in chronological order. Additionally, transitions and contextual information was added to clarify participant statements. Lastly, the data was analyzed, themes were developed and the data was presented. See Figure 3.3 below for graphical representation of the data analysis process.



*Figure 3.3: Graphical representation of the Data Analysis Process*

### *Writing the Narratives*

Riessman (1993) stated that analysis of narrative text cannot be easily distinguished from the transcription. While this may be his standard view, when using a transcriber, you realize that the transcript is not an analysis. In fact, it is just a page full of

words and choppy statements, with no current organization and meaning. Organization exists, in that stage, only to the extent where the transcript is still in the order of the interview protocol. Furthermore, there is no meaning to it until the researcher gives it such. Having said that, I took the narratives and removed all of my statements, unless they added supporting details. In those cases, I highlighted my words so they would stand out from the participants' words. Afterwards I read through each transcript and organized the data by chronological order beginning with, in some cases, eighth grade – prior to them even getting to Butler-Armstrong ECHS. So, all of the narratives can be followed chronologically, from 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade when they were at Butler-Armstrong, to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade at Henry-Hall College, and beyond. The things that happened in between, the memorable moments, and mention of memorable people, were all infused where they logically fit in the scheme of the overall narrative. After this process was complete, meaning could then be recognized.

### *Creating the Themes*

Themes are underlined within the surface text of the participant's stories; likewise, themes also set borders for the researcher and the reader (Gubrium & Holstein, 2009). Themes come from data, inductively and from our understanding of the phenomenon, deductively. When looking to create themes, repetition, similarities and differences, and missing data are all things the observer should look for (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). For this study, I then used the "cutting and sorting" approach of data analysis, also introduced by Bernard and Ryan (2010). This technique consists of cutting quotes, ensuring the maintaining of context, and sorting the quotes into groups of similar

quotes. After naming the groups, those became my themes. A description of those themes will be detailed in Chapter Four.

### *Chapter Three Summary*

In Chapter Three I provided specifics regarding the research process. This was a qualitative research endeavor that utilized both case study and narrative methods to determine the perceptions of 16 former students/Alumni regarding their experiences as ECHS students. I also showed readers the connection between my personal Researcher's Lens, including my background, culture, major influences, epistemological and ontological perspectives, and how those things affect my research. A description of the site, Butler-Armstrong ECHS, was explained in detail, along with my rationale for choosing it, which was because of its demographics, accessibility, and results. The sampling method, convenience plus snowball, was defined and justified, along with an overview of the instrumentation used to interview participants. The instrumentation was originally developed for this particular study. I also explained my role as the researcher, the management of data procedures, and described, using literature, the steps I took towards trustworthiness and ethical considerations. Finally, I explained the data collection and analysis processes.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

#### *Introduction*

Early college high schools require an amalgamation of planning with multiple entities, including: coordinaries (defined in Chapter Two), intermediaries, postsecondary partners, school districts, early college leaders, faculty and staff, and even stakeholders, which include both parents and students. Likewise, in an effective ECHS, the distinct visibility of the Five Core Principles, the 3R Framework, and rigorous academic implementation via the Six Common Instructional Strategies should be evident. The execution of these plans should manifest through the achievements and positive responses of students, who are products of these environments. The student's accomplishments, as well as their failures, determine the true value of the stakeholder's investment into the initiative. Therefore, discussions with these former early college participants yielded findings in relation to the aforementioned concepts, as well as the answers to the following research questions. Participant data and descriptions follow. Findings and their associated research question are subsequent to the participant information.

#### *Research Questions*

The overarching research question that guided this study was the following: How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia perceive the program prepared them for postsecondary education?

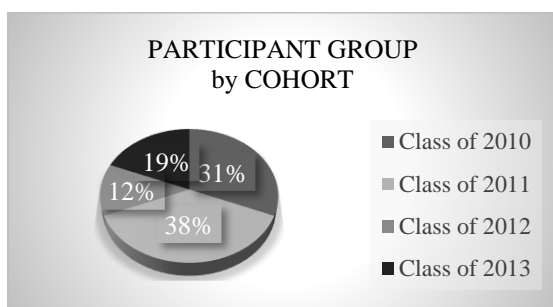
In order to address that question, the following sub-questions were answered:



- 1) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have completed postsecondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?
- 2) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have not completed postsecondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?
- 3) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia perceive the program could have better prepared them for postsecondary education?

### *Participants*

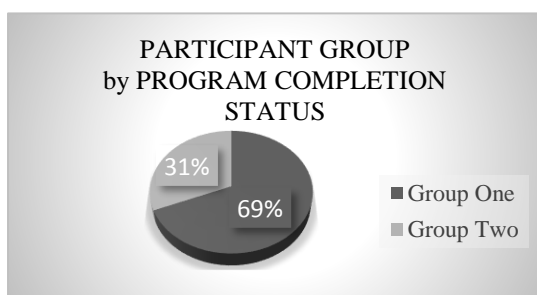
I interviewed a total of 16 former Butler-Armstrong students for this study who represented the following classes: Class of 2010 (31% or  $n = 5$ ); Class of 2011 (38% or  $n = 6$ ); Class of 2012 (12% or  $n = 2$ ); and Class of 2013 (19% or  $n = 3$ ). The variance in participants from the different cohorts may be the result of my professional distance from the most recent two classes included. I completed the entire four-years as the Graduation Coach with the first two classes (2010 and 2011). I left the school for the senior (12<sup>th</sup> grade) year of the Class of 2012 and the junior (11<sup>th</sup> grade) year of the Class of 2013. A graphical representation of participants by cohort is found below in Figure 4.1.



*Figure 4.1: Graphical representation of Participant Group by Cohort*

It is important that I define the parameters of the two groups that I created to

organize participants. For this study, successfully completing the program meant that students attended Butler-Armstrong ECHS for all four years of the high school experience, including the final two years at Henry-Hall College. I will refer to this group as Group One. They were 69% of participants ( $n = 11$ ). The second group, Group Two, was 31% of participants ( $n = 5$ ) and consisted of students who attended Butler-Armstrong ECHS and left after a period of time to either attend a different school altogether or more likely, to attend an alternate school in the vicinity which allowed recovery of high school credits, after a lack of success at the college. A graphical representation of participants by completion group is found in Figure 4.2 below.



*Figure 4.2: Graphical representation of Participant Group by Program Completion Status*

Table 4.1 below depicts all of the participants and their key demographic information.

Table 4.1. *Participant Demographics*

Pseudonym	Cohort	Low Socio-Econ. Status	First Gen. College	Gender	College Credits	Completion Status Group	Completed Associate's Degree
Mustafah	2010	Yes	No	Male	30	One	No
Tina	2010	Yes	Yes	Female	76	One	Yes
Allen Cook	2011	Yes	Yes	Male	19	One	No
Autumn	2011	No	No	Female	66	One	Yes
Kristen	2011	Yes	Yes	Female	66	One	Yes

Maximillian Prufey	2011	Yes	No	Male	61	One	No
Tosh	2011	Yes	Yes	Female	66	One	Yes
Charlene	2012	Yes	No	Female	69	One	Yes
Walter	2012	Yes	No	Male	63*	One	Yes
Keion	2013	Yes	Yes	Male	63	One	Yes
Mikal	2013	Yes	Yes	Female	63	One	Yes
Chimere	2010	Yes	Yes	Female	12	Two	No
Jasmine	2010	Yes	No	Female	19	Two	No
Leah	2010	No	No	Female	9	Two	No
Stephanié	2011	No	No	Female	17	Two	No
Alexis	2013	Yes	Yes	Female	47*	Two	No

\*Some hours include credit from a separate Early College program

Originally, I desired an equal number of participants from each cohort. I also wanted an equal representation of former students/Alumni who successfully completed the program as those who did not. While I was not completely successful with either goal, I did obtain an adequate mixture of students in order to proceed with the study. Although Butler-Armstrong was the participant's school, it is important to note that the Butler-Armstrong students were all enrolled as a result of a program called School Choice; therefore, they all had assigned home schools based upon their area of dwelling to which they could return if they needed. Butler-Armstrong accepted students who applied (see Appendix G) and based upon set Selection Criteria from the ECHS Initiative (See Appendix F). For greater context, I have provided brief introductions of each of the participants below, which is followed by an introduction to the themes and findings and analysis of the data.

### *Introduction of Participants*

Chimere is an African American female from the Legacy Class of 2010 cohort, Butler-Armstrong's first graduating class. She is a First-Generation College student and was also eligible for Free-Reduced Lunch while she was at the EC high school. Chimere falls into the Group Two category; meaning she did not remain at Butler-Armstrong the entire duration of the program. She said she earned a few credit hours from her time at Henry-Hall College. She agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm her credits as part of his background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that she earned 12 credit hours during her time at the ECHS. Chimere said that she did not know the Five Core Principles of the EC Initiative. She attended Butler-Armstrong ECHS because her mother made her.

Jasmine, an African American female who was a part of the Legacy Class of 2010, Butler-Armstrong's first graduating class, was eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch while in High School, although she is not a first-generation college student. She is a graduate of Butler-Armstrong, who falls into the Group Two category; meaning; she did not remain at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program – all four years. She remembers earning between eleven and nineteen credits before leaving the program. She also agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm her credits as part of her background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that she actually earned 19 credit hours during her time at the ECHS. Jasmine explained that she was only aware of one of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS, Core Principle 1: Student Selection. She attended "*Butler-Armstrong*"

voluntarily, but partly because she knew that was what her mother wanted her to do.

Leah is an African American female from the Legacy Class of 2010, Butler-Armstrong's first graduating class. She indicated that she was not eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch while in High School. She also stated that she was graduate of Butler-Armstrong, although she falls into the Group Two Category; meaning, she did not remain at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program. She did not recall the number of college credits she received by the completion of her high school years, but she agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to provide that data as background information for the study. Through that process it was determined that she earned nine Credit hours during her time at the ECHS. Additionally, Leah reported that she was aware of one of the Five ECHS Core Principles, Core Principle 1 pertaining to Student Selection. She also attended Butler-Armstrong voluntarily, and not because she was mandated to do so by her parent(s).

Mustafah is an African American male from the Legacy Class of 2010, Butler-Armstrong's first graduating class. He is not a First-Generation College student, but he was eligible for Free-Reduced lunch during his time at the ECHS. Mustafa falls into the Group One category; meaning, he remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. He reported earning forty credits from Henry-Hall College while he was an ECHS student. He agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm his credits as a part of his background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that he earned 30 credit hours during his time at Henry-Hall College. Allen stated that he was aware of the

Five Core Principles of the ECHS initiative, but they had not been reinforced to him. He attended Butler-Armstrong because his mother wanted him to.

Tina, an African American female from the Legacy Class of 2010, is a First-Generation College student and was eligible for Free-Reduced lunch for at least part of her time at the ECHS. Tina falls into the Group One category; meaning, she remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. She reported earning sixty plus credit hours and an Associate's Degree from Henry-Hall College. She agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm her credits as part of her background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that she earned a staggering 76 credit hours during her time at Henry-Hall College. Tina stated that she when she received the mailing for the ECHS program at the middle school, they told her that it involved college credits and the students had to be economically disadvantaged in some way, so Core Principles One and Three: Student Selection and College Credits, respectively, of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS initiative. She attended Butler-Armstrong voluntarily.

Allen Cook, an African American male in the Class of 2011, is a First-Generation College student and was eligible for Free-Reduced lunch during his time at the ECHS. Allen falls into the Group One category; meaning, he remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. He reported earning over 20 credit hours from Henry-Hall College while he was an ECHS student. He agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm his credits as a part of his background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that

he earned 19 credit hours during his time at Henry-Hall College. Allen stated that he was aware of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS initiative. He stated that his mother asked him to attend Butler-Armstrong, and he did.

Autumn is an African American female in the Class of 2011. She is not a First-Generation College student. In fact, her unique situation is that she and her mother were both in college at the same time. Around the same time that Autumn completed her college requirements, her mother was preparing for her Baccalaureate graduation. Autumn was not eligible for Free-Reduced lunch either. She falls into the Group One category; meaning, she remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. She reported earning 65-66 hours of credit and an Associate's Degree from Henry-Hall College. She agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm her credits as part of her background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that she indeed earned 66 credit hours during her time at the ECHS. Autumn stated that she was not aware of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS.

Kristen, an African American female and First-Generation College attendee from the Class of 2011, stated that she was eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch while in High School. She is a graduate of Butler-Armstrong ECHS who has been identified in the Group One Category; meaning, she remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. She self-reported earning 66 credit hours upon graduation, along with her Associate of Science Degree. She also agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm that total as background

information for the study, which was done. It was determined that she indeed earned 66 college credits while at Butler-Armstrong. Kristen said that she was made aware of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS by the Head Counselor during a meeting. She attended Butler-Armstrong as a mutual agreement between her and her parents.

Maximillian Prufey is an African American male in the Class of 2011. He is not a First-Generation College student, but he was eligible for Free-Reduced Lunch at one point during his time at Butler-Armstrong, but not the entire time. He falls into the Group One Category; meaning, he remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. Max reported earning 57 credit hours from Henry-Hall College during his time as an EC student. He agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm his credits as part of his background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that he actually earned 61 credit hours during his time at the ECHS. Maximillian stated that he feels he should have known the Five Core Principles, but he cannot say that he remembers. He attended Butler-Armstrong ECHS mainly because he trusted his mother's school choices. He just made the best of it.

Stephanié is an African American female from Class of 2011, She is not a First-Generation College student, nor was she was eligible for Free-Reduced lunch during her time at the ECHS. Stephanié falls into the Group Two category; meaning, she did not remain at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program. She reported earning about eighteen credit hours from Henry-Hall College while he was an ECHS student. She agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm



his credits as a part of his background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that she earned 17 credit hours during his time at Henry-Hall College. Stephanié stated that she was aware of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS initiative; she “just didn’t pay that much attention to them.” Her mother made her attend Butler-Armstrong ECHS.

Tosh, an African American female and First-Generation College Attendee from the Class of 2011, stated that she was eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch while in high school. She is a graduate of Butler-Armstrong ECHS who has been identified in the Group One category; meaning, she remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. She self-reported earning 62 credit hours upon graduation, along with her Associate of Science Degree. She also agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm that total as background information for the study, which was done. It was determined that she actually earned 66 college credits. She also has a sister who graduated from Butler-Armstrong in the Class of 2013. Tosh reported that while she did not recall any formal mentioning of the Five ECHS Core Principles, she was familiar with the Student Selection piece (Core Principle One) and the opportunity to obtain college credits (Core Principle Three). She also attended Butler-Armstrong voluntarily and not because she was mandated by her parent(s).

Charlene is an African American female from the Class of 2012 cohort. She was eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch while in high school, although she was not a first-generation college student. She was a graduate of Butler-Armstrong who falls into

Group One; meaning, she remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program – all four years. Earning 64 credits and an Associate of Science degree, in addition to her high school diploma, she also agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm her credits as part of her background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that she earned 69 credit hours during her time at the ECHS. Charlene held that she was not aware of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS. She attended Butler-Armstrong voluntarily, but by the suggestion of her mother.

Walter is an African American male in the Class of 2012. He is not a First-Generation College student, but he was eligible for Free-Reduced Lunch. Walter came to Butler-Armstrong from another Georgia Early College High School. Although he had an older sibling who went to a traditional school, he and his mother chose to continue his educational career as an Early College student. He also plays the trumpet. Walter falls in the Group One category; meaning, he remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. He reported earning approximately 60 hours and an Associate's Degree from Henry-Hall College. He agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm his credits as part of his background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that he indeed earned 60 credit hours during his time at the ECHS; he earned another three credit hours from his previous school, for a total of 63 credit hours. Walter stated that he was aware of only one of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS, Core Principle One pertaining to Student Selection. He attended Butler-Armstrong ECHS voluntarily. He was

just glad he could continue at an ECHS after leaving his previous ECHS.

Alexis is an African American female who was a member of the Class of 2013 cohort. She is a First-Generation College student and she reported being eligible for Free-Reduced Lunch while in high school. Alexis falls in the Group Two category; meaning, she did not remain at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program. She reported earning between 16 and 18 credits while at Butler-Armstrong. She is an anomaly in that she left Butler-Armstrong to attend an early college recovery program, which was also partnered with Henry-Hall College. In other words, although she was no longer enrolled at the school, she attended classes in the same space as her Butler-Armstrong peers. She agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm her credits as part of her background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that she earned 47 credit hours while at Henry-Hall College; however, she earned 35 while still enrolled at Butler-Armstrong. Alexis was unaware of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS. Additionally, her mother made her attend Butler-Armstrong.

Keion is an African American male from the Class of 2013 cohort. He was eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch while in High School and was a first-generation college student. He was a graduate of Butler-Armstrong, who falls into Group One; meaning, she remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. Reportedly earning 62 credits and an Associate of Science degree, in addition to his high school diploma, he too agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm his credits as background information for this study. Through

that process it was determined that he earned 63 credit hours during his time at the ECHS. Keion says that he may have been told about the Five Core Principles of the ECHS, but he didn't understand them at the time, but now he does. Keion's interview made the first mention of involuntary student participation in the program, due to parental directive, which prompted me to add a related question to my interview protocol.

Mikal is an African American female from Class of 2013. She is a First-Generation College student. She is also a second generation Butler-Armstrong student; her sister Tosh, who also participated in the study, graduated with the Class of 2011. Mikal was eligible for Free-Reduced lunch during her time at the ECHS. Mikal falls into the Group One category; meaning, she remained at Butler-Armstrong for the entire duration of the program, all four years. She reported earning between 62 and 63 credit hours from Henry-Hall College while she was an ECHS student. She agreed to allow the Butler-Armstrong program director at Henry-Hall College to confirm his credits as a part of his background information for this study. Through that process it was determined that she indeed earned 63 credit hours during her time at Henry-Hall College. Mikal stated that she was unaware of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS initiative. She voluntarily attended Butler-Armstrong ECHS after only a few days at a traditional high school in Emerson, County.

#### *Participant's Narratives Explanation*

As a part of this study, I chose to write full narratives for each of the participants. For some, their stories began before they entered 9<sup>th</sup> grade and when they were considering attending the ECHS; the narratives follow them through their experiences as

early college students and after they left or graduated from Butler-Armstrong ECHS. Along the way, they share anecdotes, thoughts about memorable faculty and staff members, their opinions on the benefits of attending an early college high school, suggestions for improvement, and they even share their wisdom, by giving advice to current and future early college students. The narrative writing process enabled me to give detailed attention to each participant's words and use their words to create themes during this process.

Yin (2014) stated that all of the evidence need not be placed in the text of the case study; he suggested that appendices, footnotes, and the like, will do, as to not dull the content. He continued with the notion that novice researcher's first inclination is to want to display the entirety of the case evidence, hoping that the weight alone will convince readers that they spent an exorbitant amount of quality time in the field; however, the inclusion of all of that data may in fact bore the reader instead. Only enough evidence to gain the reader's confidence that the researcher knows his or her subject matter is necessary (Yin, 2014). It is with this in mind that I decided not to include the full narratives within the dissertation, due to their length. Instead, they are available in their entirety as supplemental material in the accompanying Appendices A-P.

For the purpose of this study, I took excerpts from those narratives, directly related to the themes, and used the excerpts to support those themes. This helped with readability for the consumers of this study. The discussion of the specific themes is forthcoming. While this chapter will discuss only those items directly related to the research questions, it was a personal priority for me to make available the participant's

entire stories even if those stories were not a part of the overall research objective.

### *Theme Development*

Some of the themes were derived from the natural emergence of key data collected during the interview process and directly related to the study's research questions; while others were the result of pre-existing or a priori code that stemmed as a result of my personal experiences with the site and program. An a priori code, according to some researchers, may limit the analysis process to these predetermined codes, rather than allowing the participant's feedback to determine the themes as is expected in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Each research question, along with applicable themes, will now be addressed separately.

### *ECHS College Completer Participants*

The first research question that this study addressed sought to understand the ways in which ECHS alumni who completed their postsecondary education described their experiences in the initiative. Half of the participants in this study, eight out of 16 (50%), completed their Associate's Degrees at Henry-Hall College, in addition to their high school diplomas at Butler-Armstrong, upon graduation. Those participants were Tina (2010), Autumn (2011), Kristen (2011), Tosh (2011), Charlene (2012), Walter (2012), Keion (2013), and Mikal (2013). Of those eight college completer participants, half or four (50%/25%), have gone on to complete their Bachelor's Degrees from their subsequent four-year institutions: Tina, Autumn, Kristen, and Charlene. Two more participants, both members of the Class of 2013, are scheduled to graduate in Fall 2015. Those students are Keion and Mikal.

Analysis of their data resulted in the emergence of four major themes: critical relationships with adult professionals, personal qualities conducive to success, positive peer support, and the challenges of transitioning to four-year colleges and universities.

Critical relationships with adult professionals. The critical relationships theme resulted from discussions with the college completers. Developing relationships is an expectation of the ECHS initiative. Early college faculty take time to nurture students, develop meaningful relationships with the students and their families, and to address student's educational and personal needs. Many of these participants developed significant relationships with the faculty that helped them make it through their journey as an ECHS student. These two college completers, Charlene and Keion, indicated relationships that transcended the normal teacher-student bonds. They viewed the early college faculty more like their family.

Charlene: Every teacher I had, cared about me personally. I mean, I've been able to sit in classrooms while teachers didn't have a class, and just cry. It could literally be about boyfriends, but they genuinely cared. I mean, I spent hours upon hours in your office, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, just talking about random things, creating a relationship beyond teacher-student; it was mentor-mentee, it was mom-daughter and it was different. (Excerpted from, *The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

Keion: Professor B, he was a very cool professor. He was also very respectable. You know it's hard to respect some of these teachers these days, but he was a teacher that demanded respect without having to say anything. He was always willing to help. He was always saying, "How's it going over there?" He was interested in us and he was interested in me. You know, I felt like he was kind of like a father figure to me. I just met my dad two years ago, so every way I could find a father figure, I always tried to take advantage of it. I don't necessarily know if he knows that I saw him as a father figure, but I always thought of him in that way because he took the time and energy into being a great professor and teacher. So, always having approachable professors who you could talk to, not just about school but about what was going on at home, was invaluable. (Excerpted from, *The Keion Experience: Responsibility*, see Appendix X)

College completer, Mikal, had a memorable moment with the early college counselor that she wanted to share:

Dr. T was very helpful. You all were like on the same page. I don't know, y'all were both like down to earth and, like, cool. I remember one time I was crying. I'm not going to explain why I was crying, but I was crying. I went to Dr. T's office and I was expecting her to tell me what I wanted to hear, but she told me what I needed to hear. I was kind of upset, because I was like, I didn't want to hear that. But that's what I needed with the situation that I was in. She was basically like, "You got to let it go. Get over it. Stop crying. Suck it up," basically. It ended there. I sucked it up and kept it going. (Excerpted from, *The Mikal Experience: Big Shoes to Fill*, See Appendix Y)

Walter was able to experience relevant curriculum and techniques from his science teacher that not only helped him to succeed, but helped him to develop a closer relationship with her:

Professor A., I had to take her 9<sup>th</sup> grade class my first year there, because I missed that course at my other early college. They were gonna give the course to me the next year, but it turned out, I had to go ahead and take it. She was a great teacher and she was a great friend. She would help me with science and she would talk to me. I did a lot of work with her. A lot of the music projects I did, were in her class. Just working with her through the music, was a memorable experience. I would even work with some of her other students on their projects. (Excerpted from, *The Walter Experience: Sounds of Sacrifice*, see Appendix V)

College completers Autumn and Tosh spoke generally about the support they received from the ECHS faculty, holistically:

Autumn: I mean the staff members were just as personable as they were supportive. They were like friends, even though we knew they were administrators. They weren't saying, "I'm your teacher." It was like, "Let me help you. I'm here for you." (Excerpted from, *The Autumn Experience: From COMPASS to Mass-Comm*, see Appendix P)

Tosh: The teachers genuinely cared about you. We had you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, Mr. P, Ms. N, Dr. Glass when she was there, Dr. T when she was there, and we even had Dr. E when she was there. We could come and talk to you guys about personal things. I have so many memories of females breaking down, crying in people's offices and whatnot because so much stuff is going on at home.



Parents coming up trying to help students that got stuff going on at home; so it was like a big support system! We did had a handful of teachers that were like, "Yeah, these kids, it's so much more than academics right now, they are human beings too." (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

These college completers, Tina, and Kristen were pushed beyond measure by the early college faculty and developed special relationships as a result. They stated the following:

Tina: Professor B was always an influential teacher to me because he really took the time out to make sure that basically, I was challenged. For people that were advanced, he would do the critical thinking exam. Part of the critical thinking exam was an oral exam where we would just sit in a group and talk about topics of discussion; the other part was written paper exam. On top of that, he encouraged me with my stuttering. (Excerpted from, *The Tina Experience: Trendsetter*, see Appendix N)

Kristen: It was support like no other. I can say that. It was more as if the adults were your family, in that they pushed you more than you could see for yourself. Sometimes it would confuse us because we couldn't see where they were coming from. But when they would push you, and you completed it, pushed you to do more. It pushed you to achieve more academically, so that initiative helped us when we got to the college level. We knew they weren't gonna be there, but having them in your corner, even when we were at the college was comforting. We were able to come back and say, "Okay, I'm getting a little shaky with the college courses." They were able to help us, not just academically, but in all aspects of life, to keep us focused on the goal that was at hand. (Excerpted from, *The Kristen Experience: Heavy-Hearted*, see Appendix Q)

Personal characteristics conducive to success. Conversations with college completers covered certain personal characteristics that needed to be in place in order to succeed. These characteristics included the intentional seeking of academic support, maturity, and the choice of maintaining positive peer influences. Tina, Legacy Class of 2010, graduated from Emory University in 2014. In this passage she emphasized that academic support was there if you took advantage of it.

They [the college] had good tutoring. The professors were always helpful. They were always willing to help you, especially as soon as they found out that you were a Butler-Armstrong student. That was a very good aspect of it because that

person was gonna make sure that you got a B, something you can live with, as long as you showed some type of initiative. They just took you under their wings, just like Butler-Armstrong teachers did. From that aspect, I felt like it wasn't really any difference between the Butler-Armstrong teachers and Henry- Hall professors; they were both very caring. (Excerpted from, *The Tina Experience: Trendsetter*, see Appendix N)

Here, Tosh, who graduated with the Class of 2011, referred to another student, her friend Tolerance, who did not participate in this study, but did receive her A.S. degree along with Tosh; however, her observations of her are critical to the point being made about maturity and its role in the college environment.

There were only a few Butler-Armstrong people that would hang out with the older other people and you could tell the difference between the young-minded ones those who were a little bit more mature, like Tolerance, who had been that way her whole life, even in middle school. -- She never did anything wrong at school and she always kept her grades up. She was that friend to be around. You wanted in your class because she knew everything, so it was cool. (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

Autumn graduated in the Class of 2011 and discusses, in this passage, the importance of time management as a student. I must also note that almost all referenced to time management were in the spirit of not grasping that concept, despite forewarning from early college faculty and staff.

The school did their best at warning us about some things like, "You're gonna have to manage your time well." Time Management goes in one ear and out of the other, until you're at crunch time and it's like, "Oh crap, I only have two hours until class and I was supposed to read this many chapters," and actually let it sink in. Um, But academically, we were ready. It was just about whether we were willing to do the work. (Excerpted from, *The Autumn Experience: From COMPASS to Mass-Comm*, see Appendix P)

Positive peer influences. Maintaining a positive peer group of support academically and socially was a theme for the college completers. Peer influence can be good or bad, especially when it comes to teenagers, but in these instances the

relationships worked out in their favor. Charlene graduated with the Class of 2012, which was observably the closest knit class I had personally seen come through Butler-Armstrong ECHS. Here, she shows the importance of peer support systems in the college environment.

My particular peers were my backbone. Our class had a support system what genuinely cared about each other. We had to make sure that we were all okay. My friend's wellbeing was my wellbeing. If they were failing, I might not have been failing my class, but I might have been failing as a friend. (Excerpted from, *The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

Kristen, 2011, almost echoes that sentiment, below:

The same way in which I described the importance of creating your own academic support system, also applied socially. I was meticulous in who I chose to be in my circle. I chose individuals who were in tune with the Early College Initiative, and who I knew had the same goal. We made almost like a pact, if you will. "We're gonna finish this. We're gonna get this degree. We're gonna make it happen." So my friends were a very positive influence. (Excerpted from, *The Kristen Experience: Heavy-Hearted*, see Appendix Q)

Challenges with the transition to four-year colleges and universities. The college completers' discussions of their post Henry-Hall experiences with the transition to four-year schools were eye-opening to say the least. Some of their stories will expose the fact that to many college and universities, early college high school is still a fairly new concept in terms of acceptance and enrollments processes. Many four-year schools had to deviate from the norm in order to enroll these students into their institutions because there was not protocol to accommodate for their unique needs. I chose to give an example from each person because of the unique nature of each occurrence. Here are their experiences: Tina attended Emory University, a private school in Georgia. She graduated with an A.S. Degree; however, they only took half of her 64 credits.

Since leaving ECHS, I enrolled at Emory University. I could have gone to a state school for free, but I want to just touch on my decision to go to Emory. Yes, they only took 32 of my credits, but they were giving me grants to attend. So it was like even though you have an Associate's Degree in Business Administration, you still won't be in the program for at least a year and that's so you could get in, because they have like a GPA requirement that was like 3.7 for business. -- So when she did my transcript evaluation, she was like, "I guess that's great, but we only take 32. We only take half of the credits," and so that was that/.

What I think that a lot of private schools want to make sure you get as much of their liberal education as possible, because they feel like if you need to get in and satisfy their requirements. So they're very strict about that because I guess it's how they maintain their program. (Excerpted from, *The Tina Experience: Trendsetter*, see Appendix N)

Autumn, 2011, went on to Valdosta State University, which accepted all of her credits. She chose to major in Mass Communication, which had certain pre-requisite courses taken during the first two years, so they worked with her to override the course restrictions allowing her to take multiple pre-requisites simultaneously. She also noted the difficulty in acclimating socially being so young.

After graduation from Butler-Armstrong, I went to Valdosta State.-- It took them a minute to understand my credit situation.-- It seemed like they didn't understand the concept. But, because I had graduated, with an Associate's Degree out of high school, I didn't have to take any course from A to E. -- Normal students who enter in their freshman year right after high school, slowly take major coursework, like an intro class, somewhere in your sophomore year. I had to be overridden into a lot of my classes, so that was a little frustrating.

I was younger than everyone in my classes because I was a junior and these people who I'm sitting next to have been here since they were freshman. So they formed their clicks and they made their friends. So it's kind of hard to make friends when you're the youngest one in the class. (Excerpted from, *The Autumn Experience: From COMPASS to Mass-Com*, see Appendix P)

Kristen, 2011, and Autumn attended the same school, Valdosta State University. Kristen's transition was smooth.

Since leaving Butler-Armstrong, I attended Valdosta State University in Valdosta,

Georgia. I'd have to say my transition was a smooth trip. I made sure that they would accept all of my credits before I accepted admission. Financial Aid was breeze. We got the last two years funded by someone else, so financially, it was a fresh start. (Excerpted from, *The Kristen Experience: Heavy-Hearted*, see Appendix Q).

Tosh, 2011, attended Savannah State University after graduation and noted the issues with housing and her classification.

I finally decided on Savannah State. -- When I applied for housing at Savannah State, they placed me in Freshman housing and my mom had to come and tell them, "No, my child is a junior," and they were like, "Yes, but she's 18." Again, my mom, "Yes, but she's a junior, so you need to place her in upperclassman housing." Something happened when I was filling out my FAFSA, because at first it was like I owed money, but after we fixed my Financial Aid, it relaxed the situation. I didn't owe any money. Everything was covered, everything. That was about it with the issues. (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

Charlene, 2012, ended up at Georgia State University, but she wanted to attend an out of state school. She lamented about the challenges she experienced with some of her other choices not wanting to accept her transfer credits from the two-year college, Henry-Hall. She also said that Butler-Armstrong should have done a better job with informing students that that could happen to them.

After leaving Butler-Armstrong I had interest in going to several schools, which I received offers from. Colleges, depending on who you apply to, are going to question your credits because you're just getting your high school diploma, and you have your Associate's Degree. -- That's something that nobody explained to us when we first started; that we were gonna have difficulty getting into programs that we wanted to, despite the fact that we are extremely educated, highly advanced, and overly motivated.

So since Georgia State was close to home and they had a great Psychology program, I assumed it was going to be right for me. I didn't have any issues with Financial Aid. I didn't have any issues with them accepting my credits. It was also a T.A.G. (Transfer Admissions Guarantee) school which meant it partnered with partner with Henry-Hall College to take all of your credits when you graduated with an Associate's Degree, no questions asked. (Excerpted from, *The Charlene*

*Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

Walter, 2012, was the only student to receive a music scholarship, having attended Butler-Armstrong. This was because Butler-Armstrong had no music program. He deviated from the norm and made arrangements to participate in marching band at another school. The Accel program, which funds early college students tuition, would not pay for Fine Arts classes at the college; so while others were able to take classes in their major to better prepare them for matriculation into their four-year university, he was not able to do that. He received an A.S Degree, but it wasn't in his field of Music, which caused a problem for him later at Jackson State University.

Currently, I'm at Jackson State University. -- I went there for Music Education. Originally I was on a half academic, half band scholarship. One roadblock that I experienced with the transition to Jackson State from the early college is financial related. Currently, I'm trying to get enough hours to be considered a full-time student. That's because I have no more classes that I can take, for the simple fact, I transferred in with about 54 hours of the credits. I also had an Associate's Degree. Turns out, those were a lot of empty classes I took instead of taking the music or education classes, like I needed.

Don't get me wrong, they counted towards the core credits I needed; but since I already took them, I can't take them again to have a full load, and some of my music classes are only offered during certain times of the year. Even more frustrating is the fact a lot of them required pre-requisites, so I am really limited in what I can take. So I'm struggling trying to get 12 hours because there are no more classes that I can take. That's what's hindering me right now. (Excerpted from, *The Walter Experience: Sounds of Sacrifice*, see Appendix V)

Keion, 2013, also attended Georgia State University, a Henry-Hall T.A.G. school, and had no problems with his transition.

So, I started at Georgia State University in Spring 2014. It was a smooth transition. I mean, there was a problem with financial aid, but it was nothing. It was more so I had to send a form in to make sure that everything was straight. I was accepted as a transfer student. They took all my credits, which is why I'll be able to graduate so early. (Excerpted from, *The Keion Experience: Responsibility*,

see Appendix X)

Mikal, 2013, attended Clayton State University, a Henry-Hall T.A.G. school, and had no problems with her transition, other than her immediate classification.

After leaving Butler-Armstrong and Henry-Hall, I transferred to Clayton State University. At least I thought I was going to go in as a transfer, but I still needed to go through the process as if I was a freshman. So technically I was a transfer, but I still needed to do the orientation and turn in my high school diploma, my credits, ACT test scores, all of that. (Excerpted from, *The Mikal Experience: Big Shoes to Fill*, See Appendix Y)

These participants are all doing various things: Tina has graduated from Emory University and is working on a second Bachelor's degree in Speech Pathology. Autumn graduated from Valdosta State University and is a news anchor. Kristen graduated from Valdosta State University and now lives and works in Arkansas. Tosh plans to complete her Bachelor's degree, but right now she works. Charlene completed her Bachelor's Degree at Georgia State University and is serving in a leadership position at her current company. Walter is a senior at Jackson State University, but will not complete his degree requirements until 2017 due to the way courses are offered there. Keion is graduating this semester, Fall of 2015, from Georgia State as a Criminal Justice major. Lastly, Mikal will be graduating this semester, Fall of 2015, from Clayton State University with a degree in Health and Fitness Management.

#### *ECHS Non-College Completer Participants*

The second research question that this study addressed sought to understand the ways in which ECHS alumni who did not complete their postsecondary education described their experiences in the initiative. Half of the participants (eight out of 16 or 50%) completed Butler-Armstrong with their high school diplomas and a varied number

of college credits. Three of those eight (37.5%/18.75%) remained at Butler-Armstrong all four years and are a part of the pre-defined Group One: Mustafah (2010), Allen Cook (2011), and Maximillian Prufroy (2011); while the five others, Chimere (2010), Jasmine (2010), Leah (2010), Stephanié (2011), and Alexis (2013), actually left Butler-Armstrong at a point to attend other schools in order to assist them with meeting graduation requirements. Those five participants are considered to be a part of the pre-defined Group Two.

Of those who left, most attended Campus HS, which allowed them to recover graduation credits after being exited from Henry-Hall College. One student, Alexis, attended another early college high school program designed to target drop-outs, which was also housed at Henry-Hall College. Due to the set-up of those schools, all five alumni still officially graduated with Butler-Armstrong ECHS.

While their reasons for leaving varied, each participant brought to light some of the challenges faced by students after they transition to the college. Early colleges like this one that are set-up with two years of high school and two years of college have to be vigilant with student support in order to retain enrollment. Participants' comments ranged from social, to academic, to personal experiences. Data from these participants allowed for the emergence of five major themes. Those themes included: critical relationships with adult professionals, poor decision-making, lack of relevant personal skills, lack of support, and challenges with postsecondary transition.

Critical relationships with adult professionals. This theme was a commonality among both the college completers and the college non-completers. These two former



students, Leah and Mustafah, indicated relationships which transcended the normal teacher-student bonds. They viewed the early college faculty more like their family.

Leah: Towards the end, Professor Glass would ultimately fill that English position. She wasn't my favorite teacher, 'cause she saw something in me that I didn't see in myself, so I thought she was just being mean. But towards the end, we developed a relationship and I thought, "Well, she is a normal person! I can like her" [laughs], but at first I didn't. I guess spending four years with the same people, you become a family. So, it's not just, "Oh, this is my teacher. This is my classmate." No, "This is my other momma. This is my uncle. This is my auntie. These are my sisters and brothers, not cousins, but my sisters and brothers." And that support has carried me – I think it's carried all of us a really long way. (Excerpted from, *The Leah Experience: Miss Butler-Armstrong*, see Appendix L)

Mustafah: Mr. P. I mean he is like an uncle/father to me. Mr. P was there to just talk to me. He talked to me like I was a man, even though I was young and I didn't have no damn sense. He gave me a sense of entitlement."Yeah, you can make the decision to be right or wrong," he would say. He'd tell me, "Life is about learning from your mistakes. A mistake only hurts you if you keep making that same mistake." And I would just listen. I ain't had no teacher like that! Even with my mama being a teacher. (Excerpted from, *The Mustafah Experience: Tetris*, see Appendix M)

Former student Chimere was pushed beyond measure by the early college faculty:

Professor B. I gave him such a hard time. Whenever I see Professor B, I have to apologize. I had a plan. I wanted to get out of Butler-Armstrong so bad that I thought to myself, "Maybe if I don't do my homework, I'll keep getting zeros. Then I'll get all Fs and they'll kick me out. But Professor B you know, he was the same as many of the other professors where they just refused to let us fail. If you did, it was just solely on you. So he just kept pushing me. I remember one time in particular after class, he let everybody go and he had a talk with me. And he's like, "What's going on with you? And I told him, I said, "I don't want to be here. It's too hard. I can't do it." And he's like, "Yes, you can." So, something small like that is something that I appreciate, because I got A when it was all said and done! (Excerpted from, *The Chimere Experience: Redemption*, see Appendix J)

Three former students, Allen Cook, Maximillian Prufroy, and Alexis, had memorable moments with the early college faculty that they wanted to share:

Allen Cook: Senor C, the Spanish teacher. He was great when he was there. My memory with him is it goes like this. There was this female student I was

definitely interested in and it kinda was the thing that everyone just knew. He was calling people up in pairs to speak Spanish with each other. I always performed quite well on this assignment. The thing is, he always chose your desk mate, the person that sat right next to you, for this exercise; that was always for me, Hart. We had it all figured out. I would only ask him things I knew he could answer and we used to always try to do it like that, simple. And one day he called me up. Hart stood up thinking, well, we always come up here. He told Hart to have a seat and he called that student, Hack. I looked at Senor C and he looked at me, like, “Go.” And I froze. I didn't say a Spanish word. I couldn't even say the numbers anymore. She tried to help, but I literally could not remember. That was the first time I did not do well on that assignment and he never did that again. It was awful. (Excerpted from, *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*, see Appendix O)

Maximillian Prufroy: I'll never forget the day I fell asleep in history class; really, no one will ever let me forget this. But, our teacher at the time had a method of reading through the course material and then quizzing us on it. It really hammered that information in. So, I fell asleep in class and this specific professor was very animated. Professor FSU woke me up with a loud “BOOM” and asked me a question. I didn't think it was possible, but I guess you do hear things when you sleep. Having been asleep for most the class, I got the right answer; and while I credit that to myself somewhat, I also have to credit his teaching style and method. So that was a really nice triumphant day for me, academically. (Excerpted from, *The Maximillian Prufroy Experience: Failure to Realize Potential is Death*, see Appendix R)

Alexis: Mr. P was, one of those teachers that you see in, you remember, *School Days*? I promise you I loved that movie. When I first walked in his class, no lie, during the whole summer program, I sat in the back with my hood on the whole time. I was like, “I'm gonna listen to him, but I guarantee I know everything that he's talking about and I'm gonna fall asleep.” He didn't let me go to sleep though. He ended up being my homeroom teacher. He was like, “Stop treating yourself like you're stupid. I know you can do the work, just get it over with.” When teachers tell you that, you be like, “Eh, whatever;” but it hit me with him, and I was like, “Man, he's right. I'll just get it over with.” But his class was fun. We had deep conversations in his class. It was deep, very deep. He was a cool teacher. (Excerpted from, *The Alexis Experience: Free Spirit*, see Appendix W)

Former student Stephanié was also able to experience relevant curriculum and techniques from teachers that not only helped her to succeed, but helped her to develop closer relationships with that ECHS faculty member:

Some of my support was from Professor TB, my physics teacher. I still connect with her. I still go up to Butler-Armstrong and see her even when she was at AMHS, I'd go see her. She was very useful as far as helping me attach my creativity of learning to the actual subject and material. That helped me as far as remembering things. I was able to express the work through creativity, and because of her that is something I still do now. (Excerpted from, *The Stephanie Experience: Oddity*, see Appendix S)

Jasmine spoke about the founding Principal, Dr. E., and her solid leadership. In addition, several participants noted a change in the school after she left; changes that were not positive, which affected the students tremendously.

Dr. E, she was an excellent principal. She cared about us not only as her students, not just because she was the principal of a Early College Academy; she genuinely cared about her student body. And the rest of the teachers, they followed suit. Of course when you have good leadership, anything but failing can be, you know, present at the time. (Excerpted from, *The Jasmine Experience: Paradigm Shift*, see Appendix K)

Again, relationships are the very cornerstone of the early college model, as mentioned multiple times throughout the literature review. Words such as “familial” are often used when referencing early college high schools. It is well known that when teachers show that they care about students, they respond differently to them. As you read, these participants repeatedly named faculty and staff members who affected their lives as early college students, many crediting them with a lot of their successes; while others, referred to faculty members as more like members of their families. This section was definitely a significant theme that came out of participant responses.

Poor decision-making. Immersion into an adult environment with an immature mindset can sometimes create disastrous conditions for young students in programs like the early college. Chimere had a personal situation that affected her ability to complete her coursework through the early college initiative.

By what would have been my senior year I was pregnant. I found out while we were at Henry-Hall. So, I had to make a decision that I was gonna work and support my kid. That was like, one of the hardest decisions I've ever had to make because I knew how important education was if I wanted to go far in life. I also knew that if I made that decision to leave school would be tough for me in the future because I would be stuck at little jobs, you know, making minimum wage or a little bit more, but still nothing.

For a moment, I was actually at Campus High School. I was about to have my kid. I didn't have any money. I didn't have a vehicle. So, I left there too, two months before graduation.

The follower mentality was highlighted by Chimere who spoke on the concept of peer influence on decision-making.

You kind of stray sometimes, because you get that freedom and you feel like, “Okay, well just let me do what's popular. Let me do what's hot right now.”  
(Excerpted from, *The Chimere Experience: Redemption*, see Appendix J)

Stephanié indicated multiple impacts of poor decision-making in the statement below:

I was one of the ones that skipped. I was one that probably didn't go to most of my classes. It impacted me 'cause I did not pass a lot of my courses on the college level. And it impacts you educational wise 'cause of course you fail and you're put back. Of course, you know you're not on the level you're supposed to be based on the guidelines that were set for you.

You also end up lacking socially with your peers, because while everybody's joined together talking about, “Oh, let us get our chemistry homework done.” They were working together and I wasn't even aware that we had chemistry homework, you know. So you lack in both areas, academically and socially, and you end up being in a reserved space by yourself because of a decision you made, so yeah.

Lack of relevant personal skills. Participants in this group highlighted deficits in various personal skills that could have interfered with their successes in the early college initiative. Allen Cook gives a solid description of the difference between high school and college, and how that relates to self-efficacy. He believed he was prepared academically

for the college, but lacked the internal traits needed to reach their fullest potential. This concept is one that must be emphasized to students moving towards the collegiate part of the program. It could be the difference between success and failure and mediocrity and excellence.

I would say the high school aspect of the program, before I went to the postsecondary part, prepared me academically, though I never really developed the self-educating ability that I found to have needed during postsecondary. It wasn't that I wasn't prepared, but it was through the high school stages. You're being educated. You're learning it. If you have a question, you ask it, and it's explained; then you're tested on it, and based on what was explained to you, that's pretty much how you answered the questions. When I went off to postsecondary it was more, "This is what I will teach you. This is what you should learn and you were given the material to learn it. You kinda had to fish for yourself, almost. . (Excerpted from, *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*, see Appendix O)

Maximillian Prufroy, 2011 spoke about what was essentially time management skills. He described some of the sacrifices which ECHS students had to make in order to maintain. Many of the participants mentioned the workload and how it was difficult to manage at times.

While I appreciated all of that support from the teachers, not being able to have that traditional kind of life that most high school students had was trying. There were times that my friends wanted to go out and I was like, "Man, I'm doing all my homework. I still got two more projects and papers to do. I can't handle all that right now." On top of that, when I did finally manage to get a grasp on how I would handle my schedule, making myself more well-rounded still came before that. So after they had gotten their academics and extracurricular down to make them more well-rounded, they still had time to enjoy being that age. It's not that I didn't, but I had less of it. (Excerpted from, *The Maximillian Prufroy Experience: Failure to Realize Potential is Death*, see Appendix R)

Lack of support. Most of these participants, with the exception of Chimere, noted a lack of support by ECHS faculty and staff, which may have contributed to their circumstances as students at the early college. Excerpts from those conversations follow.

Jasmine speaks about lack of parental support and lack of support from ECHS staff.

Even as far as my mom, who was a part of my support system, nobody really told me what to expect. Had I really been shown how we were getting these grades in these courses, had it been outlined, like actually showing me a college transcript before taking classes, had I actually knew the process, and had it been explained to me consistently, each year of my four years of high school, I personally and definitely would have took the Early College program a lot more seriously.

I know the parents thought that it would be more hands on from the staff at Butler-Armstrong when we got to the college, that's why they wouldn't have to too much worry about their kid, you know, on the campus. But, we only had one Graduation Coach, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, to come up to the school. How could she possibly be held accountable for all of these students? However, we still are a small enough body to where, had there been systems put in place, those actions could have been corrected. (Excerpted from, *The Jasmine Experience: Paradigm Shift*, see Appendix K)

Leah recalled one major incident with an English professor in which she did not feel supported by the college liaison, although her experience with the liaison differs from the overall recollections shared by other students who thought Ms. Gina was very available and effective.

I can say personally that Ms. Gina wasn't as effective as I needed her to be with the one experience with the English teacher. Scheduling, you know, meetings with the teacher, didn't get me anywhere. When I needed to get to her, she was not in her office. She many have been there, but not in her office; it was always something like that, so I couldn't get the help and support that I needed. (Excerpted from, *The Leah Experience: Miss Butler-Armstrong*, see Appendix L)

Stephanié expressed her perception of the program dynamic as it pertained to students not meeting standards. She felt discarded when she began to struggle.

There were times when I felt like, when I wasn't achieving the school's academic goals, that I was pushed aside. When I wasn't getting all of my classes, when I didn't pass the COMPASS the first time, when I didn't meet the standards or the requirements the first time, I felt pushed aside. If it wasn't for my parents and a couple of other people saying, "You know you can do this," I probably would've been like, "I don't want to do this anymore." (Excerpted from, *The Stephanié Experience: Oddity*, See Appendix S)

Alexis did not feel supported by the Butler-Armstrong administration; in fact, she felt targeted by one person, in particular.

As far as the administration, the Assistant Principal and Principal, were not supportive so much; they were just lurkers. I had been in ISS (In-School Suspension) for who knows how many times, little things, because me and Dr. JS didn't get along so well. (Excerpted from, *The Alexis Experience: Free Spirit*, See Appendix W)

Challenges with postsecondary transition. Just as the college completers did, these non-completer participants all continued postsecondary educational endeavors. Some transitions were not as smooth as others; nevertheless, they did ultimately travel through similar paths. Chimere spoke about the challenges of completing a postsecondary program, but not being able to work in her field:

After obtaining my GED, I attended Edwards out at Norcross for their Dental Assistant Program. I completed that program in about seven months and I had a 4.0, like the entire time I was there. It's hard to learn so many procedures and instruments and everything within seven months. I had hoped to stay on at that office as a Dental Assistant once I completed my internship, but he hired someone else. I've already been out of school over a year. Now, I am paying back student loans while working in the Customer Service at a Wal-Mart. Sometimes, you know, I get discouraged because I'm like, they're probably gonna look at me like, she's been out of school for a year and she still has not experience. (Excerpted from, *The Chimere Experience: Redemption*, see Appendix J)

Jasmine communicated that while she was still in college, she did not have the same passion as she once did. During her interview she revealed that she did not want to attend a four-year school. That was the decision of her mother and she was not pleased about it.

I ended up going to Albany State. They took all of my courses from Henry-Hall College. I started not to like it down there either. I had become apathetic towards school, so I became home sick. I returned home and enrolled into Georgia State. I've only taken like two classes. That process has been a slow one. I'm learning through other life experiences that I have to do things at my own pace; this includes graduation. I am not going to be pressured to come out at specific time. I own my own lash business; I own my own Mary Kay business. I'm apprenticing

to get my hair license and I'm still enrolled at a fifth-year Senior at Georgia State. Hopefully, I will come out 2017, at the latest, 'cause I have to do that year of student teaching. (Excerpted from, *The Jasmine Experience: Paradigm Shift*, see Appendix K)

Leah appeared to have a seamless transition.

In August of 2010, I started Brown Mackie College. Since that time, I got my Associates degree in Paralegal Studies and because of Butler-Armstrong, all of the courses that I took at Henry-Hall College transferred over, which meant I didn't have to attend a full two years! Upon the completion of my degree requirements in 2012, I graduated Cum Laude from Brown Mackie, even though the official commencement exercises weren't until July 2013. I now attend Capella University, seeking to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Business Marketing. (Excerpted from, *The Leah Experience: Miss Butler-Armstrong*, see Appendix L)

Mustafah and Allen Cooke explained the reality of being an early college, especially regarding grade point averages and scholarships.

Mustafah: My transition to college was pretty smooth. I think the only roadblock that I had coming in was my grade point average. You know what I mean? I was passing the classes at Henry-Hall with Cs, which was good. But, I guess I didn't fully understand, like, this is college, this GPA is gonna stay with me forever. So, it's not like I'm gonna get a fresh start.

You see these students graduating from traditional high schools so easily. You see folks having 3.5 GPAs and getting the HOPE Scholarship and it makes you feel a way. I felt like I was smart enough and had worked hard enough to get those scholarships myself, but I can't receive them because of my grade point average. I think is a real roadblock. (Excerpted from, *The Mustafah Experience: Tetris*, see Appendix M)

Allen Cook: Since leaving Butler-Armstrong, of course my goal was obviously to finish what I started at Henry-Hall and continue on to postsecondary education; but I really, towards the end, did so much damage to my GPA, that I went a different route. My educational confidence was kinda broken. I had never before seen myself negative, below average, or really too much average at anything. So, it kinda hit me hard and I really didn't know how to handle it. I was afraid to keep going back and it felt like I was forcing it. I felt like, well, what has changed other than the time; so, I took a break. (Excerpted from, *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*, see Appendix O)

Maximillian Prufroy explained the internal battle he struggled with regarding the next



steps after attending early college high school.

I am in my last year at Henry-Hall, because right after I graduated, I didn't go back for like a year. I took that time I started working. I feel like I stayed at Henry-Hall sometimes more for convenience, as opposed to go going ahead to matriculate to a four-year institution.

Another reason I made the decision to stay at Henry-Hall was because I didn't want to just get my degree in General Studies, I really wanted to focus on career progression, and get my degree in engineering from Henry-Hall, which is what I'll have in December. The kinds of challenges that I experienced regarding returning to Henry-Hall and changing my major were my GPA and the prerequisites required for my Engineering major. It's funny, you leave as a child and you came back as an adult, but you still have your child grades! So yeah, I'm glad that they merged with Georgia State. Regardless, at the end of this semester I'm going to transfer to either Tech or Kennesaw State. (Excerpted from, *The Maximillian Prufroy Experience: Failure to Realize Potential is Death*, see Appendix R)

Stephanié who noted having the leave Henry-Hall College due to academic challenges, spoke about how returning to Henry-Hall to complete a few courses was the difference in her not having to take remedial coursework at her four-year institution.

As soon as I finished high school, I did two semesters at Henry-Hall College, I did take a few more classes and did good in them. That made up for a couple of the classes that I didn't pass while in the program. Then, I transferred to University West Georgia. Fortunately, I didn't have to take any remedial classes at West Georgia. I only as there for a semester though. I now work at the downtown arena, where I am a manager now. Phillips Arena is where the NBA plays for Atlanta, so I work with all the Hawk's players. I also work with all the management for the Atlanta teams. (Excerpted from, *The Stephanié Experience: Oddity*, see Appendix S)

Alexis, a Group Two member, discussed the possibility of her school not accepting her early college credits.

When I first tried to transfer to the Art Institute of Atlanta., they thought it was a problem taking the credits because they were high school credits. -- In the end it worked out good because they took the credits, overall. Not all of them, but like Math, English, you know, the core credits. It is really going well. Because of my learning style, this school helped a lot, because we have to do everything. I am in there Audio Engineering program. This is my second year and I should be

graduating next summer. (Excerpted from, *The Alexis Experience: Free Spirit*, see Appendix W)

Additionally, two of the three Group One members of the non-college completers, Mustafah and Allen Cook shared the following: Mustafah attends the University of West Georgia where he will graduate this Fall of 2015 with an English degree; while, Allen Cook is an Emerson County police officer and plans to attend Marshall Training within the next five years.

*ECHS Participant Perceptions of the Lack of Postsecondary Preparedness*

The third research question addressed by this study sought to understand the ways in which alumni believed that the ECHS could have been better prepared them for postsecondary education. Just as there was an overwhelming sentiment from all 16 participants that they were academically prepared by Butler-Armstrong for the college coursework, there was an equally overpowering sentiment from the participants that they were not prepared for the social aspect of college by Butler-Armstrong ECHS.

Discussions with all of the participants resulted in the emergence of three major themes: social preparation, start-up challenges, and changes in the ECHS leadership.

Social preparation. There was unanimous agreement that the early college, Butler-Armstrong, did not prepare them socially for the college environment. Group One and Group Two participants indicated an unawareness of what they were about to be involved in. Some felt like they were immediately disconnected from the high school once they began college coursework. Participants felt socially inept in classrooms and other settings on the college campus where they had to interact with older students. Some discussed not knowing how to handle certain social situations, such as older men approaching younger

women; while others admittedly did not know what to do with their newfound freedom, which led to costly mistakes such as skipping class and even some participants having to leave the program. They even spoke about sometimes not knowing how to conduct themselves in the college environment. Their lack of social preparation discussions could be separated into three sub-themes: newfound freedom, immersion with older students, and lack of opportunities for social interaction. Those themes are discussed below.

*Newfound freedom.* Jasmine, year, described the simple aspect of what regular teenagers experience at high schools, but how the environment increases those behaviors exponentially because of all the freedom.

Because there was the freedom, we did things we were not supposed to do. We did typical high school things, done on a way higher level, because there was no accountability. (Excerpted from, *The Jasmine Experience: Paradigm Shift*, see Appendix K)

Mustafah, 2010, discussed intimately the realities of having high school students on a college campus, with very little supervision.

I think most of the things we got into happen a lot with traditional high school students - sex, drug usage, and anything else that goes on with teens. But, I think in the college setting, like, once again, that freedom exacerbated it. It's more like, who's to say I can't do this? My mom ain't there. Let me go with my girlfriend and get a hotel. It's right here down the street, in walking distance. You're like, "I can bust one right quick," because I only got one person watchin' me. You go smoke weed before class, because you only got one person watchin' you. (Excerpted from, *The Mustafah Experience: Tetris*, see Appendix M)

Mikal, 2013, consolidated her observations of other student's experiences with freedom in the following statement:

For most people, the freedom got to their heads. They stopped going to class. The freedom definitely got to a lot of their heads. There's no one that tells you to go to class or do your work. (Excerpted from, *The Mikal Experience: Big Shoes to Fill*, See Appendix Y)

*Immersion with older students.* There were a significant group of participants who mentioned interacting with older students in some form. Some of it was related to the classroom environment, where they either felt like babies or they felt like they were being treated differently by a professor. Others noted gender-related issues, mainly with the girls where the older male college students were attempting to approach them romantically. In one case, Mustafah experienced some influence from an older female college student who wanted him to skip class with her and smoke marijuana. Below were comments from Tina and Jasmine regarding the older men.

Tina: I wasn't necessarily scared to be on a campus with older people or what not, but just being able to deal with the fact that I may have older men trying to hit on me all day and stuff like that was something different. That was always an issue. (Excerpted from, *The Tina Experience: Trendsetter*, see Appendix N)

Charlene: Being female jumping into the college experience, was especially challenging. College boys to high school girls was shell shocking. You get out there and you're, as a high school female, provocative and curious, all of these things. Then you've got these grown men that you find attractive that are remedial in comparison to where they should be in life. They don't care, you know. They're 22 and 25 years old and you're built like you're 22 or 25 years old, but you're 17 years old. But by you being curious, you don't care. (Excerpted from, *The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

From a male perspective, Keion, 2013, witnessed his female classmates becoming distracted by the attention from older men.

Another issue we were experiencing at the college was, as far as the females, the attention from the older guys. I'd be like, "You hang around him and you ain't going to class. You doing this, you doing that. You need to get it together." They're getting shown that attention from the older males, and it was a sidetrack, a distraction for them as far as school was concerned. (Excerpted from, *The Keion Experience: Responsibility*, see Appendix X)

Tosh, 2011, discussed the perception of the early college students by the people surrounding them at the college.

We were around 30-, 40-, and 50-year-old people every day; yes, we had all across the board, but we are still the baby of the classrooms. They knew we were young, so they looked at us as young-minded children, and it was kind of hard for us to fit in. That's why we ended up staying by ourselves and whatnot in our little groups. (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

Allen Cook, 2011, eloquently described the realities of being in an adult setting after leaving a small contained school like Butler-Armstrong.

Socially, being in a school where the student body is not as large, you deal with only so many personalities. Going straight into a postsecondary, where even your age at that time is 16 or 17 years of age, it's a little hard to interact with postsecondary students who are parents, adults, and students who have fully graduated from four-year high schools, things like that. . (Excerpted from, *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*, see Appendix O)

Here, Class of 2011 cohort members,' Autumn and Maxillian Prufroy, expressed the importance of maturity as early college students. This is important because of the self-sufficient nature of the college environment. According to Maximillian, instilling that maturity is a responsibility of the ECHS.

Autumn: We were younger than everyone, everywhere we go at this point. So it's like, sitting next to a 32-year-old mother of two, we have nothing in common with that. -- I mean, adapting to not everybody being your age and people being more mature than you, was a challenge. We were still playful and youthful, and didn't necessarily take everything seriously. We were in a very mature environment, so it made us mature very fast. (Excerpted from, *The Autumn Experience: From COMPASS to Mass-Com*, see Appendix P)

Maximillian Prufroy: And I think a lot of students that I came through with thought, "I'm smart, so I'll handle this and be done with it." It's not just that, you have to be mature and know how to carry yourself in certain situations. So I feel like instilling that concept in them, a desire to want to be adult in certain situations, as opposed to saying, "I'm me and this is how I'm gonna handle it," is the best thing that the early college can do for its students. (Excerpted from, *The*

*Maximillian Prufroy Experience: Failure to Realize Potential is Death*, see Appendix R)

*Lack of opportunities for social interaction.* Lack of social opportunities was brought forth by multiple participants through various contexts, including the inherent organization of a small learning community, an unavailability of courses that encouraged collaboration and creativity, and an extremely limited offering of extracurricular activities. One student, Tina summed this topic up in one statement:

I think throughout my high school, that I struggled with the balance of the social aspect; so I think that made school in general, tough, because I didn't have that extra outlet for something else. -- Socialization is something that came along after the fact, and I felt like that inhibited me after I graduated. (Excerpted from, *The Tina Experience: Trendsetter*, see Appendix N)

Walter pointed out several deficits of the ECHS, including how the small learning community set-up affects socialization and his feelings about a lack of activities to help with socialization skills. He stated the size for the environment caused a lack of opportunities to interact with various people. See his sentiment below:

I mean the teachers did their best to make it fun and they did their best to talk to you, but socially, all you had were the kids in the class or the teachers at your school. And the school was so small, that you literally knew everybody in school by the first week, by the end of the first week. So socially, we saw the same people every day and it just didn't help you to meet other people either, because you were just stuck in your little circle or in your little square, in that case.

Although students were advised during recruitment that Butler-Armstrong was academically focused, the reality of that was not understood until the participants became students at the school, and more likely, had exposure to students at traditional schools. Here, Walter, Keion, and Mikal highlighted the fact that no extracurricular activities existed and how that factor impacted students like them with similar interests.

Walter: There wasn't enough to do at Butler-Armstrong. It was just strictly academics. There were no basketball teams and no football. We did have the dance team, started by you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, but that was it. That was the best thing we had. We had little clubs, but they were academic. For someone like me, that can get really bad, really quickly. I really don't, I'm not gonna say that I don't like school because I know I need it, but I don't like it strictly academic. I like having fun with what I'm doing. (Excerpted from, *The Walter Story: Sounds of Sacrifice*, see Appendix V)

Keion: When running an early college, and instead of thinking like an administrator and Principal or teachers and professors, also think as the students, you know. The students are sacrificing a lot with not being at their traditional home high schools, where they could be playing basketball or football, dancing on the dance team, cheerleading, and all of those things that could possibly be ways for them to have free rides to go to four-year institutions. Know that a lot of students are talented. So, just making sure that, whatever you have at a traditional school, it's ten times better at the early college. (Excerpted from, *The Keion Experience: Responsibility*, see Appendix X)

Mikal: I think the pressure of not having any sports or other extracurricular activities got to a lot of people too, because we had just mainly academic stuff. I mean we had dance team, but it wasn't like a regular high school dance team. We had Mock Trial, I don't want to say, "Not the fun stuff", but we had like the book worm, nerd stuff, and not really any fun activities. So a lot of people was like, "I should have went to my home school. I could have been a cheerleader," and stuff like that. That lack of outlets may have affected how they did at Henry-Hall. (Excerpted from, *The Mikal Experience: Big Shoes to Fill*, See Appendix Y)

In order to diminish the effect on him personally, Walter did something quite unprecedented. He actually marched in the marching band at another Emerson County High school after school each day. He credited that experience with nurturing his socialization skills.

I was actually a special case at Butler-Armstrong; not only did I transfer from another early college, but I was the only student in the school at the time, that actually did outside activities at another Emerson County school. So I wasn't in the same situation socially as the other kids, because I would go to a whole other high school when the day was over to interact with a lot of different people.

Here, Walter brought up a point regarding the curriculum and the lack of Fine

Arts courses. While that observation may have been directly connected to his personal interests, he also alluded that by nature, the improvement of socialization skills would come along with participation in those kinds of courses. He also indicated above that he received his socialization skills from participation in the marching band at another school.

One thing I would say about the early college experience, that I would have liked to change, was the opportunity to take courses in the Arts. For me personally, especially since I'm going to school for music education, I would have preferred something in the arts; maybe a music class, maybe a chorus class, or something. You couldn't even take those classes at the college. (Excerpted from, *The Walter Story: Sounds of Sacrifice*, see Appendix V)

Walter and the other participant's perspectives were very comprehensive and exposed several key points that affect both student satisfaction and personal growth.

Start-up challenges. Some students felt like the early college faculty was "composing the masterpiece during the performance," if you will. Charlene, 2012, referred to herself and the other former students in her cohort as being a "test study." The major start-up challenge that affected these students was not having their own school at a point. During the first two years of Butler-Armstrong's existence, the school did not have its own building. It was housed inside of Escalade HS, another Emerson County High School. The third year, which was the freshman year for the Class of 2012, Butler-Armstrong had its own building. Those students never had to experience what the first two classes did; likewise, the Legacy class of 2010 was never able to experience having their own high school building because they had moved on to the college.

Many of the students in those first two classes who participated in this study recalled those times and the feelings that were associated with not having their own



space. This affected morale, enrollment, and it also made the creation of the school culture even more challenging. You can read statements from Chimere (2010), Mustafah (2010), Leah (2010), Allen Cook (2011), and Tosh (2011) below:

Chimere: We had to adapt to this one little hallway at Escalade High School, another school in Emerson, County. It was funny [*Laughs*], we had maybe six classrooms. It was different. Our little group of 100 students felt really, really sheltered and secluded. So now, not only were we adapting to Butler-Armstrong as first year high school students, we had to adapt to Escalade as well. During that first year, we lost many of our peers because I think a lot of kids just kind of went home and told their moms or their parents, you know what, “we can't do this.” We started with over 100 students, about 106 I think, and dwindled down to about 75. (Excerpted from, *The Chimere Experience: Redemption*, see Appendix J)

Mustafah: A while into my experience at Butler-Armstrong, I still didn't want to be there, but I was stuck and there was nothing that I could do about it. To make things worse, we didn't even have our own school at first. We were inside of Escalade High School. If you watch the movies, it kind of felt like one of those orphan movies, you know, when you get the new orphan and everybody bullies them. That's how it kind of felt, like a small group of us were in a big boarding house, and everybody else was there to gang up on us. And it was crazy the way they ganged up on us like they had cause, like we were gang bangers from a rival set or we got some different religious belief that they didn't agree with. . (Excerpted from, *The Mustafah Experience: Tetris*, see Appendix M)

Leah: My biggest challenge was, and I think everyone can say this, but not having our own building, not being able to say, “This is ours.” We had to share a small portion of Escalade HS, another high school in Emerson County. There was always tension between the two schools. Escalade students didn't like us and we were terrified of Escalade students! The fact that we were constantly fighting with another school over a tiny block of space was a huge challenge for us. . (Excerpted from, *The Leah Experience: Miss Butler-Armstrong*, see Appendix L)

Allen Cook: Again, being something new, being a part of only the second class, when you arrived, you could see that there was this line, a little sense of tension between the Escalade HS students and the Butler-Armstrong students. We did not have our own institution, which seemed to be a conflict. And it wasn't because anything had been done to anyone; it was just that Butler-Armstrong was a new school, up and coming, they had bright students, teachers that could provide individual attention, and students were excelling; versus Escalade was a school in a pretty urban area, I won't say struggling, but they didn't have the luxuries that Butler-Armstrong had. So those students felt like the Butler-Armstrong students

thought we were better than them. And there is a sense of tension when you feel like anyone walks around carrying themselves better than you. (Excerpted from, *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*, see Appendix O)

Tosh: Escalade HS on that one hallway. They didn't take too kindly of us being in their building. They looked at us like, "Why are they even here"? Some thought we were too smart for them. Some thought we were better than them, you know. Some of them felt some type of way. Some of them were even actually cool. Like, I knew people at Butler-Armstrong that were friends with people that went to Escalade HS, but it wasn't very many. (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

One statement from Class of 2011 cohort member, Allen Cook, summed up the topic of start-up challenges rather satisfactorily:

Feeling as though I was part of something new part of something that was growing and developing, was something that, even today, I take a lot of pride in that. But there's a saying that a lot of people above my generation use, "The same things that make you laugh, make you cry." And as much as I felt proud about that, I felt as if everything we were going through was trial and error. And that feels great when that coal becomes a diamond and you look back and you say, "I was part of that work that made that a diamond;" but while you were there, it was just coal. . (Excerpted from, *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*, see Appendix O)

Changes in the ECHS leadership. Leadership in any organization in critical, especially in a specialized school setting like early college high schools. Butler-Armstrong's initial principal retired in 2009. There were only two administrators there at the time, a principal and an assistant principal. The same year she retired, the school district moved the Assistant Principal to another school. This transition had a huge impact on the faculty and study body. Charlene spoke emotionally about the change below:

In 2009, we got a new principal. I think she came into the school with a misconception of what we were. We got somebody who was completely detached. It was like going from your mom to a babysitter. She was walking into a school full of essentially nerds, but she came into our school as if we were a large formal traditional school with disciplinary problems. She immediately created a tension amongst the students. She created a militant environment, so it

was genuinely a complete flip in the emotional climate in that building after she arrived.

I think the biggest issue was that she did it with no remorse. She had no intention of becoming familiar with the environment. She wanted to create her own vision and you can't really do that. Great businesses become great because they have a wonderful leader that walks in and understands what they're walking into. There's also good businesses, where the leader comes in and makes their presence known.

The new leader was the catalyst that prevented that school from being what it could have been, because she had a roster of students that would have done whatever it took, and she could have cared less. Yeah, it was her fault. She broke it. (Excerpted from, *The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

### *Participant Suggestions for Improvement*

Participants suggested multiple areas of improvement to address where the ECHS could have better prepared them for postsecondary education. Those improvements could be divided into four major themes: innovative programs, high school to college bridge, college campus supervision, and extracurricular activities adjustments.

Innovative programs. Several students suggested types of programs and other things that could be implemented to help support students at Henry-Hall. In reference to the older men trying to approach the teenage girls, Tina's following comment justified her subsequent suggestion:

For example, I wasn't necessarily scared to be on a campus with older people or what not, but just being able to deal with the fact that I may have older men trying to hit on me all day and stuff like that was something different. That was always an issue. (Excerpted from, *The Tina Experience: Trendsetter*, see Appendix N)

One of those suggestions, by Tina, was a student mentoring program for young ladies at the college. The suggestion was that older students be identified who would be willing to work with the early college students to have round table discussions regarding

issues that are important to them, like the older men trying to talk to the younger women.

In reference to academics and transition, Mustafah stated the following:

Regarding the transition at the college, I believe they should have more professors at the college who are paired with the professors of and students at the Early College, so everything can run smoothly. I think it would be a little better success rate instead if this was done. I also think if the teachers at Henry-Hall were as concerned as the teachers at Butler-Armstrong, and understood, like, these still are kids that we are dealing, but they are doing this amazing thing, that would be great. If we just put a little bit more effort in, we can send them to the next level. I think if they understood that, that would help us increase enrollment and maintain numbers.

Regarding the professors, I would think it would probably be better if you just had four or five professors that teach whatever basic classes the students need. I think that would've been better 'cause it makes it more relational too. The relationships just transfer over. I would think it would be better just to have the students focused on Math, Literature, this subject, that subject, and you've got five professors who will be consistent. Regular college teachers don't really care if you're not there, so you could miss every class and that would be okay. At least this way, there is some accountability. I think having kids go to the class where there is an actual attendance policy, just like you would in high school even when you get to college, is needed in this program. (Excerpted from, *The Mustafah Experience: Tetris*, see Appendix M)

Another suggestion by Mustafah was to have early college students to check-in daily at a designated area on the college campus to provide a climate of accountability for students. In reference to students who may be experiencing academic challenges,

Stephanié stated the following:

Staying on top of the students, I thought they could've did a better job with, as far as, just figuring out different ways to do it, 'cause not everybody responds to the same thing. You know you can't just slap a piece of paper down and say, "You're failing; you need to figure out how you're gonna fix this." You can't do that with everybody. So I think figuring out different ways to get students attention and let them know, "Okay, this is where you are and this is where you want to be. This is the route to take it and you're not on that route." You know, different things to hone in on why we're lacking, and figuring out what their end games were gonna be. (Excerpted from, *The Stephanié Experience: Oddity*, see Appendix S)

In reference to mental preparation, Tosh explained the problem, but did not necessarily make a suggestion to improve upon it.

Tosh: But my main struggle was, “How do I maintain my age, not grow up too fast, but still be able to transition and do what I have to do at Henry-Hall College and then at a four-year university being as young as I am? I don't really know if there could be improvement in that social aspect of the school. (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

High school to college bridge. Multiple students noted that there was a disconnection from Butler-Armstrong once they began taking classes at Henry-Hall College. Due to the set-up of the school, the physical disconnect was anticipated; however, the mental disconnect was not expected by students, which caused some issues on both ends. Participants also lamented about not knowing what to expect on the college campus as well. One suggestion made by Jasmine was to do more in terms of preparing parents for their student's collegiate journey through workshops; while another suggestion from the same participant was to explain more thoroughly to students the concepts of college credits. In addition, there were suggestions to have more frequent meetings with students regarding progress, and to do a better job with urging the participation of students in academic resources while on the college campus. See Jasmine's comments below:

For some reason the whole high school/college bridge dynamic was watered down. It wasn't taken as seriously as “babies graduating from high school,” maybe they need a lot of guidance. You know, we had our all white ceremony that kind of tried to give us that graduation feel that you're actually leaving the small leagues and headed into the big leagues, from high school to college, but that was about it. (Excerpted from, *The Jasmine Experience: Paradigm Shift*, see Appendix K)

See the comments atop the following page from Kristen and Leah:

Kristen: Butler-Armstrong did a great job, the first two years, with the hands-on approach; if that approach, that interaction with the professors could be kept within the next two years, I see that it would greatly influence the experience, as opposed to, for example, dropping your kids off at a four-year college when they're still nesting. We were still being molded during that time. So, still have that hands-on approach and welcome the college students back, making time and incorporating that into the role of the high school professors, almost like we are going to school twice, if you will. We would go to school, get our work, but we would come back to the high school and actually have it broken down to us where we can still learn it on our level. I wouldn't say it's dumbing it down, but to the point where it is in laymen terms, as opposed to the college format. Again, we're just getting dropped off at Henry-Hall, but we're still in the Butler-Armstrong mindset. So, having that collaboration would be a positive approach, as well. (Excerpted from, *The Kristen Experience: Heavy-Hearted*, see Appendix Q)

Leah: Overall, I think there should be more support from the high school when students transition to the college. There should be more people to contact. There should be another liaison, just in case one isn't available. There should be someone else, because it's a lot of students coming from Butler-Armstrong to the college and it's a lot going on. Each student has specific needs, and if those needs aren't met, then they'll end up in a position like I was in with my English teacher. As students, we may not be able to handle a situation the way in which it should be handled, and I think that it would make a huge impact if there were more support. (Excerpted from, *The Leah Experience: Miss Butler-Armstrong*, see Appendix L)

College campus supervision. Students mentioned repeatedly that there was little to no supervision on the college campus, which lead to skipping and other destructive behaviors cited throughout their discussions. One student, Mustafah, 2010, came up with a plan to address this matter:

Regarding the freedom, I believe this is something that could be worked on. Make sure that people are attending classes and, you know, not spending idle time getting into trouble, but doing something positive with that idle time. It may even be better if the Early College students had a place to report, you know, give them some boundaries. For example, if Henry-Hall had a building strictly for Early College students only, with like, a little cafeteria, somewhere to study, little TVs, and little computers so you can work in quiet. This gives them structure instead of being around the grown people who just sit in the cafeteria chillin' 'cause, they don't wanna go to class. Before realize it, it's kind of like you have built a baby setting for them, without them don't even knowing. Kids need a time to grow up;

and yeah, people do better with boundaries. (Excerpted from, *The Mustafah Experience: Tetris*, see Appendix M)

Extracurricular activities adjustment. It was also suggested that more opportunities for social interaction be offered through extracurricular activities (Walter, Keion, and Mikal). Students noted that the lack of social interactions were a hindrance to them in multiple ways, when they matriculated to their two- and four-year colleges. Other participants spoke very passionately about leadership and even offered suggestions for improvement in that area below:

Autumn: I just ask, if at all possible, try to keeping people who are dedicated to the early college initiative there. I could see that leave as I was on my way out. I could see the change in administration wasn't good for the program. At the end, we didn't have as much as much of an encouragement, as we did in the beginning. The fact that Dr. E left was just devastating, because it was like that school was her baby; and she wasn't there anymore to see it grow. (Excerpted from, *The Autumn Experience: From COMPASS to Mass-Com*, see Appendix P)

Alexis: My main suggestion for improvement would be making sure the authority, like the Principals and the Assistant Principals, know what they're getting themselves into. They really need to have their whole business thing together because I don't really think the new administration was prepared enough for that school. They had traditional school backgrounds. (Excerpted from, *The Alexis Experience: Free Spirit*, see Appendix W)

### *ECHS Participant Perceptions of Postsecondary Preparedness*

The overarching research question addressed by this study sought to understand the ways in which alumni believed that the ECHS prepared them for postsecondary education. The previous responses from the aforementioned research questions, located in this chapter, provided the information to address the perceptions of College Completing Alumni, Non-College Completing Alumni, and how both groups of participants believed that the ECHS could have better prepared them for postsecondary education. There was

an overwhelming sentiment from all 16 participants that they were academically prepared by Butler-Armstrong for the college coursework, which was realized once they began taking classes at Henry-Hall College. The subsequent responses from study participants will address how Butler-Armstrong ECHS was effective in preparing them for postsecondary education.

As explained previously, the students at this school matriculated from Butler-Armstrong HS after the completion of their 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade years and begin their 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade journeys at Henry-Hall College (both names are aliases). Participants spoke very highly about the academic supports provided by the early college teachers and the support from the ECHS Program Coordinator at the college. Conversations with these participants regarding the ECHS preparing them for postsecondary education emerged into two major themes: high school academics and collegiate supports. High school academics will be discussed below.

High school academics. As stated before, participants emphatically believed that the high school prepared them academically for college level coursework. Participants spoke about the intense instructional delivery and applicable instructional delivery at the high school. They also raved about the availability of tutorial support at the high school, even after they began taking classes at the college. Therefore, high school academics could be divided into the following three major sub-themes: intense academic instructional delivery, applicable instructional delivery, and tutorial supports. Comments such as “perfectly fine,” (Chimere) and “easy” (Tina) were used in reference to the academic transition to Henry-Hall College. Maximillian Prufroy, 2011 discussed



preparedness by content areas and the general forewarn given by ECHS faculty and staff prior to the transition.

Because of the academic preparation I received at Butler-Armstrong, I was prepared very well in terms of Physics and Math, but it varied by subject. I was pretty well prepared for English as well. I just wish that I would have taken it upon myself to hone those other skills a little more. But, they really hammered in the preparedness by letting us know from day one what the game was gonna be. Getting there, I didn't understand great work ethic as I do now, but I got their point. (Excerpted from, *The Maximillian Prufroy Experience: Failure to Realize Potential is Death*, see Appendix R)

Charlene, 2012, noted the experience with being, “over-prepared” in her math class.

I took two math classes at Butler-Armstrong, then walked into the college math class at Henry-Hall, and genuinely felt like I had accidentally been placed in a remedial course. I didn't understand it. I was in class with people of various ages too because of the campus we were on. People were asking these questions and I'm like, [claps hands] “Maybe you should start over. Maybe I'm in the wrong place.” And all of my friends were like, “What is going on? Did I not do good on that test? Wait, I saw my scores what is going on? We were literally confused.” (Excerpted from, *The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

Alexis, 2013, similarly noted that not only was she able to handle the college coursework with ease, but she also was able to help several others in her college math class:

Once we got over to the college, I was really shocked because it sort of seemed like I was taking the same classes from Butler-Armstrong all over again. In fact, Butler-Armstrong was a little bit more challenging. I knew that material already. I knew how to do everything. Butler-Armstrong had prepared us well --When we first got in our college classrooms it was weird. It was some people, older than me, who didn't catch on so quick. I felt really bad having to explain something to somebody that was like 40. I'm not even gonna lie. (Excerpted from, *The Alexis Experience: Free Spirit*, Appendix W)

Comments such as those expressed the academic confidence that was present in Butler-Armstrong students when they embarked upon their collegiate journey. The concept of intense instructional delivery was not lost upon this participant group, as

shown in the following examples.

*Intense academic instructional delivery.* Many students made specific references to the coursework at Butler-Armstrong being demanding; however, multiple participants actually noted one specific course in particular, Physics, taught by Professor TB.

Autumn: My Physics teacher, TB probably pushed me harder than all my college professors ever pushed me. She made you feel like every piece of paper needed to be quality work, anything. She'd be like, "Autumn, what is this?" And then push me to be like, "Okay, if I'm not comfortable with it, why am I handing it in for a grade"? (Excerpted from, *The Autumn Experience: From COMPASS to Mass-Com*, see Appendix P)

Maximillian Prufroy: Professor TB was the first teacher I felt really looked past, what I thought, pretty decent intelligence at the time and saw room for improvement. -- She was the first one to really aim right at the heart of it. She would flip through our interactive notebooks and say, "Garbage. What is this?" At first I was like, "My ego is about to jump right out," but after listening to her, I'm glad that I wasn't so bullheaded at the time that I did not listen. (Excerpted from, *The Maximillian Prufroy Experience: Failure to Realize Potential is Death*, see Appendix R)

Tosh: The most memorable academic experience I have is when Professor TB had us build that rollercoaster. Oh, that rollercoaster! I could not do it for nothing! Me and my mom sat there trying to fix the tube and trying to get the hardware off the controller. We could not do it! To this day, I would tell any current/future EC students, "You guys think this is all tough, oh my God; y'all ain't seen nothing if you ain't took TBs Physics class." (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

Charlene: In Professor TB's Physics class, she had every class do this big project. -- When I tell you I struggled through that entire project, I just could not wrap my mind around the science part. -- She decided that, instead of watching me struggle, she would let me help others on their projects. -- With Professor TB, she understood that her subject was hard, but she taught it at that level of difficulty, because she wanted the next level to be easy. (Excerpted from, *The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

Walter: The funny thing was that I never really knew her. -- Then when I had her class, she was a whole new person. She was like a demon wearing a purple dress. But she was like the greatest teacher ever because I learned so much from her class. -- It was just a great teaching experience. (Excerpted from, *The Walter*

*Experience: Sounds of Sacrifice*, see Appendix V)

While intense instructional delivery is prevalent at the early college high school, the combination of intensity with support is what creates a productive formula. As noted with this specific professor, an increase in work ethic, assisting students with the realization of their specific strengths, and preparation for the next level, were a few of the benefits of this technique for the participants above.

*Applicable instructional delivery.* Several participants referred to professors at the early college making the curriculum germane to their age demographic and current culture. Just as there were multiple references to one specific teacher in the area of academic intensity, there were many participants who referenced Professor P in the area of applicability. Here were some of their sentiments:

Allen Cook: I definitely remember my literature professor, Professor P. How he taught, how he educated, was very not at a whiteboard. It was him actually sitting in a desk, or on one of the desks, even standing on the desk, and not speaking at you, but it felt more to you. He taught with more current events, things that you could relate to as a 16/17 year old in that timeframe. He used music and things from other classes, and he incorporated them into teaching you about a book you've never read. (Excerpted from, *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*, see Appendix O)

Jasmine: Mr. P. was so passionate about what he taught. He conveyed these things through force or exposure. I really enjoyed his class too. One thing we used to do a lot of was reading comprehension. He would bring in lyrics and we would dissect the lyrics of different songs that were current songs or past songs that were still relevant to our culture. It was sort of like he studied the students he was working with. He knew what would be relevant to us and he brought in music or brought in subjects that would help us to be better involved; and that is an outstanding teacher. (Excerpted from, *The Jasmine Experience: Paradigm Shift*, see Appendix K)

Leah: Professor P stepped in and combined both classes, his and the class with no teacher, until they hired a permanent teacher. That was a really good experience because the way he taught was different from all the other teachers. He related,

you know, what was happening right then, to the stories that we read. I could appreciate him taking real life and switching it around and making it seem like, this story. Or you know, taking lyrics from a song and really focusing on the words of the song to help us with Reading Comprehension. He made that be a part of who I was and connected it to what I was going through at that time. (Excerpted from, *The Leah Experience: Miss Butler-Armstrong*, see Appendix L)

The use of music in the classroom was not foreign at Butler-Armstrong; in fact, at least two other participants referenced its use in the science department; Charlene, who referenced members of her class writing and performing raps for a major Physics project in Professor TBs class and Walter who worked on musical projects in his Biology class with Professor A. This method helps students to retain information while making learning fun. It may not have been a Common Instructional Practice, but it definitely worked for these participants.

*Tutorial supports.* Tutorials were a major resource to Butler-Armstrong students during their time at Butler-Armstrong ECHS and while they were on the campus of Henry-Hall College. Tutorials were available before school, during school, after school, by appointment, and even through academic club offerings. Participant's Tosh, Charlene, Leah, Walter, Mikal, and Alexis expressed their feelings towards tutorial resources which was shown in the comments below:

Leah: I wasn't really good at Math and my teachers knew that, so every year, I would get support. I received support from my actual math teacher, Professor N, Professor C, as well as Professor G. Afterschool tutorials, in-class tutorials, whatever was needed, they were there to help and support me. I really had a good experience. (Excerpted from, *The Leah Experience: Miss Butler-Armstrong*, see Appendix L)

Tosh: First of all, our teachers arrived at school before you did and they actually pushed tutorial. You got morning tutorial, you got a mandatory during-the-day tutorial, and then you got afternoon tutorial for those who needed it. You also had clubs created that were academic based like the Butterfly Club, which was a

Biology and Environmental Science club, so it was a never-ending learning experience. (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

Charlene: We also had our teachers at the high school campus to support us academically. They might have not been there physically, but they were still there for us, serving as tutors after school. So most the time, we would shuttle our way back to Butler-Armstrong and get assistance with homework. They had new classes and everything, but were still allowing us to take up all of their time. (Excerpted from, *The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

Walter: It also helped that I spent a lot of time at Butler-Armstrong, even when I was student at Henry-Hall. I would go back to the school a lot and the teachers would always be there to help if I needed it. So it was like having a private tutor all the time, which was very helpful. (Excerpted from, *The Walter Experience: Sounds of Sacrifice*, see Appendix V)

Mikal: Teachers provided academic support. We had tutorials and then we had homeroom, which was sort of like tutorial that was helpful. We even had some of the people that were current Henry-Hall students to come back on Fridays and help us with those courses too. It definitely prepared me for college. (Excerpted from, *The Mikal Experience: Big Shoes to Fill*, See Appendix Y)

Alexis: All our teachers were willing to help. They were cool. If we needed help, we had tutoring, so that was good. They were more like, “You guys know where the classroom is.” They would stay after school or, if we told them ahead of time, they would make time for us then. Everybody was supportive. (Excerpted from, *The Alexis Experience: Free Spirit*, See Appendix W)

Students felt academically supported while at the high school. They also felt comfortable enough with their Butler-Armstrong professors to come back to the school, even after they were enrolled in college classes. According to the participants, the tutorial options created conditions for them to be successful, if they took advantage of the resource.

Collegiate supports. The college partner is an integral component of the early college initiative. It is the vehicle used to drive the opportunity for students to obtain college credits a reality. Each partnering institution, or postsecondary institution, has a

separate arrangement with their secondary partner to service the needs of early college students. Butler-Armstrong was partnered with Henry-Hall College. Henry-Hall College is a two-year institution that affords students an opportunity to earn an Associate's Degree and multiple professional certifications.

In addition to Butler-Armstrong students having access to all of the facilities, including the Writing and Math Labs as well as the Learning and Tutoring Center, which students like Maximillain Prufroy did take advantage of. He stated, "I spent many days in there putting together projects and getting help from the people in there."

The college also hired one person, Ms. Gina, to work with the ECHS students. She was referred to as a Liaison and a Counselor, but her official title was the Butler-Armstrong Program Director. She executed multiple roles in order to assist the ECHS students in their transition to the college. There were many participants who highlighted Ms. Gina in our conversations. According to the participants, she was a major reason why the college side worked for so many; therefore, her efforts were highlighted below:

Mustafah: Ms. Gina, I think she was pretty relational with my class. Ms. Gina made sure that we had the classes that we needed and she also made sure that those classes were interchangeable between the high school and the college, so the credits could count for both. I think she was effective. I know I thought, "You never see displacement or anything." She just did her job. But at the same time, I think, that for as many students as she had, and to effectively keep all the students in line, it needed to be at least four or five Ms. Ginas. (Excerpted from, *The Mustafah Experience: Tetris*, see Appendix M)

Tina: Ms. Gina, from what I gathered, helped with the transition to Henry-Hall College, whether that included academic or social needs, whatever we needed. She was that transition person that we can go to for whatever, whether we had any issues with a professor or whatever, she would be that person to take care of it. So I think that shows a lot about her. Butler-Armstrong has like, a physical principal and stuff like that. I sort of viewed her as that, not necessarily that leader sort of position, but as a figure like that, because she was really the only person that was

on campus with us. I knew she also did a lot of things with the actual Early College Initiative too, reporting back to whomever; at that time she did a lot of this. So I just looked to her as sort of a support system for us because you didn't have anyone else that was full-time on campus and she made sure everything ran smoothly. (Excerpted from, *The Tina Experience: Trendsetter*, see Appendix N)

Allen Cook: At the college level, I remember Miss Gina, the liaison for Butler-Armstrong. She was the largest part of assisting us in that transition. She was our biggest supporter on and off the stage. I feel as though without her, without her being present, I don't think there would have been any support between the college professors and the EC students. They try to give you that same respect that they would give any student and that's to not look at you any different. And as much as we appreciated that, that just maybe wasn't the support that a Butler-Armstrong student needed. So I would say if it wasn't for Miss Gina, calling on her, we would not have had that support, in my opinion. (Excerpted from, *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*, see Appendix O)

Autumn: Ms. Gina, I don't remember what her role was called, but she was kind of our liaison between the high school and the college. I found myself in Miss Henry's office all the time because I had questions, questions that they probably tried to answer before we got there, but I didn't listen. So now, I'm like, "Oh no, help me." Ms. Gina helped with class scheduling. She communicated for the EC students to administration if there was an issue in the classroom. If there were any special needs, which we tried not to have because we kind of wanted to blend in and not be the high school kid in the classroom, she was there to support. She was that person that made the transition for us to move to the college, smooth, so we didn't have any issues with us being there. She made us as high school students feel comfortable and just made it go. (Excerpted from, *The Autumn Experience: From COMPASS to Mass-Comm*, see Appendix P)

Kristen: I would say that our College Liaison, Ms. Gina, was 100% effective! After our first semester there, we were pretty much good to go for the remaining of our education at the college, because we now knew: how to pick courses, who to pick, and we knew the go-to people on the college campus, which was very important. Although we had assistance at the high school, having that person that's on the campus, that is familiar with the college aspect, knows about us, is invaluable. That was a special touch to it as well, because she knew us individually, as opposed to us just getting somebody that's just trying to, for lack of a better term, make a check or, do their job on a day-to-day basis. It became her mission, the same way that we have a mission with the Early College Initiative. It was everyone's mission to help us. So, she was the sole person that we went to when all else was failing. If we couldn't find that support, that assistance we needed, Ms. Gina helped us right then. (Excerpted from, *The Kristen Experience: Heavy-Hearted*, see Appendix Q)

Maximillian Prufroy: Although she wasn't a peer, it was also good having a liaison from the college to run interference of all the information. It was a lot to take in. You had a lot of people, with a bunch of different opinions, and she kind of helped put it in perspective. For example and in regards to professors, some people may have failed a class and hated it, and another person might have taken the class with that same professor and loved it. She filtered it for you, which helped out a tremendous deal. Ms. Gina pretty much owned student integration. I feel like she did an excellent job of that and still does an excellent job of that. Not only did she run interference on information that was coming at you in terms of its usefulness and what was available to you, but in terms of gathering resources and making sure those were ordered as well, tremendous job! It was great, the job that Ms. Gina did. (Excerpted from, *The Maximillian Prufroy Experience: Failure to Realize Potential is Death*, see Appendix R)

Stephanié: We did have an Academic Advisor for Henry-Hall College, Ms. Gina, to connect with us. She made sure we registered for our classes. She made sure that we were attending our classes. She communicated, as far as our grades, back and forth with Butler-Armstrong. Anything that was going on at Henry-Hall College, she was our communication person to go to or she would come find us. And if she couldn't find us, she found somebody that could find us. So yes, she was our person. (Excerpted from, *The Stephanié Experience: Oddity*, see Appendix S)

Tosh: Ms. Gina was a liaison between Butler-Armstrong and Henry-Hall College. She helped get our classes in order and basically helped us be on the right path to get our Associate's Degrees. I definitely was in all the right classes I needed to take. She wasn't playing about that. When it came to us creating our schedules, she was emailing us, "Hey, I need your schedule. Deadline is such and such. Hey, I need Accel applications. You know there's a deadline. Your classes won't be paid for. Need to hurry up," important things like that. She was on our case until everything was done! Then, you would see her around campus. If you had any questions, you knew where her office was. She'd keep you updated on things happening at Henry-Hall College. We used to have those meetings on Fridays or something like, in the Student Center Building and she used to come in there and keep us informed with pretty much everything that was going on as far as Butler-Armstrong and Henry-Hall College were concerned. So she kept us in the loop a lot. (Excerpted from, *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*, See Appendix T)

Charlene: When it came to graduation type of things, we had Ms. Gina. Ms. Gina was our on-campus advisor. She helped us get scheduled for classes and made sure that the classes we had, lined up with high school graduation requirements. She also aided us in making sure we had the correct courses for specific degrees we wanted at Henry-Hall. She made sure we got our transcripts and that our applications for graduation were in so we would be able to walk. Any issues we



might have had with teachers, we could talk to her about too. But the biggest thing for her was making sure we were in our courses and doing well in our courses. She made sure we weren't failing; and if we were failing, that we were getting assistance. She was more so emotional support for us if we were ever having issues with teachers or classes. We could go sit in her office and talk about it, and she would help us figure out alternatives. I think she was effective. . (Excerpted from, *The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*, see Appendix U)

Walter: We did have Ms. Gina. I cannot forget about her! Ms. Gina was another you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, for Henry-Hall. She was a nice lady. Her main thing was to keep us on track, make sure we were doing our work, and basically keep reminding us, "Hey, you are not college students. You are still in high school. Don't act like a high schooler, but remember that you still got a lot more to do before you can graduate from high school." For me, she was very helpful. She would contact the teachers if I couldn't. She was that person we would go to like, "Hey, I'm having a problem with this class," or she would go and talk to a professor if it was a bunch of students coming to her about things they didn't like or they were all having a problem with. Even if they were all just getting bad grades, she would go to the professor and just find out what was going on. She would also give us feedback from the teachers about what we were doing. She was always there, for the most part, in her office, if we needed to come to talk her. She would always help us with our schedules and whatnot. She's great people. (Excerpted from, *The Walter Experience: Sounds of Sacrifice*, see Appendix V)

Keion: For me personally, Ms. Gina was very effective. She was very helpful in making sure that I got into the college. She was really cool to talk to as well. She kept up with us, making sure that we were still in tune with the early college campus, knowing what was going on over there, and not out of the loop. I can't remember if it was every week or every month, but we always had a meeting, early in the morning. The whole class had to attend. She would bring us scholarship opportunities and she would also let us know about some of the issues that had been brought to her that we needed to fix. In some meetings, she would bring in some of the twelfth graders that were at the end of the early college journey and they would give us their advice on certain professors, certain classes, what to do, what not to do, study groups, things like that. But she always made herself available and was concerned that we were successful at the institution. I liked her. (Excerpted from, *The Keion Experience: Responsibility*, see Appendix X)

Mikal: Like, that's all we had. Ms. Gina was basically our Counselor. She told us what classes to take, when to take them, and if we would be on track to get our degrees or graduate in general. She even made sure we were doing well in our classes and helped us with getting the right textbooks. She made sure we had the

resources to be able to get through Henry-Hall. She was really helpful, because I would have been lost. I really would have been lost. She was cool and very effective. (Excerpted from, *The Mikal Experience: Big Shoes to Fill*, See Appendix Y)

From what I gathered from participants, Ms. Gina was indispensable at Henry-Hall since the second year students went to the college. She was extremely effective at bridging the gap between the high school and the college, scheduling classes, and intervening when conflicts or issues arose on the college campus. The participants very affectionately referenced her efforts to support them on campus when no one else was there to.

#### *Chapter Four Summary*

This chapter provided the data that was collected through 16 individual participant interviews regarding the early college high school initiative at Butler-Armstrong ECHS, the selected site for this study. It also described the different themes that naturally developed based upon the participant responses and connected those responses to the overarching research question for this study.

Taking all of the data into consideration, I was able to make a determination about the participant's perceptions of the effectiveness of the early college high school in preparing them for postsecondary education. Participants, all 100%, believed that they were prepared academically by Butler-Armstrong ECHS for postsecondary education. They were extremely confident in the areas of Mathematics and Science. Moreover, they felt prepared with rigor and for the demanding course workloads of the college. Participants praised their Butler-Armstrong faculty with providing substantial academic

support and credit them with maintaining an environment of care and concern for their academic and personal well-being.

Additionally, study participants did believe that the college support, in the form of the Early College Program Director was effective in her role to facilitate the transition of the students to the college, providing superior support in the areas of admissions, class scheduling, college planning, the providing of scholarship information, and support with college professors.

In contrast, participants, all 100%, indicated that they were not prepared socially by Butler-Armstrong ECHS for postsecondary education. Reasons for their perspective included: a lack of preparation for the freedom of the college environment, a lack of preparation for the interactions with older students in the college environment, a lack of preparation for the socialization of the college environment, a mental disconnect between the high school and the college students (bearing in mind that the physical disconnect is a part of the set-up), and a lack of supervision on the college campus. Participants believed that, if these matters are addressed, that it will improve the overall effectiveness of the transition from Butler-Armstrong to the college. Despite their concerns, 100% of participants confirmed that, if given the opportunity to choose Butler-Armstrong all over again, they would. Overall, students unequivocally believed that the early college was beneficial in terms of providing access to college credits, as well as an opportunity for the accelerated completion of their four-year Baccalaureate degrees.

The next chapter will provide a summary of the entire study, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the emergent themes, implications for educational leadership,

recommendations for future research, a researcher reflection, and a conclusion.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### *Introduction*

Thus far, in chapters one through four, this study has introduced the topic of Early College High Schools; it has provided a solid literature review and methodology, and the findings have been discussed and analyzed. Chapter Five will provide a summary of the entire study, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the emergent themes, implications for educational leadership, recommendations for future research, a researcher reflection, and a conclusion. I will now restate the research questions that this study was based upon. Those questions included the overarching research question: How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia perceive that the ECHS prepared them for postsecondary education?

To answer this question, the following sub-questions were also addressed:

- 1) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have completed postsecondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?
- 2) How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have not completed postsecondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?
- 3) In what ways do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia believe that the ECHS could have better prepared students for postsecondary education?

#### *Summary of the Study*

Due to the inequities in college enrollment across cultural groups, with African Americans lagging far behind their White counterparts, early college high schools and

programs like them are needed in order to help close that gap between the ethnicities and to provide access to postsecondary education for underrepresented groups in higher education. Through the early college initiative, minorities, students with low income households, and first-generation college goers are receiving a rigorous academic curriculum in hopes of preparing them for postsecondary education. Along with this rigor is a supportive environment, full of school faculty committed to the early college model and its principles. Free of charge, the students eligible to take college courses (however that looks in that particular school) are dually enrolling into our nation's two- and four-year colleges and universities, with the potential of earning credit towards a Bachelor's Degree.

This site, Butler-Armstrong Early College High School (BAECHS), facilitated such an environment for selected students for almost ten years. Speaking with each participant gave different insight into the aspects of the school that worked and those that needed improvement. Sixteen study participants provided valuable, first-hand knowledge of their experiences as early college students through individual interviews. These students were a part of the first four graduating classes of BAECHS: Classes of 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. Using this particular group of participants allowed readers a window inside of their entire academic journey, which for some culminated in the attainment of their Baccalaureate degrees. This study also allowed the number one stakeholders, the students, to voice their perceptions of whether Butler-Armstrong ECHS was effective in preparing them for postsecondary education; and as a result, in meeting the standards as outlined in the Five Core Principles of the Early College High School

Initiative and the 3R Framework which guides ECHS practices. While many extraneous factors may have played a role, the participants attributed many of their achievements back to the preparation they received at Butler-Armstrong ECHS.

As with anything that is new, it took a while to develop protocol, establish productive practices, and create the culture and climate wished for the organization. This fact should be considered when reviewing these data.

### *Summary of the Findings*

Previous research on early college high schools, including Thompson and Ongaga's (2011) study, revealed similarities in the challenges experienced by the participants in this study in terms of college campus trials, such as: skipping classes, the use of drugs, and even the occasionally inevitable outcome of student failure.

Additionally, findings drew similarities to the Conceptual Framework of the Five Core Principles of the Early College High School Initiative and the 3R Framework of Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. Even though each individual experience was unique, some connections could also be seen across participant sub-groups. Some connections were made between cohort members and others findings were specific only to that particular sub-group of participants. An example of this concept was the idea of Butler-Armstrong being inside of Escalade High School during its first two years of existence. This had a major effect on the Classes of 2010 and 2011 only which was shared in detail throughout their recollection of events during that time. Those challenges that involved feelings of displacement and isolation, fear, and uncertainty just to name a few, made it even more difficult for those groups to transition from middle school to high school and to acclimate

to the new concept of early college high schools. The classes of 2012 and 2013 never had to experience those hardships because they always had their own building. Figure 5.1 below represents the major emergent themes that derived as a result of this study, which will be further detailed in the discussion.

Table 5.1. *Major Emergent Themes*

Themes	Relationships	Personal Qualities	Academic Support	Social Support	Challenges	Institutional Commitment
ECHS College Completers	Critical relationships with adult professionals	Maturity	Taking advantage of available resources Positive Peer Support	Lack of Support	Transition to Four-Year Colleges and Universities	ECHS Leadership
ECHS Non-College Completers	Critical relationships with adult professionals	Poor Decision-making	Not taking advantage of available resources	Lack of Support Negative Peer Influences	Transition to PSE During and Post ECHS Reasons for leaving ECHS prematurely	ECHS Leadership Struggling Students COMPASS
Lack of Preparedness for PSE	N/A	Self-Efficacy Time Management	Encouragement in use of resources	Campus Supervision Student Accountability	Update of Transition Manual	Environmental Stability Extracurricular Opportunities
Preparedness for PSE	Critical relationships with adult professionals	Maturity Self-Motivation	Intense Academic Instruction Applicable Academic Instruction Tutorials	N/A	N/A	N/A

### *Discussion of the Major Emergent Themes*

Outlined in the table above were the major emergent themes of this Georgia Early College High School qualitative study. The following is a comparison of the data



vis-à-vis the literature presented in Chapter Two of this case study. I have provided a detailed explanation of each of the data that were found based upon the four research questions that were provided at the beginning of the chapter. The first groups of findings discussed are the data from the Group One, College Completers.

### *ECHS College Completer Experiences*

The corresponding research question desired to gain knowledge about the experiences of the ECHS participants who graduated from the partnering postsecondary institution. Once again, Group One participants remained at Butler-Armstrong ECHS all four years of high school. For this study, that consisted of the 11 students, eight students of whom were: Tina (2010), Autumn (2011), Kristen (2011), Tosh (2011), Charlene (2012), Walter (2012), Keion (2013), and Mikal (2013). The remaining three Group One participants are in the Non-College Completer section. The opportunity to earn college credit while in high school is a huge benefit of the early college model. Before I begin the discussion of data, I would like to provide an overview of the college credit process at Butler-Armstrong ECHS. As stated before, students at Butler-Armstrong matriculate to Henry-Hall College after their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year of high school. They spend grades 11 and 12 at Henry-Hall as full-time students.

Students on the Associate's Degree Track moved at a more accelerated pace, taking anywhere between 15 and 19 hours per semester (approximately five to seven classes); and in some cases, summer school, in order to complete their A.S. Degree within two years. During that time, Accel (the grant that pays ECHS student's tuition) was not paying for summer courses, so that expense was the responsibility of the

student's family. These students were also required to maintain a 2.5 or higher GPA. If their GPA fell below that their course load was lowered the following semester to a maximum of 12 hours, the least number of credits which could be taken to be considered a full-time student. All of this information can be found in the *Transition to College Manual*.

Any college credit earned as a high school student is commendable; however, these participants, earning anywhere between 62 and 79 college credit hours while in high school, took full advantage of the opportunity provided by the early college high school initiative to receive a college education. Core Principle Three stated: "Early College Schools and their higher education partners and community jointly develops integrated academic program as all students can earn 1 to 2 years of transferable college credit leading to college completion. (Jobs for the Future, 2009, p.19) Based upon this standard, these students fulfilled the initiatives mission. In fact, 100% of this study's participants earned college credit while in high school. The major emergent themes for the ECHS College Completers were: relationships, maturity, taking advantage of available resources, positive peer supports, lack of social support, and postsecondary transition challenges. I will begin the discussion of their data with relationships.

Relationships were at the forefront of the ECHS Completers discussions. Developing relationships is a critical component of the ECHS Initiative. McNulty and Russell (2007) reported that the 3R Framework has become a staple in educational reform. The concept of relationships could also be tied to Core Principle Four, Support Systems. Based upon the participant's data, Butler-Armstrong excelled in providing an

environment conducive to the creation of substantial teacher-student relationships. These participants reported sharing personal problems with, crying around, and also seeking advice about personal issues from the adults at the ECHS. Thompson and Ongaga (2011) stated that ECHSs are organized around themes of trust and are a created attachment that manifests as a supportive bond between teachers and students. In most cases, the relationships with these participants and the faculty and staff at Butler-Armstrong transcended the traditional teacher-student relationship as some even boasted about going shopping with faculty on the weekend, attending sporting events, and even visiting their homes at times. In general, the more interaction with faculty, the better the personal satisfaction is for students, the higher the student increases their educational aspirations, and the more positive that a student views the institution (Kuh, et al., 2006). The participants also revered their relationships with the professionals and never lost their respect for them as the adults, despite being so close to them. Important relationships with ECHS faculty and staff were only one part of the equation that yielded positive results for these ECHS participants; certain personal attributes were also present and integral to the success of the college completers.

Being an ECHS Completer was not happenstance, it took a great deal of maturity and effort in order for these individuals to obtain their A.S. Degrees. The trait of maturity, whether directly stated or simply implied, was the major effective quality exhibited by these students. One participant described a peer of hers, also an ECHS student although not in this study, who “never did anything wrong at school and always kept her grades up.” She called her the “friend to be around” because she was one of the

few people who was able to seamlessly integrate into the college environment because of her maturity. McDonald and Farrell (2006) referred to the concept of mirrored maturity, in that, by the ECHS students being subjected to the older college students who had expectations of their maturity because they were in a college setting, the ECHS students began to behave as the model. Maturity is a personal journey. I believe these skills can be nurtured, but not taught. More has to be done by the early college to prepare students for social interaction with older students, since many participants felt uncomfortable being around the older students at the college. Many times students have the skills because they interact with adults daily; they just do not have the confidence to apply it in another setting, according to one of the participants. Maturity was factor in college completer successes; however, having that quality did not mean that they did not make some of the same mistakes as the non-college completers.

The ECHS Completers, in some cases, admitted to participating in some of the same poor-decision making as the non-completers, such as skipping class, but these participants had limits and boundaries. Two participants in particular went into great detail about their approach to skipping class. They never skipped class when they had a test, during mid-terms, or when any important assignment was due. Another participant stated that there were times that she calculatingly weighed the option of missing one class for preparation for another class because she had researched what was going to happen that day. So, if they were watching a film in history class and she needed to prepare for a Chemistry exam; it was worth missing the viewing of the film to get a better grade on the Chemistry test. The McDonald and Farrell study also found that participants maintained a

commitment to their studies through self-regulation and how managing those behaviors were critical to their success (McDonald & Farrell, 2012). College completers tended to self-regulate more than their non-college completer counterparts. Another factor that separated college completers from non-college completers was taking advantage of available supports.

So far, I have discussed relationships and personal traits in relation to the college completers. Taking advantage of available supports is critical to the success of any student, especially those in as rigorous of a school as the ECHS. Taking advantage of available resources encompassed both of the major aforementioned themes of this specific participant group. Having a good rapport with adults at the high school paved a way for these students to seek those same types of relationships at the college too.

Through these participant interviews, it was revealed that the college professors at Henry-Hall College were just as supportive as the high school teachers at Butler-Armstrong. AIR and SRI (2005), through their study of the ECHS Initiative, indicated that some college professors recognized the age of the ECHS students and their abilities and adjusted their instruction in order to meet their needs. As discovered by this study, areas of support from college professors at Henry-Hall included special attention to Butler-Armstrong students, especially if they could determine that the student was putting forth an effort to do well in the class. Additionally, participants experienced mentor-like behaviors from the college professors as one participant described them as taking her under their wings. Pathways to College Network (2007) indicated that the presence of a caring teacher or school staff member who shows concern for their advancement is a

potent ingredient in nurturing their academic growth and achievement. Those same pre-established relationships with the ECHS teachers also made it possible for these participants to return to the school and seek the support of familiar teachers with their college coursework. In addition, the teachers genuinely cared about the participants, their well-being, and their successes, and they made the time for them in spite of having new cohorts of students also requiring support and attention. Therefore, while the support systems were in place, these participants utilized them, which gave them a greater opportunity for successful outcomes.

The concept of positive peer support and the role it played in their success, academically and socially, was emphasized as well. Two participants spoke about their strong peer support groups that aided in their achievement. One participant referred to her peers as her backbone and conveyed the sentiment that her wellbeing was her friends wellbeing; furthermore, if they were failing, she may not have been failing her classes, but she may have been failing as a friend. Another participant's support group made a pact to finish with an A.S. Degree. She then credited them with being positive influences. McDonald and Farrell (2012) referred to this concept as Corporate Accountability, the process by which students, without adult influence, independently and interdependently support one another through college coursework. They discovered that students acclimated better to the college rigor more smoothly when they held one another accountable for grades and course requirements. One organization declared that positive peer support is an important strategy for facilitating academic persistence and in promoting college-going for underserved students (Pathways to College Network, 2007).

The journey of an ECHS student is so unique that only those who have experienced it can truly understand. Peer relationships are critical at the adolescent stage of life that these participants were in while they were ECHS students. These relationships could have affected them negatively, but these college-completer participants made the decision to surround themselves with those who could help to support their academic and personal growth and achievement, which required a lot of maturity.

A lack of social support was a major factor for students in this group, despite their maturity. Core Principle Four of the ECHS Initiative stated that ECHSs should engage students in, “A comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion” (Jobs for the Future, 2009, p.19). Unfortunately, preparation for the social aspect of college was not executed as effectively as the academic preparation (which will be addressed later in the chapter). Many participants did not feel comfortable in the college setting. Female participants reported being harassed by older male college students and they also mentioned not knowing exactly how to handle that type of attention, although it was not brought to the attention of any adult. Other participants reported the awkward feeling of not knowing how to act around the older students. One simple example was the urge one participant had to laugh sometimes when they knew that adults would not find the situation humorous. The participants added that they also had nothing in common with the older students, which was sometimes frustrating because they were looked at like little children. These feelings of awkwardness had a negative impact on the participant’s experiences at the postsecondary institution.

Lastly, the ECHS completers expressed critical issues surrounding their transition from Henry-Hall to their four-year colleges or universities. Core Principle Five: Intermediaries and Advocacy, according to ECHSI (2008), expected that ECHSs and their partners work together to influence national and state policy. These related issues could benefit from the use of collective conversation amongst state and local university officials. Issues were related to credit acceptance, classification, and pre-requisites. These were concerns that they believed were not addressed properly by the ECHS prior to their graduating. Kazis, Vargas, and Hoffman (2004) indicated that high school counselors often lack the focus on college-related issues; likewise, even students with the most resources often find the college preparatory process daunting and confusing.

One participant knowingly attended a private school that only took half of her credits. According to her, "I think private schools want to make sure you get as much of their liberal education as possible." She also had to wait a full year and apply for the Business school that had its own separate set of requirements for entry, including a 3.7 GPA that had to be earned over the course of a year at her school, even though she already had an A.S. degree in Business and graduated as the valedictorian of her class. Another participant noted it took her institution some time to understand her credit situation. Her hurdle was that her major required pre-requisite courses to be taken within the first two-years of the program, so she had to be overridden into many of her courses because she had to take her pre-requisites simultaneously. She also felt it was difficult socially to integrate during junior year when, everyone else had formed their cliques and she was the youngest one in the class.



Classification status affected another participant who stated that they placed me her in freshman housing. They did so because she was 18 years of age but, as her mother pointed out, she was also a junior, so when she told the housing office about the program, they eventually changed her to upperclassman housing. The lamentation of one of the other participants, who had become frustrated because none the schools she applied to out- of-state wanted to accept her college credits, was powerful. She lamented about the fact that certain schools do not want to accept student's college credits when they are straight out of high school. She was also adamant about the fact that the ECHS should have explained that to her when first began school.

Another participant, who graduated with a General Studies degree from Henry-Hall because the Accel Grant would not pay for his music classes, attended an out-of-state four-year institution and essentially started all over. He had to go back and take pre-requisites that are only offered during certain times of the year. He has also had Financial Aid issues, stating, "I'm trying to get enough hours to be considered a full-time student." He continued with the sentiment that the classes he took at Henry-Hall, were "a lot of empty classes I took instead of taking the music or education classes like I needed."

The ECHS Completers data proved that certain conditions need to be present in order to be a successful early college student. According to Kazis, Vargas, and Hoffman (2004), public attention focuses more on postsecondary admission versus postsecondary success and that this particularly affects the ECHS demographic of first-generation college goers, minorities, and economically disadvantaged students. Those traits or characteristics included putting for the effort in your collegiate classes, taking advantage

of the college professors as resources, managing your time wisely, and surrounding yourself with a group of positive people to encourage you along the way. Additionally, the ECHS must do more to advise students on the potential of these occurrences, include: collaborating with postsecondary institutions to know how the early college credits will look at their school, understanding that acceptance intricacies of the private and Ivy-League schools and warning students that they may not honor all of their credits. The ECHS must also make sure that the major at the partnering postsecondary institution aligns closely with the intended major at the four-year school. Lastly the ECHS must encourage students to get their classification defined prior to enrollment at their next institutions because their classification affects other areas, such as housing. These issues with transition must be addressed by ECHSs and their officials if they numbers of college goers are going to increase. These issues are institutional and should not be the burden of isolated students upon transition.

#### *ECHS Non-College Completer Experiences*

The corresponding research question sought to gain knowledge about the experiences of the ECHS participants who did not graduate from the partnering postsecondary institution. Earning any college credit as a high school student is commendable and all of these students graduated with college credit hours from Butler-Armstrong ECHS. For this study, this category consisted of the eight students.

Again, I would like to provide a little background. Students on the Non-Degree Track took between 12 and 13 hours per semester (approximately four college classes). They too were monitored closely. Students with continuous failures at the college were

unfortunately exited out of the program because they could not take their 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade classes at the high school due to them not being offered. For many students, especially at-risk students, the small learning community serves as a place of solace amidst a world of uncertainty. One participant in this group admitted that he would have, fallen through the cracks at a traditional school, but didn't at the ECHS because everybody was one big family. The major emergent themes for the ECHS Non-College Completers were: relationships, poor decision-making, lack of support, not taking advantage of available resources, negative peer influences, and transition to postsecondary education during and post ECHS. I will begin the discussion of their data with relationships.

Just as the ECHS College Completers, these participants also developed appropriately intimate relationships with adult faculty that transcended traditional teacher-student relationships, which is an expectation of the ECHS model. In a slightly different context, these participants described the relationships with the ECHS faculty as supportive and nurturing yet firm, especially since many of them needed the additional encouragement in order to put forth their maximum efforts. Valdez (2009) in one ECHS study stated that students put forth more efforts when they know the teachers care about them. That research proved to be a fact in this study too as one participant spoke about intentionally wanting to fail so that she could get put out of Butler-Armstrong and be sent back to her home school; however, one of her ECHS teachers refused to allow her to fail. Participants in this group also expressed initial resistance to teachers who tried to encourage them to do more. The participants eventually understood what those ECHS

teachers were trying to pull out of them and developed lasting relationships with them as a result of their not giving up on them. Despite having good relationships with caring adults at the ECHS, non-college completers faced other challenges to their success, some of which were directly related to their decision-making.

Poor-decision making was a recurring theme among most of this group's participants. Those decisions sometimes had irreversible consequences that led to them having to leave the program. There were some similarities between this group and the college completers in that they both skipped classes at the college. The difference between the two groups of participants in this study was that the members of this group took the skipping and other destructive behaviors significantly further than the college completers. Woodcock and Beal's 2013 study of three ECHS graduates also revealed fallout of negative behaviors such as skipping, due to a lack of supervision at the college (which will be addressed later in the discussion). One ECHS completer witnessed non-completers skipping class every single day, playing cards, and going to the gym and playing basketball instead of going to class. A participant in this non-completer group admitted that, at first, the decision to skip class was sporadic, but quickly became the norm after a while. Skipping class also contributed to failure since students cannot perform at their highest levels when they have no idea what is happening in their college classrooms. Another participant had done so much damage to her GPA during her days of getting suspended at Butler-Armstrong that she ultimately had to leave. One of the most difficult participant's stories to hear was the young woman who became pregnant and had to leave the program. She admitted to being highly intelligent, but just made a poor

decision that impacted her entire life. Many of these self-induced obstacles could have been avoided with proper oversight of students at the college level or with some type of accountability plan.

A lack of support was revealed by the ECHS non-completers. One participant in particular lamented about how her mother did not support her and how the ECHS did not do their jobs in the teaching her mother how to support her as an ECHS student.

According to the American Institute of Research (AIR) and Stanford Region Innovations (SRI), parent engagement is a critical area of school success since parents have the greatest opportunity influence students. (AIR & SRI, 2005b) I personally conducted the parent meeting for postsecondary transition the years that I was the Graduation Coach; however, that meeting was a one-time information session. This study has revealed the need for ongoing support in that area. There does need to be more preparation for parents and subsequently, students regarding the transition to the college.

Again, connections could be made between participant categories. When it came to resources, all of the students agreed that an excessive amount of resources were available, even at the college; the difference in the groups is who chose to take advantage of the resources. In addition to the exposure to college and academic rigor, ECHSs are expected to provide the ECHS student with the skills to manage college coursework and successfully complete it (AIR & SRI, 2013). One participant in this group stated that she knew about the resources at the college, but she believed that the ECHS should have done more to encourage the use of them. That same participant suggested that not all students seek assistance and take advantage of resources; therefore, more needs to be done to

closely monitor these students' progress and even their mental wellbeing. She continued that, since the school was so small that individualized type of attention should be feasible. According to 2007-2008 data reported by AIR and SRI, 66% of students did not take advantage of the supplementary supports. This ECHS was no different from the data in AIR and SRI study, so ECHSs have to meet students where they are and ensure that the students are taking advantage of every resource that is being provided. One of the non-college completer's group members expounded upon the concept of self-educating. He admitted to being prepared academically, but not necessarily knowing the drastic difference between high school and college education. He described high school as students receiving information, asking questions, and regurgitating the information on tests; whereas, in college, the professors taught them what they want to, gave them the resources, and told them what they expected them to learn. He explained it as students having to fish for themselves. One ECHS study conducted by McDonald and Farrell (2012) referred to this theme among participants as autonomy or the concept of being able to monitor, govern, and adjust one's behaviors and study habits at the college; because, as another participant in same study noted, they were now in real college and had to be disciplined in order to be successful. College completers tended to seek the resources and use them; whereas, the non-college completers wanted more of a guided and structured approach to the use of resources, even at the college level. Again, ECHSs have to meet students where they are and offer more intentional supports for those students who are struggling with that self-regulation piece.

Conversely to the college completers, this group alluded to and blatantly

discussed being around individuals that may have adversely affected their progress, especially once enrolled at Henry-Hall College. One participant spoke about an older student who was encouraging him to skip class and use marijuana. Another participant said that she sometimes would just follow her peers, even when they were not doing what was right, because they were the cool kids. This is consistent with the results from a 2005 study conducted by Gardner and Steinberg in which they measured the risk factors of adolescents alongside peer influence (Gardner & Steinberg, 2005). The study found significant evidence that peers took more risks in the presence of peers versus when they were by themselves. ECHS students must be aware of these tendencies and adjust their mindset to do something different; likewise ECHS adults must be vigilant with detailed explanation of this concept, along with the ramifications of the decision to be negatively influenced, in order to help ECHS students make better choices.

Lastly, I will discuss the transitions during and post the ECHS. During the ECHS years these participants had difficulty adjusting to the independence required for college success and completion, in most cases. As mentioned previously in the ECHS college completer section and as supported by literature, success at the college requires a certain formula and shift in mindset in order for students to be successful.

Post ECHS, one participant did a very thorough job of explaining his feelings regarding not being able to receive a scholarship after high school and how that seemed to not be fair because of the rigor in his work versus the traditional high school student who was able to receive the HOPE Scholarship doing far less challenging work.

Unfortunately, this is the reality for students across the nation who are exposed to the

rigor of a college education while in high school. This is in part because of the ongoing quintessential culture of separating “college material” students from non-college material students, and providing each group with a different level of education (Kazis, Vargas, & Hoffman, 2004). This concept, combined with the idea of delayed gratification introduced by McDonald and Farrell (2012) for the ECHS student who chose their academic focus over traditional elements of high school such as sports and overactive social lives, can sometimes create the appearance of underperformance. For example, other participants spoke about the ruining of their GPA’s and their academic confidence while they were ECHS students which caused them to take alternate routes other than continuing and completing postsecondary education. These ideas were a great majority of the challenges experienced by this sector of students, the non-college completers. A non-college completer showed that certain concepts have to resonate with students in order to maintain in the early college: First, students have to make sure to take advantage of the small learning community and the relationships they build with the teaching faculty; second, students need to accept the fact that the college and the high school have to be approached differently. College requires far more independence and self-motivation. Lastly, the power of positive decision-making is a requirement for success. Next, I will discuss the participant’s perceptions of the lack of preparation by the ECHS for postsecondary education.

#### *ECHS Lack of Preparedness for Postsecondary Education*

The corresponding research question sought to gain knowledge about how the ECHS could have better prepared students for postsecondary education. Self-efficacy,



time management, encouragement with the use of college resources, campus supervision, and student accountability were the major emergent themes, stated or implied that the participants felt they were lacking in preparation by the ECHS for early college. This particular data set derived from conversations from all of the participants and has not been split into groups by completion status. The overarching theme from these participants was that they unequivocally believed that Butler-Armstrong did not prepare them for the social aspect of the college environment. This was exacerbated by an overabundance of freedom, immaturity, and a lack of social skills. Woodcock and Beal revealed similar trials in their 2013 study and said that many challenges were encountered during their time as EC students including a lack of time management skills once enrolled in college courses.

Regarding self-efficacy, one participant stated that he was given all of the information needed to be successful over at the college, but lacked the trait of self-efficacy that could have enabled him to do better. Time management was another common theme among all participants. The adjustment from having to attend classes all day every day at the high school and only twice a week at the college was more than many of them could handle as they struggled with how to manage all of the spare time. That combined with other distractions created a disaster for many of them.

Woodcock and Beal (2013) also revealed through their study a lack of supervision experienced by their participants on the college campus. These participant's experiences were similar as they spoke in depth about how no one from the high school was on the college campus except the Graduation Specialist, which was the position I held, and I was

not there every day. Formal attempts at the implementation of programs or additional supports by ECHSs are often not successful because of understaffing or unorganized in execution according to data retrieved by AIR and SRI (2005). One participant said he thought before he made the decisions about the fact that his momma was not there to stop him and no one else was watching, so why not go ahead and do things he should not have. Another participant spoke about an altercation on campus between a male and female student, an incident in which the police had to be called because it created such a disruption. I asked him if he thought incidents like that could be prevented and he said no, not unless someone was going back and informing on their classmates.

Students are going to do things they should not do, despite knowing what is right and what is wrong. They need more supervision on the college campus. Early college students may be in a specialized program, but they are still children. ECHS staff members must be vigilant with monitoring students, which relates to the concept of student accountability. Data from AIR and SRI (2005) also revealed that some ECHSs did not have formal programs in place for social and academic supports. Many participants in this study implied, but two participants stated directly, that there needed to be more accountability. One participant proposed to have professors at the college pair with ECHS teachers to ease the transition and to give the students an opportunity to develop relationships with them just as they had with the ECHS teachers. He also thought that would also give the college professors the opportunity to learn about the program and become invested in the mission of early college student's achievement. This, according to him, would even help with at the truancy at the college because students would be more

closely monitored by adult professionals. Both points are valid considerations for suggested areas of improvement based upon participant feedback.

Institutional trepidations. Although not a research question per se, the concept of institutional concerns was mentioned repeatedly by participants. Core Principle Five of the ECHS Model: “ECHSs and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement” (Jobs for the Future, 2009, p. 19). Some of the participants’ concerns could be addressed at the school level; however, many of them needed to be addressed at the district level and above. The concerns were regarding leadership, struggling learners, the COMPASS Exam, extracurricular offerings, and environmental stability. Regarding leadership, once the original principal retired, she was replaced by another individual during the senior year of the Legacy class which was 2009. According to participants, the new leader had a different mindset than the first principal. Participants passionately complained about her militant leadership style, apparent lack of knowledge about the ECHS Initiative, and the effect her leadership style had on the current climate of their ECHS. Carter (2012) included participant’s descriptions of their effective ECHS principals who were referred to as personable and collegial and looking at every person in the school as a partner or collaborator. This same study revealed that dominant trait of the ECHS leaders was their student centered nature. During this study participant’s described their experience as feeling as if they were not involved in their own senior year. Interestingly, another result from the ECHS principal study was that majority of the ECHS leaders were already members of the surrounding community prior to assuming

that role; therefore having a personal connection between them, the ECHS and the community (Carter, 2012). The district had the opportunity to promote the assistant principal from within who already had significant ties to this study's school site community, but instead replaced him too, causing a complete change in administration. All schools are not created equal therefore district leaders must select an appropriate person who can seamlessly transition into the ECHS organization. For early colleges, that person has been: nurturing, innovative, a shared leader, and most importantly, well versed in early college high school programs, practices, and expectations. District leaders should also seek sustain stability. Research suggests that trust is an element of a culture's organization that is critical and often overlooked (Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2008). Transiency in leadership in a small learning community can be detrimental to multiple stakeholders, simultaneously because the trust has to be developed with the new leader which can take time. The need for targeted early college training is necessary for all early college principals as this is a highly specialized environment requiring a certain set of skills. All principals are not created equal and should not be treated as such when it comes to placement in ECHSs.

One struggling learner expressed the feeling of being pushed aside when she was no longer meeting academic goals. Various levels of support are needed for students who may struggle more than others as a major aim of the ECHS is to establish an environment where all students are expected to go to college (AIR & SRI, 2013). Two more participants expressed the troubles they had passing the COMPASS college entrance exam and how that affected their status in the program. There needs to be a contingency

plan in place for students who are unable to be successful on the COMPASS Exam. The first-year of Butler-Armstrong's students attending the college, they were able to return to the school to take a couple of classes, but the school district subsequently discontinued transportation, so that was no longer an option. Additionally, there were not enough personnel at the ECHS to teach students from the college, nor enough room to house a large number of them.

The lack of extracurricular offerings was a major concern brought out by participants because they directly related the lack of these offerings to key elements of their personal growth, including: socialization skills and collaboration abilities. A 2010 research study conducted by the SERVE Center in North Carolina surveyed ECHS students, 27% of whom identified a lack of extracurricular activities for one of most important reasons students left the ECHS. Participants in that study also noted that they missed the traditional high school experience, which included the opportunity to participate in activities such as sports and band. Participants in this ECHS study conveyed that the lack of opportunities to interact with larger groups of people and under different circumstances prohibited their ability to grow socially. The aforementioned study also discovered that ECHS can sometimes be too small and hence become a deterrent for some students. School districts may be limited in how many courses can be offered at small schools because they only earn a certain number of teachers per pupil. Teachers must then be allocated towards core content areas for the most part; however, electives such as band, orchestra, and chorus, do encourage teamwork and social interaction in order to have an effective product. The implementation of these programs,

even as extracurricular activities, might be something early colleges might do as a consideration. Also, implementing early colleges as a part of a larger school, or the school-with-a-school model, could address many of these concerns. Several schools in Georgia currently practice this. Their students get the best of both worlds with an early college cohort, but in a traditional school setting, with all of the staff, facilities, and activities at their disposal. While participation in sports may not be an option, more could be done to increase student participation recreationally, even if they do not compete against other schools. This may substantially increase student morale.

Environment stability was the last thing regarding institutional concerns that the students expressed and this mainly stemmed from the participants who had to experience being in another schools building for the first two years of Butler-Armstrong's existence. Other ECHS studies have spoken about the "power of place" and how that affects student success (Hoffman & Webb, 2010). Some participants shared horror stories regarding their experiences and how that affected their classmates and even the school enrollment that first year. Placing students within another school setting was not the best decision to make, especially when the population of students was so vastly different. Even if school leaders did their best to separate the students, incidents have the ability to and likelihood of occurring. School districts should consider not doing things like that until they can afford to have all schools in their separate locations.

#### *ECHS Preparedness for Postsecondary Education*

The overarching research question desired to gain knowledge about how the participants believed that the ECHS prepared them for postsecondary education. There

was an undeniable difference in student perceptions of academic versus social preparation at Butler-Armstrong ECHS. These participants emphatically believed that Butler-Armstrong did its job in preparing them for college academic work. Additional responses could be directly related to two of the three components of the 3R Framework, Rigor and Relevance. Most of the students were taught rigor as a part of the vocabulary at Butler-Armstrong. They not only knew what it meant; but more importantly, they knew what it felt like. As stated previously, “rigor implies a challenging academic program and experience that prepares all students for college, work, and citizenship.” (Ongaga, 2010, p. 376) The concept of rigor was definitely prevalent at Butler-Armstrong. While the overall sentiment of Butler-Armstrong’s academic was that it was rigorous, one class stood out. Physics was the foremost example of rigor. That course summed up the point of rigor, preparing students for the next level. The content knowledge is only one part of the overall impact of a teacher on a student. It is the permanent instillation of striving for excellence that means more. Rigor cannot exist without support, and sometimes teachers in early colleges have to be willing to deviate from the plan in order to get the maximum results from their students. The concept of pushing students past their educational limits is another lesson, especially those students who are rarely challenged. This is more important at this school because of their participation in college classes. A personal observation that I made with her class specifically, was that students wanted to work for her; often at the expense of other courses. That is just how important she made her class to them. That is also something that all teachers should be able to do, impress the importance of their content and keeping students continuously engaged so they want to

give the effort. Lastly, ensuring that all early college teachers are teaching to this level is important. That may require professional development in the 3R Framework and Common Instructional Strategies that can be taught by other teachers, like TB, who were effective with it.

Relevance is the second “R” in the 3R Framework. The ability to engage with students on their level is extremely important, especially in an environment where relationships are so critical. One professor was credited with, “Not speaking at you, but to you,” while other students recognized him being, “Passionate” about his craft. This English classroom experience included the use of, “Music and things from other classes” to “Help us with reading comprehension.” These songs were, “Current or past songs that were still relevant to our culture.” Participants credited him with taking the time to learn the needs of his students. I had the personal opportunity to observe this teacher during my time and it was a magnificent experience. He taught critical thinking which is very important in education and life.

Providing relevant curriculum to students increases engagement and makes the idea of learning difficult tasks, such as critical thinking and analysis, easier, when done correctly. It also strengthens the teacher-student relationships because the students feel the teacher cares enough about them to make learning fun for them. This is not done with ease, especially with teachers of all ages. One participant stated that teachers at Butler-Armstrong were relatively young. For older teachers, some professional development may be needed in order to increase the use of relevant material within early college classroom settings.



Participants raved about the availability of professors at Butler-Armstrong for course support. Participants were even able to return to the high school, while they were students at the college, to get support. Research indicated that 89% of ECHSs reported on a survey that they provided academic support in the areas of literacy and mathematics (AIR & SRI, 2005a). These two content areas are where the participants indicated they were most comfortable in terms of college coursework.

Henry-Hall offered an array of various support opportunities. This site has experienced several transitions over the years in terms of academic support. Initially students were required to attend a study hall. Subsequently, students were required to attend the Learning Center on the college campus for a certain number of hours per week. Now, alumni are being hired using grant monies to tutor current students according to the EC Program Director who works at the partnering institution. Additionally, students felt supported by the high school, even while taking the college classes. There were implied logistical issues with the students coming to the school, unbeknownst to the students. They have stated that they felt welcomed and that is definitely positive; however, there is a limited amount of personnel in a school that size which places a strain on the teachers when there is a high volume of students needing support. One suggestion for the school would be to assign teachers tutorial shifts by content area, perhaps during their planning periods, maybe a couple of times a week specifically for the college students. Classrooms cannot be disturbed during the day for the college students because that affects the current student's learning. The same should be done after school since tutorial is offered to all students. One teacher per content area could be assigned to support the college

students and they can rotate. Another suggestion is that Butler-Armstrong create a Work Study class and have qualifying students, serve as tutors on more of a frequent basis. They would get a grade and, while it would not be paid position, it would resemble an internship. Finally, it would be advantageous to do more to encourage the use of on-campus resources at the college. The early college students who had transitioned had a multitude of resources at the college, including Math and Writing Labs and a Learning Center. Their comfort zone may have resided at Butler-Armstrong, but using those resources should be a part of the college experience, and should therefore be utilized.

### *Implications*

With little research done in the area of early college high schools, especially in Georgia, this study provides a plethora of implications for early college leaders, school districts, and stakeholders, more specifically, ECHS students and families.

#### *Early College Leaders*

This research provided valuable information for early college leaders, based on the perceptions of the participants. Early college leaders can use this data to make productive planning decisions to address the deficiencies that were uncovered at this site.

First, early college leaders must provide an ongoing comprehensive transition program for parents and students. This program should address the following: what is to be expected at the college academically; what is to be expected at the early college socially; the expectation of students on the college campus; a list of academic resources for students at the college; and a thorough review of the college grading systems, including how credits work and the importance of maintaining the GPA.

Second, early college leaders must work with the college administrators, faculty, and staff to prepare them for the presence of early college students on the college campus. This involves collaboration with teaching staff and notification to students about the presence of minors on the college campus. Collaboration with teaching staff should be beneficial with ensuring early college students are prepared for the standards of the college, prior to taking classes. Collaboration should also identify “early-college friendly teachers” who would be willing to take attendance and report any suspicious behaviors or changes in the behaviors of ECHS students.

Third, early college leaders must actively engage the college population into the high school environment, as much as possible. This could include requiring their participation in at least one extracurricular activity at the school and the organization of a formal peer-tutoring program. Additionally, ECHS faculty can have assigned duty to serve students from the college at designated times during the day. It was also be beneficial to have early college faculty frequent the college campus at least one day each week just to check-in with students and to allow them to see a familiar face.

Fourth, early college leaders must provide adequate supervision on the college campus. Ideally, someone should be at the college full-time that works for Emerson County, to serve the needs of those students and to keep them informed about the happenings at the high school of which they are still part. A designated area for the early college students, if space permits, would be ideal, and would set boundaries for students while on the college campus.

Fifth, early college leaders should ensure that students are provided with a vast

array of extracurricular activities, including physical outlets, and Fine Arts related programs. These types of activities increase socialization skills and create more well-rounded students. It also gives ECHS students a break from the monotony of a strictly academic school environment.

Lastly, and most important, early college leaders must hire staff who are willing to put forth maximum effort to afford students the aforementioned opportunities. ECHS leaders should also instill in faculty and staff the blue print of the Initiative, which includes familiarity and comfortability with: The Five Core Principles of the Early College Initiative, the 3R Framework, and the Six Common Instructional practices.

#### *District Leaders*

This research also provided valuable information for district-level leaders District level leaders can use this data to make productive planning decisions to address the deficiencies that were uncovered at this site. First, district level leaders must be prepared when taking on the responsibility of opening a new school and developing new programs. Adequate and separate facilities should be the number one priority of district leaders.

Second, district level leaders must be careful when assigning principals to school buildings, especially specialized schools like early college high schools. All schools are not created equal; therefore, district leaders must select the appropriate person who is the right fit for the organization. For early colleges, that person should be: nurturing, innovative, a shared leader, and most importantly, well versed in early college high school programs, practices, and expectations. District leaders should also seek to sustain stability. Transiency in leadership in a small learning community can be detrimental to

multiple stakeholders simultaneously.

### *Stakeholders*

This research also provided rich information for stakeholders, more specifically, students and parents. Stakeholders can use this data to make consideration and acceptance decisions.

*Students.* This is one of the most important decisions that a student can make in their young lives. Attending an early college high school comes with a set of responsibilities that can sometimes transcend a student's numerical age. Understanding the specifics should help students to make a sounder decision. Students only have one opportunity to attend high school. It is important that students consider all of their options when making the decision to attend an early college versus a traditional high school. Here are some things that students should ask themselves:

- 1) Do I want to attend a small learning community (school with under 500 students)?
- 2) Do I want to play sports (e.g. basketball, football, cheerleading, marching band, etc.?)
- 3) Am I self-directed (meaning will I take ownership of my learning by seeking help when needed)?
- 4) Am I a hard worker?
- 5) How well do I handle stress?
- 6) Am I mature enough to be on a college campus after the 10<sup>th</sup> grade?

If a student's responses to these questions conflict with the nature of the program, that student should probably attend a traditional high school. Students who remain

despite a contradiction in values, may develop social, academic, and emotional issues that could impede their learning.

*Parents.* The decision for a parent to allow their child to attend an ECHS is one of the most important decisions that a parent can make due to all of the implications associated with the choice. Attending an early college high school comes with a set of responsibilities that can sometimes transcend a student's numerical age. It also comes with a set of responsibilities for the parent. After the first two years students transition from a child-centered environment into an adult-centered environment which exposes them to certain things prematurely. Your child will not be the same person that he/she was when entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade. They will not even be the same person that they would be during that same year if they were in a traditional school. Here are some things that parents should ask themselves:

- 1) Is my child a social butterfly? Does he have or desire lots of friends?
- 2) Is my child active in sports (e.g. basketball, football, cheerleading, marching band, etc.)? If so, what arrangements are being made to continue those activities in the absence of their availability at the early college?
- 3) Is my child self-directed (meaning will he/she take ownership of their learning by seeking help when needed)?
- 4) Is my child a hard worker?
- 5) How well does my child handle stress?
- 6) Is my child mature enough to be on a college campus after the 10<sup>th</sup> grade?

Parents and students should discuss the answers to these questions in depth; if

there is any conflict with the answers and the nature of the program, the child should probably attend a traditional high school. Students, who remain despite a contradiction in values, may develop social, academic, and emotional issues that could impede their learning.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

This research is important for an understanding of the perceptions of students who have attended one early college high school in Georgia. These results are in no way a generalization of all early college high schools because multiple variables in the model make that impossible; additionally, the fundamental goal of qualitative studies is not to generalize, but to provide insight into an entity (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Having said that, the early college community could seek to learn more information on former students, post ECHS graduation. Following up with former ECHS students to see if they continued with postsecondary education could be valuable to early college intermediaries. I believe that early colleges could also seek to learn more about the implementation of the Common Instructional Practices and 3RFramework and the impact of those strategies have on student achievement. Early colleges could also seek to learn more about the effects of positive relationships between faculty and students. Lastly, ECHSs could learn more about the correlation between ECHS leader's styles and school climate.

### *My Reflections*

This study meant a lot to me in terms of professional growth and development. It also meant a lot to me personally because I truly care about the participants. While I am

no longer an ECHS employee, that initiative is very close to my heart. I believe in its mission of providing deserving at-risk youth with access to college education, especially in a world where the prices of college are skyrocketing. Through the participant interviews and subsequent writing and review of the narratives, I was able to see where I made mistakes as a professional with these participants and other students. Some of their responses were extremely difficult to hear because I truly believed that I had done my due diligence to do the following: make them aware of their resources and encourage their use; provide outlets for students that mirrored traditional schools; and put together a comprehensive transition manual to address anything that could possibly arise. I had no idea that the document needed to include acclimating socially to the college environment. Because of the relationships that my peers and I developed with the students, I took for granted their ability to be able to immerse into an adult environment because they interacted so well with us. In an ideal world, I would rewind the hands of time and go back to correct my shortcomings; however, that is not possible. My goal now is to take the information I have learned and provide it to ECHS leaders so that they can be aware of the challenges facing ECHS students on a daily basis in order to make strides to prevent those things from occurring in the future. I also plan to share this information with the current principal of Butler-Armstrong ECHS as well as the Butler-Armstrong program director who still works at Henry-Hall College. Working at an ECHS was a learning experience for me and my faculty peers. The concept is still constantly evolving because of the uniqueness of student needs and the changes in the availability of resources. While the goal of this research was not to generalize the findings across all



ECHSs, my hope is that some transferability exists for other ECHSs.

### *Conclusion*

The purpose of the study was to acquire former student's perceptions of their experiences at one Georgia Early College High School, Butler-Armstrong. After conducting the interviews, reviewing field notes, and other documentation outlined earlier, I was able to decipher their views and substantiate them based upon the selected literature review, which was also concurrent with the findings of this study. I am confident that accomplished the goal of the conducting the study as outlined in my research design and that the findings are consistent with the selected research design and original interview protocol.

Based upon the data, I have concluded that 100% of the participants in this study believed that Butler-Armstrong ECHS prepared them academically for their transition into postsecondary education; undesirably, I concluded with the same certainty, that 100% of participants believed that they were not prepared socially by Butler-Armstrong ECHS for the transition into postsecondary education. Now that this study has concluded, I believe that ECHS and district leaders will know what needs to be done in order to serve future ECHS students more effectively. I also believe that, as a result of this study, other stakeholders such as potential parents and students will be able to make an informed decision regarding the student's appropriate fit for a school such as this one. The full narratives will be extremely helpful in providing any extra context and important details to interested parties as well. Ultimately, I sought to improve conditions for current and future ECHS students; it is my belief that this study is a step towards that direction.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Interview Protocol

Project: *Alumni Perceptions of the Georgia Early College High School Experience*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_:\_\_\_\_\_ am/pm

Interviewer: Tequila Tranise Morgan

Participant(s): 2010-1, 2010-2, 2010-3, 2010-4, 2010-5, 2011-1, 2011-2, 2011-3, 2011-4, 2011-5, 2011-6, 2012-1, 2012-2, 2013-1, 2013-2, 2013-3

I will begin with reintroductions and an explanation of the study. I will also explain and provide a copy of the Five Core Principles of the ECHS Initiative. Then, I will review the informed consent form with the participants. Afterwards, I will ensure that any and all questions are answered and then ask the participants to examine and sign the paperwork. Once the forms are signed, I will begin the audio recording with two separate devices in case there is a technical difficulty. I will use a hand held recorder as well as my iPhone, iTalk app. The interview should last approximately 1 hour. I will follow a general protocol for questioning, but because the questions will be open-ended, some questions may adjust depending on the participant response. Please see questions below. The following are preliminary questions. Please respond as accurately as possible.

- ❖ Graduation Year or Year Leaving School
- ❖ First Generation College Goer Status
- ❖ Free/Reduce Lunch Status while in High School
- ❖ Gender
- ❖ Ethnicity
- ❖ Completion of the Program Status

❖ College Credits completed while in program

The following are the major study questions. Please provide as much detail as possible.

- 1) Were you ever made aware of the Five Core Principles of the Early College Initiative prior to today?
- 2) Tell me about your experience as an ECHS student.
- 3) Please explain the support you received academically from the ECHS faculty and staff.
  - a. If you remained in the program long enough to enter the collegiate phase, were you prepared academically for the college coursework? Please explain.
  - b. Can you tell me about a personal academic experience?
- 4) Please explain the personal/social support you received from the ECHS faculty and staff.
  - a. If you remained in the program long enough to enter the collegiate phase, were you prepared socially for the college environment? Please explain.
  - b. Can you tell me about a personal social experience?
- 5) What support systems (if any) were in place at the college to support you in your journey?
  - a. How effective was the college liaison in supporting your needs at the partnering institution?
- 6) What were some of the challenges that you experienced or witnessed as an ECHS student?
- 7) How did your peers influence your experience as an ECHS student?
- 8) What are some ways in which the early college program could have better served you (suggested areas of improvement)?
- 9) Are there any memorable faculty/staff members that helped make your experience as an early college student better? If so, who? Please share a story.
- 10) What have you been doing since leaving the ECHS?

- 11) If college, did you experience any roadblocks, which could be attributed to your being an Early College student, in your transition to postsecondary education (college)?
- 12) Describe what impact (if any) the ECHS had on your life.
- 13) If you could make the decision again, would you have chosen to attend this school? Why or why not?
- 14) In hindsight, what do you think about earning college credits while still in high school?

After thanking the participant for their feedback, I will then turn off both recording devices and reiterate my steps to protect the participant's privacy, as well as their rights as a participant. I will also ensure that the participants have my contact information in case they have additional questions/concerns.

## Appendix B

## Research Questions and Relationship to Core Principles

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RELATED CORE PRINCIPLES
How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia perceive that the ECHS prepared them for postsecondary education?	Core Principle Three: College Credits Core Principle Four: Student Support Systems
How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who have completed postsecondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?	Core Principle One: Student Selection Core Principle Two: College and Community Partners Core Principle Three: College Credits Core Principle Four: Student Support Systems
How do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia who did not complete postsecondary education describe their experiences in the initiative?	Core Principle One: Student Selection Core Principle Two: College and Community Partners Core Principle Three: College Credits Core Principle Four: Student Support Systems
In what ways do alumni of one ECHS in Georgia believe that the ECHS could have better prepared students for postsecondary education?	Core Principle Two: College and Community Partners Core Principle Four: Student Support Systems

## Appendix C

### Initial Interest Survey

*Project: Alumni Perceptions of the Georgia Early College High School Experience*

The following Interest Survey will be sent in a link to potential participants via email, once the participants are identified.

1. Would you be willing to participate in research conducted by Tequila Tranise Morgan on the Early College High School Initiative?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  
2. If your answer to question #1 was “Yes”, please enter the following information:
  - ☐ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Address: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ☐ Best contact number: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. Describe your highest level of education
  - ☐ HS diploma
  - ☐ Some College
  - ☐ Associate’s Degree
  - ☐ Bachelor’s Degree
  - ☐ Master’s Degree or higher
  
4. Did you complete the ECHS Program?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  
5. What was your graduation year? 20\_\_\_\_ (If you left the school before graduation, please enter the year you should have graduated.)
  
6. Do you currently reside in the Atlanta area?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  
7. If your answer to question # 5 is “No”, in what city and state do you reside?  
 \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. What is your best availability to participate in a face to face interview? If you are unable to participate face to face, what time can you participate in a virtual interview?
  - ☐ Weekdays after 4 p. m.
  - ☐ Saturday morning between 9:00 a. m. and 12:00 p. m.
  - ☐ Saturday afternoon between 1:00 p. m. and 5:00 p. m.



## Appendix D

### Letter of Informed Consent

July 2015

#### DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

My name is Tequila Tranise Morgan and I am a doctoral student at Georgia Southern University. I am a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree in the Educational Leadership: Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development. I am conducting this study to research the effectiveness of the Early College High School Model as perceived by former students.

This seeks to provide insight on the experiences of some of the first alumni of Georgia's Early College High School Initiative. Participation in this research will include voluntary participation in an interview conducted by Tequila Tranise Morgan. The interview questions were created specifically for this study and its purpose and they are based upon the Five Early College High School Core Principles: (1) Student Selection, (2) College and Community Partners, (3) College Credits, (4) Support Systems, and (5) Intermediaries and Advocacy.

This study will involve minimal to no risks. Possible minimal risks may include: mental stress or emotional trauma due to recall of your time as an EC student.

A review of your journey, through a revelation of the perceived challenges and strengths of the ECHS program, will hopefully inspire Early College leaders to revisit policies, procedures, strategies, and practices to help increase the probability of student satisfaction and accomplishment. Additionally, this information can help current students and parents of ECHS students in Georgia know what to expect after enrollment in the program. District leaders can use the data from this study to gauge the effectiveness of their programs. The University System of Georgia organization may especially benefit from this study because they can see EC experiences were like for students in Georgia. This study of the ECHS Alumni perspective may help to identify which organizational processes can be altered to improve the experiences of students.

Possible benefits for the participants of this project could be to inspire positive adjustments to Early College High School (ECHS) common practices. You all have built a legacy of excellence that has continued over the years. Through your disclosure, ECHSs, especially start-ups, can use this critical data to determine appropriate supports for their students and the barriers that could impede student growth and achievement. In addition, current Early College personnel will be able to assess the long-term effects of the initiative on its Alumni. Your name and all other personally identifiable information will be kept confidential. Additionally, neither the school name nor the School District's name will be included in the final report.

I will be the only person with access to your personal information. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. I will be utilizing a transcription service to transcribe the audio data. This service will be signing a confidentiality agreement as well. Deidentified or coded data from this study may be placed in a publically available

repository for study validation and further research. You will not be identified by name in the data set or any reports using information obtained from this study, and your confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.”

Participants will be asked to partake in one interview. This interview should last approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes. If a follow-up interview is necessary, the participant will be notified.

As a participant, you have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher or the researcher’s faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843.

There will be no compensation for participation in this study.

Your participation in this project is strictly voluntary, but greatly appreciated. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide that you will not participate in this research project. If you decide to participate in this project, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. You have the right to inspect any instrument or materials related to the proposal. Your request will be honored within a reasonable period after the request is received.

*Title of Project: The Road Less Traveled: Alumni Perceptions of the Georgia ECHS Experience*

*Researcher’s Name: Tequila Tranise Morgan*

*Researcher’s Phone Number: (770) 312-2380*

*Researcher’s Email Address: TequilaTMorgan @comcast.net*

*Institutional Contact’s Name: Dr. Daniel Calhoun, Dissertation Chair*

*Institutional Contact’s Affiliation: Georgia Southern University*

*Institutional Contact’s Phone number: (912) 478-1428*

*Institutional Contact’s Email address: dwcalhoun@georgiasouthern.edu*

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

Please sign below acknowledging your consent to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/20\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant’s Name (please print) Participant’s Signature Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/20\_\_\_\_\_  
Principle Investigator’s Signature Date

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H16005.

## Appendix E


## Selection Criteria



## BUTLER-ARMSTRONG EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL



### STUDENT SELECTION CRITERIA

- First Generation college attendees
- Eligible for free or reduced lunch (preferred)
- Application
- Letter of Interest
- Review of Transcript, Discipline, Attendance Records  
And Test Scores
- Teacher/Counselor Recommendation
- Student/Parent Interview
- Must be legal resident of the United States and resident  
of 

## Appendix F

## Application for Enrollment into Selected Site

**BUTLER-ARMSTRONG EARLY COLLEGE**

Only the parents of those students selected to attend the Butler-Armstrong Early College Academy will be notified of acceptance. The completed application should be returned to the **Counseling Office of the middle school** where your child is presently enrolled. Private and home-schooled applicants may return completed applications and required documents directly to....

## Application for 2008-2009 Academic Year

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Gender ☐ Male ☐ Female

(Last) (First) (MI)

Student Number Home Phone Work/Cell Phone

E-Mail Address:

(It is very important that we have this information as this is our primary means of communication with students and parents)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Apt. # \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date:        /        /               Birthplace: \_\_\_\_\_  
               Month    Day    Year

Name			Address			Home Phone			Occupation								
Father																	
Mother																	
Adult other than parent																	
Student lives with: <input type="checkbox"/> Both Parents <input type="checkbox"/> Father <input type="checkbox"/> Mother <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____																	
Current Middle School _____						Dates Attended: _____											
Home High School: _____																	
Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____																	
Is the student currently receiving English Language Learner (ELL) Services? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes																	
Does the student have an IEP? <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes    For which services? _____																	
Does the student receive free or reduced price lunch?    Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>																	
This student has been enrolled in any public school for (check one box in each column):  <div> <div>USA</div> <div>GEORGIA</div> <div>DEKALB COUNTY</div> </div>						College Attendance Information  Does anyone in your immediate family (mother, father, sister, brother) have a 4 year college degree? Please check all that apply.											
						Less than 12 months						<input type="checkbox"/>					
						One full school year						<input type="checkbox"/>					
Two or more school years						<input type="checkbox"/>											
						Mother <input type="checkbox"/>											
						Father <input type="checkbox"/>											

		Sister <input type="checkbox"/>
		Brother <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>ETHNIC / RACE DATA</b> Confidential information needed for Federal/State reports. Please Check as appropriate for student		
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<input type="checkbox"/>	Does anyone with whom you live (other than immediate family) have a 4-year college degree? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship: _____ Will you be the first in your family to obtain a college degree? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Asian/Pacific Islander	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Black (not Hispanic)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Hispanic	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Mixed Race	<input type="checkbox"/>	
White (not Hispanic)	<input type="checkbox"/>	

I \_\_\_\_\_ understand that if my son/daughter is accepted into the SCHOOL NAME, I will comply with all rules, regulations, attendance and academic requirements that have been established for admission.

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

## IRB Approval

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs		
<b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

**To:** Tequila Morgan

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Initial Approval Date:** 07/27/2015

**Expiration Date:** 06/30/2016

**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research -  
**Expedited**

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H16005** and titled "**The Road Less Traveled: Alumni Perceptions of the Georgia Early College High School Experience**" it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of **25** subjects.

***Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research. – Description: This study will investigate the perceptions of the Early College High School experience.***

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol: you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

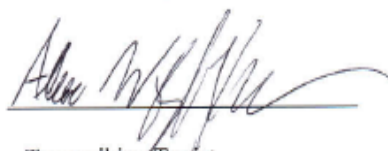
Sincerely,

  
Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer

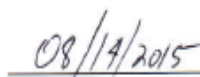
## Appendix H

## Transcriber's Pledge of Confidentiality

As a transcribing typist of this research project, I understand that I will be hearing audio recordings of confidential interviews. The information on these recordings has been revealed by research participants who participated in this project on good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information on these tapes with anyone except the primary researcher of this project. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards, and I pledge not to do so.



Transcribing Typist



Date

## Appendix I

### Memorandum of Understanding

#### **GEORGIA'S EARLY COLLEGE INITIATIVE INTERMEDIARY AGREEMENT**

The University System of Georgia Foundation, Inc. (the "Intermediary") is pleased to award to **Emerson County School District**, as fiscal agent for the Early College partnership between **Emerson County School District** and **Henry-Hall College** the amount of **\$10,000** for the period of **September 2009 through June 30, 2010**. The purpose of the grant is to continue supporting the implementation of **Butler-Armstrong Early College High School**. Specifically, **Emerson County School District** and **Henry-Hall College** (collectively the "Grantee") have executed a Memorandum of Understanding providing for the development and implementation of **Emerson County School District at 1234 Travis Way**.

**By accepting the grant award, the Grantee agrees to:**

1. Participate fully in all local, state, and national evaluations, including, but not limited to, providing samples of student work and teacher assignments (with appropriate protections and assurances to the students and teachers) of the Early College initiative conducted by the Intermediary and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation ("Gates Foundation"), which is a funding organization for the Early College initiative.
2. Participate in the Early College High School Student Information System (SIS), funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by Jobs for the Future. A major goal of the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) is to demonstrate that new school designs, organization and supports will increase significantly students' success in secondary and postsecondary education. Grantee will provide school and student level records for the USG and the SIS, consistent with federal state, and local regulations, including student characteristics and performance indicators. USG and SIS will provide the early college high school, ECHSI funders and the ECHSI evaluators with ongoing analyses of student progress toward the goals of the ECHSI.
3. Participate in professional development training, coaching, workshops, and conferences provided by the Intermediary.
4. Maintain adequate student records, make those records available to the Intermediary, permit the Intermediary to conduct routine site visits to observe Grantee's Early College classrooms and administrative functions and hold discussions with Early College personnel.
5. Maintain an Early College website, which includes a link to the website for the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia ("BOR"). Grantee hereby authorizes the Intermediary, the BOR and the Gates Foundation (for the National Early College High School Initiative website) permission to post information about Grantee's Early College on their websites, including a link to Grantee's Early College website.



6. Notify the Intermediary in advance of all press releases generated by the Grantee relating to the Early College initiative and agree to submit all such press releases to the Intermediary, for approval, 48 hours in advance of release date.
7. Maintain adequate books, records, documents and other evidence pertaining to the costs and expenses of this grant (collectively the "Records") to the extent and in such detail as will properly reflect all expenditures made under this grant. Grantee agrees to make available at all reasonable times during the period of this grant and for three (3) years thereafter any of the Records for inspection or audit by any authorized representative of Intermediary. Grantee shall permit the Intermediary to monitor and conduct an evaluation of operations under this grant, which may include a visit by the Intermediary staff to observe Grantee's Early College and a discussion of the program with Grantee's Early College staff.
8. Any expenses to be funded out of the Grantee's budget item for training and travel that are not associated with Early College must be pre-approved by the Intermediary.
9. Agree to use grant funds only for allowable expenditures as defined below.
10. Notify the Intermediary immediately of any leadership changes in Grantee's Early College program.
11. Include a representative of Intermediary (to be chosen by Intermediary) as a member of Grantee's Early College Advisory Council.

**Continuation of grant funding is contingent upon:**

1. Maintaining the target population of the Early College Initiative, as outlined in the letter of intent and Implementation Plan.
2. Adhering to the proposed design and activities as approved in the established MOU. Changes to the MOU and to the Implementation Plan, must be approved by the Intermediary in advance.
3. Adherence to deadlines and benchmarks agreed upon in the implementation plan and satisfactory performance and budget reports, as set forth in the Performance and Budget Reporting section below.
4. Continued participation, communication and collaboration with statewide intermediary to provide continued effective data collection, program evaluation and advocacy efforts aligned with the goals of the statewide and national Early College High School Initiative.
5. The continuation of the collaboration between **Emerson County School District** and **Henry-Hall College** under the MOU.

### **Performance and Budget Reporting**

The Grantee is required to submit written performance reports to the Intermediary. The written reports will include performance information regarding students, administrative operations, and the grant budget. The guidelines for the reports, along with financial reporting worksheets, will be distributed to the Grantee from the Intermediary.

#### **Reporting Schedule**

Principal and Budget Report due:

*November 2, 2009*

Updated Principal Reports due:

*February 1, 2010*

Principal Report due:

*June 30, 2010*

### **Grant Payments**

These grant funds will be disbursed once. If the office is able to acquire additional funds they will be awarded provided that the Grantee meets the contingencies of the award as described below. Any portion of the grant funds unexpended or uncommitted at the end of the grant period must be returned to the Intermediary no later than 45 days after the end of the grant period. Additionally, should the Grantee choose to discontinue involvement with the Early College Initiative at any time during the grant period all unexpended or uncommitted grant funds must be returned to the Intermediary within 45 days of Grantee's withdrawal from the Early College Initiative.

<b>Payment Amount</b>	<b>Payment Date</b>	<b>Contingency</b>
\$10,000	September 30, 2009	Submission and approval of July 30 <sup>th</sup> Principal Report and return of signed contract

#### **Allowable Expenditures:**

- All costs related to attendance at Early College conferences, meetings and workshops
- Stipends for Early College faculty and staff for staff development and training and other grant-related purposes
- Items related to a plan of sustainability
- Approved Professional development costs
- All costs related to becoming a statewide and national Early College demonstration site

#### **Unallowable Expenditures:**

- Capital costs
- Permanent staff positions

- Any activities that can be construed as lobbying
- Any activities that include payment to an elected official (e.g., conference participation, meals, travel, etc.)

#### **Compliance Statement**

Grantee agrees to comply with the requirements of the Intermediary as described in this Agreement. The Grantee agrees that the Intermediary reserves the right to cancel this Agreement and discontinue funding on written notice to the Grantee if the Grantee does not comply with the terms of this Agreement, including, but not limited to making satisfactory progress, and submitting satisfactory performance and budget reports by the deadlines set forth above. If the Intermediary cancels this Agreement and discontinues funding for any reason, the Grantee agrees to return any unspent and uncommitted grant funds previously distributed by the Intermediary.

#### **Signatures**

This agreement must be signed by the Superintendent of the school district and the President of the Postsecondary Institution.

By signing below, the parties affirm that they have read and agree to all terms and conditions set forth in this Agreement.

**Emerson County School District**

**Henry-Hall College**

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Superintendent

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
President

FEIN \_\_\_\_\_

FEIN \_\_\_\_\_

**Acknowledged and Accepted on behalf of the  
University System of Georgia Foundation, Inc.**

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Intermediary

## Appendix J

### *The Chimere Experience: Redemption*

Chimere interviewed Saturday, August 8, 2015 at 11:30 a. m.

*She arrived early for her interview that beautiful Saturday morning! I had not seen her since she graduated from high school. I actually thought we said 11:30 a. m., but she said I told her 11:00 a. m., so unfortunately when she arrived, I had to delay her for a short time while I made myself presentable. Chimere was very patient and understanding with me. She wore a pair of jeans with slits down the legs, a black top, and black tennis shoes.*

Here is Chimere's story...

Well, like I said, my mom made me attend Butler-Armstrong HS. Initially I didn't want to do it. All of the people that I went to elementary and middle school with, were all gonna go to the same high school - Druid Hills, without me. So of course you know, as a kid, I wanted to stay with my friends. I didn't know what Butler-Armstrong was about, I didn't know the people, and I just, didn't want to do it. I realize that may sound as if I was just being difficult, but I wasn't. I wasn't even necessarily being rebellious against my mom; but I was a kid, and I wanted to be with my friends.

Once I actually got into the program, I said, "Okay. You know, this is not that bad." But then it became a challenge, you know. The work was harder, the workload was larger, and the professors were a little bit tougher than what I was used to. So I got to the point, silly me, where I wanted to flunk out. I mean, I wanted to flunk out so bad, especially in Professor G's Math class. I tried my hardest but he was really tough. On top

of everything that I was going through, adjusting to high school and being away from all of my friends, I'm struggling in Professor G's Math class too!

We had to adapt to this one little hallway at Escalade High School, another school in Emerson, County. It was funny, we had maybe six classrooms. It was different. Our little group of 100 students felt really, really sheltered and secluded. So now, not only were we adapting to Butler-Armstrong as first year high school students, we had to adapt to Escalade as well.

During that first year, we lost many of our peers because I think a lot of kids just kind of went home and told their moms or their parents, you know what, "We can't do this." We started with over 100 students, about 106 I think, and dwindled down to about 75.

Often times we got the feeling that we just weren't wanted there, like they didn't care for us being in their school. They called us, "Those smart people." I think in a sense, they were probably a little bit intimidated by us once they found out exactly what the program was. They had mixed feelings about us. Some people were like, "Oh, that's cool", while other people were like, "Oh, y'all think y'all better than us?"

As teenagers just like the Escalade students, a lot of us were thinking, "We didn't even know this program existed six months ago, you know what I'm saying?" Like, our parents heard about it by whatever means or through whomever, and just like that, we're here. At least that's how I felt. But, like I said, often times, we just weren't wanted in that building.

The administration tried their best to give us more of a natural high school

experience. The pep rallies and mascots that they included after the fact, helped, but it wasn't the same. We even had little dances. I still have one incident in my head from one of our dances that I'm not gonna say. The funnier part is one of the people that I brought to the dance to this day, is my husband and he still talks about it. Like, he'll randomly bring it up and he'll laugh, and I'm like, "Shut up."

But it just wasn't the same. We weren't on their cheerleading teams; we couldn't play football or basketball. We couldn't do their sports. So, uh, although Butler-Armstrong tried, it wasn't the same high school experience. I just don't know if Escalade HS was the best experience for me.

Despite those circumstances, I can say the professors or teachers that we had, whatever you would like to call them, were awesome. I would definitely say that; and not because I'm here with you either!

A lot of the teachers were young, but I felt like that our bond was better because of that fact. They cared about us so much. Academically, they wanted us to strive, really like for the sky, because they saw something in us that we didn't see in ourselves. They always pushed us. Even Professor G, the teacher whose class I wanted to flunk out of, believed in us. He wanted the best for us and, uh, he just kept pushing and pushing.

A lot of the times I thought the stuff was hard. I'm like, "I'm only 15" or "I'm only 16" and I can't do this. I spoke on Professor B, but I will always remember Dr. Glass, she was the English/Literature teacher, whatever you would like to call her. She always had us reading and writing these really long papers and I'm like, "How many words you want me to write? I can't write a paper with that many words in it." But she's like, "Yes, you

can.” So, I appreciate that fact that they pushed us. They never gave up on us.

And it didn’t stop with those two; I can't believe I can't think of her name, the math teacher lady, maybe Professor C. I remember having Professor Cs, Math class and she would go over a math problem as long as it took, as many times as she needed, for us to understand. I've been in classrooms before where, if you don't get it, we'll talk after class, but that talk after class never happened.

So, then I would go home and I'm trying to do the homework, but I just didn't know what to do because I didn't get it in the class. Professor C would say, "Do you understand? Do you get it? Okay. Come on. Let's go to the board.” And she would hand you the dry erase marker and she would want you to do it, and she would help us, step-by-step, to break down these problems. As you know, Math is like one of the most troubling subjects for a lot people, but she always made sure that we understood.

I gave Professor B such a hard time. Whenever I see Professor B, I have to apologize. It wasn't that I was not smart 'cause I'm very bright. I just, at that moment, wanted to flunk so bad. I wouldn't do my homework, not because I didn't understand Geography, but because I just didn't want to do it.

I had a plan. I wanted to get out of Butler-Armstrong so bad that I thought to myself, “Maybe if I don't do my homework, I'll keep getting zeros. Then I'll get all Fs and they'll kick me out. That was the simple mentality that I had at that moment. But Professor B you know, he was the same as many of the other professors where they just refused to let us fail. If you did, it was just solely on you. So he just kept pushing me.

I remember one time in particular after class, he let everybody go and he had a

talk with me. And he's like, "What's going on with you? Because I've watched you grow since you've been here and I know the type of student that you are." He's like, "So, what's going on?" And I told him, I said, "I don't want to be here. It's too hard. I can't do it." And he's like, "Yes, you can." So, something small like that is something that I appreciate, because you know, when I didn't believe that I could do it, they told me, "Yes, you can. You got this." And you know, I got an A when it was all said and done! I had an A. Biology with Miss Armstrong was no different. That too was really hard, WHEW! I had an A in that too.

I always kept an A with Dr. Glass because regardless of the amount of work that she gave us, I always loved to write. And, I talk a lot. The one thing that she always told me was, "make sure that you don't write how you speak." Because she said, often times I would write a great paper; but sometimes, I would write how I spoke. For a long time I didn't understand it. I'm like, "What do you mean?" She's like, "Look at this. You write how you speak." And I read the paper, read the paper, read the paper, and finally I understood what she meant. It wasn't necessarily grammatical errors or anything like that, but it was the way that I spoke. I guess it was too casual in a sense. That was good that she showed me that correction, because I never paid attention to it.

But yeah, I appreciate all the professors though because they were really, really, really there for us.

Academics were one thing, but socially, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, you were my support. Yeah, on any occasion, whether it was something that was going on between Butler-Armstrong and Escalade (because a lot of the time those females were like really



hostile towards us for whatever reason) or whether it was something personal that happened in my home, I always came to you. So, I understand why they called you, Mama Braelynn Melodee. I'm sorry if you don't want to be called that. I get it. But I understand why they did it, because like I said, you had those personal bonds with everyone. We were all like your babies. So, you know, that's just what it is and I appreciated that, because a lot of stuff I just couldn't talk to my mom about. So, it was nice to be able to come to you and you wouldn't judge us. You were just you, but you would set us straight now! Laughs]

We appreciated you as well. And I know for a fact, not just speaking for me, but I can speak for all of us; often times there were some things that we probably shouldn't have said to you. I felt like sometimes we probably did make your job a little bit harder because we looked at it as, okay Ms. Braelynn Melodee is young, you know. We kind of looked at you as a homegirl –versus this is our administrator. So, you know, I think we kind of made it a little bit tough for you to have to balance the two. We always wanted to hang out in the office with you and it's like, "Go to class." Because it's like, you wanted to create those personal relationships and bonds with us, but it's also like, okay, "I still have a job to do. I'm still here for a reason." We always wanted to, like, sit up under you all day, but you were like, "You all here to learn. Y'all have to go to class."

Although I didn't have him as a teacher, Professor P was also memorable. I was a member of B. O. L. D. (Brothers of Leadership and Distinction) and L. O. D. (Ladies of Distinction), which you all, Ms. Braelynn Melodee and Professor P, sponsored together. We knew he was the English teacher, but we also had a connection with Mr. P, just, as

we did with you. He was very, very intelligent and he messed up when he let me know that he was a genius in math, so he would have us in his classroom a lot. It was the same as you!

Once he let me know that he was a genius in math I really, really, really stayed in his classroom because anything that I didn't understand, anything that I still needed help with, I could go to Mr. P and he would help me.

He also kept the guys in check because some of them were, like, really, really rude sometimes, between that little trio of Roberts, Billingsley, and Jackson, you know. He would really, really try to keep them in line. He was like military in a sense; not that he was in the military, but that was kind of how he acted towards the guys or whatever which I appreciated, because sometimes they were mean. They always wore the newest Jordan's and Timberland boots and stuff, but my family didn't have a lot of finances, so I didn't have all that stuff. But yeah, I miss Professor P. I haven't seen him in, like, I don't know, maybe like seven years.

We had completed the high school part of our program before Butler-Armstrong got our own building. The academic transition to Henry-Hall College was not bad because I knew academically, what had been instilled in us by our EC professors. The thing that caused an immediate problem for me was financial. We needed the TI86 calculator, one of those large, you know, hundred and something dollar calculators for my Math 1101 class and my parents didn't have the money to get it. So quickly, I fell behind in math.

Other than that, I was fine. I was perfectly fine. I didn't have a problem with the

English 1101 or 1102. I passed both of those. Chemistry was probably the worst; it was hard. It was very hard. I don't believe I did well. And it wasn't just me, you know.

Overall, the failure rate was very high.

I understood that you all couldn't have known what was going to happen over at the college, because it was the first year, but some people may be like, "Are you serious?" It was kinda like trial and error. You know what I'm saying? So, I understand it. I mean, if it could have went differently, okay. But at the same time, it was the first year and we were the first class, so you know, things happened. At least it was corrected for the next set of students so that they could have an easier time and they could understand better. Yeah, Chemistry for us, was horrible.

When we needed help at Henry-Hall, we just created our own study groups. For the most part, the students from Butler-Armstrong would all just group and study amongst one another. They had this little lounge space upstairs in the café that we would all just go and, you know, sit in there and study with each other. If the school did offer some form of support, we didn't attend. We all just always stuck together. We made sure that we were around familiar faces.

While academics at the college may have been fairly tolerable, the social aspect was quite different. I definitely did not feel socially prepared for Henry-Hall. If ever there was a moment where I didn't see a familiar face from Butler-Armstrong, I would just feel lost or it would be a little bit scary because you know in normal colleges, you have the people straight out of high school, so they're about 18 or 19; but at Henry-Hall, you also have people that are 45 and 50. So the age range was really, really large. I remember one

girl said to me, maybe in a English class, "So, are y'all for real, for real college students or did y'all come from one of those schools?" And I'm like, "Excuse me?" Like, "What do you mean? I'm here in this classroom with you, aren't I?" But, I don't know, I guess she felt like we didn't do it the right way."What is the right way? How is this not the right way just because it's not normal or it's different than what you're used to? I suppose they were probably just adapting to our presence.

Also, if anything happened at Henry-Hall, I mean, whatever it may have been, nothing was there to support us. I don't recall anyone there that I could even name to say, oh, well, I spoke with her or I spoke with him and, you know, they were there for me, or I knew that I could always go to them. I personally would always come back to Butler-Armstrong and speak with an administrator and you know, tell you guys what was going on and let you all handle it or fix the issue for us, whatever the case may be. But there was no go-to person for us at Henry-Hall.

Our classes were scheduled pretty spaced out for the most part, and I know some of us took a while to learn the campus, which you know, makes sense. So, they were just making sure that they got to class. Things like that made the adjustment more challenging. Now some of the girls, they just didn't care about going to class sometimes.

You know, they got up there and their focus was off. It was no longer on academic stuff. It was more so about what party's going on, how can I get to that party, or oh, I met this guy. And I'm like, "You all need to go to class." But you know, when you're in that environment and you're 16 (a few people were 17), you kind of stray sometimes –because you get that freedom and you feel like, okay, well, just let me do

what's popular. Let me do what's hot right now.

In terms of peer influence, I would say I had a little bit of both, positive and negative experiences. It just depended on which crowd I hung around. If I hung around people like Wescott, Tucker, Myers, Baskerville, and McIntyre, then it was pure academics because they had a mission. They had a goal they wanted to complete, so, if I hung around that crowd then it was just like, okay, let's study. If I hung around Hall, Collins, or Duerson, then it was like, "Girl, let's see what party we can get into or "Oh Girl, he cute." You know, things like that. So, it really just depends. If I hung with this group it was academics. If I hung with that group it was, let's find out what social events is going on. So, it just, it depends on the groups.

I really, really hung with, I guess, the in crowd in a sense, because I really hung with Kirby, and Duerson, and Hall - all of them. I really just hung around people that were popular because – I don't know. That's just what I did. It was rare that I hung with the crowd that was solely focused on the academics. And did it affect my work? Yeah, most definitely, because sometime I just felt like, oh, I don't have time to do my work. But it wasn't that I didn't have time, I just chose not to do it. So, I was kind of back and forth, but majority of the time I wanted to be with the crowd that was worried about the wrong stuff and not the schooling itself, so...

By what would have been my senior year I was pregnant. I found out while we were at Henry-Hall. So, I had to make a decision that I was gonna work and support my kid, because I wasn't gonna get an abortion. It was tough because I felt like I needed the money right then and there – because that belly's growing. The time was ticking and the

baby would be here soon. He didn't ask to be here, but as a new parent I would have to make sure that he was gonna be okay. That was like, one of the hardest decisions I've ever had to make, because I knew how important education was and I knew that if I wanted to go far in life, if I wanted to advance, then I was gonna need my education. It was also tough because I knew that if I made that decision to leave school would be tough for me in the future because I would be stuck at little jobs, you know, making minimum wage or a little bit more, but still nothing.

For a moment, I was actually at Campus High School. I went there, did everything I was supposed to do, but still, it was getting time. I was about to have my kid. I didn't have any money. I didn't have a vehicle. I'm getting my education, but even that is about to be postponed now because I made a decision that I shouldn't have made. So, I left there too. Believe it or not, I still smack myself to this day for that decision because I left around March and Campus HSs graduation was that May. When I left, it was two months before graduation.

So that two months for me, was the difference between a GED versus a high school diploma. I didn't get to walk across the stage and get my high school diploma. And I know job applications say "GED or high school diploma", but to me, it's not the same at all. I know it's equivalent to so many people, but I still beat myself up because I never got a high school diploma. I knew I had the ability. I was smart. I was capable of doing so much more, but that decision that I made to grow up too fast, doing stuff that I shouldn't have been doing, cost me my diploma.

I didn't want to be that person, but life happens and it didn't make me stop. After

obtaining my GED, I attended Edwards out at Norcross for their Dental Assistant Program. I completed that program in about seven months and I had a 4.0, like the entire time I was there. It's hard to learn so many procedures and instruments and everything within seven months. So, all the people that I started with, they were just dropping off, dropping off, dropping off, just like they did at Butler-Armstrong, but I stayed. I also complete a five week internship at a general dentistry office in Lilburn, out in Gwinnett.

My coworkers were really nice. They really, really helped me. The dentist, had just taken ownership of that business before I came. This young Black Dentist and owner was tough, like really, really tough. That was his second office that he just had taken over. So, he owns two offices, at 36 years old, which is very good considering how long it takes for you to go to school to become a dentist. I believe it is eight years. He, wasn't the easiest to work with, but I do understand that he meant well because, like, so many other people that I've encountered in my past, they see something in me, just like the Butler-Armstrong professors.

So, it's very annoying. I had hoped to stay on at that office as a Dental Assistant once I completed my internship, but he hired someone else. I've already been out of school over a year. Now, I am paying back student loans while working in the Customer Service at a Wal-Mart. Sometimes, you know, I get discouraged because I'm like, they're probably gonna look at me like, she's been out of school for a year and she still has not experience. I'm actually gonna go back to school next fall to be a dental hygienist. I wanted to be a dentist but the only school in Georgia is located in Augusta.

Let's see, the father of my son I was pregnant with in school is now my husband

of almost five years. It's been a long time! We now have two children. My son is five. He'll be six in November. He's actually starting Kindergarten in a couple of days and he's missing like four or five teeth at the same time. My daughter turned two in March. The girls are different from the boys. She is a diva. Diva. I mean, "Mommy, can you paint my nails? Mommy, I need my hair bows." And she's a diva. She sits with her legs crossed. She's so cute.

If Butler-Armstrong is still open when my children get that age, I probably will, most definitely, do that for my kids. You can be 18 years old with an Associate's Degree or credits towards that Associate's Degree. That is so awesome! Like, look at how much faster you can speed things up to get a career going for yourself.

I will be open with them and talk to them about my experience, but I'll also let them know, I'm pretty sure it's changed. You know, some things are different. But I won't do them like my mom did me 'cause I had to go. It was no if, ands, or buts about it. I will let my kids have an option, sort of!

Now, as an adult, I do understand it. I do wish that I had taken Butler-Armstrong way more seriously – because it was a great opportunity. If I could go back and redo it, which we can't, I would definitely attend Butler-Armstrong again, I would do so many things differently. I would have listened more, I would have participated more, I would have studied more, and I would have just seen the entire thing through.

The college credits alone were great because it gave you a head start. The stress level could sometimes be too much, so I think mentally you have to be prepared for it. I was just thrown into it. So, I don't think mentally I was ready for it. You really, really



have to be ready – because it's not a piece of cake. Traditional high school is traditional high school for a reason.

The biggest impact this program had on me was most definitely, the people I met. Like I said, and I know I'm repeating myself, but so what. You guys really, really pushed us. Like, you really pushed us. You let us know that there was something inside of each of us that was special and that we would really succeed in life, as long as we knew that we could do it.

My advice to any student considering Early College HS would be, if you student don't want to be there, have that conversation with your parent in the beginning. Don't wait. Don't wait until, like, a year in and say, "Okay. You know what, this isn't what I want to do." If you're gonna attend, come in and study; don't play around. Get what you came for. Like, go through with it 100%. Make the best out of it, because it wasn't a bad experience. Now that I look back over a lot of things, it was actually something that could have turned out really, really great, but because of my own childish mentalities and my own, selfishness, I messed up a lot.

Oh well, it sucks that the new generation won't have a Ms. Braelynn Melodee. If they, if they can find something close then they'll be okay!

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix K

### *The Jasmine Experience: Paradigm Shift*

Jasmine interviewed Monday, August 3, 2015 at 5:30 p. m.

*She and I greeted one another with a hug at the door. She arrived looking especially gorgeous that day. She is in the process of obtaining enough hours working under a licensed Cosmetologist, so that she can eventually pursue her own Cosmetology Certification. She has been doing hair as long as I can recall. She was even my stylist at a point in time. Since she is off Mondays that was the best day for her to come by for the interview.*

*She wore an ankle length, black and tan tube dress with fashionably extra-large earrings, a gold bracelet, and black sandals. Her curly locks were in an up-do.*

Here is “Jasmine’s” story...

Butler-Armstrong was different. It was different in the sense of our relationships with the professionals there. For instance you, Tequila Braelynn Melodee, and our English teacher, Mr. P., the relationship was stronger because there were smaller class settings. We were even able to vocalize our opinions, as far as the student body, because we were the first class. It was only us.

When we first started at Butler-Armstrong, we were in an interesting environment. We were in a small setting in the back of another high school in Emerson County. That school was not our school. Coincidentally, I went to Escalade Middle School, so it was okay for me because I knew the student body at Escalade HS. Those were the same people I had been to middle school with. But as far as that transition for

the overall student body, and the effect that had on us as a class, it was different.

The first year was awesome. Well, I do recall one incident where a boy had gotten hit by a little bb gun thing and they had to shut down the whole school. People were crying and carrying on. It was different little situations like that. Getting President of Student Council during my freshman year of high school was a memorable moment for me.”OOP,” another memorable experience was when we did the college tours! “Boom! That was awesome!” I actually ended up going to an HBCU later.

Second year was awesome. It was different having the new students from the next class to come in, since we were by ourselves that entire last school year. One day, [laughs] we went to visit Henry-Hall. Henry- Hall would be the college we were going to attend once we had completed the high school portion of our program. Like I said, this was the second year, so we were in tenth grade. Anyway, some of the boys in our class got into an altercation, you know, the normal high school stuff, with some boys on the campus of Henry-Hall College. We don’t know if they were students or what. We all had to defend ourselves and that brought us closer together. We were a family.

In addition to trips like that over to our future college, we had other fun things that we did at Butler-Armstrong. We had organizations such as L. O. D. (Ladies of Distinction) and B. O. L. D. (Brothers of Leadership and Distinction), and Yearbook Committee, different things like that that I really loved. Oh, we even went to Six Flags, do you remember that?

We had dances at the college campus, just for us. Our Senior Year we had a Bowling Night, an Ice Skating Night; we even had a Roast Awards Night, all those

things. We had a Prom too! I mean, those things really mattered. Those things mattered because we did not have football games; we didn't have basketball games; and we didn't have a cheerleading squad, you know what I'm saying? All of those events really made it all the more memorable.

One of the reasons we are able to have so many activities was because of our academic accomplishments, our success in which can be credited to our great teaching staff. Several teachers made my experience at Butler-Armstrong a good one.

One who really just sticks out in my mind was my English professor, Mr. P. He was real young. He was the age then that I am now, 23, which me and my peers still laugh about to this day!

He was fresh out of school. As an individual, I'm a passionate person. I'm also an emotional person. That's why I recognized it in him. He was so passionate about what he taught. He also knew that this was an opportunity that we were actually being given. So he tried to impress that upon us; but at the age of 14, we could not fathom what he was trying to convey.

The rest of the teachers were great at what they did, but as it relates to being able to convey the seriousness of a topic and the great opportunities that we were getting. Mr. P, hands down was the best. He conveyed these things through force or exposure. He was so young of course, that sometimes his way of doing things, we was like, "Whoa, you're coming a little strong," because he was emotional to be young!"

I really enjoyed his class too. One thing we used to do a lot of was reading comprehension. He would bring in lyrics and we would dissect the lyrics of different

songs that were current songs or past songs that were still relevant to our culture. It was sort of like he studied the students he was working with. He knew what would be relevant to us and he brought in music or brought in subjects that would help us to be better involved; and that is an outstanding teacher. And again, we knew how old he was!

Knowing he was that serious, and putting aside the fact that we knew certain personal things about him and his character or whatever, when he stepped into that classroom as an educator, he was a great! Now, of course, the maturity level and certain things he would do were a bit much. He'd be like, "Y'all are stupid. Y'all are stupid. Y'all don't realize the opportunity," but when I go back, being grown now, I'm just like, for real; he was giving it to us as real as can be expected. I think that at the end of the day I respected it then at 14 and I respect it now, nine years later.

I liked Mr. B as well. He taught history. Yeah, I liked the way he taught, all cool, calm, and collective. But again, the methods of teaching, I need somebody more hands on, so that's why I liked Mr. P. He made us get hands on and that's who I am as a person.

Working with TB in Physics, we had to put together was it, a train, or a car, or something...oh yeah, a rollercoaster! [Interviewer Laughs] Putting that together, that was awesome. It wasn't hard. It wasn't hard at all. None of the work was hard. Study habits were what needed to be taken care of, and she tried to implement that, but her methods were a little bit different for me. She had passion too. Overall, her class was one of the most memorable academic experiences at Butler-Armstrong.

I could name, who was sisters, Ms. N and Dr. G, Yep, they were good. Ms. A and, "Oh God, what's his name, with the glasses, Math, Mr. G. G was good. I mean, he was

great. He was funny. He was passionate. I loved him. Ms. C, she was more mild-mannered, more serious, but was passionate about what she did. We saw each of their personalities – and it affected us differently. So everybody was really awesome.

Each teacher, at the end of the day, I could recall all of them and their personal stories. They brought their own personal aspect to the school. For some reason, I felt like they didn't feel as pressured as a typical teacher would at traditional school. And it is so in their personalities to be familial. You could see the camaraderie between all of the faculty and staff in how they interacted with one another. This also transferred over to the way they taught and interacted with us. It was a family, you know what I'm saying? And it showed. At the end of the day, that's what made Butler-Armstrong a memorable experience.

Of course, you Ms. Braelynn Melodee; okay, you know I know you. I know you personally. Outside of school, we've carried on a relationship since I graduated high school of course, that was more on a personal level. And, you know, I love that, when you came with the friendship, I never thought I really blurred the lines between professional/academic or social/personal.

I mean you were always there for us to talk to. You were passionate about the student body. You were passionate about what you did. You showed us that you were dedicated to us, you know, and whether we all appreciated that or not, it was there nonetheless. That meant a lot as far as a support system. As far as hearing our voices, you never had a problem with doing that; of course your pull at that time was limited because of your position of that time, but it was just awesome.

Dr. E, she was an excellent principal. She cared about us not only as her students, not just because she was the principal of a Early College Academy; she genuinely cared about her student body. And the rest of the teachers, they followed suit. Of course when you have good leadership, anything but failing can be, you know, present at the time. Dr., his first name's Tony, R was awesome. I loved that. And then as it went on of course, and we went to the college, it was totally different!

Yeah, I was one of the first people to just take COMPASS College Entrance Exam at Henry-Hall and go right into the coursework. I didn't have to stay back at Butler-Armstrong and make up for the classes I couldn't take over at the college. So being one of the first to do it that was a lot of pressure. And, you did not know what to expect. Neither the professionals nor the student body was really prepared for what we were gonna embark upon when we entered into Henry-Hall.

When we transferred over to Henry-Hall it was exciting and a little bit more intimidating. Some people had extreme academic panic. They were just distraught because of the pressures of getting out of school. I'm actually like a headstrong person, so I thought, you know, "I'm gonna take it by storm. Nothing can stand in my way."

As far as me being prepared academically, my study habits and just who I am naturally, if I'm taught well, I can. I (and the whole student body) was warned about the difference in the teaching style like, "Jasmine, you know these are not high school professors. They want what they want when they want it," but actually understanding that was another story. I wish someone would have had a syllabus in front of me and said, "Jasmine, this is what they're gonna do with you in this class; and being that you are a

Pre-Med major, this is what you need to do. So the summer prior to going into this course, we may want to go ahead and have you sit in on a class so you kind of see what's required of you, you know, before you actually go in and take these courses.”

I wasn't prepared for the difference in, okay, I can study, you know, maybe at night and then go and just do whatever tomorrow. 'Cause that's what I was doing at “Butler-Armstrong”; I didn't have to read and I could go, take the End of Course Exam, and ace it. I didn't have to study for the COMPASS Exam. I could go in and pass these. Why? It was never hard for me. It came to me naturally.

And so, knowing the difference in study habits and being prepared for the rigor, time management, and the adaptation that it takes, were totally different things. I do admire other students in my class such as our Valedictorian, Tina, who came out with her associate's degree. Yea, she understood. It clicked with her because, in her normal study habits as a high school student, she did understand the need to study hard and was prepared to do so when it came to, you know, transitioning over to being a college student. But for me, just being like, “Oh, it comes as it comes”, and the fact that I was able to get by with it in high school without nobody catching that, my situation was different.

When I went over to the college, it showed that you didn't study based upon your paper. You know, English was pretty easy for me, but when it came to science, you know, being a Pre-Med major, I wasn't prepared. And so I was like, “Science, I don't know if this will work for me in the long run when I go over to the postsecondary school.” I don't know if it was a matter of fault; I just wasn't prepared. When I had to get



down and put the rubber to the road, it became difficult. I knew my study habits and the way that they needed to change, but going from high school to college at the age of 16, wasn't as easy as it sounded.

Because the professors did not know that we were EC students, they didn't treat us any differently. They weren't there for the extra support. They were like, "Hey, this is what needs to be done. You have a syllabus. These are the dates that you have to take the test." And so that's where, I want to say a different word but it won't come to mind, the ball was dropped.

For some reason the whole high school/college bridge dynamic was watered down. It wasn't taken as seriously as "babies graduating from high school," maybe they need a lot of guidance. You know, we had our all white ceremony that kind of tried to give us that graduation feel that you're actually leaving the small leagues and headed into the big leagues, from high school to college, but that was about it.

Even as far as my mom, who was a part of my support system, nobody really told me what to expect. I mean, I already knew to go to school and make As and Bs. For me I, I just thought this what you had to do. But it's hard, because to actually think, "Okay, this is going to prepare me for different opportunities", actually understanding what that means, I didn't. Had I really been shown how we were getting these grades in these courses, had it been outlined, like actually showing me a college transcript before taking classes, had I actually knew the process, and had it been explained to me consistently, each year of my four years of high school, I personally and definitely would have took the Early College program a lot more seriously.

Even though I did not take this opportunity as seriously as I should have, there were things in place at the college to help us as EC students. Study sessions and tutorials were there; those were most definitely there. Not too much do I recall the frequency of them, but yes, they were there. I can't however say they were emphasized. I mean it wasn't as visible. It wasn't like the first thing I heard because then I might have been like, "Oh, let me go to study session." So that's why it doesn't stand out in my mind. I am really taking myself back to that and no, like it won't come to my mind, because it wasn't like out there. I wasn't getting an email. My mom wasn't like, "Well, you gonna go?" You know? I don't doubt there were people probably there, but for me it wasn't made a point of priority. But it was just you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee. It was only you up there making sure that was done. It needed to be more than just you doing that.

I even remember the Saturday schools back at Butler-Armstrong to help us with End of Course Testing. I do remember the afternoon tutorials we were able to attend, but not so much the sessions at Henry-Hall.

And see "Boom," [after interviewer explained the rationale behind EOCT preparation] you just hit a factor, just the way you just explained that to me. If we would have had meetings with you or whoever was in charge of making sure that academics was aligned - the Academic Advisor, me, and my parents, if we would have sat down and they was like, "Okay, Jasmine, do you understand what this is, what this means?" I know I would have done better.

Okay, so I did have some academic related challenges because of the reasons that I just mentioned. We also had to deal with the social part of the college environment at

Henry-Hall, which, “No, I wasn't prepared for that either,” but it had nothing to do with Butler-Armstrong. It had to do with home. Of course they work hand in hand. Maybe if the school would have had more of a training with the parents on transitioning your high school student to a college student, some of the things that they'll be involved, introducing them to the college, it would have been a little better. You know what I'm saying?

Another thing, of course they not even gone be too much involved because they didn't have to pay. You know what I'm saying? If they tuition would have been involved, that would have been a different story. They would have been like, “Okay, let's see what we gotta do. We need to go through...; but because, “Okay, my baby going to college for free”, it's just a totally different mindset as opposed to you being a high school senior, graduating, and becoming a college freshman.

Peer influence is an extremely big part of high school, even with students who are full time at a college. So, I was always like a leader, just naturally. So at Henry-Hall, I just did my own thing. I pretty much stuck with my high school class who were over there at the time and I did my classes. I drove at the time, so if I wasn't at school, I was on my way to work.

I was a part of the little crew, you already know, and we thought we were just too cool for school! We just thought we were above anything, and it was because we was so socially involved in our middle schools and still remained socially involved with people at our high school. We were the type of students that studied a little bit and we always did well. We didn't try our absolute hardest, but we still were Honor's Students.

These same peers, who I hung around at Butler-Armstrong, didn't go full-time over to Henry-Hall that first year we were there, so I didn't hang around them too much. I would dabble with other classmates if we had a couple of classes together. I would try to speak with them, you know, as far as studying and notes and how do I get prepared for the next exam or something like that. But other than that, they had no effect on me whatsoever. The friends that I did have that were over there, they were pretty serious about school, but they weren't my normal crew. I just did what I wanted to do. It was just me, free reign.

One particular college circumstance that we faced was the interaction with older people (adults). Given how large the campus was, and the fact that we were 16-year-olds, we were running rampant and free, you know. The mature boys were a big issue for a lot of the Butler-Armstrong girls. We were already advanced; at least we considered ourselves to be advanced, especially because we were going to college at a young age. So you know, we just ran with that mentality of being grown. And now, already dealing with what peer pressured minds are going to do, we have to add in the fact that we're around 21 year olds - grown women, we had ourselves a problem.

Yes, because there was the freedom, we did things we were not supposed to do. We did typical high school things, done on a way higher level, because there was no accountability. You know, as teenagers, we think we know it all anyway; we think, "Oh, we're a junior. We're a Senior. We pretty much have it all figured out." But no, we didn't. We know sex; we know drugs; we know all these things are present in high schools, but to have it on this wide playing field at the tender age of 16, that was to be expected. You

had to think about the age we were at that time and what we were dealing with in the environment that we were being put in. It was a learning process.

We also skipped class. In high school you have to check in at 8:00 am and get out at 3:00 pm. If you're skipping school between that time there are systems in place to check truancy, period. But at the college, it was told, "Baby, nobody will be escorting you to class. There's no bell. There's no locker time." Like me, I was driving and a couple of my other classmates, they were driving; and yeah, we skipped. Of course we were told not to skip class.

I know the parents thought that it would be more hands on from the staff at Butler-Armstrong when we got to the college, that's why they wouldn't have to too much worry about their kid, you know, on the campus. But, we only had one Graduation Coach, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, to come up to the school. How could she possibly be held accountable for all of these students? However, we still are a small enough body to where, had there been systems put in place, those actions could have been corrected.

They would have different student activities on campus, which was cool. Just for me, at the maturity level that I was at being 16, even being wise for my age, I'm gonna be distracted like a normal 16-year-old. Sometimes, and I learned this because I'm an education major, when working with young adolescents we can sometimes overestimate our students based upon the way they look or the way they carry themselves. We think that we can automatically trust them with so much responsibility, and that might not always be the case. We have to deal with their cognitive development and all that good stuff. I think that's what happened to me at Henry-Hall.

At a point, because of all the things going on with me, and the Legacy Class in general between switching over principals our last year and the realization that there was a serious disconnect between us and the high school, I was just so nonchalant towards Butler-Armstrong.

My full junior year I was up at Henry-Hall. I ended up failing at the college and that's when I had to go Campus HS. Campus HS, thank God, was the opportunity, if we didn't do so well over at "Henry-Hall", to take all of the courses that we needed in order to fulfill the Emerson County requirements for our high school diploma, and still graduate on time. It was like a transitional school that gave you the opportunity to take, essentially, two semesters within one semester. Campus HS also gave students the choices to either walk with them or their home schools at graduation.

I went to Elizabeth Andrews during my senior year, 2009-2010. I was finished in March of 2010 with all of my high school graduation requirements and was just waiting until May so that I could participate in the commencement ceremony at Butler-Armstrong.

[Singing] Since I left Butler-Armstrong...I went to Albany State for two years. Coincidentally, my mom was very involved with that process; from financial aid, to academics, to scheduling all that kind of stuff, but for some reason that dynamic from Butler-Armstrong to Henry Hall was lost upon her.

Anyway, I did really well because of Butler-Armstrong. My first year in college I had a 3.7 GPA. Along the way I had some challenges that I never thought I'd have with school. School always came to me naturally. It came to a point where I did not like

school; and because I'm more of a creative person, you know, I love to do hair, nails, makeup, all that kind of stuff, I wasn't happy there either.

Yeah, I told my mom prior to me leaving Butler-Armstrong, that I did not want to go to a four-year university. I wanted to finish up my Associate's Degree at Henry-Hall and I wanted to do hair school.

Here again, this is how Butler-Armstrong exposed my parental issues and the parenting style that I clashed with. The parent/child relationship has to be discussed. It should be engrained into college programs, even Butler-Armstrong, training for parents, because children don't come with a manual and some people don't know how to be parents. Social workers can attest to that.

But, I ended up going to Albany State. They took all of my courses from Henry-Hall College. I started not to like it down there either. I had become apathetic towards school, so became home sick. I returned home and enrolled into Georgia State. I've only taken like two classes. That process has been a slow one. I'm learning through other life experiences that I have to do things at my own pace; this includes graduation. I am not going to be pressured to come out at specific time.

I've been working since I was 14, so I do that well. I own my own lash business; I own my own Mary Kay business. I'm apprenticing to get my hair license and I'm still enrolled at a fifth-fifth year Senior at Georgia State. Hopefully, I will come out 2017, at the latest, 'cause I have to do that year of student teaching. And so yeah, hopefully I'll come out with that; and when I do, I'm gonna have a big old party! I did some traveling to Spain and Italy this past summer. Yeah, we did a seven-day cruise and it was

awesome. The food was awesome too. I am actually considering teaching abroad.

It was a great experience. I sometimes forget that I graduated from a Butler-Armstrong; but I guess that's why I feel like I've been in college for a long time. I loved my experience. I loved the people I met. We still stay close to this day.

Now, at 23, I can look back and see some things more clearly. Anyone who has experienced what we experienced as EC students has a story. We all probably do a lot of reflecting. I reflect upon a bunch of decisions that I made. I think that if I had just received more involvement from my parents, I would have been prepared better for the opportunities that I was given.

In fact, if I had it to do all over again, Mmm-hmm, I would! Even with all the stuff I went through, I got college credit in high school, and that was the point. It took graduating, and going to a four-year school, to realize the opportunity that I was given. I wish I would have just taken it more seriously. Butler-Armstrong was never really a challenge for me. The work wasn't even a challenge for me. It was just my study habits that needed to change. I was completely capable of doing the work. It was not hard.

Butler-Armstrong also opened up my mind to the possibilities. I was afforded an opportunity and every opportunity is a blessing. I was chosen for a reason. I wouldn't take away my life experiences that have made me become the person I'm about to be as an educator. It gave me more of a compassionate heart towards young people. I'm aware of things that I would not have been aware of, if not for Butler-Armstrong.

The fact that I do want to work with young adolescents is even better because this school broke the traditional role. I'm not a traditional person, you know? I'm very much



an advocate for the life process; more so than, I have to meet these points in my life by a certain time because it's what society tells me to do. Butler-Armstrong broke that mold for me. It said you don't have to be a four-year high school student in order to be ready for college. There are different things that work for different people. And so it has helped me to think outside of the box in terms of how the world works, period.

Nowadays we really become more self-aware through social media, all these different things that are taking place, and we are right there. The things that worked 10, 15, 20 years ago are not working in this time. It's not working for these students on a mass level. Butler-Armstrong prepared me for that type of thinking, to know that not everything works for everybody.

As a former student, I would like to see the faculty at Butler-Armstrong address these certain things so that the next generation can benefit from the school a little more: Maintain a strong support system, even at the college. Keep reminding students of the end goal. The school is small enough to make it personal. Have monthly checkup meetings with the students and their parents when they go over to the college.

Emphasize the Five Core Principles of the EC Initiative to the students and parents, and their responsibilities in reference to upholding their end of them. Explain to the students that this is why you're here. This is why you were chosen out of the many students in this district; and because you have been chosen, know your special role, okay?

Know how serious this opportunity is for both parents, students, alike. And, know what this is going to require. This school has six years of experience and everyone should be well-versed as it relates to parents, teachers, and students.

Provide each student with a personal academic plan. The personal plan can include behavior and the plan is not designed to micromanage. It is designed to provide support and show care, realizing that this is process where you're trying to get to develop physically, cognitively, emotionally, and mentally, in such a short amount of time; whereas, people have a full four years to be able to prepare for these types of situations.

Make sure students know that they're a part of something special. If any person feels like they're special, they're gonna want to go hard for you. Make it personal. The school is small enough to do that.

Partner with middle schools to groom the type of students that you are looking for and to provide them with information early enough to make more informed decisions. This is a unique program. The normal six to eighth grade paradigm is preparing you for a normal nine through twelve experiences.

Hire people with a genuine commitment to children, differentiating between them really caring or just coming for a paycheck. You have to have people who are designed to educate and this is their purpose. That's a spiritual level.

To the current/future ECHS students: This is a setting with limited activities and outlets. You are going to have to study more too. Really know if this opportunity is what's gonna work for you. Yes, this is a great opportunity. We want everybody to be able to do it, but at the same time, understand that this is what it's going to take. Please, weigh your options.

Take it seriously. Open yourself up to the possibilities. Take advantage of the ability to have an earlier start than most. Be cognizant of the fact that everybody won't

like like what you are doing, but don't allow that to wear down on you, because that was a challenge a lot of my peers experienced.

Get involved outside of the school, so if you have the ability to be in dance or get involved in different clubs do that, because that will help you being able to express yourself as an individual because you don't have that opportunity.

Just take advantage of the opportunity you've been blessed with!

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix L

### *The Leah Experience: Miss Butler-Armstrong*

Leah interviewed Friday, July 31, 2015 at 6:00 p. m.

*She arrived over an hour late for her interview because she was dependent on transportation from her mother, who accompanied her to the interview and throughout interview process. She was just as kind, soft-spoken, and poised as the girl I remembered from years ago, when she was a student of mine. Her smile was consistent and subtle and she appeared to be mentally pre-occupied, sort of an undertone of pensive thought. Wearing her navy blue tank top, cream-sleeveless covering, jean shorts, lace shoes to match the covering, and accented by a beautiful diamond necklace, she was casually prepared for our conversation.*

Here is Leah's story...

When you first start high school, you think it's gonna' be something grand. You think, I'm almost there! These people are preparing us for a future that we don't really know we want yet. This was especially the case at Butler-Armstrong HS!

We were the first students ever to participate in this program when starting Butler-Armstrong ECHS. When I think back about challenges our class faced, I think about the first two years when we did not have our own school. My biggest challenge was, and I think everyone can say this, but not having our own building, not being able to say, "This is ours." We had to share a small portion of Escalade HS, another high school in Emerson County. There was always tension between the two schools. Escalade students didn't like us and we were terrified of Escalade students! The fact that we were

constantly fighting with another school over a tiny block of space was a huge challenge for us. Dealing with that was one thing, but I faced other problems too. My locker was right next to the door and when it would rain the ceiling would leak and there would be mosquitoes all over the place.

Of course, when I think back, there are good things I remember too. We used to have these little end-of-the-school-year celebrations, “Free Fridays”, is what they were called. These parties were given to us as a reward for hard work and probably partly because of the situation we were in with not having our own building. One particular celebration was at Henry-Hall College. We had a field day; we went swimming; we had a cookout and it was just fun. It felt like, you know, a family reunion kinda! Another time we celebrated like that was when we finished our final exams and End of Course Tests. When we got the results back and had passed everything, we didn’t learn that last week of school. Everything was great, so we basically celebrated for a whole week!

We were able to have fun things like that in part, due to the work our Butler-Armstrong professors put into our learning. Here’s one good example. At one time we didn’t have a second English teacher. We had two English classes, but only one English teacher. Instead of the school constantly getting different substitute teachers, Professor P stepped in and combined both classes, his and the class with no teacher, until they hired a permanent teacher. That was a really good experience because the way he taught was different from all the other teachers. He related, you know, what was happening right then, to the stories that we read. I could appreciate him taking real life and switching it around and making it seem like, this story. Or you know, taking lyrics from a song and

really focusing on the words of the song to help us with Reading Comprehension. He made that be a part of who I was and connected it to what I was going through at that time. During that period, I really wasn't focused on one specific thing. My mind was everywhere, and with Professor P being my teacher, I was able to focus and calm myself down and really get to where I needed to be.

While I was excelling in English, from the beginning, I wasn't really good at Math and my teachers knew that, so every year, I would get support. I received support from my actual math teacher, Professor N, Professor C, as well as Professor G. Afterschool tutorials, in-class tutorials, whatever was needed, they were there to help and support me. I really had a good experience.

Towards the end, Professor Glass would ultimately fill that English position. She wasn't my favorite teacher, 'cause she saw something in me that I didn't see in myself, so I thought she was just being mean. But towards the end, we developed a relationship and I thought, "Well, she is a normal person! I can like her" [laughs], but at first I didn't.

I guess spending four years with the same people, you become a family. So, it's not just, "Oh, this is my teacher. This is my classmate. No, this is my other momma. This is my uncle. This is my auntie. These are my sisters and brothers, not cousins, but my sisters and brothers." And that support has carried me – I think it's carried all of us a really long way.

Like any school, we had our good and bad moments. Most of our moments, throughout high school however, were good experiences. Professor P again, it was one morning right before classes started and I was so upset about something. He walked up to

me and said, “Hey. Good Morning. People suck. Have a good day” and he disappeared! Little things like that were what I grew to cherish.

Another major moment for me was when I was running for Miss Butler-Armstrong. I was disappointed that I didn’t have the support I felt I should have because we were all so close originally. Some of my friends supported me and some of them didn’t. I appreciated the ones that did show support. Two people specifically came to me and said, “You know, you’re a great person and I don’t want to run against you” so, she supported me and I supported for her to win! I really wanted her to win. I wanted her to have the confidence that she should have had. So, I think, in that particular situation, we supported each other more than anyone else around us. Eventually I became the very first Homecoming Queen in Butler-Armstrong history. That was such a memorable experience! Just reiterating the support from the teachers, right after I was crowned Miss Butler-Armstrong, two professors in particular, Professors B and FSU, they sang the song from the Coming to America movie, “Queen to Be.”

Another highlight of my time at Butler-Armstrong was when they introduced us to HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) through a college tour. We had so much fun; in fact, I think we had a little too much fun! Because we were so close, it made that experience that much more enjoyable. Since they looked at us almost as adults they were like, “Look, you’re high school students; act like you have good sense!” And we did, because we were just grateful they had given us an opportunity to see what college life would be like once we left Butler-Armstrong. Yeah, I think that was a good experience for a lot of us.

Unlike attending a HBCU, we weren't leaving home like traditional college freshman, but at some point in time we had to leave our high school experience and prepare for our own unique journey at our partnering college. After the completion of the Transition Ceremony, we either went to the new Butler-Armstrong building or we became students at Henry-Hall College. The Transition Ceremony was similar to a graduation and it marked the completed of the first two years of high school, as well as the transition into our college courses. Ultimately, at graduation, you either got the Associate's Degree or you received your high school diploma, with college credits.

As I stated earlier, some people went to the college and some people did not. In addition to participation in the Transition Ceremony, we had to meet certain criteria before being able to take college classes, including the passing of the COMPASS college entrance exam. My experience with the COMPASS was the worst! I passed every section except for the Math, which I took three times. Because I did not pass the Math portion of the COMPASS, I was only allowed to take courses which related to English or History, but I couldn't take Math or Science courses.

The COMPASS wasn't the only challenge I experienced as it related to the collegiate side of the program. Other challenges were, you know, getting there on time. That's a challenge that I'm still working on, getting to school in a timely manner. Another challenge was immersion into this new environment. Socially, I am not, as you know, as open to new people as others are. I didn't have classes with a lot of my classmates from Butler-Armstrong, so we were no longer all traveling in these packs to same classes, as we did at the high school. Now, all of my sisters and brothers were



always somewhere else. I kinda' stayed to myself. If I was not comfortable with you or around you, then I was gonna' just find me a quiet spot and stay there. Being at Henry-Hall College, that was not as easy as it sounded, you know. You see these people in class every day and then after class they're like, "Oh, let's hang out"! I just wasn't that person.

I was terrified, because, like I said, I didn't have a lot of my high school classmates in my college classes; maybe there was someone in my class, maybe there wasn't. One class in particular, I was the only student from Butler-Armstrong and I felt like I was constantly being attacked because the teacher knew that I was from Butler-Armstrong. He would, you know, attack me in any way he could. This class was English, and like I said before, that's my favorite subject, so I know for a fact that I shouldn't have had any problems in that class academically or otherwise. But, this particular teacher criticized and scrutinized everything I did. I was not comfortable at all.

Ms. Gina, who was basically – I don't wanna call her a babysitter, was the person in charge of making sure we got to our classes and made sure that everything we needed was taken care of, was our liaison for Butler-Armstrong.

I can say personally that she wasn't as effective as I needed her to be with the one experience with the English teacher. Scheduling, you know, meetings with the teacher, didn't get me anywhere. When I needed to get to her, she was not in her office. She many have been there, but not in her office; it was always something like that, so I couldn't get the help and support that I needed.

Overall, I think there should be more support from the high school when students transition to the college. There should be more people to contact. There should be another

liaison, just in case one isn't available. There should be someone else, because it's a lot of students coming from Butler-Armstrong to the college and it's a lot going on. Each student has specific needs, and if those needs aren't met, then they'll end up in a position like I was in with my English teacher. As students, we may not be able to handle a situation the way in which it should be handled, and I think that it would make a huge impact if there were more support.

The beginning of my 11<sup>th</sup> grade year, I was still at Henry-Hall, but after that, I transferred to Campus High School because I couldn't take the Math related courses at the college. They always say, three times a charm. The third time I attempted the COMPASS, I did pass, but by then it was a little too late for me to continue at Henry-Hall. So, I kept those credits I did have and continued with getting my high school diploma at Campus HS. There, I was able to complete all of my credits for high school and still graduate on time.

After we graduated in 2010, I did absolutely nothing for two months. In August of 2010, I started Brown Mackie College. Since that time, I got my Associates degree in Paralegal Studies, and because of Butler-Armstrong, all of the courses that I took at Henry-Hall College transferred over, which meant I didn't have to attend a full two years! Upon the completion of my degree requirements in 2012, I graduated Cum Laude from Brown Mackie, even though the official commencement exercise weren't until July 2013. I now attend Capella University, seeking to obtain a Bachelor's Degree in Business Marketing. Even though I stayed in town to pursue post-secondary education, I wish I had taken advantage of the opportunity to attend one of the colleges that we were

introduced to us on our HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) trip through Butler- Armstrong.

At times, and as my experiences at Butler-Armstrong occasionally flood back into my mind, I question, if given the opportunity to make the decision again to attend that school, if I would do it. My response that question would be, “Yes and No.”

Educationally or academically, I would say, “yes”, because it is a great program as far as preparing me for the next stage in my life. Socially, I’d have to say, “no”, because I wanted to be more active in high school and we didn’t have a lot of activities that, you know, other schools did. There was no dance – well, we had a dance team; “I’m sorry!” [laughs because Ms. Braelynn Melodee was over the dance team of which she was a member] We didn’t have anything else though. You know, even though I was active outside of school, I wanted to be active in my school as well, and we didn’t get that opportunity. Some people participated in college clubs and organizations at Henry-Hall to offset that deficiency, but not me. In my opinion, it just wasn’t the same. A lack of social outlets would definitely weigh heavily on my decision to redo the Butler-Armstrong experience if given the chance; so again, I have mixed emotions on the subject.

On the other hand, knowing what I know now, I still believe Butler-Armstrong was a good idea. I’m fine with anything that will push me closer to my goals. I’ll do it. Whatever needs to be done, I’ll do it! But, it was a lot of hard work and late nights and attitudes in the morning because I only got two hours of sleep. I experienced a lot of that. It was a good learning experience, but I think it was a lot, you know, for 16 year olds to be able to handle.

Coincidentally, one of my church members has a daughter that actually started Butler-Armstrong this year, and she was so excited the day I wore the graduating Class of 2010 tee-shirt. She saw the shirt and she's like, [gasps] "I'm going to that school!" And I was like, "Oh my gosh, I graduated from that school!" She asked me, she said, "Okay, so what do I need to do? What, should I expect?" I told her, just as honest as I could, "If you are not mentally prepared for it, you may not succeed. And I don't want to scare you, because I think this is a good opportunity for you. I think it's a good opportunity for any student that wants to succeed in life. But I will tell you this. It takes a lot of hard work. You have to be patient and you have to be willing to put in that work, 'cause if you're not willing to put in any work, or if you're doing it to please other people and not because you wanna please yourself, it won't last. You wanna say, at the end of all of this, I graduated from "The" Butler-Armstrong Early College HS, and I'm amazing." And she said, "Oh my gosh, I'm so excited! I'm so excited!" And I said, "Well, it's a great opportunity. You just have to seize the moment and make it the best you can. If you're not into, you know, a lot of activities, then great; that's even better! Focus on your academics, but, just take this opportunity and cherish every moment because it's gonna go by so fast."

In a perfect world, I wish I could go back to my senior year because it was a lot going on in my life then. I thought I wasn't gonna make it through my senior year. It was – I'm very emotional. [She begins to cry – interview pauses, but recording doesn't stop, because participant wanted to continue, even though she was asked if she wanted the recording stopped] We had to pay our senior dues and I didn't think I was gonna be able

to graduate because my mom did not have the money. I was even on the graduation committee, so I knew everything that was being put into, you know, Prom and Graduation and the Baccalaureate. And here I was thinking, “I might not make it.” Then one day, you called me into your office and you said, “It’s been taken care of.” And I was like, “What are you talking about?” You handed me a receipt and said, “Your graduation dues have been paid.” Nothing like that has ever happened to me before! That was a beautiful, mind-blowing experience for me. So, being able to go back to my senior year, being able to see myself in that moment is something that I wanna do. I wanna go back in time and stand outside the door, just to see you hand me that receipt again. That would blow my mind. Those are the things I’ll never forget, as long as I live.

Five years later, looking back, Butler-Armstrong had a huge impact on me. When I get down or when I’m upset about something, I think about, you know, Professor “P” telling me that day in the hallway, “People suck. Get over it. Go on about your life.” I think about that when I’m thinking about science, ‘cause I love science, which always reminds me of Professors TB and A. They were women in science. I still don’t know of too many female Physics or Biology teachers out there. So, that’s huge to me. I think each teacher had a specific impact on me. Even you had a huge impact on me. To this day, you, Tequila Braelynn Melodee, are the reason why I wanna be a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority!

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix M

### *The Mustafah Experience: Tetris*

Mustafah interviewed Saturday, August 1, 2015 at 6:00 p. m.

*Mustafah arrived extremely late for his interview. When I texted and called to find out what the delay was, he kept telling me that he was around the corner or twenty minutes away, things like that. Due to the delay, I was almost forced to cancel the interview because of prior commitments, but we were able to sit down. He hugged me tightly at the door and expressed how happy he was to see me. Mustafah and I had not seen one another since he graduated from high school over five years ago. I was equally as glad that I was able to connect with him. He has been through a lot over the years, especially coping with the unexpected suicide of his good friend and next door neighbor at his college. Prior to the taping, he detailed the horror of him and another person finding his friend in his bathtub with a self-inflicted gunshot wound, an experience I'm sure he will never completely recover from.*

*Mustafah wore a stylish Mohawk haircut. He had on a black tank with colors and jean shorts. Two tattoos were visible, one honoring someone who had passed away.*

Here is Mustafah's story...

My parent made me go to Butler- Armstrong High School, which I was very unhappy about for, I'd say the first year. I guess with my mom being a teacher in Emerson County, I never got to attend "regular schooling" like everybody else, 'cause I had the opportunity to go to any school in the district that she wanted me to go to. So if she wanted me to go to Butler-Armstrong then that was where I was gonna go, instead of

my home school which is where I really wanted to go during those years, so that I could finally get back with everybody in my neighborhood.

A while into my experience at Butler-Armstrong, I still didn't want to be there, but I was stuck and there was nothing that I could do about it. To make things worse, we didn't even have our own school at first. We were inside of Escalade High School. If you watch the movies, it kind of felt like one of those orphan movies, you know, when you get the new orphan and everybody bullies them. That's how it kind of felt, like a small group of us were in a big boarding house, and everybody else was there to gang up on us. And it was crazy the way they ganged up on us like they had cause, like we were gang bangers from a rival set or we got some different religious belief that they didn't agree with.

None of that was the case; it was just because of our education. Our families cared that much about our education to force us to attend this school and push us to do something more. It kind of made me sad, with that being a primarily black school and all. At one point we even had Escalade people running in and out the halls, knocking on the doors while we were trying to learn. They like, "If they doin' it, I wanna do it. If I can't do it, they can't do it; nobody ain't succeedin' in here." There we were, our own people mad at us for trying to better ourselves, but it kind of confirmed the crab in the bucket mentality that is still prevalent in our community today. They might have been saying, like, "I don't wanna what they doin'," but I bet they would kill to have that spot now. At the end, for me at least, I ended being cool with them, because they realized what they never understood, that I was cool too.

Even after all of the craziness died down between us and Escalade, I still felt a way. Even though I had friends and I had people to talk to, sometimes when I would get home from that bus ride and everybody in the neighborhood was talking about what went on at school, I kind of felt left out, like, "My school's so damn boring. I wish I could have fun. Why can't I just live in their world for one day and just experience real high school." I guess it's like one of those things like, you've only got one childhood. You only get one high school experience. My experience had been chosen for me and it wasn't the decision I would have made.

It enraged me sometimes. A lot of days I'd come home after school and my friends would just be talking smart. They'd say things like, "Boy, you're the smart boy." It caused me to want to fight them. I was gonna fight them, but then we'll be cool. I wasn't mad that they was calling me smart, but it just fatigued me after a long day. Nobody likes to feel like an outsider in any situation, even though there will come a time in life when everybody's an outsider. Just think, nobody wants to be looking at a circle right there and you're the only one standing outside of it. Nobody wants to be there. And that's how I used to feel sometimes. I will say this, while some of my Butler- Armstrong experiences weren't good, it wasn't all bad.

The more you experience in life you realize that some of the things you thought had insignificant value, turn out to be the same things that help prepare you for what's ahead. For example, having people running in and out the halls, knocking on the doors at Escalade HS made me be like, "What can you not learn through?" So, when you get to college and you got that roommate and they're playing music at 3:00 AM, you think,



well, this ain't new. I was going through this in ninth grade. Folks coming and beating on the door while I'm trying to read, it's all good, let 'em do what they do. I'm gonna still get up and pass my test in the morning.

To be honest, Butler-Armstrong gave many kids an opportunity to experience the opposite of what they actually wanted. I soon came to realize that the support from the faculty and staff of Butler-Armstrong was amazing. Genuine relationships between the faculty and staff and the students were present and they actually cared enough to want to see me succeed. They wanted to help me; when I know a lot of times, if nobody has a relationship with you, they don't care one way or another about your success. In larger settings, kids end up falling through the crack; that probably would have been me. But like, it was pretty hard to fall through the crack in such a small setting.

Yeah, I got a lot of personal - social support from Butler-Armstrong. I mean honestly, I was saying to myself recently, "I wouldn't be here right now if it weren't for the early college, 'cause I was on the wrong path." Mr. P was a very influential person when it came to me. He'd, tell me, "You don't gotta be bad to be cool. You cool already." A lot of stuff I got in trouble for was just me being me. But when he told me that, those words kind of stuck with me forever, 'cause I was like, "I am already cool." I don't know what made him do that for me, but he did, I'm just saying. So definitely, I felt supported.

Somewhere, in between all the madness, we also had some positive and memorable social experiences as well; in fact, we had many. One that stands out for me would probably be the trip to New York; more specifically, when I declined a trip to New York. I know I'll never forget about that. That was probably the first time I gave up

something that I knew other people wanted. Honestly, I'm usually selfish; but this time, I gave up something that I did want, but didn't want at the same time. I guess the part of me that did want it, wanted it because I seen so many other people want it. At the same time, I'm like, "Well, I do this all the time, so it's nothing new. I'd rather somebody else get the experience."

The full story is that they only selected about 30 people to go, if that. It might've been less. They chose students based on certain criteria: you know, students who had good grades; students who did not have behaviors issues, things like that. But a lot of people were mad that I had been able to go 'cause Professor P spoke on my behalf because I did have a few behavioral issues. People thought I ain't deserve to go because I act up. And I told them, "Well, I mean, I really don't have to go." If I really wanna go there, I can just go with my grandma. So, I told them that I wanted to give somebody else an opportunity to go.

Eventually, my mother forced me to go, but I was thankful for the experience because it made me step outside my box. It made me not only hang with the people that I wanted to hang with, but I got cool and had interests with people that I had never thought that I'd be cool with. Before I was like, "Nah, I can't do that." I usually hung with the Jasmine's, Collins', and the Richardson's. When I went on the trip, it forced me to hang with the Stinson's, the Ali's, and the Myers', you know, people I wouldn't have just hung with any other time. But we actually had a lot of common interests; we just looked and talked a little different from one another. They were really cool.

And doing other things like that, it showed me, like, everybody is actually

compatible. It's just a matter of, like, "No, you can't fit there. You can't fit there. You can't fit there." Life is just like Tetris and everybody fits in a certain spot; but often times, nobody is willing to move around to fit into a place. Everybody want to stay in the same place. Sometimes though, we gotta be conformative, if we wanna see everybody succeed.

That's one thing I think is good about the Early College Initiative. Like, if it's a small enough number, it kind of rids the chances of you having your cliques – your jocks, your cool kids, your losers, etc. Everybody's just one big family. Everybody was close. After all, everybody really had the same issues; some of us wanted to be there and some of us didn't, but everything we built was built together, and I think it helped to make everybody well rounded.

After leaving the small confines of our one hallway at Butler-Armstrong, we transitioned over to Henry-Hall College. I can honestly say that I was prepared academically. I knew how to take notes better than a lot of people, thanks to Dr. G or Mr. P, I can't remember which one. When I got to college, I was ahead with taking notes. My notes were more organized than most, so a lot of people used to come to me and try to copy my notes to be able to study for tests, 'cause they knew everything was gonna be in line and not jumping around everywhere.

Now socially was another story. I wasn't prepared as far as maturity for the college environment. I guess, instead of college being like, "Let me go out there and let me talk to everybody," I think I was really more sheltered because of the Early College. Henry - Hall forced me to open up when I didn't wanna. Then, through riding the MARTA I realized a lot of these people was riding the MARTA bus too. So, after a

while, you catching the same route home every day; somebody gonna get bored of just looking at you and say, "Here, let me talk to him. I see him every day, might as well say something to him," and you build relationships like that. I also knew people from the neighborhood or they knew somebody that I knew from the neighborhood and we got cool like that.

Another social reality of the college was this sudden overwhelming amount of freedom that we did not have at the Butler-Armstrong. Us having so much freedom, was a good thing and a bad thing. I think one good thing about the program was that it allowed children the opportunity to experience freedom earlier than we were often times given. Kids, sometimes, are so busy living out other people's dreams that they don't get no time to focus on themselves. So, you're living somebody else's life.

On the other hand, with your new found freedom comes the ability to make decisions, whether good or bad. One of the critical choices any kid makes is their selection of friends. Through my friendships, I learned good things and bad things. An example, mind you, I'm 16 and this lady is 19 and she wanted me to skip class with her and go smoke weed. I think at that time, it's kind of an exciting feeling, like, "I'm 16 in college right now. I really don't I wanna miss this class?" Then I'm thinking, "Oh she ain't go." So at first it's like, "No, I'm not gonna do that. I'm gonna do my class." Then it became, "I'm just gonna miss class this one time and go smoke weed." Then you're like, "Hey, they didn't trip. I'm gonna do it today too" and then you end up in that bad cycle. You look back and see that something you've been doing is now like a pattern with you. I can't even say that it was the Early College students. I really feel bad saying it, you

know, I was probably the only one, like for real. For real, like, the only one. I mean, I know only person I think that I might've smoked with a couple times, and that was Richey.

You've gotta be kind of an older soul to be thinking past that kind of temptation. Which we did have, I mean there are adolescents who mature faster than others. So, you're gonna have some that be like, "I'm gonna miss class." Then you're gonna have some who're gonna be so focused like, "I'm in college right now, I'm 16 in college." I am going to do what I need to do.

Another challenge was that I believe the school matured us faster with that freedom. So, I think that was something parents needed to understand. Like, "Your child is not gonna be that regular child he/she was. They were finna have a whole new child, basically an adult. You put two years on their life in this program, but they're still not aging. That's all it is I want them to be aware of.

I think most of the things we got into happen a lot with traditional high school students - sex, drug usage, and anything else that goes on with teens. But, I think in the college setting, like, once again, that freedom exacerbated it. It's more like, who's to say I can't do this? My mom ain't there. Let me go with my girlfriend and get a hotel. It's right here down the street, in walking distance. You're like, "I can bust one right quick," because I only got one person watchin' me. You go smoke weed before class, because you only got one person watchin' you.

So, I think parents needed to be more understanding about the mistakes and the things that their kids might have delved into. They might have said, "Nah, they wouldn't

do that, but they might end up delving into because nobody is there to stop them. Parents gotta talk to their kids, 'cause I don't think we talk enough in our community. We let things happen and react later instead of being proactive. And we could stop a lot of situations before they happen, but it's hard to stop things when it's already started.

Despite the poor decisions that were made, we did have someone on campus to provide support, Ms. Gina. I think she was pretty relational with my class. Ms. Gina made sure that we had the classes that we needed and she also made sure that those classes were interchangeable between the high school and the college, so the credits could count for both. I think she was effective. Because we were the first class, there wasn't that much for her to keep up with. As we added the next class, the relationship got distanced because it was just constant, everybody. She did all of this stuff without any attitude, whatsoever. I know I thought, "you never see displacement or anything." She just did her job. But at the same time, I think, that for as many students as she had, and to effectively keep all the students in line, it needed to be at least four or five Ms. Ginas. She had so many students rushing to her about various problems. She had a lot to handle. She had a lot to keep up with. You've got a campus with at least 2,000 students and you are the only person responsible for a certain number of them, I would think that would be hard for anybody.

Even with all of the things I did which were not ideal, I still managed to stay at Henry-Hall the entire duration of the program and graduate from Butler-Armstrong HS with my high school diploma and college credits.

My transition to my four-year college was pretty smooth. I think the only

roadblock that I had coming in was my grade point average. You know what I mean? I was passing the classes at Henry-Hall with Cs, which was good. But, I guess I didn't fully understand, like, this is college, this GPA is gonna stay with me forever. So, it's not like I'm gonna get a fresh start.

You see these students graduating from traditional high schools so easily. You see folks having 3.5 GPAs and getting the HOPE Scholarship, and it makes you feel a way. I felt like I was smart enough and had worked hard enough to get those scholarships myself, but I can't receive them because of my grade point average. I think is a real roadblock.

I am now a senior at the University of West Georgia. I guess I can say I was prepared. Now that I am at a traditional college, there are some additional things that I wish could've learned from the Early College. I think one area the Butler-Armstrong experience kind of contradicted my current college experience was the fact that the college professors really don't care. They care, but I guess after having so many classes with students who don't care, as a professor you're like, "I'm gonna just care for the students that really care about their education." I wish I would've known it was like that. I think that's one thing that I really wish I would've learned from the Early College, but I guess it's not their fault. I just wish I could have been prepared for how both teachers and students alike, don't really care about you. The only person that's gonna care about you when you get to school is you.

It's crazy, I also wish it would have been emphasized more, that when you get to school you're really on your own. Like, your level of support changes. Okay, I could call

my mom. I could call my sister. I could call my brother for money, but after about that third time of calling somebody 'cause you done ran through some money, which you know wasn't a lot, but when you ain't working or doin' nothing for it, and somebody giving it to you, it's like, "Well, what was you doing with all that money?" You get tired of that feeling. You like, "Boy, I got to figure out some way to make me some money. I got to get some money. I don't wanna keep calling." That forces you to grow up too.

Despite having the early college experience, I still made mistakes when I got to West Georgia. I did good my first semester and then my second semester it seemed so easy that I was like, "I can do this easily. I ain't gotta go to class." One class turned into three, three went to six. Then I'm in every class, trying to pick up on where we at. If I would've just did like I had done in the recent past and just stayed on top of the work, I would been okay. One thing youth have to learn is that, partying gone be there. Of course we like the fun stuff, all that's still gonna be there once you handle your business. It'll probably be there more once you handle your business. You'll have ten times more than you'll have while you trying to get it.

Attending Butler-Armstrong did put me ahead of other people that I seen make mistakes that I had made earlier, so I'm thankful that it happened while I still could still benefit from a lesson learned. I'm thankful that any trouble that I was into, it happened while I still was able to recover, because there's no bailing out anymore. Anything that happens in college, the problem is on you.

I graduate in December of 2015 with an English degree, so I think the worst of it is behind me. Life is a continuous learning journey. I am grateful for my experience at



Butler-Armstrong. I can also now look back and see some ways in which Butler-Armstrong could improve for current/future students.

Regarding the transition at the college, I believe they should have more professors at the college who are paired with the professors of and students at the Early College, so everything can run smoothly. I think it would be a little better success rate instead if this was done. I also think if the teachers at Henry-Hall were as concerned as the teachers at Butler-Armstrong, and understood, like, these still are kids that we are dealing, but they are doing this amazing thing, that would be great. If we just put a little bit more effort in, we can send them to the next level. I think if they understood that, that would help us increase enrollment and maintain numbers.

Regarding the freedom, I believe this is something that could be worked on. Make sure that people are attending classes and, you know, not spending idle time getting into trouble, but doing something positive with that idle time. It may even be better if the Early College students had a place to report, you know, give them some boundaries. For example, if Henry-Hall had a building strictly for Early College students only, with like, a little cafeteria, somewhere to study, little TVs, and little computers so you can work in quiet. This gives them structure instead of being around the grown people who just sit in the cafeteria chillin' 'cause, they don't wanna go to class. Before realize it, it's kind of like you have built a baby setting for them, without them don't even knowing. Kids need time to grow up; and yeah, people do better with boundaries.

Regarding the professors, I would think it would probably be better if you just had four or five professors that teach whatever basic classes the students need. I think that

would've been better 'cause it makes it more relational too. The relationships just transfer over. I would think it would be better just to have the students focused on Math, Literature, this subject, that subject, and you've got five professors who will be consistent. Regular college teachers don't really care if you're not there, so you could miss every class and that would be okay. At least this way, there is some accountability. I think having kids go to the class where there is an actual attendance policy, just like you would in high school even when you get to college, is needed in this program.

It needs to be instilled in the students that not going to class isn't an option. Make them think, "No I really have to go," 'cause I think I turned into, like, "Oh, well, I'm not paying for this, so, I can miss this class one day." They are paying for it though, in more ways than they can imagine. If you have a job and are saying, "Well, they paying me. I'm just gonna miss this day of work." Well, when you don't show up, your check at the end of the week ain't gonna be what it's supposed to be and your bills gonna come up short. So, if you miss classes and fail, what was really the cost? Not to mention, administration and Ms. Gina's job will be harder 'cause y'all got peoples parents calling like, "Why wasn't she going to class?"

This concept is also good I think because being a 15 year old in a room with 21 and 22 year olds will always be problematic. They regular students may not even paying attention to the EC students, but the students in EC are still worried about what they got on and how we look, instead of, "Okay, let me get this work done. This work is really easy, 'cause I don't think the work gets any harder. Once you get to high school the work stays about the same, but it's about your drive and your level of focus that has to change.

These are just some things, that over the year, I've thought about. This provided me an outlet to share my ideas. I believe in what this school can accomplish with the right adjustments. If I could make the decision to attend Butler-Armstrong, I would have and I'm not just saying that. When I think about the staff, it's kind of crazy. You can ask anybody else and I doubt they'd be able to remember who all taught them in their high school. For me, that's like the thing I remember most. It's relational, like.

I definitely appreciate you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, and Mr. P. I mean Mr. P is like an uncle/father to me. I got my father; I come from a home with both parents. You know my mother and my father. My mother graduated with her doctorate and all her other degrees. Now my dad, you know, he was unemployed the majority of the time I was at Butler-Armstrong. My sister was away at college and my brother had moved out. I had a lot going on during that time. With my dad, I'm the baby, so would get most of the flack in a way, and I was cool with that. But I think with him being in this period where he couldn't get a job, and my mom got this doctorate, and she making all this money; she was the bread winner, I think that took a toll on me. I don't think my dad did it intentionally, but unintentionally, he affected me with some of the actions that he made and some of the things that he'd say.

So, it's like, Mr. P was there to just talk to me and what I like about P, he just talked to me like I was a man, even though I was young and I didn't have no damn sense. He still gave me that entitlement, regardless. He let me feel like I made sense. You can just be telling people, "No, you're gonna do it this way, 'cause if you tell somebody, "no," nine times out of ten, "They're gonna do what they wanna do," just because you told

them they can't do it. And I think just 'cause he gave me entitlement; he gave me a chance to be like, "Yeah, you can make the decision to be right or wrong." He would say, "You don't have to be bad just 'cause your dad don't want you to be right. You don't have to just be right because your dad don't want you do be bad. You just make decisions." And he'd tell me, "Life is about learning from your mistakes. A mistake only hurts you if you keep making that same mistake." And I would just listen.

I ain't had no teacher like that! Even with my mama being a teacher, I don't know if most teachers were afraid to get that close or what, like, "Your mama a teacher, you'll be good." But, I don't know what it was, but he just looked out. I would be hungry, he gonna take me to get something to eat. I'm so used to—it's so crazy and petty. I'm so used to getting off the dollar menu with my family. He's like, "No, just get what you want." You don't even know, a lot of times I just tried a lot of stuff at McDonalds, off some, I'm with P. I may have seen somebody order it before and it smelled good, but I really didn't want to be no burden, but with him, it was okay.

He introduced me to BOLD (Brothers of Leadership and Distinction). I think that helped me a lot too. I've always been street savvy from hanging with the wrong people, but I think, when I met him, he kind of, for lack of better description, kind of turned me into like, a TI. I look at him like, "Okay, he gonna handle his business. That mofo right there is crazy." But at the same time you can go put him in a room full of corporate people and guess what he's gonna do, he's gonna adapt perfect, and that's how I try to be.

I feel like everybody liked me; of course Mr. P, but I feel like everybody liked me, even though when I made bad decisions. Like, I had to learn that people saw so much

potential in me. And they didn't say, "You are throwing your life away, son. They more so emphasized, "You ain't throwing your life away, but, bro, if you only knew how much smarter you were; if you just listened..." I wish. I can't listen for nothing. I'm so stubborn. 'Cause if I would've listened, I could've been well ahead of the game, even more than I already was.

Even though you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, ain't seen me in, what, five years? It's still relational. It's still love. It's still energy with you. It's like, you can't pay for that at a regular school. There's too many students for it to be like that or the teachers wanna love everybody, but they got their certain favorites and their favorite is gonna cling to them. But, with the EC program, it's just like, a lot of times, I feel like everybody was a favorite to everybody.

Butler-Armstrong taught me, don't judge a book by its cover. We each look different and have our own unique characteristics, features, and our own unique situation that are molding us into people we are today. That also applies to my initial perception of the school; it may not look like to be traditional high school, but it has its own unique characteristics and features that make it a great place to be.

To the current and future Butler-Armstrong students, go to class. [Interviewer laughs]! Study. It's only easy as long as you do what you're supposed to do, now. If you do what you're supposed to do now, it really does make it easy.

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix N

### *The Tina Experience: Trendsetter*

Tina interviewed Sunday, August 2, 2015 at 4:45 p. m.

*Tina was gracious enough to arrive at her interview earlier because Tosh forgot about hers and did not know if she would be able to participate that day at all. Tina's agreeing to participate in this interview was especially meaningful because she admittedly struggles with her speech. It manifests through studder. Despite this challenge, she has never allowed it to prevent her from being the absolute best she can possibly be. Tina was Butler-Armstrong's very first Valedictorian! Tina wore black jazz pants, a black tank top, and her hair was in its natural state.*

Here is Tina's story...

I remember in ninth grade, the first year of the program, when I was in the middle regarding my feelings about the Butler-Armstrong. I remember a lot of times saying that I was stressed out and the program was too much. So, both semesters of my freshman year, I was supposed to leave maybe, on two occasions. And we had spoke with Dean "E", the Principal, and she was like, "well, you've got a like A plus in all your classes, why are you so stressed out and stuff? My mom was like, "you can go to any school," but I just felt that I would have blended. I would have been failing at life in a traditional high school environment, so I ended up staying.

I just think it was just the balance. I think throughout my high school, that I struggled with the balance of the social aspect in school; so I think that made school in general, um tough, because I didn't have that extra outlet for something else. But,

regarding my overall experience, I will give it 80 percent on a scale of one to 100 because of the fact that, I just think that I did not develop socially. The real world is not that small. Looking back, maybe I should have went to a regular high school because I would have got that inclusive experience of everything. Socialization is something that came along after the fact, and I felt like that inhibited me after I graduated.

Even though I felt that way about the social aspect of Butler-Armstrong, the academic preparation was a lot stronger. I had various supportive teachers like, Mr. B, in particular. I still talk to him to this today. Recently, I even did a Financial Needs Analysis for him through my Primerica business. And so I still keep in contact with him permanently. Professor B (used interchangeably with Mr. B), was always an influential teacher to me because he really took the time out to make sure that basically, I was challenged. For people that were advanced, he would do the critical thinking exam. Part of the critical thinking exam was an oral exam where we would just sit in a group and talk about topics of discussion; the other part was written paper exam. On top of that, he encouraged me with my stuttering.

On that note, Dr. Glass, yeah, she was that same way; she encouraged me to participate in class and to continue to keep going. So in the grand scheme of things, I think I had a lot of support from teachers there. That's also probably why, when I got to college, I missed that stuff, because when you go to a Top 20 University, pretty much everybody in your surroundings has these backgrounds, talking about where they've been and where their rich parents went to school. They know where to go and what to do in those college classrooms, whereas with me, I'm having to figure out the basics. And I'm

trying to figure all of this stuff out, by myself.

Professor TB, she was very supportive. She was like, “Your lab book is awesome,” and stuff like that. She really appreciated my work ethic.

Dr. Glass, like I mentioned, I just remember one time I was sitting in a circle reading some Shakespeare or something and we were trying to analyze it. I was the only one participating. Like, no one was really saying anything because they either didn’t read or they just didn’t know or whatever. I was participating and no matter how long it took me to get out what I wanted to say, she let me. I guess she really admired my effort. Like with me, the thing about me is that regardless of my situation, I’m just not gonna sit there and just not participate because I feel like, “Oh, this is really hard for me.” So, she always encouraged me in that aspect and made me know that I was doing a good job.

In addition to the individual support I received at Butler-Armstrong, they also offered group support, such as SAT prep and tutoring, but I didn’t take very much of it. My 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade year, we even had a social type of group, BOLD (Brothers of Leadership and Distinction) and LOD (Ladies of Distinction), and that was extremely helpful. We really needed that extra guidance, because I still had like high and low periods. That organization helped with building my confidence and stuff of that, where I sort of started to come into my own a little more

At this point, we were leaving our high school and starting anew at the college. The academic transition over to Henry- Hall College, I can honestly say, was easy, even though I’m sure opinions vary on the subject. It was very easy for me. In addition to the classes I had, I was also in the honors program, so I took honors classes as well. I



expected those honors classes to prepare me for course requirements at my four-year school, but the jury is still out on that.

For those who it may not have been as easy for I remember it was a big support system with tutoring resources available. They had good tutoring. The professors were always helpful. They were always willing to help you, especially as soon as they found out that you were a Butler-Armstrong student. That was a very good aspect of it because that person was gonna make sure that you got a B, something you can live with, as long as you showed some type of initiative. They just took you under their wings, just like Butler-Armstrong teachers did. From that aspect, I felt like it wasn't really any difference between the Butler-Armstrong teachers and Henry- Hall professors; they were both very caring.

Earlier I mentioned Professor B being encouraging with my stuttering. Fortunately, I didn't have to give any presentations in any of my classes...until I took Public Speaking. That was a challenge. I tried to fake confidence a lot; sometimes that worked and sometimes it didn't. For one, you're younger than everyone, and two, when you know that you're smart, but then you stutter, sometimes people don't see that. That was difficult for me in that sense. So I remember, one of my speeches in particular, I just couldn't get through it. People around my school were always encouraging, but it's just hard because you always try to be this person that you want to be, but you have that thing that seems to hold you back.

One of the challenges that I didn't experience personally, but witnessed my peers experience was, in some classes, their entire grade may have consisted of three tests a

semester, so many of them ended up probably getting a low grade in classes or failing classes. That was because they didn't know how to balance. You have to study in that aspect so that you could pass all of your tests, or at least be able to pass at the end of the semester.

Another challenge was Math. I've seen a lot of them struggle in that aspect, not necessarily because they weren't smart enough to grasp the concepts; some of them simply may have not attended tutoring sessions, but I don't know.

What I found out when I went to my four-year-institution is that sometimes, asking for help is not as easy for some as it is for other people. So, going back to Henry-Hall, a lot of them didn't ask for help and they needed it. The grade reporting at the college and the high school were also very different, so many people didn't even keep up with their grades. They didn't have a real set knowledge of what their grade was until the end of the semester.

I definitely saw people skipping class. People just either didn't want to come or they skipped when they didn't do an assignment or felt they weren't prepared for a class. I know for me, I may have skipped a class or two, but when I did that, it was because I felt like I could use my time more wisely and do work for other classes. So again, I may have done that once or twice, something else that.

Another memorable academic experience for me at Henry-Hall was when I was named a Finalist for the Outstanding Business Administration Award, a recognition that only four other business administration students received. At the time, I didn't really understand the magnitude of an award like that; but now, I look back at those things and

be like, “Oh, that was really amazing for me to be a finalist for at 16 years old.”

As I said before, my college academic experience was going well. Now, I would have to say, “No”, in terms of being realistically prepared for the social aspect of the college experience. For example, I wasn’t necessarily scared to be on a campus with older people or what not, but just being able to deal with the fact that I may have older men trying to hit on me all day was something different. That was always an issue.

So in regards to that, we didn’t necessarily have any guidance for anyone or people that we could go talk to about those experiences. So, it was like our parents or us, like we were all these 18-year-olds trying to counsel each other about things that go on like that, which is not effective, but most of that stuff, we had to deal with on our own. I don’t know why we didn’t come to you all about those types of things. I just think that sometimes those lines can get blurred where, okay, you know that you’re in high school, but you’re not physically going to a high school, so you try to be grown. I guess it was that, things where you think that you got it down packed and stuff, but you really don’t. I figured, the social aspect is just something that is inevitable and you’re gonna have older guys talking to under-aged girls. And sometimes you don’t necessarily know, being 18 or 20, that, “I’m speaking to under-age girls.” That’s I guess the big aspect of it.

Sometimes too, the older people did treat us differently or whatever. That’s something we didn’t necessarily like. It wasn’t the fact that we were younger, we just didn’t like sometimes when the teachers called us out like, “They’re a Butler-Armstrong student. They’re only 16 while we were in class, because then the older people’s perception of you changed. They’re like, “You’re here. You’re 16 doing this and I’m 30.”

Some were, “Oh, it’s good that you’re 16 and doing this.” From that aspect, would like to just be another person in class, because we didn’t wanna feel like we were better than anyone.

It would have definitely helped had we had those conversations, instead of us just automatically being thrown in. Maybe we could have had little break-out session, like a mentor group, with five girls or whatever and someone older, so you’re able to get feedback from each other, and all of us could talk about what’s going on and stuff. I think that that would have been helpful.

I don’t want to give the impression that we did not have any support at the college. In terms of a Guidance Counselor, of course there was you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, and I would think, Ms. Gina. Ms. Gina was extremely helpful once we transitioned from the high school to the college.

Ms. Gina, from what I gathered, helped with the transition to Henry-Hall College, whether that included academic or social needs, whatever we needed. She was that transition person that we can go to for whatever, whether we had any issues with a professor or whatever, she would be that person to take care of it. So I think that shows a lot about her.

Butler-Armstrong has like, a physical principal and stuff like that. I sort of viewed her as that, not necessarily that leader sort of position, but as a figure like that, because she was really the only person that was on campus with us. I knew she also did a lot of things with the actual Early College Initiative too, reporting back to whomever; at that time she did a lot of this. So I just looked to her as sort of a support system for us because

you didn't have anyone else that was full-time on campus and she made sure everything ran smoothly.

My friends EC friends and I hung out a lot during that time too. I was friends with a lot of different people, but there were other people who were only friends with a certain group of people. I remember first starting off that I was friends with a certain group and then the dynamics of us I guess changed a little bit; we started to branch out and I guess and we just went our own separate ways.

There was also an active social climate at Henry-Hall. Like, I met a lot of people that were Jamaican; and because I am Jamaican, I joined the Jamaican Club that they had; so in that aspect, I think I made a lot of good connections and met a variety of people while I was at the college.

Towards the end of high school, I can say that I had a few memorable social experiences. I remember when we went ice skating for one of our senior class activities. That was a good time. I liked that event, as well Prom, although Prom was just okay. I didn't have as much fun as I thought I was going to have. I don't know, I shouldn't had a date and stuff, but I just wasn't looking at many guys at our Butler-Armstrong. One more, around the time we graduated I had a lot of girls at my house. That was a fun time too, I guess.

I don't really discuss, but since you mentioned it, I was Valedictorian of my class. I also obtained my Associate's Degree, along with my diploma.

Since leaving ECHS, I enrolled at Emory University. I could have gone to a state school for free, but I want to just touch on my decision to go to Emory. Yes, they only

took 32 of my credits, but they were giving me grants to attend. I knew eventually, because you have a credit limit at a UGA or wherever, that I have to come out of pocket, so I was going to go to a private school anyway.

Emory was different. It was different because of parents' income. My dad doesn't work, so because of my mom being the sole provider, I was able to go to Emory pretty much for free. I only graduated with \$12,000 of debt because I decided to study abroad for the summer. It still would have been like \$5,000, but I was able to stay there for four years with only \$5,000 of out-of-pocket expense.

I was planning to apply to the business program, so I thought that I would only really have two years to a business degree since I have my A. S. Degree in Business Administration; but she was like, "No", you need to take Calculus, you need to take all these classes before you could even go in there.

I had to be in the college prep program for at least a year before I get into the business program, because it's a separate application for them just like it is with nursing school. Every separate application, you have to do all these things before you can actually go there.

So it was like even though you have an Associate's Degree in Business Administration, you still won't be in the program for at least a year and that's so you could get in, because they have like a GPA requirement that was like 3.7 for Business. Now mind you, you go to Emory, but the business school is a completely different. They have different building. The students don't even say that they go to Emory. They say they go to Goizueta. So it was just a completely different world over there. So when she did

my transcript evaluation, she was like, “I guess that’s great, but we only take 32. We only take half of the credits,” and so that was that.

What I think that a lot of private schools want to make sure you get as much of their liberal education as possible, because they feel like if you need to get in and satisfy their requirements. So they’re very strict about that because I guess it’s how they maintain their program.

One of my high school teachers, Dr. G, had spoken to me about going into Math and Science, so I majored in Computer Science. So my first semester there, I thought I really knew where I was going. That was the thing. That was Henry-Hall College; it gave me that false sense that I really knew what I was doing.

Academically, I mean it was hard because I was used to excelling when I went there. Initially I wasn’t failing; I was just making like C’s, which I thought was so terrible, until eventually, I stressed myself out to the point where I did fail.

At Emory, a three class load was considered full time enrollment because we were on a four credit system. So my first semester there, I took Physics, Calculus and some other class. When I took Physics, my science major friends were like, “Are you crazy? You’re not even a science major.” Physics wasn’t that bad. It was Calculus and I know math. I’ve always been good at Math. When I tell you, in all my classes, I put into practice what Butler-Armstrong taught me. I slept in my teacher’s office. I slept in there. She did not cut me any slack.

I sat in her class and I would do the exact problems on the exam but I would start to get anxiety, which had never happened to me before. I would just completely blank

once that test was right in front of me. So the first test in math, I got a C, but I beat myself up over it because I wasn't used to making Cs.

And then so once the second test came, I just completely blanked out and I was going to my teacher's office hours, and I was in there all the time and stuff like that, and once I saw my grade, she gave me a D. And then in Physics I got a C, like a C plus, I think. Then, in my other class, I guess I got a B or whatever. But those are my three classes that I took. Overall, it was harder.

At Henry-Hall, those Honor's classes didn't even help. Their tests were just out of a book. As long as you read the book, you knew what's gonna be on the test. Even if they did have an essay, it wasn't anything where you had to think critically.

Emory, on the other hand, based everything around Critical Thinking. It was built on that, no matter what subject you're in. They test your critical thinking skills, so the exam questions are more application. You have to apply what you know, not just be able to recall what you're doing.

So with that complete shock, I didn't know how to study for tests. I was completely lost. It wasn't that I wasn't studying. I just did not know how to do it. How am I supposed to study for all this stuff? So my study skills were just terrible. I would be thinking that I'm getting it and then I'd be like, okay. I'd say, "This was not on the study guide." It took me a while to get it, to really get it. It was very trying because I was just like, "You know what, this school is just terrible."

I did have some help, but overall, they just didn't care because I would go to them and I would tell them my grievances and what was trying to do and they would just



be like, your grade is your grade. And I get that, because I guess you have to maintain the integrity of the school, but goodness!

Going back to the social thing, maybe it was just me, I'm sort of awkward, but I mean, I just felt like when I did the transition to Emory, I felt like everything that I had learned just didn't apply there.

Socially, it was difficult to make friends there. It was because, for one, it was a culture shock. I've been going to a Black school ever since I moved from New York. I moved from New York when I was in third grade, so the people that I've been around all have been very familiar to me; but going to a school where it's so diverse, with Blacks and Asians, that was just another thing for me.

I really tended to forget all that I accomplished in high school. When I was at Emory I was around people whose SAT scores were a lot higher than mine, I sort of downplayed my accomplishments because of the people that I was around. Everyone was smart. So, I wasn't different anymore like I had pretty much been throughout my entire education. I was no longer set apart.

If I ever thought about mentioning what I had done, it was like, "Well how many people were in your graduating class?" Then they'll say, Oh, I went to school with a whole bunch of people." So, when I got used to that type of thing; then, it was kind of difficult because I really didn't feel like they understand where you're coming. I really think it was more of the fact of their ethnicity. It was also the fact that they were rich. It was little things like just, "Oh, I need money again." I'm still calling just to ask for \$20 and I'm sitting there like...I worked. From my freshman year, up until I graduated, I

worked.

My friends didn't have to work or anything like that. So, with that, socially, like my first month or two there, even with the Black people, they were just a different type of people. You would expect that everybody would just be inclusive, but I would go into like the cafeteria and stuff and say hi to everyone if I see a group of Black people, and they would look at me like, "What's wrong with her?"

I don't know if it was an elitist mentality or if it was a competition type of thing or whatever, but it was just extremely embarrassing. With housing, I decided to move into single, because I wasn't used to really sharing everything like that, even though I have a sister. We were very independent and I was just used to doing stuff by myself. That's how I was. So, I probably should have had a roommate my first year that I was there, but I did not, so that played a big role in the social aspect too. Eventually I did find a group of girls where most of us are still cool, but those initial couple of months there were rough.

At a point I was a cheerleader. I was also a part of the professional business society. That was actually a good experience for me. I joined that junior year. They do interviews and stuff like that just trying to get you prepared for corporate America. Most of the members were business majors, but they had people that were outside college too, as long as they had an entrepreneur mind.

I graduated from there in May 2014. Immediately before graduation I was received a job offer with a company called Idle Technologies, where they pretty much save insurance company's money. We're an IT company and I test the rules engines to

make sure that they work for each client that we have.

I'm also in school, full-time (online) at Utah State. I'm in a program for Speech Pathology. I'm actually getting a second Bachelor's Degree in Speaking and Communication, so by this time next year, I should be full-time in my Master's program. I could have done a three-year Master's now, but with this, I can work still and do my program, so I figured that this was the best route for me to do this for a year. I've just been busy with making sure that my GRE scores are where they need to be, so I've been studying for that and just trying to get my school selection down because I may be going out of state.

I don't know exactly what I want to do right now, but the reason I am interested in this field is obviously because I stutter, so to help kids and adults with their speech ability, is a passion of mine. I've been speaking with a lot of Speech Pathologists, and the great thing about this profession is that it's so many settings working in the field.

You would probably never get bored because you're able to work in a hospital, nursing home, or assisted living facility, wherever because it's a range of disorders that people deal with: feeding disorders, swallowing disorder, tracheal problems or anything like that. You can work with it. Of course you have a fluency with stuttering or whatever, but a kid has some type of mental disability, you'll have the ability work with them. So it's a lot of things that you can do!

I get bored very easily. I don't like doing the same thing every day; so it's a wonderful feeling that the stuff I'm learning right now is so interesting, especially since Emory sort of sucked the life out of me! I love school again; and I should be enjoying

learning!

There's such a limited amount resources for adults who stutter and Speech Pathologists, often times, are still trying to use child methods on grown people, which is not effective. Or they don't listen to exactly what you need, because some people only stutter in certain situations; they stutter when they have to speak in front of people or; some things trigger where you know that you're not gonna be fluent in that aspect. That's the help they need. My Speech Pathologist even prescribed me with the drugs last summer that weren't helpful, so I decided just have to deal with this on my own.

I'll be honest; I didn't get much support at Butler-Armstrong in reference to my condition either. If I would have went to a public/regular high school, I would have gotten additional speech therapy. And it was hard because the reason why I stopped getting speech therapy while I was in school was because my mom, a lot of times, had to take off work for things related to my speech; and after a while it was just becoming too much. So, I wasn't able to get that extra enrichment, in that sense, so I could better improve my speech.

I guess we could have pushed more for resources at Butler-Armstrong because what's unfortunate is that the people who speak up the loudest tend to get more. But, at least my mom was a Speech Therapist too, so that helped.

Looking back, and this has nothing to do about the speech thing, Butler-Armstrong needs to be a more well-rounded program. I don't know what it is now, but, there is a group that could benefit from more social involvement. I know that people try and preach, oh academics and stuff like that, but in order for you to make the best

student, they need to be able to have different social opportunities, and I think that Butler-Armstrong lacks that aspect.

I understand we couldn't have sports and stuff, but something has to change. I suppose I could have done stuff outside of school, wherever, but I'm just looking back on it and that would have been something that would have made me better now.

I mean, there were some, we had a dance team. I even remember the Yearbook Committee. I don't know, I guess what I'm trying to say is that maybe there could be partnerships with bigger schools too, because if you only have like 50 students or whatever, you still need that extra interaction with other students too.

Moving away from the extracurricular suggestions, the transition to the college could be improved upon too. You're 16 years old, you know, so I think just going through regular 16-year-old things was enough; then to add all of the things that come along with transitioning to college, was a lot.

For one, I know that the availability of faculty was limited, but having other people to go to, so you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, didn't have to be there for everything, would have been nice.

It would have been great if Ms. Gina would have coordinated with Henry-Hall faculty to identify people that were just willing to just, you know, take interest in us and stuff like that. And, even if she found some students that were older and willing to volunteer in that aspect just for, you know, guidance that would have been cool too. It's kind of going back to what I mentioned earlier about the college and the older boys.

Butler-Armstrong may not have been perfect, but if I could make the decision to attend Butler-Armstrong all over again, I'm gonna say yes I would still do Butler-Armstrong again; and the reason why I say yes is because, although this program I think didn't prepare me socially, I don't think I would have accomplished as much if I would have went another school.

I think that my stutter would have been a more bigger deal at a traditional school. I say that because those would have been the people that I knew all through elementary school and they just knew me as, "Oh Tina, she's shy. She don't talk good," stuff like that. I didn't talk good, but I just didn't want to feel like going through that every time I opened my mouth. I couldn't articulate my words how I wanted to, so that's just how people looked at me and defined me. So I feel like if I would have continued to travel with that group, I would still be considered that type of girl.

It's so hard to change. It's so hard to be that person that you want to be but people keep constraining you to whatever they think that you are. So, in that sense, I would attend Butler-Armstrong all over again, because I don't think I would have accomplished as much; additionally, I think my teachers would have looked over me, because they did that to me at my previous school.

One example briefly is, there was an award that I was supposed to win for the highest GPA in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the person didn't give it to me because I had to do a speech. So I feel like similar things would have kept happening like that if I went to a public school.

In terms of earning college credits in general as a high school student it has its

good points and bad points. It's good if you know what you want to do. If you're like, "Oh, I want to do this, I want to be an engineer. I want to do that. It's perfect. I mean even if you don't know what you want to do, General Studies credit would be good too, I guess.

I think that it's good, especially for kids who probably would not go to college, or would not be in a position to go to college; for kids who naturally don't have the opportunity, whether it's just resources, income, or whatever, it's great. But regardless of what, I was gonna go to college. I would have done it anyway. My mind was set on that, so this was just like a plus.

With me, even though I got my Associates in Business Administration, my field has completely changed. I would just go up and down as to what I wanted to do, so I still ended up staying four years, despite having 32 credits transfer from Henry-Hall College. So, it just really depends on what your situation. There are also other benefits. I could have graduated for free from a four-year college. I just chose to attend a private institution, so that was a little different.

To current/future ECHS students, the advice I would give to you is this: Make your own path, so if they don't have a social expert there you try to fulfill those things on your own, which is important. Make sure that you're able to be more well-rounded; do something outside of school that makes you happy. Don't be too hard on yourself, especially throughout this time because you are already doing something that many adults can't do. Be humble, but at the end of the day, recognize that you're really doing something that's great. Don't grow up too quickly because it can make you do that. It can

make you feel like you're old and stuff, so really enjoy the moment as you are. Really try to remember that you're in high school and that you can still do high school stuff.

Personal Note: One reason I stayed at Emory was because I just needed to slow down.

Take time to really get yourself together and stuff. Don't feel like, "In two year, I need to do this. In two years, I need to do that."

If you know what you wanna do, fine, but if you don't that's fine too. Do not compare yourself to other people. Personal Note: It's so hard to do, especially when you have everybody doing their own thing right now and people in law school, people that graduated from law school, and people that are at med school, it's especially because of the fact that I was in the first class, so I want to be the first at things.

Do stuff at your own pace. It's not a competition, but at the end of the day it makes the program better, the fact that you have all these professional people who came from it. Do what you need to do to get where you wanna go. It doesn't matter how long it takes you.

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*



## Appendix O

### *The Allen Cook Experience: Never Judge a Book by its Cover*

Allen interviewed Sunday, August 2, 2015 at 4:45 p. m.

*Allen Cook was a person of his word, even though he had to reschedule our initial interview for a work conflict. He notified me in a very respectable time frame and expressed his interest in rescheduling. When we spoke on the phone, I could hardly believe who I was walking to! He has grown up to be such a polite and professional man. Allen brought his friend, fellow Class of 2011 cohort member, Maximillian. I was excited to see them both.*

*Allen wore a multi-colored (orange, pink, black, and white) tank top with diamond designs, blue jeans, and navy blue tennis shoes with white soles and mint green accent. He had a nice low haircut. He also wore a black sporty casual watch.*

Here is Allen's story...

Coming in, I could notice that Butler-Armstrong was in a building state. It was in its first couple of years and I could notice that things were the start of something new. I didn't really let that bother me. Regarding school, at that time, at my age, a school was a school, no matter how it may be or what the experience is like. I didn't really recognize things like that. Overall, I thought I enjoyed it. I enjoyed going; I guess really going through the changes, not like I was going into something that had already been there. No matter whether the changes were good or bad, I was that guy who enjoyed the program; and, I enjoyed being a part of the process.

I would say that one of my immediate challenges was in my transition from

middle school. I had just come from a middle school program that was, I won't say struggling, but was in an area with a student body performing at a certain level, that was not adequate. When I transitioned into the Butler-Armstrong program, I kinda carried that confidence over. Leaving that other program, after being pushed educationally in my household so strong, I was kinda outscored, out-tested, and outperformed by most of the students at my new school, on a quite consistent basis. I won't necessarily say that my confidence was broken, but I realized I wasn't always the smartest person in the room. I took that and I tried to make it the necessary goal to motivate myself.

But constantly noticing students who, not to sound impolite, but maybe provided little effort, I stereotyped them and I pretty much said, "Okay, definitely smarter than that person, smarter than that person." Then when they felt like it and they tried, they outperformed me in an assignment or in a test, even when I put way more effort in it. I would say that that was my only challenges; it was learning to realize that there's always someone better than you at something. I definitely think that weighed on me for a while until I got over it.

I could say that I witnessed another obvious challenge because everyone there wasn't there by choice. That was one of the things you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, asked me at the very beginning, did I voluntarily attend Butler-Armstrong, and I think that was key. There were so many students that were there who didn't wanna be there. And when you don't wanna be somewhere, you don't perform. Subconsciously, you don't perform at the level in which you could 'cause you really don't wanna be there."I don't wanna be in that environment." And I think that there were a lot of parents who tried to do right by their

children, and felt as though they were prepping them by sending them to Butler-Armstrong; but more, they kinda hurt them by making them attend.

Again, being something new, being a part of only the second class, when you arrived, you could see that there was this line, a little sense of tension between the Escalade HS students and the Butler-Armstrong students. We did not have our own institution, which seemed to be a conflict. And it wasn't because anything had been done to anyone; it was just that Butler-Armstrong was a new school, up and coming, they had bright students, teachers that could provide individual attention, and students were excelling; versus Escalade was a school in a pretty urban area, I won't say struggling, but they didn't have the luxuries that Butler-Armstrong had. So those students felt like the Butler-Armstrong students thought we were better than them. And there is a sense of tension when you feel like anyone walks around carrying themselves better than you. I think that led into altercations, whether verbal or physical. I definitely noticed that and more so for the class that was ahead of me, than from my class.

My very first day starting Butler-Armstrong, I was in the wrong classroom. I sat in the class ahead of me's grade level, without knowing. I was sitting in their class and I was watching as they were all mingling, they're talking, and I was like, "Wow, these people have interacted pretty quickly." I was like, "Hey, they bonded pretty fast." And it was another student, sitting right across from me, his name was Zack. He's not saying a word; I'm not saying a word; we don't know each other. Everyone else is just interacting. They went through the roll call, calling all of the students that should be there, and we both raised our hands for not hearing our names being called. That's when we found out

we was in the wrong class and I never saw that student again that whole school year. We never shared another class together until the following year, and it was kinda like, “Hey, you’re still here.”

I definitely built a lot of friendships. Some friendships, even my best friend, we became friends off of rivalry. When I first met him, I didn't really like him. I didn't really like him as a person. I didn't like his friends, and it was just weird 'cause one day, we said, “Hello,” and that became a, “What's up,” and we never stopped talking after that. So I definitely think that it built a lot of close friendships and it built a lot of unique friendships in ways that you don't normally be friends.

My other best friend, Ant, his first year people kinda knew him for not saying a word. He literally, and I mean that literally, would not say a word, even if the assignment was to say a word. He did his best to not have to. And talking in the hallway one day, someone made a reference about sports, and it was as if it was the key! He's a diehard Patriots fan and he began talking so much and so fast, with so much information, as if he was managing that team, and the whole hall just paused, like in a moment of silence. He talks to everyone now.

As you can see, my friendships meant a lot to me, still do. The relationships with the EC faculty and staff were also important. As far as the academic support that I received, it was actually quite a bit. Again, with it being a new program, it was new teachers. I'm not sure of their experience level comin' in, but everyone was quite onboard with a team effort. Teachers stayed after longer. They went above and beyond. They contacted you. They exchanged personal cell phone numbers. The educators definitely

wanted you to learn. So I thought that the support was definitely there. No one turned you away for assistance or tried to send you off to another means. Everybody tried to help you, if they could, on the spot, right there when you asked for it. So I think the educational support was definitely there, not just from the teachers, but from the staff, whether they taught a subject or didn't. They tried to put you in a position to learn whatever it is that you were trying to learn.

It's very unusual when an administrator or a staff member knows you by name when you walk into the office. No matter whether it's for something good or bad, they can just look at you and speak to you based upon how your personality dictates you be spoken to. With us having such a small student body, that was the experience I had at Butler-Armstrong. I thought it was definitely helpful that you didn't feel, when you went to that person that you was going to someone, I wouldn't say in a higher position, but someone that you felt as though you needed to work up a chain of command to get to. It really felt more personal 'cause you can just go to that person, as if everyone there was a Counselor, whether that was their role or not. So I definitely think that was helpful.

Thinking right off the top of my head, I definitely remember my literature professor, Professor P. How he taught, how he educated, was very not at a whiteboard. It was him actually sitting in a desk or on one of the desks, even standing on the desk, and not speaking at you, but it felt more to you. He taught with more current events, things that you could relate to as a 16 or 17 year old in that timeframe. He used music and things from other classes, and he incorporated them into teaching you about a book you've never read. So I definitely can say that's a standpoint in my educational chapter that I

remember.

There were others. First off, my disclosure, I would say everyone, whether or not I can remember everyone's name, but everyone was definitely helpful. The people that I will begin to list are the people that just maybe stuck out to me for a particular reason and I feel as though I was with them the longest.

Professor B who taught History, it is definitely good to see him continue on with the program so long. I definitely remember his class. I just remember how he taught history and how he taught things. I guess my one special memory, I guess, would have to be when he gave us a Social Studies Fair assignment. He gave to us, like months before. He mentioned it again a month later and we never heard nothing about it for two months. Mind you, you're doing all this other work for some of your other classes, so it totally slipped my mind, and it also slipped Ant's mind as well.

So, we came to class one day and he was like, "Don't forget your Social Studies Fair projects, due in about two days." And the whole class's reaction was, "What assignment? What project?" Some people remembered and had already started. They brought these great projects in and I remember myself and Anthony, we begged and pleaded with our Spanish teacher, Senor C, to miss his class in order to be able to finish the project. Unfortunately, we kinda missed our deadline of getting it in at the beginning of class, but we knew that he wouldn't grade them until later. It felt like we was on a spy mission. We promptly broke into the library and put our boards up and just laid them next to all the other boards, as if we turned them in on time and everything was great. It did not work out that well. He actually noticed, gave us, I would say, a poor grade, but he

recognized that we did it. It was quite a poor grade, and we ended up doing extra credit to try to make up for it. That was my biggest memory with him.

Like I said, I remember Senor Cruz, the Spanish teacher. He was great when he was there. I remember he left kinda, I'm not sure I remember correctly, in the middle of the semester. But he was a great teacher as well. He had so much energy. He taught literally walking back and forth, and standing up. He made you interact with Spanish. He'd try to get you to say what you would normally say, but in a Spanish conversation. My memory with him is it goes like this. There was this female student I was definitely interested in and it kinda was the thing that everyone just knew. They never said anything; everyone just knew. He was calling people up in pairs to speak Spanish with each other. I always performed quite well on this assignment. I could always speak Spanish that we hadn't even learned that day. The thing is, he always chose your desk mate, the person that sat right next to you, for this exercise; that was always for me, Hart.

He was my desk mate and we always did the assignment with each other. We had it all figure out. I would only ask him things I knew he could answer and we used to always try to do it like that, simple. I would give him a sign to help him understand when needed. And one day he called me up. Hart stood up thinking, well we always come up here. He told Hart to have a seat and he called that student, I'll even say it, Hack. I looked at Senor Cruz and he looked at me, like, go. And I froze. I didn't say not a Spanish word. I couldn't even say the numbers anymore. She tried to help, but I literally could not remember. That was the first time I did not do well on that assignment and he never did that again. It was awful.

I mean, it did not work out, but a lot of people remember me for my, I guess, I'll say infatuation with the young lady I just mentioned, Hack. That entire chapter of Butler-Armstrong, I pretty much I liked one girl and I was pursuing after her the entire time we were there. People kinda came to know me for that. Even when I wasn't pursuing her, people, they would kinda recognize me and remember me for, not what I did, but for, I guess, what she may have done or just knowing her in general. So I think that was my biggest social aspect of Butler-Armstrong.

No we weren't together at the time of that Spanish experience; that was our ninth or tenth grade year. That was when we could finally adapt, after we got our own buildings. We, Hack and I would not begin to interact 'til our first semester of the postsecondary part of the program.

I would say the high school aspect of the program, before I went to the postsecondary part, prepared me academically, though I never really developed the self-educating ability that I found to have needed during postsecondary. It wasn't that I wasn't prepared, but it was through the high school stages. You're being educated. You're learning it. If you have a question, you ask it, and it's explained; then you're tested on it, and based on what was explained to you, that's pretty much how you answered the questions. When I went off to postsecondary it was more, "This is what I will teach you. This is what you should learn and you were given the material to learn it. You kinda had to fish for yourself, almost. It's not that those teachers aren't there to help you either, but you had to be more specific with how you wanted that help. You had to know what help you wanted, versus in high school where the teachers helped you best they could and they



threw out what help you needed most, based on you.

Socially, being in a school where the student body is not as large, you deal with only so many personalities. Going straight into a postsecondary, where even your age at that time is 16 or 17 years of age, it's a little hard to interact with postsecondary students who are parents, adults, and students who have fully graduated from four-year high schools, things like that. I don't feel as though it was a big deal for me.

I wasn't really nervous about the environment or the people, but it definitely felt, I guess considering my age, more competitive for me. I didn't feel like I was competing for anything, but I felt being 16 or 17, like I had to prove myself. I was disappointed when I didn't do as well as I liked and I was a lot more excited when I did even just good enough, especially having less exposure than the people around me. I felt like I was writing against people who had lived longer than me, had far more experience, maybe more education in their background, and I definitely think that socially, that played a role. I wish I would have handled it differently and tried to feed off of that aspect, instead of pushing it away. That's one thing I can say.

At the college level, I remember Miss Gina, the liaison for Butler-Armstrong. She was the largest part of assisting us in that transition. She was our biggest supporter on and off the stage. I feel as though without her, without her being present, I don't think there would have been any support between the college professors and the EC students. They try to give you that same respect that they would give any student and that's to not look at you any different. And as much as we appreciated that, that just maybe wasn't the support that a Butler-Armstrong student needed. So I would say if it wasn't for Miss

Gina, calling on her, we would not have had that support, in my opinion.

I perceived her roles to be easing that transition, making it as smooth for a younger, not as developed high school student, to transition into a full college student role. I thought she did the best job that she could have. She did a quite well. I felt as though it was her job to help us with applying for Financial Aid, all those things that a regular college student has to go through at 18, 19, and 20. She helped us go through that at 16 or 17.

Before her, I knew nothing of applying for Financial Aid. You think it's just, you're graduating to the next level, and you just go. You just go and you kinda pay for it when it's over, or you pay for it as you go through; but the Financial Aid process, the FAFSAs, having to do everything on such a deadline, was a huge process that was quite tedious. Personally, I think I woulda struggled if I had to do it alone. But she made that process very easy.

I do have one situation that I would like to share which occurred around the time my class graduated. One thing I can remember in the program was when we actually had a Valedictorian-Salutatorian dispute. There was an issue over the named Sal voluntarily taking an overload of college classes; whereas, the Val that was named elected to only take the high school classes, with the standard mandatory college classes. Their GPAs were, I believe, 0.1 points apart from one another. The sentiment from the Sal was, "The load I took was obviously more rigorous. I did more. I took all those college classes," and the student who didn't was actually named Valedictorian, because the title defaulted to whoever had the higher GPA. So there was a house divided among the Butler-Armstrong

students over who should be Valedictorian and who should have been Salutatorian.

Since leaving Butler-Armstrong, of course my goal was obviously to finish what I started at Henry-Hall and continue on to post-secondary education; but I really, towards the end, did so much damage to my GPA, that I went a different route. My educational confidence was kinda broken. I had never before seen myself negative, below average, or really too much average at anything. So, it kinda hit me hard and I really didn't know how to handle it. I was afraid to keep going back and it felt like I was forcing it. I felt like, well, what has changed other than the time; so, I took a break.

I ended up joining the United States Air Force Reserve. I'm still currently serving in the Air Force. I've deployed once. I've actually been on three trips overall and have currently been promoted to the rank of sergeant.

I did attend some college between that time and I actually did far better. I ended up taking a break because, again, I was deploying. I haven't forgotten that semester yet. I think even now I've been a little afraid to go back, just for one, I've been busy; but two, I feel like I left off on a good note and I'm afraid to ruin that good note.

Another thing, once I became old enough, I applied for the academy and am now police officer in my local county. I'm a full-time officer there and that's been a new experience for me, all while still serving part-time in the United States Air Force Reserve. So I've been doing that. I've seen a lot. I've matured quite a bit. You kinda have to. At my age, I'm 22, but when I started, I was 21. I was the youngest officer in my precinct. I was most of the time the youngest officer on the road.

So it's kinda hard, to just to speak a little bit about what I do, to tell adults 35 and

up, “You gotta come with me. This has to stop. Do this, do that.” And they look at you and they're, like, “You're young enough to be my son. Like, I coulda raised you myself.” So I definitely think all of that has changed my way of approaching people, but I try to stay focused. My goal is to eventually get away from the patrol aspect of Law Enforcement, especially today, in this day and age, where patrol officers are so heavily criticized. It's hard not to take it personal.

As far as being a full-time officer, and being promoted to Sergeant in the United States Air Force Reserve, I definitely like where my life is going. I definitely still have far more goals to prepare myself for and education is mandatory. Within five years, I would like to attend the U. S. Marshall Academy in Glynco, GA in order to become a United States Marshall. That's been my goal and I've been standing by it. If I'm not in their academy by the time I turn 28, 29, I haven't done myself justice, 'cause I still wanna be young goin' through that. I could talk about what I do and my goals all day, but I'll just go back to the reason why we are here.

I enjoyed my early college experience. You, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, asked me a question in the beginning and my answer to that was feeling as though I was part of something new, part of something that was growing and developing, and even today I take a lot of pride in that. But there's a saying that a lot of people above my generation use, “The same things that make you laugh, make you cry.” And as much as I feel proud about that, I felt as if, it just couldn't be helped at the time, being part of something new is just that. It's new. Everything you're going through is trial and error. And that feels great when that coal becomes a diamond, and you look back and you say, “I was part of that

work that made that a diamond;” but while you were there, it was just coal.

It’s not necessarily saying that the program was bad or negative at the time. It's just that, because you know you're a part of change, (and the one thing that's constant in life is change), you see that. You see some teachers come, go, new teachers change out. You can see that everyone knows that this is new, and no one's certain about where it will go.

And even in today's life, it's hard to put everything into something that you're not sure will last. That's in any aspect, whether that be a relationship, or a car. It's hard to put all your effort and eggs into that one basket when you don't know where it will lead. So whether someone says it or not, how they carried themselves in the program, you can feel it. You can feel if they're 100% invested or even if they're just 90%, which is still good; but, you can tell. I definitely think that aspect was a way that Butler-Armstrong could have been better, but that's just something that couldn't be helped, 'cause everyone has to start from somewhere.

I’m sure all early college schools had their unique set of challenges. I remember being taken to a place where I met these other EC students and we was discussing the program. [Subsequently he was reminded that I took them there and it was a Summer Leadership Retreat.] When I spoke to students from other programs, they talked about how their setup was different. They did their four years of high school and took college classes every year. They would have high school class, leave for the day, and go to the college and take classes. They did that every day for four years, high school and college kinda side-by-side - four years in a row; versus our program, just knock out the two years

in the beginning and we'll send you to the college full time the last two years. I am not advocating for either model, but I thought that was definitely interesting.

The concept of earning college credit while in high school was quite well thought out. I am also glad that by the time they got to my year, some things and the structure had kinda worked out a little bit better. Another thing as far as earning the high school and college credit at the same time, I found that it could really, really help you or it could really, really hurt you. It's one thing to find out that you got a certain grade a college class, but it's another thing when it also counts as a high school class, that you never took. Uh, so when you perform well, one A is like two A's, but one D is like two D's.

So you can, if this was your opportunity, you could have a GPA reset. Everything you knew about your GPA was almost as if you were starting a sport game over back at 0-0. So graduating Butler-Armstrong, walking across the stage in order to go to postsecondary, it was almost like you came out at half-time and the game score tied, so if your GPA was great, which, I won't say that mine was great; it was fair, I ended up, I guess, doing more damage than good, not really understanding that self-education process I talked about earlier.

But, I know there's other students whose GPA's skyrocketed. But other than that, I can definitely say, I enjoyed it; if you use it well, if you use it what it's intended for, then it works out. I won't say, just because I didn't use it to the best of its ability that it was not for me or bad. It's meant to be reflecting. So it was still a good process and thought. It's just you can only trust a student to do so much.

Even knowing what I know now, I definitely, without a doubt, would still have

attended Butler-Armstrong. As much as I say I wish I would have gotten social experiences from a four-year, traditional high school, I know that what I experienced at Butler-Armstrong meant more to me than that would have. It's so easy to say that you wish you would have attended pep rallies and had sporting games to go to, those types of events that other traditional high schools offer; but I look back and I really do take pride that I wasn't just a student, that I wasn't just a number and a percentage of students they needed to pass. I really felt personal in that school and I definitely think my interactions were better because of the small body of students. It's so easy to see someone, remember their name, see them again, and really get to know everyone's strengths and weaknesses, versus in a traditional high school where you wanna go there for the social aspect, but traditional can be antisocial 'cause there's so many people. It's hard to talk to everyone in a crowded room; that's the best example that I can use. So I definitely would choose Butler-Armstrong all over again. I'd do some things differently, but I would definitely choose the program all over again.

With me not having continued my postsecondary education as well as I would have liked, I try not to get complacent; but I look at my age now, realize that I do have college credits, thanks to Butler-Armstrong. It's finally caught up to me to where now, if I went back to school, I would be right on schedule; not as advanced as I would have liked, but it makes me feel good knowing I have that safety net and that I'm not starting from zero. I'm starting from at least 30% towards a Bachelor's Degree. Now, I'd like to attain that at the very least. I think your high school is a pretty important part of your life, for at least the next ten years. High school is where I know most of my friends from. It's

something that's always gonna be on my resume, and it's gonna be part of what I discuss when I talk about my educational history. Anyone who asks me where I got my high school diploma from, I'll proudly tell them, Butler-Armstrong is where it came from.

'Cause I can tell my friends where I went, where I work, about my life, and where I traveled; but it was all about, what school you went to or are you goin' to. So I definitely think that played a huge part in my life. It's given me a lot of experiences and an opportunity to meet a lot of people. I have so many significant memories that I still value and remember today.

The best advice I can give to current/future EC students would be this. I'd just start by saying, "When I first started, we didn't wear a uniform. Then, we started wearing Butler-Armstrong shirts and khaki pants; but I look now, and that uniform has come a long way! It's blazers, jackets, and really nice ties, something like that. And I know you first start high school, talking about the uniform you don't necessarily like, but it's so much more to the school than that."

It's weird to think it's only been four years. It seems like it has been so much longer. But without even knowing where the program is today, I can say to them, "Take full advantage of it. It's not something to despise or rebel against." It is different and sometimes that scares people.

You're just going in a different direction; a different direction that, if utilized properly, it can be for your best interest. I won't even say the better. This could literally put you wherever you would like to go. So I definitely think, out of any advice I can give, that they should know, "Don't look at it for what it is on the surface. Don't look at it for



what you read in the handbook. Don't look at it for what you hear in the Butler-Armstrong song, which has changed.” When I was there, the main part that we all remembered was our supporter was Bill and Melinda Gates. Now that whole part of the song is gone. I don't even know it, “But don't look at it for that. Look at it for what it can be, for the friends that you build, for the teachers that are there for you, for everything that you can do, not what you can't.” So that's truly the best advice I can leave behind.

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix P

*The Autumn Experience: From COM-PASS to Mass Com*

Autumn interviewed Thursday, July 30, 2015 at 6:22 p. m.

*I was very pleased that Autumn had the opportunity to interview with me that particular day. We had spoken earlier about scheduling an appointment in the near future. I knew she was in town briefly, visiting her mother, and handling some business. One of those matters of business was more personal in nature. She was going to visit a former classmate and fellow study participant, Kristen. Once they got together, they both thought it would be a good time, since I already had an appointment with Kristen, for Autumn to sit for her interview as well. They arrived together. I must disclose that Kristen was physically present during Autumn's interview; however, she was asleep majority of the time, snoring even, until she was tapped by Autumn!*

*Autumn wore a WSB-TV cap representing her days as an intern, black pants, and a blue/turquoise tank top. She was wearing a red and blue tooth around her neck and stud earrings, along with a black watch. Autumn did not attend Butler-Armstrong ECHS voluntarily.*

Here is Autumn's story...

Where do I start? Honestly, the early college experience, I fought my way through it probably right up until graduation. Um, I did not want to go the early college at all. Nothing personal, it was just that I had gone to, what I call, special schools my entire life. I went to a public elementary school; then after that, my mom was like, "Oh no." So I went to a charter school for sixth and seventh grade. I went to a theme middle school for

eighth grade, and again, I went to an early college high school. It was like my mom put me into regular school, but what is regular school? But I fought my way through it; and in the end, I realized it was a great. It was a great step for me.

You can't beat it; I mean free school and a support system that pushed me to work harder than I would have ever worked, as opposed to going to my school that I was supposed to go to, Cedar Grove High. I didn't necessarily want to go to Cedar Grove either, but I wanted to go to anywhere other than Butler-Armstrong.

It was just a new concept for everyone. And as far as being the pioneers, we were the second class, so I could tell that it was new. I could tell that while I was learning, the administration was learning, and we were just all learning together. But overall, it was a really good experience. I made friends that I still have today. And that's what I was hoping for in high school, even though I didn't go where I wanted to go. I wanted to have those lifelong friendships and I do.

Because our class sizes were small, we knew everybody. It wasn't like a normal high school where you could really have beef with somebody, because it was 12 of us, not really 12, but we had to be close. We needed each other. If we wanted to have a study group, we needed to be okay with everybody. We were all different, but because it was so small and intimate, that's what made it a good experience.

When I first started at Butler-Armstrong we did not have our own building. We were housed in another Emerson County High School, a traditional high school that most students go to because they are zoned in that area. Being at Escalade HS, using that hallway because we were so little, we said the space mattered, but it really didn't. We

functioned well on that hallway, but it did feel like it wasn't where we were supposed to be.

I grew up in Atlanta. I grew up in that area, specifically. The nicest way to say this is, "That is a different environment, going to a public school, period, but specifically Escalade." It was a rougher crowd. And for us to be pushed into a school where we were being pushed consistently to do better, to achieve higher, and to be exposed to those students who were pushed differently, it was...different. We were literally maybe 20 feet away from each other, but it was two totally different environments.

We interacted with them just a little and it wasn't always positive interactions, because we were in their space. We kind of made them have to, I guess, share classrooms, or however they managed to give us those classrooms. It was tight for them. I could understand them not wanting us in their space, but there was tension. Sometimes, it was hostile environment.

I know they were fights. I was never a part of the fights, but I would see them or hear them because you hear commotion, and it was like, "Oh, what's going on outside?" At one point there were bleach balloons thrown at Butler-Armstrong students. It was a rough environment. Well, that part of the Emerson County was just rough.

I always think back to our time on that Escalade High School hallway and the teachers were always there for us. The teachers that started out at Butler-Armstrong made the experience. We didn't have our own classrooms. We didn't have on our lunchroom. We didn't have on our football field. We didn't have our own anything. But what we did have were teachers that supported us and pushed us, even when we didn't want work.

We didn't want to work as hard as they wanted us to work, but they pushed us to have goals and have dreams, and we knew we had to go to college; it wasn't a decision that were gonna have to make, we knew in two years, we were gonna be in college, so we had to be prepared for it and those teachers pushed us for that. We always had support.

Because our school was so small, the teachers really did have time to know us personally. They could call our parents by their first names. Like they could look at you and know who your parents were and how to get in touch with them if you're struggling in an area.

They were there for you when you didn't do as well on a project, like what went wrong.

Let's see. I mean, if we were given like an assignment like different papers or different projects, and if we said we couldn't it, they were like, "Yes you can. Yes, you can. You're fully capable of doing it," and eventually, we would do it. This would come to be very different from the college experience where we had to work more independently to get assignments completed. And, being however old you are in ninth and tenth grade, we were resistant, and we needed that extra encouragement to make us stronger with our academics and as people.

I mean the staff members were just as personable as they were supportive. They were like friends, even though we knew they were administrators. They weren't saying, "I'm your teacher." It was like, "Let me help you. I'm here for you."

Not that I wanted to wake up at 6:00 a. m. but I wanted to be there because I liked being around all the teachers, even the administration. I didn't live near the school location so I had to take a shuttle. My routine was, I had to get up, get on one bus; the bus

took me to the shuttle location, and the shuttle location would either take me to Butler-Armstrong, or, when I started the college classes, I could walk to Henry-Hall because Henry-Hall was our shuttle location. But yeah, every teacher, well my memory is bad, but every teacher made it easier. They didn't make the work easier, but they made the experience of learning easier. Like, I wanted to be there.

It's just so hard to name specific faculty and staff members that were memorable because it was such a small staff. Like everybody had their special memories. Mr. FSU, that history class taught me a valuable lesson. Dean E always was there when I got off the bus and she was smiling. It was like, "Ah, that's cool."

I'm trying to think of another one I can talk about. It's just hard. I mean, I didn't have a teacher that I did not like. When went to all those different football games with you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, I'll never forget that; and even though you were tough on us, we came to school and we were still able to have fun with you.

I remember one incident in particular; Professor FSU gave me a C one time. It's bad that these memories are vivid, but they were good memories. I don't look back and get mad, they're just memories. Anyway, there was a project that he gave me; and when I think about it, he gave us a project like you would in college, but it was a high school project. And if it wasn't done at 9:00 am and you were the first to present, he was like, "Oh no, it's over." We were like, "What, [laughter] I just need to print this out. What are you talking about?" And he's like, "No; it's over." And that made our grades drop. I think I might have had a B, but it dropped to a C, and that was my grade. I learned from it, and it translated over when I went to Valdosta later. I knew if it ain't done, then it might not

get graded. But those kinds of things never stuck, because everybody always encouraged me.

They all worked well together too. We could tell that Mr. P could work together well with Miss N, and Dr. G and Dean E, like everybody worked together. Well, you all probably talked bad about us when we didn't want to do this work, and about how we fussed and complained and all that kind of stuff, but you all worked together, so we worked together too. Because of that cohesive group of teachers and faculty, we were fine.

I must say, at one point we got two new administrators. It was my junior year and we were already at the college, but the difference between the new Principal and the old administration was evident. It just felt like she didn't understand the Early College Initiative, that we were being pushed to a higher level and more importantly, that we still needed that support, that encouragement, and that positive loving environment. It sounds crazy, but I feel like we thrived because of that support from the faculty, because we didn't think we could do it. We didn't have anybody in our ear who wasn't saying, "You can do it."

She came from a different school district, APS I believe, and that is a very rough school district. I could see that because I had friends who went to APS schools and they were, just different, what I call, "A different breed." It's just different. And I could tell she brought that same, I can't think of the word, but she just brought that same attitude about school and we didn't need that. We were fine. We were structured. We had our ups and downs, but we were fine. And, we didn't need that much structure!

But otherwise, the program was growing, so I don't like to critique them because they were learning. Like any new organization, any new school, they were learning. And we were only the second class. I'm trying to think of ways that were bad, but personally understood, they were new. They messed up. But I mean, if something went wrong, they were learning. They had their own way they thought it should have gone. They thought that if it worked at their old school, then it was supposed to work at Butler-Armstrong, but Butler-Armstrong was different.

Before we could transition over to the college after our sophomore year, we had to take the COMPASS College Entrance Exam. I think that you have to take it if you don't have a diploma. Anyway, we had to take it. It included Math, Writing...and reading yes. I did not pass the Writing and Reading, I believe, the first time I took it. I know for a fact, because I couldn't take any Social Studies or English related courses. I could only take Math and Science.

It was simple and I did not pass! I went to sleep. I feel bad every time I tell somebody this, but I went to sleep. After that, they're like, "Your grades are fine, Autumn, why didn't you pass the COMPASS?" And I'm like, "I went to sleep. I'm sorry." And then the time after that, I just rushed through it. I rushed through it and was just putting stuff. The second time I did not pass because I did not read the instructions. So I didn't know that you have to, if the sentence is correct, click the correct sentence. You don't just click next. It was simply because I did not read the instructions.

That experience had me worried that I was not going to be able to finish the early college program with everyone else. So, Miss Braelynn Melodee pushed me and was just



like, “Autumn, you've got one more time. We normally don't even let people take it this many times, but this last time. You better pass it”! I will always remember that Ms. Braelynn Melodee, even if you don't. I remember, I'm like, “I have to show Miss Braelynn Melodee that I can do this, like I have to.” I think everybody was worried at that point. My parents were worried. My classmates were worried. I was worried. Emerson County was worried, [laughter] everybody. They're like you need to pass this COMPASS. I remember that, Oh God, I remember all of our conversations. And it's like, as our Graduation Coach, you were that person for us, like, you will not go to Henry-Hall if you cannot pass this COMPASS.

I eventually passed it, but after that, it took me a lot longer or I had to do different things that most people didn't have to do, like take summer classes. I had to take 18 or 19 hours to graduate with my Associate's Degree. I would not have graduated with it, without having to do all that extra work. What is so crazy is that we had tons of resources to prepare for that test. We had fancy COMPASS books that that practice exams and even, the instructions that I probably didn't read. We did practice tests. We studied. I feel like we studied for that like we studied for the SAT. It was kind of like, instead of focusing on our End of Course test, and I believe we did take the EOCT; we were more focused on passing the COMPASS because you could not complete the early college program if you did not.

In my situation, I could have continued in the program because I was eligible take some college classes. [Sigh] They had an option of allowing me to only take Math and Sciences, but that would have put me at a disadvantage. In most cases, if you weren't able

to complete all the college classes that counted for high school, and if you weren't fully enrolled in Henry-Hall College, you had to leave.

The disadvantage I spoke about is because, at that point, you would have taken an odd amount of high school credit in some areas, and in other areas, you would not have been where all the other high school students were. So when you get there, you're like ahead of them in some subjects, but you're behind in another subject; so you go to a regular high school and you're not on that even playing field, especially when it came to electives. So I would have been all over the place as far as finishing my high school classes. That would have been bad.

I recently spoke to a high school in Augusta; well, they're not early college, but they have a similar process in that they can take college classes. They weren't able to be full-time and their program is not as rigorous as. They're just taking a few classes at the Technical College; like, it's right there. In any case, a lot of them were struggling with the COMPASS, so I had to give them my story and they felt better. I was like, "You will make it, just slow down and listen to everybody who's telling you all the good stuff, because I promise, they're not just talking."

Once I got past all of that COMPASS stuff, I was finally able to be a full-time student at Henry-Hall College. I can only speak for myself, but personally, I wasn't necessarily prepared for the independence of college life, by not having someone there saying, "This is when you do this. This is when you do that. This is how you should do this, how you should study, how you should just operate as a college student." You can't be prepared for that.

I knew about the Early College Manual, which had a lot of these things in it; now if I fully read it, I don't remember, but I know I probably didn't. It was more like, "It'll be okay. We got this." And we kind of let life teach us. That was one of the benefits of our early college experience. I think that with throwing a 16-year-old into college, life teaches them very fast, but some come out better than they went in. And honestly, you and Miss Gina, now Mrs. Gina, gave us so many materials to get us as ready as possible, but as 15-16 year olds, we're like, "Ugh." It was a lot of paper. It was a lot of reading. I'll keep this in my back pocket for if I need it.

Ms. Gina, I don't remember what her role was called, but she was kind of our liaison between the high school and the college. I found myself in Miss Henry's office all the time because I had questions, questions that they probably tried to answer before we got there, but I didn't listen. So now, I'm like, "Oh no, help me."

Ms. Gina helped with class scheduling. She communicated for the EC students to administration if there was an issue in the classroom. If there were any special needs, which we tried not to have because we kind of wanted to blend in and not be the high school kid in the classroom, she was there to support. She was that person that made the transition for us to move to the college, smooth, so we didn't have any issues with us being there. She made us as high school students feel comfortable and just made it go.

Miss Gina and Ms. Braelynn Melodee, you, were like attached at the hip, so it was like I could either go to one or the other if I was at the college having an issue, because we didn't have to go back to the high school often; even though, sometimes would. I mean both of you would help in that process, that transition from a high school

student to a college student. I'd say she was the one I felt most comfortable with.

I think she was very effective in her role. I think having someone like you and her; one at the high school, one at the college, was so crucial just because you had someone at both locations. So if you ended up back at the school for any reason, we had you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee. If you were at the college and you were like, "Oh no, my paper vanished. What do I do?" We had Ms. Gina. So you had someone at both locations, so if you're freaking out, you had somebody to freak out to. And I mean, I don't think the program would have survived if we didn't have someone who was readily available at both places.

At the college, for some people, the classes were more hard or harder than you would have expected. I would say, I took an English class, and this was a time where the teacher didn't know I was a high school student and I think I had a D. We had to read, I want to say, 80 pages a week. I also want to say it was summer class, but I can't remember. All I know is we had to read 80 pages a week and it just wasn't happening. Like, it just wouldn't happen for me. So I had a D and I had to tell him, "I'm in high school."

I used that, and I feel bad, but like, it is hard. And he's like, "You're in high school? You're doing better than I thought you would be doing." And he's like you're 16? I'm like, yes. And that was a challenge for me because I, at that point, don't want to tell anyone that I'm failing, which Miss Gina probably already knew. I didn't want to tell my mom I'm failing, so I thought, "Let's go to the teacher. Let's see if he can help me. And he was just like, "Okay, take it slow. It's gonna be okay. You will be fine. We have this

amount of assignments left. You just gotta plan your time wisely.” And that was one of those times where I’m like, “Okay, I need to be reading 20 pages a day, doing this, this, and this.” And I never would have thought that I would have to do that at 16.

He worked with me. I was a lot younger than anybody else and I appreciated him for that. I think I ended up getting a C, but I was okay with a C at that point, because I knew I worked hard. I didn’t get very many Cs, but I was just glad it wasn’t a failing grade at that point.

The school did their best at warning us about some things like, “You’re gonna have to manage your time well.” Time Management goes in one ear and out of the other, until you’re at crunch time and it’s like, “Oh crap, I only have two hours until class and I was supposed to read this many chapters,” and actually let it sink in. But academically, we were ready. It was just about whether we were willing to do the work.

Socially, I would say “yes” and “no” to be prepared for the college. There are things that, because we went to the college at 16, we just weren’t accustomed to. We were younger than everyone, everywhere we go at this point. So it’s like, sitting next to a 32-year-old mother of two, we have nothing in common with that. They already knew where they were going next and what they wanted to do, and we were, just 16.

I mean, adapting to not everybody being your age and people being more mature than you, was a challenge. We were still playful and youthful, and didn’t necessarily take everything seriously. We were in a very mature environment, so it made us mature very fast, but at times it was like, “You can’t laugh now. It’s not funny.” And that was a challenge for some more than others. I would say that’s one of the biggest things that the

early college program does for anybody, mature you. You're gonna be more mature after you leave because you're put into those environments, where you don't know how to respond. It's like, "Hmm, everybody's just sitting and being quite. Maybe that's what I'm supposed to be doing." It's like if the teacher didn't show, like what do we do? This never happens in high school. Certain things you just don't know until you get there.

Most of the time, we blended in with all of the other college students. They only knew in our science class because that was the first class we all took together. So it was most of us in one room, with maybe five or six other college students. But otherwise, if I was in a class that I chose to go to when me and Ms. Henry were planning my schedule, I was like, "I want to take this class." She's like, "Okay, nobody else is in it." And I'd be fine. So I'd be the only one there and they wouldn't know until I had an issue, then I had to tell them, "Oh, I'm in high school. Sorry."

As an early college student, I enjoyed being at Henry-Hall. I only have older cousins, so I was used to being around older people; but I tell people this, I learned how to play spades when I was at Henry-Hall. I enjoyed doing that in between classes. My mom's like, "Why did you learn," because in my house, that was a game that all the grownups played. But once I learned, I'm like, "Let me play." She's like, "Where did you learn this?" I'm like, "At Henry-Hall." I enjoyed it because I got to know these people who were from all walks of life.

Henry-Hall was a good place for us to be, because it a traditional school.

Because it's a two-year school, people have unique stories. They wake up one morning, that 32-year-old mom probably woke up one morning, and was like, "I want to

go back to school,” and she has a reason to be there. This college dropout or high school dropout that's sitting across from me at the spades table, when he got his GED, was like, “I'm gonna go back to school.”

So people were from all walks of life and so I learned from so many different people. I mean, there is no particular experience, but the entire time, I learned from different people and from their different walks of life. And most of the time, it was on spades table. Socialization was an important part of the early college experience.

Sometimes peers can affect you in good ways or bad ways, I mean, like I said before, maturity mattered; and if you had friends who weren't as mature, or who weren't as motivated, it would negatively affect you. And if they don't have a parent in their ear telling them, "You better not fail any classes," they're not gonna be as motivated as you. My mom was never stern, but we had our talks, and it's like she saw the potential in me that I didn't see in me. She would be like, “You can be Valedictorian,” and I'm like, “No, I can't.” I remember sitting in the Student Center just crying like, No, mom; I'm not perfect.

And she pushed me. I'd have to study on my own sometimes so that I would do my work well, because not everybody is gonna want to be as motivated as you. And because I was behind everybody else because of the Compass, I was taking class during the summer. I was taking 18 or 19 hours as a high school student during the semester trying to catch up, while other people might have been chilling. But I was like, “I cannot, I cannot fail. I never wanted to disappoint my mom, so I had to it. It was kind of like, fight or flight.

With all the classes I was taking, I then had to spend that hour and half on the bus in the morning and in the evening, which took away from my study time. Not to mention, my still wanting to be a teenager. So I had to learn, if people around me were not gonna be motivated, I still can't forget what's important.

That is probably why I joined Student Government too, so that I'd have older friends who could help me be better in school. Like, they could give me warnings about teachers; and, it gave me something else positive to do outside of my school, so I wasn't distracted.

After graduation from Butler-Armstrong, I went to Valdosta State. When I went to Valdosta State, I was younger than everyone in my classes because I was a junior and these people who I'm sitting next to have been here since they were freshman. So they formed their clicks and they made their friends. So it's kind of hard to make friends when you're the youngest one in the class, and you seem like an overachiever. I'm like, "I'm normal. I was forced to this, guys. It wasn't my fault."

It took them a minute to understand my credit situation. It was like, "Okay, you're how old and you have what?" And it seemed like they didn't understand the concept. But, because I had graduated, with an Associate's Degree out of high school, I didn't have to take any course from A to E or something like that.

If I wouldn't have gotten that Associate's, then it would have been a different story. But because I had the degree, I didn't have to take any extra classes, which was a plus because they required, I think, one more Math or one more Science. Since I had the Associate's degree, it was smooth.



Normal students who enter in their freshman year right after high school, they slowly take, major coursework, like they might throw in an intro class somewhere in your sophomore year, or throw in another intro class, while you complete your core courses.

I had to be overridden into a lot of my classes, so that was a little frustrating. Like, “Why am I so special? Why do you have to do all this?” I had to do a little extra paperwork to get into every class, because the system just didn’t want to let me take all those intro classes at once. But otherwise, my transition to my four-year institution was smooth.

I was there for two and a half years. But one semester, I thought, “Let me slow down.” Then I realized, “I have to pay for this. Let me finish. Let me not slow down while I’m in school. Maybe once I leave, I can slow down.” That was one semester.

So then I graduated Bachelor of Fine Arts in Mass Media. I also did the Sports Broadcasting Certificate because I wanted to go into some kind of news media and didn’t know whether it was gonna be sports or regular news. It took me about four months to find a job and I started as a news trainee with WSB in Atlanta; that was for a year. That position just got me ready to be a news reporter. So after that I decided, “Okay, I want to be a news reporter,” so they were like, “Okay, if you want to do it, we’ll show you how to do it. And, after that, I got a job in Augusta at the NBC affiliate as a news reporter, and that’s what I’m doing now. I just get on there and tell stories, and hope somebody is listening to me. Right now I work 2:30 am-11:30 pm. I’m normally on the 11:00 pm show Friday, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. I’m off Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Butler-Armstrong helped me tremendously in my journey to where I am today. I

just ask, if at all possible, to try to keep people who are dedicated to the early college initiative there. I could see that leave as I was on my way out. I could see the change in administration wasn't good for the program. At the end, we didn't have as much as much of an encouragement, as we did in the beginning. The fact that Dr. E left was just devastating, because it was like that school was her baby; and she wasn't there anymore to see it grow.

We sacrificed a lot to be there, but, I mean, we gained so much. I was just talking to one of my co-workers about our school days, and I'm like, "Yeah, I graduated with an Associate's Degree at 18, so when I graduated from Valdosta, I was 20. Like, "I am two year ahead of you all and I can slow down if I wanted to. I could take a year off and do whatever I wanna, and still be ahead of people.

No, I didn't have a class of 300 or 400, but who remember that many people? I graduated with 26 or 27 and I know all of them. And that's about how many people you remember out of that hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people you graduate with if you went to a public school.

And I mean, we still go that taste of our school because I went to Cedar Grove's Homecoming. We could go to football games. You, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, took us to ton of games to watch the dancers and we still got that taste of "real high school."

People have asked me, "Should my child go there?" And I ask them, like, "Have they been pushed in the past?" Are they coming from not knowing what they're capable of?' I do feel like every student deserves a change; and the fact that we got free tutoring

and the free college, with the encouraging professors, every child needs that. Every school should be like that. But it's just about if your child realizes what they are getting themselves into.

My Physics teacher, TB probably pushed me harder than all my college professors ever pushed me. She made you feel like every piece of paper needed to be quality work, anything. She'd be like, "Autumn, what is this?" And then push me to be like, "Okay, if I'm not comfortable with it, why am I handing it in for a grade?" Like, she pushed us. We strived to do our best. Even though I probably fussed and cried and complained. Oh yeah, tears came! If I look back, I remember the tears. But at the end of day, I knew what she was telling me, was right. I never even took a Physics class after her class, but that concept was not lost upon me; anything I presented to anybody after that, if it was not my best, I thought twice before turning it in because of her.

We were pushed harder than probably any high school student in the county. I don't think anybody else was challenged as much as we were. Those things are what made that place so special! Every time I see an early college, I kind of compare it to ours and I'm like, "They don't got nothing on us."

Overall, I look back at it, and I want to help other early college students. People will notice, if they look at our numbers - how many people came in and how many graduated, you will see not everybody was willing to rise to the occasion; but they at least got the opportunity. And I'm pretty sure if they look back at what opportunity they kind of gave up by not going for it, they regret it. I mean I can't tell you they will, but I think they would.

Being able to go into a college classroom and get a good grade coming out of it, imagine the confidence you just gave the 16-year-old. Every time I passed a college class, it was like, “Oh yeah, I did that!” Again, your confidence is there, so if you decided to head into a four-year school, you know “You can do it.” If you did it at 16, you can do it at 18, 19, or 20.

Personally, earning college credits through this program helped me in so many ways! Not only is it easier on your finances, but on your parent’s finances as well. I only had to pay for two years of school, [laughter] so that's not as much debt as most people come out of school with. And, thinking back on it, it was even more special for my family, because I didn’t have many people in my family who finished school. My mom is the only one; and the fact that she's my mom, I think she might have done it because of me attending Butler-Armstrong. We graduated around the same time.

I know that it made me the hardworking person that I am. Because I had to work hard there, I still work hard now. Friendships and relationships, because we were so small, it just was a good experience. When I come home, I want to see the people that I can see. I still go and see Miss Gina at Henry-Hall.

Butler-Armstrong will forever be a part of me. Even my bio on the station website includes Butler-Armstrong because it had such a good impact on my life. In the end, that's what gonna matter when I'm grown, the kind of job I have, the kind of the life I've had and the memories.

My advice to any new students in the position I was in would be, “Keep going. You may fuss and you may cry. You may scream at your parents; you may scream at the

administration, but just keep going until you just physically know you're at a breaking point. Even then, it's probably not that bad. If you're ever feeling like, "I can't do this," know that, "Yes, you can. You can. We endured not even having our own buildings for two years. You can do it. You can keep pushing.

I can give this story: Tina was the Valedictorian the year before I was about to graduate. So my mom always compared me to Tina. She's like, "You can do that. You can be Tina." I'm like, [uses a crying voice] "I'm not Tina, mom." I remember that was our main argument, but just keep going."You can do it." I may not have gotten Valedictorian, but I accomplished some amazing things during my time at Butler-Armstrong that I am very proud of to this day! Just remember, If you're gonna go there, you gotta be ready for change!"

## Appendix Q

*The Kristen Experience: Heavy-Hearted*

Kristen interviewed Thursday, July 30, 2015 at 5:15 p. m.

*Kristen and I have kept in touch over the years, though not as frequently as we did once upon a time. She lives out of state, but wanted to participate in the study while she was in town. She actually received a ride to the interview from another participant,*

*Kristen wore a black tank top and jeans with her hair pulled back in a single ponytail. She looked sporty with her lime green and black tennis shoes. She has a tattoo with her name on the top of her right arm. Her diamond studs softened the ensemble perfectly along with her hazel/gray eye color.*

Here is Kristen's story...

This was one of the more challenging experiences, in that we were young and we had to grow up fast. I mean, we all had our choices to own up to that responsibility that was placed upon us, but for some, they were not able to meet it. For myself, I enjoyed it because it challenged me in learning who I am as a person. So, it wasn't just the academics. You learned a lot about how far you could push yourself in this particular type of program.

It was support like no other. I can say that. It was more as if the adults were your family, in that they pushed you more than you could see for yourself. Sometimes it would confuse us because we couldn't see where they were coming from. But when they would push you, and you completed it, pushed you to do more. It pushed you to achieve more academically, so that initiative helped us when we got to the college level. We knew they

weren't gonna be there, but having them in your corner, even when we were at the college was comforting. We were able to come back and say, "Okay, I'm getting a little shaky with the college courses." They were able to help us, not just academically, but in all aspects of life, to keep us focused on the goal that was at hand.

I would say the early college support is a collective blend of staff efforts and strong peer relationships. We all knew we had a sole goal, a sole purpose that we were trying to reach. So, you have the teachers pushing you towards it. That would be different from a regular high school where the teacher may have one goal and the student's friend may veer them off in a different direction. With the Early College Initiative, everyone is on the same page. We're all trying to push each other, whether it's socially and we were falling off life-wise. But we had a Counselor that was there to help us. If we couldn't talk to the Counselor, we had a teacher that was willing to take that extra ten minutes after school and just say, "Okay, what's going on? I see you're falling off." So, we had everybody play the roles to help us keep moving forward so that we didn't fall behind.

Now supporting and enabling are two different things. They didn't baby us in any aspect. It was more so that we received the education (instruction) at a higher level than where we were at that time. So, for instance, if we were in ninth grade, we were getting tenth grade level material, same with problem solving, Math, or History, whatever the case may have been. We were not just getting the education itself, but the methods used were more rigorous than your usual, "I'm gonna take your standard test of ten questions, this, that, and the third." You get your essay questions. You get your oral tests. You get the actual experience ahead of time, so it kind of prepares you when you get to the

college level.

Academically, I can say that I about 85% prepared for college, just because we didn't know what to expect when we got to that level. I feel as though the early college initiative prepared us as much as they could from what they as a high school professor knew regarding the curriculum at the college level.

There's so many courses that we've taken that were memorable, especially at the college. I enjoyed when we took Chemistry and Biology. It was the same approach. I would say the professors at the college had that same family-oriented, more so supportive vibe as the Butler-Armstrong professors. I would say the support aspect was there as well. I would say that Chemistry was a little bit different. It was hard and they didn't baby us the same way we were used to, not that we were being babied. We didn't expect special treatment just because we were early college students. That particular course and professor did a sit down with us and we were able to discuss things, and actually figure out how to solve it, so that we can keep moving forward, so that we don't feel like we were being left behind. They made sure we didn't feel like we were supposed to be ahead of everybody else, but also that we were on track with everyone else.

At the college, I'd say that support is a personal initiative. We had the Liaison who was there for us. But for ourselves, we had to be willing to go to our professors to set up meetings. I had a professor for Introduction to Psychology stay in his office just because you need to let them know your initiative. At this point, it's kinda like you're on your own. So, it's not saying you lost the support system in college, but you have to make that effort yourself. You have to be willing to create your own support system; and so



that's what the Early College Initiative helps you do, know what you need to look for to set that up for yourself.

We did have a college contact to help us with certain important things. That we were aware of, the College Liaison was almost the same position as our Graduation Coach, Ms. Braelynn Melodee that we had. She had the same responsibilities as her. They worked very closely with another, hand in hand. So, we, in a sense, we thought you guys, Ms. Gina and Ms. Braelynn Melodee, had the same position, just different in that one of you worked on the campus. But overall, making sure that we had the courses we needed and making sure that we were on top of things, were what I perceived as that main role and responsibility. We could get easily distracted, and it goes back to the social maturity. We could go far left; that's where the support from her kicked in, to ensure that we were staying on track.

She would speak to the professors and say, "Okay, well such and such hasn't been here this many days. What's going on?" So, she kinda had that motherly role, in a sense, where you know somebody's always gonna be watching you. So that was important. And it wasn't hovering. It wasn't like we couldn't get her away from us, but she was that bird in our ear like, "Hey, you're getting a little off." Or, "You're doing good." It helps you to stay on track.

I would say that our College Liaison, Ms. Gina, was 100% effective! After our first semester there, we were pretty much good to go for the remaining of our education at the college, because we now knew: how to pick courses, who to pick, and we knew the go-to people on the college campus, which was very important. Although we had

assistance at the high school, having that person that's on the campus that is familiar with the college aspect, knows about us is invaluable. That was a special touch to it as well, because she knew us individually, as opposed to us just getting somebody that's just trying to, for lack of a better term, make a check or, do their job on a day-to-day basis. It became her mission, the same way that we have a mission with the Early College Initiative. It was everyone's mission to help us. So, she was the sole person that we went to when all else was failing. If we couldn't find that support, that assistance we needed, Ms. Gina helped us right then.

Even though we had Ms. Gina, we did experience challenges at the college. I'll give you a personal example. I took a World Religions course, but it was at that time where I was still learning myself and it bothered me morally. Initially, I was so concrete that course was what I wanted to do. When I began the course, I said, "I can't do it," because it just interfered too much with what I had already become comfortable with. Dropping this course would have affected my being able to get my Associate's Degree. And, so, it was more the initiative of my parents, per se, to put me back in the course because they wanted me to finish the degree. I am glad that I did complete it, but that situation was a challenge for me. I appreciated that I did it through the early college, because in a regular four-year university, no one's gonna tell you, "Maybe you shouldn't drop that class. Maybe you should see what it has to offer. Maybe you should see what else is out there."

Socially, I wouldn't say I was prepared as much, just because, with the academic setup we had at the Early College Initiative, we were still in that high school mentality.

You have 15 and 16 year olds who were still learning about ourselves. So socially, we're innocent. I'd say that early college helped us to stay focused, so when we got to the college aspect, we could keep that tunnel vision, because for some people, the social aspect would distract them. For some it won't. But I'd say we weren't as prepared socially, but I'm sure that's something that could be worked on in the future.

Another challenge I witnessed was some of my peers going through the battle of wanting to be with friends that weren't in the Early College Initiative. I mean, you had your group of people that you went to school with for four years and eight hours a day; and you're used to that set of people. But then you come from your public middle school and the EC environment is very different. So they battled; they had challenges with going back to that life that they were used to, per se, which is why you have some that ended up with families at an early age, falling off, or going to a different or alternative school, because it was just too much for them to handle at that time.

The same way in which I described the importance of creating your own academic support system, also applied socially. I was meticulous in who I chose to be in my circle. I chose individuals who were in tune with the Early College Initiative, and who I knew had the same goal. We made almost like a pact, if you will. "We're gonna finish this. We're gonna get this degree. We're gonna make it happen." So my friends were a very positive influence.

There were different aspects of the Early College Initiative that were not just academic. At Butler-Armstrong we had different things like our dance team to get us involved in our school. I thought it was important to get involved, especially since we

were no longer on the high school campus. And unlike at a four-year institution where people can sometimes lose focus with their involvement in activities, our participation in activities kept us connected to the high school, because that's where they were located. It kept us in tune a little bit more with where we really were in life, as opposed to a social club at the college. So being able to be with my friends that were on the dance team and in B. O. L. D. (Brothers of Distinction) and L. O. D. (Ladies of Distinction), helped me to stay with like-minded people.

B. O. L. D. and L. O. D. was sponsored by two of my most memorable faculty members at Butler-Armstrong. I can combine two in one, and that was the Graduation Coach, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, as well as my English Professor, Mr. P, who I liked to call the Dynamic Duo, in that they came from similar backgrounds and weren't afraid to be honest with the students, brutal as it may have come. It wasn't brutal in a negative way. It was brutal in that you had professors that kinda wanted to sugarcoat things; these two, per se, were giving it to you how it was gonna come to you in the real world.

I would come to them and be stressed, so stressed, and they'd look at me like, "Why are you doing this to yourself?" So many times this happened and it would kind of rear me back to reality, in a sense, that sometimes we needed that reminder of what we're doing. A lot of times in early college, we're just going through the motions like, "This is what we're supposed to be doing." These two individuals helped me to apply it to my life personally.

This was principally critical during my first two years at Butler-Armstrong, before I went to the college. They watched me grow. And I appreciated them in that, as they

watched me and my other peers grow, they grew with us and weren't afraid to admit it, and that's something that we appreciated. We don't, a lot of times, have professors, teachers and faculty who will admit that they too have some things to learn. They expect you to have this grand portrait of who they are; and sometimes, we need that reality check of, "You're not alone." Because as the program is growing and changing, the professors and faculty is changing, as well as the students. So, getting that balance of reality from them was a great deal of assistance.

Since leaving Butler-Armstrong, I attended Valdosta State University in Valdosta, Georgia. I'd have to say my transition was a smooth trip. I made sure that they would accept all of my credits before I accepted admission. Financial Aid was breeze. We got the last two years funded by someone else, so financially, it was a fresh start.

Any roadblocks that I experienced were more so emotional. I was the master of hiding my emotions or not addressing things that were really taking their toll on me while I was in the Early College Initiative. So, going to the four-year school, that's when it started to expose itself. I couldn't really handle it 'cause I had never really exposed anyone to those issues when I was in high school. So, it wasn't a roadblock from the early college, more so a personal decision not to add more to what was already on my plate.

On a lighter note, I joined a Service Coed fraternity called Alpha Phi Omega and have subsequently received my Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. I decided to transition to Phoenix, Arizona, and I have been living there for a year and three months now, on the other side of the world.

Absolutely, if I could make the decision again, I would have chosen Butler-Armstrong. I say the initiative in itself helped us to become who we are. Some people may have felt that it grew them up too fast, but once you get to that point of getting both degrees, you see a new person, not necessarily from what you've learned in a classroom, but who you have become as a person. So, it's beautiful and bittersweet, as they would say. I would definitely choose it again if given the opportunity.

The Early College Initiative kept that family aspect. We had professors and faculty where I thought, "I want to be like them one day. I want to get to where they are or the joy in life that they have." This is in part because we spent time with our faculty outside of class, where we may have gone to dinner or we may have had different events that we attended, just to get that exposure to life. Where else can you get that type of individualized attention?

Earning college credits while still in high school requires a different mindset, because you have to plan ahead. When you realize, "I'm earning college credit," it is deducting from what you have to earn at your four-year institution. So, a lot of times you, once you're in that academic mindset, you're like, "Okay, lemme just go ahead and knock this out." The same is similar to those taking AP courses, because they too have the possibility to earn college credits (if they pass the AP Exam). It's not for full credit, depending on which program they're doing, but they're still getting credit towards it. So, the more you deduct in high school, the less you need in college.

Now, some may feel that it takes away from those four years. Some may see that as taking away yet another segment of learning about yourself, what you're doing, and

what you learn in post-secondary. So, it kinda, like I said, “bittersweet” in that, once you deduct those courses, it’s helping you focus on yourself and your life; the adverse of that, if you don’t participate in this type of program, you learn all of the things we learned through Butler-Armstrong, when you’re Freshmen and Sophomores at your four-year college. We’ve already done that, so, it’s a breeze. Once you understand the concept of getting college credit, you’re focused, especially when you can look at your transcript and say, “I’m halfway complete with my degree.”

Butler-Armstrong did a great job, the first two years, with the hands-on approach; if that approach, that interaction with the professors could be kept within the next two years, I see that it would greatly influence the experience, as opposed to, for example, dropping your kids off at a four-year college when they’re still nesting. We were still being molded during that time. So, still have that hands-on approach and welcome the college students back, making time and incorporating that into the role of the high school professors, almost like we are going to school twice, if you will. We would go to school, get our work, but we would come back to the high school and actually have it broken down to us where we can still learn it on our level. I wouldn’t say it’s dumbing it down, but to the point where it is in laymen terms, as opposed to the college format. Again, we’re just getting dropped off at Henry-Hall, but we’re still in the Butler-Armstrong mindset. So, having that collaboration would be a positive approach, as well.

During my time at Butler-Armstrong, I kind of belittled the importance of my emotions. And, so that’s something else I would say the early college should address. Please make sure that the students are there mentally and emotionally, because

sometimes we do become those robots that are just going through, just trying to make it, so that we can make someone proud, or make someone be a part of that statistic that we made it.

I would say this study is essential in that a lot of people wanna explain the glitz and the glamour of the program, but I believe this study should properly expose the reality of the program, in that we're still human. And in a sense, it's almost like we're robots just going through the motions. With the Early College Initiative, I believe they're successful in New York; it's more so up North. So down south, they're not as familiar with the concept; but through this study, and these interviews, anyone that reads this dissertation should be able to get almost, "A Dose of Reality", if you will. People can see us as individuals, as opposed to just numbers.

So, to the next generation of early college students I say to you, Make sure that you still live for your age, even though you you'll be placed in an adult atmosphere at 16 or 17 years of age. Learn to appreciate the freedom, without allowing it to take over you and cause you to not achieve your goal of a college education. You're in a position to complete sixty plus credits and be almost finished with your Bachelor's degree by the age of 20. So, that's something to look forward to. Just focus.

Whenever you feel like giving up, remember why you started. Don't allow anyone or anything to deter from achieving such a great accomplishment. In years to come, you'll see it pay off. Know that you took the road less taken which means there's open lanes for you to succeed.

Remember, as much as you may go through emotionally, remember that this



experience is preparing you for life. You may not want to wake up for work one day either, but you know there's a goal in mind that you have set for yourself. For the Early College Initiative, it is to get that degree. For life, it's to make a better life each day, so that you can get to where you wanna be.

Prepare for the journey of a lifetime! Take advantage of the opportunity you've been granted that a select few are chosen to partake. Don't be afraid that you're missing out, just know that the experience is what you make it. They usually say the sky is the limit but here you're limitless!

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix R

### *The Maximillian Prufroy Experience: Failure to Realize Potential is Death*

Maximillian Prufroy interviewed Friday, August 7, 2015 at 6:15 p. m.

*Maximillian texted me the same day that Allen Cook was supposed to come by for his interview and asked if he could tag along. Without even knowing his plans to actually participate, I reached out to my methodologist to see if I could interview them together. She advised against it, for the simple fact that I had not conducted any other interviews in that manner. He did not sit in on the interview with Allen, but after it was over, he did indicate that he wanted to interview as well. Maximillian was wearing a long sleeve plaid shirt which he had rolled up to three-quarter length and Cargo Khaki pants. He was also sporting a pair of skippers that were olive and tan leather and navy socks. He was definitely dressed to impress.*

Here is Maximillian Prufroy's story...

It was something else. Butler-Armstrong was very different from what I heard about the traditional high school experience. That proved to be good and bad. It put me in a better position for right now, in terms of how I matriculated through life, but at the time I was forced to make heavier decisions for which I did not realize the gravity.

The support I received from the faculty and staff at Butler-Armstrong was tremendous. I always had people there to talk to, and I mean not just about academics. It played a role, because stress can affect how well you perform. On that note, the resources were also there; if ever I needed questions answered at Butler-Armstrong, I knew I could count on them to always help me grasp a concept.

I'll never forget the day I fell asleep in history class; really, no one will ever let me forget this. My dad is a history and I guess it was passed on to me, I really don't know. But, our teacher at the time had a method of reading through the course material and then quizzing us on it. It really hammered that information in, because all history is dates and recall of events.

So, I fell asleep in class and this specific professor was very animated. Professor FSU woke me up with a loud, [snaps fingers] "BOOM," and asked me a question. I didn't, I didn't think it was possible but I guess you do hear things when you sleep. Having been asleep for most the class, I got the right answer; and while I credit that to myself somewhat, I also have to credit his teaching style and method. So that was a really nice triumphant day for me, academically.

There were other memorable moments I had with Butler-Armstrong teachers. I remember when Professor TB was there. This was the first teacher I felt really looked past, what I thought, pretty decent intelligence at the time and saw room for improvement. She didn't take anything less, 'cause most of the teachers I'd ever had were like, "That's great work. Good job" and they'd leave it at that. I mean, it is one thing to give praise, but in order to really grow a person you also have to give them constructive criticism.

I mean it's not that none of the teachers did that 'cause they all did; but she was the first one to really aim right at the heart of it. She would flip through our interactive notebooks and say, "Garbage. What is this?" At first I was like, my ego is about to jump right out, but after listening to her, I'm glad that I wasn't so bullheaded at the time that I

did not listen. I'm glad because I began to think, "You know you're intelligent, but you could be more. You can still be more."

I didn't really think about it until later. Your mind like is always growing as to what you can attain and aspire to, and she really sparked that in me! I feel like she was a great teacher to have, prior to going to Henry-Hall, because I feel like that fire wasn't really stoked before her. She really cared; and because she cared, she was honest. So that was one of the most memorable teachers for me, Miss TB. It doesn't really get much better than that in terms of teachers.

A lot of people seem to think, "I care about them so much that I can't really tell them this," and nowadays I'm like, "What, tell him, tell her" In that kind of program I feel like it's really important to, "Keep it 100," for lack of a better word, just be as honest as you can. Don't sugar coat anything because that keeps adolescents in that mindset that's not gonna help them matriculate or function at the next level institution.

Learning how to handle adult situations is also well enforced in early college schools, because you've soon got to be in an adult environment and it's important to know how to deal with that.

Professor P, he was one of those who really helped hit home the concept of dealing with things correctly and honestly the first time, and why that was the best way to do it. I remember when, you know how kids have puppy love, but I hopped from one girl to the next, and he kind of pulled me aside and was like, "Okay, you really need to think about this." To his credit, he was right in what he said about how to handle that situation, and the kind of person that I should try to be, as opposed to what I was doing at the time.

While I appreciated all of that support from the teachers, not being able to have that traditional kind of life that most high school students had was trying. There were times that my friends wanted to go out and I was like, “Man, I’m doing all my homework. I still got two more projects and papers to do. I can’t handle all that right now.” On top of that, when I did finally manage to get a grasp on how I would handle my schedule, making myself more well-rounded still came before that. So after they had gotten their academics and extracurricular down to make them more well-rounded, they still had time to enjoy being that age. It’s not that I didn’t, but I had less of it.

Because of the academic preparation I received at Butler-Armstrong, I was prepared very well in terms of Physics and Math, but it varied by subject. I was pretty well prepared for English as well. I just wish that I would have taken it upon myself to hone those other skills a little more. But, they really hammered in the preparedness by letting us know from day one what the game was gonna be. Getting there, I didn’t understand great work ethic as I do now, but I got their point.

Socially, I wasn’t prepared. I mean, the preparation was given to me, but I did not have the wisdom to implement it at the time. I had talked to my parents. My parents are great people, but in terms of starting to make my own decisions and using my mind, I hadn’t practiced that enough; and you know, your brain learns through experience. I feel like had I been given an opportunity to develop more street smarts, if you will, it would’ve went a lot better. So, having the information that’s one thing, using it is a completely different thing. I eventually learned to use it, but going into Henry-Hall, it just was not there. It was kind of like putting the puppy in a playpen. So in terms of what I should or

should've been doing when I got there, I think the information was placed in front of me, but again, I didn't have the wherewithal to use it.

That was even more of the reason it was really important to have friends in that kind of program, to make yourself social. At Butler-Armstrong they taught us about networking, and how important that was going to be at Henry-Hall, having peers to support during your time of need. It was a great skill to have. It affected how you deal with class, job opportunities, and everyday life.

But, just having a support system of your peers was critical because sometimes you can't go to adults because they'll understand and try to make you feel okay. It's their job. Your friends however, kind of say, "It's okay. I understand. I get that and I hate it too." It makes you realize that you're not alone in this. And so that was a really good experience, having understanding and welcoming peers. Fortunately, we had the Legacy lass there to help too.

Although she wasn't a peer, it was also good having a liaison from the college to run interference of all the information. It was a lot to take in. You had a lot of people, with a bunch of different opinions, and she kind of helped put it in perspective. For example and in regards to professors, some people may have failed a class and hated it, and another person might have taken the class with that same professor and loved it. She filtered it for you, which helped out a tremendous deal. It was great, the job that Ms. Gina did.

Ms. Gina pretty much owned student integration. I feel like she did an excellent job of that and still does an excellent job of that. Not only did she run interference on

information that was coming at you in terms of its usefulness and what was available to you, but in terms of gathering resources and making sure those were ordered as well, tremendous job!

We had a few other resources at the college that they kind of put out there for you, but it was up to you to go and use it. Like the Learning and Tutoring Center for example, I spent many days in there putting together projects and getting help from the people in there. They did a really good job. They picked patient people. They picked the right people to get it done. I felt like that was very important. It was really good in terms of the availability of resources. I don't really know if there was a way to push a desire to want to use those resources; that had to come from within, especially at a college, 'cause it's an adult institution. I would only go there sometimes on a recommendation from my professors.

Speaking of professors, "Rate My Professor" was a website where people, who had taken classes from different professors, could go back and rate their experiences in order to help people coming after them, to make the best choice. That was a great resource too. That, and like I said before, the Legacy class!

It wasn't all academics. Before we ended our early college journey, we had a "Senior Roast." I don't know, it kind of opened my eyes to being able to be honest with yourself and other people, and how that could be humorous. I had always been the kind of person like okay, "That's not cool so I won't do that. I don't want anybody to know that. Or, I was always embarrassed about things that made me, me sometimes. Having that roast was enlightening; I really wished we could've had it every year. It opened my

eyes and made me realize much more that it's okay to be who you are. And what you do with that information is the groundwork for how you can be great, because if you don't accept that, then you're always going to be shortchanging yourself in your efforts. So that was, that was a memorable social experience for me. Mr. P. and Ms. Braelynn Melodee did awesome.

Since leaving early college, I joined the Air Force I've been on orders two times, working here and there, stateside. But, the real major drive for me to join in the first place was to go to school and get school done. It made me even stronger, but to have the strength, determination, and the will or desire to want to do it in the first place, came from me being there at the early college setting.

I have had a slew of jobs, while trying to take part-time courses. I am in my last year at Henry-Hall, because right after I graduated, I didn't go back for like a year. I took that time I started working. I got advice from a few people about what I should really do, about what I should really focus on. And honestly, I feel like I stayed at Henry-Hall sometimes more for convenience, as opposed to go going ahead to matriculate to a four-year institution. And I feel like it's great that I waited because, not only do I not have any debt, I think Henry-Hall and Georgia State recently merged; now it's pretty much the same school, which is great because now technically, I am at a four-year institution anyway. It really is.

Another reason I made the decision to stay at Henry-Hall was because I didn't want to just get my degree in General Studies, even though, for my age, it really wouldn't have mattered I got my degree in because I would have been matriculated to a four-year



institution. But, what I really wanted to focus on, in terms of career progression, was to get my degree in engineering from Henry-Hall, which is what I'll have in December.

The kinds of challenges that I experienced regarding returning to Henry-Hall and changing my major were my GPA and the prerequisites required for my Engineering major. It's funny, you leave as a child and you came back as an adult, but you still have your child grades! So yeah, I'm glad that they merged with Georgia State. Regardless, at the end of this semester I'm going to transfer to either Tech or Kennesaw State.

I definitely got my own way of realizing how great I could've been, but that really doesn't matter now. In terms of overcoming from roadblocks, a part of that is being mature enough to identify them. I think that's the first step.

At the age of 16 in the early college program, that meant, in reality, when you carved out four hours of time to watch TV on the weekend, it was probably not a good idea. Even though it was your chill time, maybe cutting it down to two hours and doing some studying, or some research on something related to one of your classes, would have been a better idea. The ball game had stepped, so you couldn't continue with the old habits, unless you wanted to make a slippery slope for yourself.

I think I may have mentioned earlier about trying to get adolescents at that age to develop that drive, desire, and wisdom about what they're about to get into and being able to go in there and use those resources is key to success in this school. I mean they don't have to grow into adults overnight, but they do need to understand that their lives are not going to be the same.

And I think a lot of students that I came through with thought, "I'm smart, so I'll

handle this and be done with it.” It's not just that, you have to be mature and know how to carry yourself in certain situations. So I feel like instilling that concept in them, a desire to want to be adult in certain situations, as opposed to saying, “I'm me and this is how I'm gonna handle it,” is the best thing that the early college can do for its students.

I feel like it's great to give young people the opportunity to earn college credits while they are still in high school. I believe that the Student Selection process could be tweaked now that I understand the Core Principles. I feel like I shouldn't have been there because I wasn't really at a disadvantage to begin with. The student with the drive, or at least some of it that can be nurtured, should be selected in terms of getting the right students.

Another thing in regard to Student Selection, I can honestly say that my grades going into Butler-Armstrong were better than they were when I left, in terms of trends. I went from being an A, A minus student to a B minus student, to a C student because of the way that I thought. I feel like, with better screening, you can get the right B minus or C student and grow them into that A plus student.

Even though I don't think I necessarily fit the intended mold of an early college student, I definitely would have chosen to attend Butler-Armstrong again, if given the opportunity. You can't really do much better than that at that age, in terms of experience and what you can achieve. Like I said, knowing what I know now, I would have been a whole different animal, a different beast, 'cause the desire and the drive that I have since developed, given to a 14-year old me, [snaps fingers] would have taken the world by storm.

Then you can get a leg up on an education, two hears ahead of your peers which nowadays is gonna be prized. Information grows and expands at an exponential rate now. The math I took in 11<sup>th</sup> grade was taken by my sister in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Education is such a powerful tool in terms of how you acquire it, who wants you to get it, and how quickly you can obtain it at a quality rate.

Not to mention it was all paid for. I've been fortunate enough to, to still have no student loans. So I'm still trying to stick with that but real life hits you once you get out of a program like that. People take it for granted and don't really take into account all that goes behind the scenes, because nobody just wakes up one morning and says, "I want to put 50 people through school real quick." You know it really takes a lot of planning and a lot of paperwork I bet; but being able to do that, without owing anything, one could not ask for a better gift!

Coming into high school, I was shy. I didn't have nearly as much confidence as I do now. My decision making skills were decent, but I feel like in order to be an effective adult, or to be effective in an early college setting, your decisions making skills need to be way above par because there's so many distractions. I feel like a part of that is your actual environment. I guess it varies from state to state, or location to location, but in Georgia, or maybe just in that area period, it was a lot going on.

I would tell current and future early college students that your GPA is a reflection of your work ethic, not how smart you are. When you go for a job interview, no one is going to care about how smart you are. I mean, if they can train monkeys to go into outer space, what's stopping them from using them to do that job? But it speaks volumes when

you work hard. And, like I said, having the wisdom to implement what you know is far greater than just knowing what you know.

I've asked people all the time, people older than myself who definitely have more wisdom than I do, would you rather have a smart student or a hard working student? They say, "You can teach a hard working student anything and get them to do it, but smart students have trouble understanding why they have to do the work in the first place." So my advice to anybody, "Smarts doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. It only matters to the degree that, you can do something which you have the ability to do; but if you never do it, it means nothing."

Failure to realize potential death to me; what doesn't grow is dead.

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix S

### *The Stephanié Experience: Oddity*

Stephanié interviewed Sunday, August 1, 2015 at 12:25 p. m.

*I actually was able to connect with Stephanié when she came to my current school's Open House for her younger sibling to get their schedule. I had not seen her since she left high school. She was very open to the idea of participating, so when I reached out, we scheduled an interview shortly thereafter. She was supposed to come later in the day; however, she called and asked me if she could come earlier, right after she got out of church. Coincidentally, one of her cohort members cancelled on me soon before did, so it worked out perfectly. She has such a calm demeanor, just as I recall. Stephanié wore a tan tank top, black pants, and some gorgeous black and gold sandals. She had her reddish brown hair down in a straight bob.*

Here is Stephanié's story...

I have a small dilemma, I would say, with sometimes focusing on my work. I have ADHD. I was diagnosed with it my eighth grade year in middle school and was taking pills to manage it. So when I went to high school, I told my parents that I did not want to take any more medication. I wanted to try to do it on my own.

I have since been made aware of programs in school that could have accommodated me. And now I'm going to cry. It makes me a little sad because I really appreciate my parents for not allowing that to happen. I know that might sound a little weird, but I think my experiences would have been a lot different, had I not been able to figure this out on my own.

She didn't really tell my teachers either. My eighth grade year, a little bit after I found out, I started acting out, I guess. Back then my English teacher knew and so she kind tried to harness me in. She tried to change her classroom dynamics with me, but my mom was adamant, "Don't do anything, just let her figure it out."

No, I didn't have any special privileges. I didn't get extra time to do work or take tests or anything. But overall it helped me, because I don't want to go through life thinking that oh, because I have this issue, people are going to start giving me special privileges throughout life. So I'm glad that my mom didn't do that for me.

It was hard 'cause I just stopped taking pills. My mom just started finding them. I didn't like the side effects from them. That's also when I started to act out in school and she was like, "What's going on? You are not doing this." I was like, "I don't know" and then she realized I wasn't taking the medication. That's when we had a long conversation.

And by me opening up and telling certain people that at Butler-Armstrong, those were the same ones that I opened up to education wise. Those were the same ones that I was able to tell things to when I was feeling down or when I was feeling up. So they helped me, my teachers and professors. I didn't really tell my classmates or anything.

My parent made me go Butler-Armstrong HS. [Chuckle] When I went to Escalade Middle School, a teacher recommended to my mom that I apply for the program. So, since she heard about it, and researched it by getting in contact with then the Principal, Dr. E. , all of the paperwork was done and it was all about Butler-Armstrong from my eighth grade year, through that summer, and all the way until I began the program.

I enjoyed it, personally. It was different for me. It started off being uncomfortable. I had a couple troubles in ninth grade where I felt like I wasn't the brightest, as far as the bunch. Me and my mom would have these conversations when I would say, "I'm not gettin' it as quick as these other classmates. I'm not all A's and I'm not this." And so you start judging yourself and basing the value of your learning on others around you. I had a couple educational hurdles I had to jump over. It started off very bad that year. Social wise, it wasn't bad, but education wise, yes it was.

Then, probably around my tenth, more specifically, the end of my tenth grade year, we started getting ready to move to a different location where we would be for my eleventh grade year, I got a little situated. I received my first Honor Roll Award at Butler-Armstrong during my tenth grade year. I got mainly all A's and I got a B. I forgot what class the B was in, but I got A's and B's, and I was excited because it was an accomplishment for me. I don't think it was a big, big deal for a lot of people because they were used to getting grades like that. But, I've always struggled academically, so when I got all those good grades, given how hard the work was, it was really good.

There were a few teachers there that I attached myself to who gave me support. People can give you support; but it's a matter of you taking it in, accepting it, and doing the steps they are giving you to do.

Some of my support was from Professor TB, my physics teacher. I still connect with her. I still go up to Butler-Armstrong and see her even when she was at Arabia, I'd go see her. She was very useful as far as helping me attach my creativity of learning to the actual subject and material. That helped me as far as remembering things. I was able

to express the work through creativity, and because of her that is something I still do now. She recently called my mom and told her she was leaving Butler-Armstrong.

As far as socially expressing that I don't understand things, I would say Miss N, my Math teacher, helped me hone in on that skill. I hate Math; and she totally was like, "Okay now, if you don't get it, I can't help you until you let me know."

There was all my Counselors, you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, and Dr. T were very nice. Ms. Braelynn Melodee, although we weren't like you and some of your other students, I felt like when it came to the wire to get something done, or to talk to someone about something, me and my mom was like, "Oh, we gone go see Ms. Braelynn Melodee." Overall, that's about it as far as personal support.

To help with our academics, we had Saturday school. I think it was early in the morning too, until like 12:00 pm, or something like that. I was there every Saturday! We also had online work that we did on the website. And when it was time to prepare to go over to the college, y'all gave us book material to study for the COMPASS Exam.

The COMPASS Exam is a college placement exam for Henry-Hall College, Butler-Armstrong's college partner. It was a big thick book and the COMPASS Exam covered English, math, and Writing. You had to get a certain score in order to place in certain classes.

Mentioning accomplishments earlier reminded me of something else I was proud of. I struggled with the COMPASS, especially with the Math portion. I think I passed Reading and Writing, but I did not do good on the Math part. I had to redo the Math, so I was kind of nervous for our Transition Ceremony.



The Transition Ceremony acknowledged all the students that were transitioning from Butler-Armstrong to actually taking college courses. We wore our all white and gold, and we walked across the stage. We got our little certificates and our family and friends were there. It was held at Henry-Hall College in their Fine Arts Auditorium, so it was very nice. I knew you all would let us walk, but I didn't know if I was actually going to take college classes the first day.

We had some more practices and Ms. N met up with me and did work. Because I did not pass the Math COMPASS the first time, that summer, my mom and my dad paid for an intermediate math class, for which I did not receive college credit. They were mad. It was like a five or six-week course. Good thing they did, because after that they went ahead and let me take the COMPASS again, and that's when I passed it, on my second attempt. I was proud of that. I would have been out of the program if I had not passed that COMPASS.

Academically, yes I did feel prepared for Henry-Hall College. I felt like if I really would have harnessed in on just academics, like I should have, I probably would have done much better. I was very much prepared, about 90 something percent.

The classes weren't hard. If they were difficult, it was 'cause it was something new. But it wasn't something that I couldn't have achieved. It was just work ethic. Yeah, if I focused and did what I need to do, and reached out to my support system and different options, you know the tutorials and Saturday school or whatever, I probably would have done much better academic wise.

The support I was used to was no longer there because they were back at Butler-

Armstrong. They did warn me, “You know, when you get to college, nobody's going to be there to wake you up; nobody's gonna be there make sure you go to class; nobody's gonna do that.” But it's something else being there!

When you got there, there are activities on campus. Our first week they had all their clubs, all over the place, just giving out all this stuff! There are new people on campus. There was also the same people that you used to hang out with at Butler-Armstrong, but now, you have all this free time in between classes. You can set an alarm and you can just press ignore. You can just continue to do what you need to do.

They used to do little seminars in the library, underneath, in the auditorium. I didn't really do the campus activities, I wasn't that open; but I did hang out with Butler-Armstrong students on campus. So whatever Butler-Armstrong students were doing around campus, I was like, “Yeah, we'll go.” You know I love to eat, so I was always eating in the cafeteria and that kind of stuff. That's not really necessarily everything that Henry-Hall offered, it was just something social to do with other people that I was familiar with. That was my issue with going to Henry-Hall College.

I didn't want to go to class. I had all this free time. I thought, “Oh, the work is online. I can look online when I get home.” And when I got home, there was other excuses why I didn't do it. So if you're not disciplined and focused and know what you want to accomplish, [slaps hands] you weren't prepared for that environment.

My support at the college was the same support as at the high school, only because those were the ones that I opened up to more. We did have an Academic Advisor for Henry-Hall College, Ms. Gina, to connect with us. She made sure we registered for

our classes. She made sure that we were attending our classes. She communicated, as far as our grades, back and forth with Butler-Armstrong. Anything that was going on at Henry-Hall College, she was our communication person to go to or she would come find us. And if she couldn't find us, she found somebody that could find us. So yes, she was our person.

I think she was effective for a lot of the students. As far as being effective for me,

I would say about maybe 70 percent. At that moment, I wasn't in the place where academics was my all. So when she would talk to me, I would be there. I'd talk to her and stuff, but it wouldn't hit home."Okay, you're getting' ready to get put out of the program, until she started talk to Butler-Armstrong or my parents. And when we had our sit down and did all that stuff effectively, that was when I was, "Okay, now I need to really like get myself together." So it was effective, but for me it was effective towards the end not necessarily in the beginning. And again, that was just my experience. A few other people were hopping on it [snapping fingers] and were like, "Okay, she's serious, let's get it. Let me get this done."

I would say that almost everybody's challenge was with the balance of trying to have a social life and continue with academics. If you didn't have that balance then one was going to lack, of course. Some people decided to lack socially and thrive in academics; some were pretty balanced, and some were the opposite, they lacked academically and thrived in their social life. So it was just a matter of prioritizing.

I was one of the ones that skipped. I was one that probably didn't go to most of my classes. It impacted me 'cause I did not pass a lot of my courses on the college level.

And it impacts you educational wise 'cause of course you fail and you're put back. Of course, you know you're not on the level you're supposed to be based on the guidelines that were set for you.

You also end up lacking socially with your peers, because while everybody's joined together talking about, "Oh, let us get our chemistry homework done." That was one of the classes I did not like. But, "Let's get our chemistry work done." They were working together and I wasn't even aware that we had chemistry homework, you know. So you lack in both areas, academically and socially, and you end up being in a reserved space by yourself because of a decision you made, so yeah.

I'm can't really say that my friends were very supportive, even though they didn't agree with certain things I was doing. I wish that the people that I did call my friends in high school, when they saw me not going to class, that they were like, "Stephanié, why weren't you in class?" So I think that was a strain, I felt like that was one of the negative points from that time. I think we got the supportive side from all of the adults, but not necessarily from each other. Even the class after me supported each other. I remember walking through the library to get something for one of my classes and seeing all of them literally in one spot going over some work and studying together. And I was like, "Oh okay!" But did we did do that, no. It was like, all on your own.

I did accomplish some good goals at Butler-Armstrong, during my first two years. I did not succeed on the college end. So at that point it was brought to my attention that I would be I would be kicked out; not necessarily kicked out of the program 'cause y'all still kept hands on me, but academic wise I took courses at Campus HS, which was right

next to Butler-Armstrong. I took my classes so that I could graduate. So I finished all the rest of my high school coursework there. I did have a few college credits when I left Butler-Armstrong and I was able to earn the rest of my regular high school credits from Campus HS. And I think it was better instead of just transferring out and going to my home high school because, at some point, wherever you start you wanna finish. I was happy that I was able to do that 'cause I was able to finish with a group of people that I had taken this journey with.

As I mentioned, Butler-Armstrong didn't take their hands off of me. During my twelfth grade year, I was able to participate in some social activities and eventually, commencement with Butler-Armstrong Early College Academy. We had a Homecoming held at the college that was nice. I enjoyed it. It was my first time participating in something like. As I said earlier, I didn't really do the activities like that. I did attend our Junior and Senior proms. Even though the juniors and seniors were taking classes at the college, I think Butler-Armstrong did a good job with trying to make us feel like we were actually in high school, like we were actually young people, yes. Oh Lord, my junior prom was a Masquerade Ball. We had fun!

Those are memories because, you know, there was no sports at Butler-Armstrong and those are the things that most people go to certain high schools for; they're good at sports or band or so they can get a musical scholarship, stuff like that. Since this school was strictly academics, all our clubs had to do with learning. There was dance team and little organizations to put on planning stuff, but everything else had to do with academics, just academics. So it was nice to have those other experiences where we felt like normal

high school students. We felt like okay, I got pictures to actually pull out to show I went to a prom and got that experience. I bought my dress and stuff like that. You, Ms.

Braelynn Melodee, did good for the Mardi Gras one. That one was the bomb!

As soon as I finished high school, I did two semesters at Henry-Hall College, and then transferred to University West Georgia. The transition was fairly smooth because y'all helped us fill out all that stuff. Y'all helped us do all the forms. Y'all helped us get with what grants and scholarships; whereas, I would have had to do it on my own. I didn't have the GPA to get scholarship, but my mom helped me apply for grants. My church also gave me financial assistance, then my parents came up with some more.

I did take a few more classes at Henry-Hall after I graduated and did good in them. That made up for a couple of the classes that I didn't pass while in the program. Fortunately, when I got to West Georgia, I didn't have to take any remedial classes. Had I gone to West Georgia right after high school that probably would not have been the case.

I also became more appreciative for all of the help you all gave me in high school, because keeping up with dates and deadlines is no joke. I'm pretty sure I can count on at least one hand how many times I got close to deadlines in Butler-Armstrong and y'all were like, "Okay, let's get it done real quick." Y'all helped me get it done; at West Georgia I probably missed about four deadlines trying to get things done.

I only as there for a semester though. I hated being away from home. My mom kind of needed my help with certain things 'cause she was going back to school and everything, so I kind of shifted back home and served as her extra pair of hands and extra income. So I worked. I worked hard. I probably had like four jobs at one time almost.

Yeah, so not necessarily a social life, but I got all that out of high school. I matured a little bit. I got my brother graduated from school and got him ready for college, and got my other brother ready for high school. I work at the downtown arena, where I am a manager now. Phillips Arena is where the NBA plays for Atlanta, so I work with all the Hawk's players. I also work with all the management for the Atlanta teams.

Whenever you eat something in the arena, it comes through me, and a couple of other people, but I see all that stuff. I go through the kitchen and make sure we meet health expectations and stuff. I make sure things get to where they need to be on time. I come in during off events to schedule people. I help come up with the meals, stuff like that. It's a lot of work. That's where I was till 2:00 this morning. That's why I asked could I come earlier because I knew if I went home and got in the bed, I wouldn't wake up. I didn't start off like that. I was a cashier and they promoted me, and promoted me, and now I'm running the show now.

The concept of earning college credits in high school is great. It opens students up to see what life will be like, both academically and socially. It helps you hone in on who and what you are, as far as like your individual personality. I think that it also gets you prepared for life, in all aspects, like talking with your bosses, those kinds of things. Getting college credits prepared me for all of that. I think my brother should do it. If he wasn't so into sports, I would've suggested him going to Butler-Armstrong, but he's at the next best thing.

If, when I graduated, you would have asked me if I would return to Butler-Armstrong again if given the opportunity, I would have said, "No." I did not want to see

you people ever again in life. But now, I would've went back. Now, at 23, if I could go back all the way back to ninth grade, I would go back to Butler-Armstrong. I would do things differently, of course, but I would go back. I don't know if that's maturity, wisdom, or whatever. I think it's more of realizing that all those of those experiences prepared me for something greater.

I do think there are some areas on which Butler-Armstrong could use improvement to better help students like I was. There were times when I felt like, when I wasn't achieving the school's academic goals, that I was pushed aside. When I wasn't getting all of my classes, when I didn't pass the COMPASS the first time, when I didn't meet the standards or the requirements the first time, I felt pushed aside.

If it wasn't for my parents and a couple of other people saying, "You know you can do this," I probably would've been like, "I don't want to do this anymore." After that COMPASS experience, I was like, "Oh, I'm done. I don't want to do it. I'm tired of failing. I don't feel like this is for me anymore." Because at that point, the school wasn't trying to wheel me back in. They weren't trying to say, "Okay, you can do this, let's figure out ways. They maybe tried once, "Do you want to go to the Saturday school? Do you want to do this?" But after that, it was like, "She didn't...she's not just...she's not going to make it." That kind of feeling, you know.

When I look back I see it, but at that moment, I'm felt like one in a big group of people. You get what I'm sayin'? I know that it's not like a one person school and so I did have to meet requirements. That's why I don't put it on other people, 'cause it was all on me to achieve do certain things and achieve my goals. I was one in my graduating class;



there was a class above me and a class after me, so there was a whole bunch of people. I was just that one percent, so I don't think they should've bent the rules for me or anything like that, I just think they could have shown me a little more personal concern.

Staying on top of the students, I thought they could've did a better job with, as far as, just figuring out different ways to do it, 'cause not everybody responds to the same thing. You know you can't just slap a piece of paper down and say, "You're failing; you need to figure out how you're gonna fix this." You can't do that with everybody. So I think figuring out different ways to get students attention and let them know, "Okay, this is where you are and this is where you want to be. This is the route to take it and you're not on that route." You know, different things to hone in on why we're lacking, and figuring out what their end games were gonna be.

I think only a couple of people knew what I really wanted to do, as far as my overall goal and achievement in life. Sometimes that is not always college. Everybody favors education, but sometimes that's not where certain people want to go. The college setting is not for everybody, so I think that instead of pressuring everybody to go to another university, or continue with school period, they could have looked at where a student wanted to be and shown them what routes could be taken, to get to that person's overall goal.

I didn't finish. I did not get my Associate's. I still don't have my Associates, but now, I have all these certifications in learning and teaching, and I teach one and two-year's olds their basics. I teach them from when they're in diapers, to talking, to potty training, all that stuff. I do that, but I didn't have to take the traditional educational route,

like a whole degree. I know eventually that I have to go back, which I'm at that point now like okay. I think right now I'm ready. But at that point when I was in high school I wasn't ready. All the experiences, all the things we've talked about, both good and bad, have shaped me. Now I feel I have the confidence and the drive to want to go back to get it so that I can get to the overall goal.

I have a church member that actually goes to Butler-Armstrong and she brings back so much. I'm like, "What in the world?" She's like almost all of her class have their degree and all of them were A Honor Roll in high school. I was like, "Okay, I mean it's good for them. I'm not judging or anything." But it's just a side note that it's totally different now than what it was before.

Early college was an eye opener. It made me realize that certain things don't matter. It grew me up in many ways as far as like with relationships and with realizing that I need to focus on me and not everybody else. And it taught me not to also compare myself to other people, 'cause you never know what other people are struggling with. Everybody has struggle, so it helped me realize that, just because I'm not where everybody else is, I'm okay. Overall, I think it, it helped me become a better person for myself 'cause I think I was letting myself get in the way of what I could have been accomplishing. I was letting the negative mindset get in the way of me doing certain things.

I just would not want other young people to have the same challenges as I did, so my first piece of advice would be, (1) "Figure out what you want. Figure out what your goal is, 'cause if you don't have goals, then you're just doing things, to me; (2) Talk to

someone about what route to take for that goal. It can be anybody as long as you're talking to somebody about it. Then talk to somebody that can help you get there, 'cause talking to your friends is good, but talking to someone that can help you get there is even better, whether you think they gonna help you or not; and (3) Never give up on yourself, because even when you mess up, there's another route to get to the right spot. You might have to go through some stuff to get out of there, but there's always another way.

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix T

### *The Tosh Experience: Hindsight*

Tosh interviewed Sunday, August 2, 2015 at 6:05 p. m.

*I sent Tosh a text message when she did not show for her interview. She was very apologetic when she told me that she had completely forgotten about our interview. She said that she would see if her mother could bring her after she returned from the store. Meanwhile, I contacted the next appointment after her and she was able to come earlier. This worked out perfectly. Tosh arrived just as I wrapped the other interview. Tosh's mom brought her and also stayed for the interview. She sat on the two-seater sofa as Tosh and I sat on the larger sofa with Tosh's back to her mother. Her mother quietly played on her phone during the process. It is important to note that I am very familiar with Mama Tosh because she was always very supportive of me, her daughters, and the school while I was an employee at Butler-Armstrong.*

*Tosh wore a black tank top and jeans with her hair pulled back in a single ponytail. She looked sporty with her lime green and black tennis shoes. She has a tattoo with her name on the top of her right arm. Her diamond studs softened the ensemble perfectly along with her hazel/gray eye color.*

Here is Tosh's story...

My attending Butler-Armstrong was pretty much voluntary because back at that time, RHS was not the school to go to. So yeah, I would have rather gone to Butler-Armstrong. Then, at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade meeting, my feelings were confirmed when you guys explained that we could get college credit and possibly an Associate's Degree. They were

like, "College credit," and I was like, "College credit, are you serious? That'll kill two birds with one stone right there"! I thought, "Then I could just transition all nicely into a four-year university and be ahead, so yeah, I'll go to Butler-Armstrong. Yes." And it beat going to RHS!

We had some fun, especially ninth grade. Those were the best times! My first year, we didn't have our building at the time. We were at Escalade HS on that one hallway. They didn't take too kindly of us being in their building. They looked at us like, "Why are they even here?" Some thought we were too smart for them. Some thought we were better than them, you know. Some of them felt some type of way. Some of them were even actually cool. Like, I knew people at Butler-Armstrong that were friends with people that went to Escalade HS, but it wasn't very many. So we pretty much stayed on our one hallway.

Well, if anybody knows Butler-Armstrong, we were small. It was like 100 of us all together, so word traveled fast. It was like any other high school as far as the drama was concerned, high school times ten! Because we were so small, you could go tell one person something and the whole school would know the very next day. Everybody knew each other. Everybody knew each other's business too, so some days you wanted to go to school just to see what kind of gossip was gonna be said. It was so bad, even the teachers would be asking about stuff they heard. It was like, "How did you know? What is going on? What is really going on?"

That was just the negative aspect. There was positive aspects too. Since we were small, we was cool with each other and we got along with one another. We really didn't

have much choice, we basically had all the same classes with each other. Another benefit of being that cool with everyone was when problems came up, we could solve them and whatnot. We weren't like the high schools where we were fighting all the time and getting suspended every day. We could actually work out our problems because, at the end of the day, most of us started out as being friends. That's kind of how it was for me.

We had a lot of different characters in Butler-Armstrong. We had a lot going on. It was like there was a time when everybody wanted to be LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender), you know; everybody wanted to be a part of a certain clique. We had this group. We had that group. We had A. S. K, (that was, you know Apre, Stephanié, and Kate.) Yep, then you had "Jenna 6." Like I said, we had all of that going on.

Then my tenth grade year, we had a building for Butler-Armstrong. Butler-Armstrong was hard. It was really hard. There were classes where I was just like, "This cannot be for me. Like, Butler-Armstrong cannot be for me," but then we had those teachers that were just like, "Yeah, Butler-Armstrong is for you, so you gone have to do what you gotta do." The ones that fell off, we can honestly sit here and say that we don't know why, because we had everything that we needed at Butler-Armstrong.

First of all, our teachers arrived at school before you did and they actually pushed tutorial. You got morning tutorial, you got a mandatory during-the-day tutorial, and then you got afternoon tutorial for those who needed it. You also had clubs created that were academic based like the Butterfly Club, which was a Biology and Environmental Science club, so it was a never-ending learning experience...and kind of fun all at the same time!

I have a lot of memorable social experiences from Butler-Armstrong. I guess our thing was trying to do as much as we could in both of our schools, the high school and the college, especially since we didn't have as much as a regular high school did. So events like Butler-Armstrong's Homecoming, Prom, and Homecoming at Henry-Hall College were major events for us! I even remember when we had those Teacher vs. Student Basketball Games. Yeah, those were my major moments! The dance team, all of that, were serious moments for us because that's all we could really do. We didn't have much else. So everything we did, I pretty much got it locked and loaded in my memory.

The teachers genuinely cared about you. Well, I wouldn't say all of the teachers were people you could come and talk to, but we did have those select few teachers and those select few parents that were cool with the select few teachers, so that's kind of how we knew who we could go and talk to. We had you, Mr. P, Ms. N, Dr. Glass when she was there, Dr. T when she was there, and we even had Dr. E when she was there. We could come and talk to you guys about personal things. I have so many memories of females breaking down, crying in people's offices and whatnot because so much stuff is going on at home. Parents coming up trying to help students that got stuff going on at home; so it was like a big support system! Not every teacher, but we did have a handful of teachers that were just like, "Yeah, these kids, it's so much more than academics right now, they are human beings too."

It was like they wanted you to succeed. They wanted you to pass all your classes and do what you had to do. It didn't matter if they were teaching a class, they would be like, "Hold on, let me teach them this one more thing, give them this assignment, and

then I'll come back and help you out." You could email them. You could call them. It really didn't matter what the situation was. If you needed some help, there was always somebody there to help you. It was like everybody, well not everybody because a few of the teachers was like deuces at 3:30 and 4:00, so I'm not talking about them; but the cool teachers like Mr. FSU, Mr. B, Senior C, all of you guys were supportive. I can hear Senior C saying, "Tosh, smile. Go to church. Go to a mosque." It was like, "Why do you do that every day?" Every day he let us out of class he was like, "Go to a church or synagogue and pray. Talk to Jesus. Do something." I was like, "Senior C, I can't."

Ooh, a lot of my teachers are memorable. Like, Mr. P who used to have us watching Def Jam Poetry, and I'm like, "Who does this? Like wait, there's curse words in this. My ears, I cannot..." He used to have us listening to hip-hop music. We used to go in Tequila Braelynn Melodee's office and just be chill, like, "Yeah, so how's life? You know I got this problem going on at home. I really need to talk to somebody about it."

I could go to Ms. N's classroom and be like, "My College Algebra professor gave me this problem and I don't understand it." She would break it down from Point A, to Point B, to Point C, and it would just be really good. Then I could go talk with Dr. G, her sister, about something related to literature and she would thoroughly explain it to me. I'd be like, "Okay, that makes a lot of sense." So, it's like each one of our teachers was always there. That's the main thing I can remember about being in Butler-Armstrong, the general fact that all of my teachers would be there.

The most memorable academic experience I have is when Professor TB had us build that rollercoaster. Oh, that rollercoaster! I could not do it for nothing! Me and my



mom sat there trying to fix the tube and trying to get the hardware off the controller. We could not do it! To this day, I would tell any current/future EC students, “You guys think this is all tough, oh my God; y'all ain't seen nothing.” If you ain't took TBs Physics class, you don't know what hard classes are. I'm sorry, that's just me. I hear a lot of people that graduate from traditional high schools saying, “This class is hard.” No, it is nothing like taking physics at Butler-Armstrong. Let me be the first to tell you, I ended up having to do so much extra credit because that assignment was not working for me. We had the Interactive Notebooks that kind of helped too. That was harder than a lot of my college classes, for real. Eventually, I got a B out of Physics, but that was a challenge.

They also took our success personally. I know a lot of teachers were kind of upset when the numbers started to fall because we were all supposed to be together, like we was all supposed to be able to do it, so it kind of hurt them when one fell off. They were like, “Dang, I could have saved that one”, but we gotta keep it moving with the ones that are still here. We had everything that we needed as far as academics were concerned.

For the most part, yeah I was prepared for the college coursework. There were classes I did struggle with, but for the most part, I was prepared, especially in my Math classes. I felt like college material, like I belonged in those college classes when it came to Math. I was like, “Yeah, this is my class”! Science was a little hard, but Ms. TB tried and we could still always come back to the school and get help when we needed it.

We were pretty much treated like any other student at Henry-Hall College, so I can't really say that a lot of our professors were much help, you know. With them having so many classes and so many students, it was hard for them to focus on one, like the

teachers at Butler-Armstrong, which we were used to. We pretty much were going back to Butler-Armstrong to get all our academic help.

To provide that support in other areas over at the college, we basically had you, Ms. Tequila Braelynn Melodee, coming up there and we had Ms. Gina. Ms."Gina." Ms. Gina was a liaison between Butler-Armstrong and Henry-Hall College. She helped get our classes in order and basically helped us be on the right path to get our Associate's Degrees.

I definitely was in all the right classes I needed to take. She wasn't playing about that. When it came to us creating our schedules, she was emailing us, "Hey, I need your schedule. Deadline is such and such. Hey, I need Accel applications. You know there's a deadline. Your classes won't be paid for. Need to hurry up," important things like that. Accel was a scholarship for joint enrolled students. We had to fill out our application every semester and get it turned in by a certain deadline in order for our classes to be paid for tuition, so we wouldn't have to worry about coming out of pocket thousands of dollars for our tuition. She was on our case until everything was done!

Then, you would see her around campus. If you had any questions, you knew where her office was. She'd keep you updated on things happening at Henry-Hall College. We used to have those meetings on Fridays or something like, in the Student Center Building and she used to come in there and keep us informed with pretty much everything that was going on as far as Butler-Armstrong and Henry-Hall College were concerned. So she kept us in the loop a lot.

Now, socially I felt like everybody spent so much more time focused on

academics at Butler-Armstrong, that the social aspect kind of fell to the wayside. To be quite honest, "No, I don't think any of us were prepared socially for college." I feel like we were 16 and everybody expected us to just come and be 21, just like that, and they forgot about the fact that we were still in high school. To this day we still don't know why! We were around 30, 40, and 50-year-old people every day; yes, we had all across the board, but we are still the baby of the classrooms. They knew we were young, so they looked at us as young-minded children, and it was kind of hard for us to fit in. That's why we ended up staying by ourselves and whatnot in our little groups.

At Henry-Hall College, you get all these looks like, "Oh, you're a junior? Oh, my goodness, you're so young. You should hang out with the 18-year-olds," but you don't really click with the 18-year-olds because they're taking freshman classes and you 'bout to graduate at the end of the year. That's kind of how it was for me. Generally, going through Butler-Armstrong we had everything that we needed; most of us anyway. It was easier for us to succeed because Butler-Armstrong kind of helped with that academic transition, but socially it was like, "Yeah right"!

Me personally, I had a hard time with the whole idea of being called a baby. Since we were 16 years old, at first it was like, "Ha, ha, ha, yeah that's funny, I am the youngest", but then it started to really get on our nerves. It wasn't just me either. It was a lot of us that were like, "We can't even interact with these people because they were looking at us like we're five years old, still drinking on sippy cups and whatnot." They're looking at us like, "You guys are too young to understand this. Wait until you turn 18," and all this, and we're like, "Yeah, mm-hmm, can't really hang out with you"! This is why

we pretty much stuck to ourselves on campus, 'cause it was no point in trying to mix with them. They couldn't mix with us.

Other challenges included just making bad decisions at times. If I had it to do all over again, I definitely would have, I would have done a lot better at Henry-Hall College because now I know that there are certain things you do on campus and certain things you don't do on campus. If you wanna pass classes, then you don't need to do this. If you wanna get straight A's, then you do need to do this. So if I was to do it all over again knowing what I know now, yeah, I'd probably be coming up out of Butler-Armstrong with like 4. 0s. You would just have a whole bunch of co-Valedictorians everywhere, because we would be like, "This is the second time around. We already know what the game is. Now we can actually make a change and do something different."

I think that we would try to branch out a little bit more and make some more friends at Henry-Hall that didn't go to Butler-Armstrong. There were only a few Butler-Armstrong people that would hang out with the older other people and you could tell the difference between the young-minded ones those who were a little bit more mature, like Tolerance, who had been that way her whole life, even in middle school. I don't know if it innate or environmental, but you could tell. She never got in trouble. She never did anything wrong at school and she always kept her grades up. She was that friend to be around. You wanted in your class because she knew everything, so it was cool.

I would not hang out at the Student Union because some of those people had been there for a really long time and that really made no sense since it's a two-year university. I would see some Legacy Class of 2010 students that were supposed to have graduated,

but they were still there. I'm like, "You're supposed to have been gone. You folks graduated in 2010. Get your Associate's Degree and move on.

But my main struggle was, "How do I maintain my age, not grow up too fast, but still be able to transition and do what I have to do at Henry-Hall College and then at a four-year university being as young as I am? I don't really know if there could be improvement in that social aspect of the school.

Ideally, you wanted Butler-Armstrong to be different from any other high school, while at the same time wanting students to at least get that feel of traditional high school experience, without changing what Butler-Armstrong was designed to do. So it was kind of hard trying to bridge that gap between the two. Being a non-traditional high school, it didn't have things like prom, football, basketball, and cheerleading. We had dances, but, we didn't have band and all of that stuff traditional high schools had. When I went to my four-year university, they had band, tennis, and all that extra stuff, so we were like, "I don't know where I wanna start first." Like this is a whole different world different from what I was used to the past four years.

It's like a whole different ballgame. You don't know what you wanna do or what you wanna try. You're running around like a chicken with your head cut off, doing the absolute most, because you don't know where you wanna go. Traditional high schools actually had classes that went towards college credit or something, or where you can take certain classes in the major that you wanna do in college. I think they were called Career Pathways or whatever. So when those students got to college, they already knew what path they were taking to get that degree in that particular area. We didn't have that. So

yeah, I was already ahead in some areas transitioning from Henry-Hall College to Savannah State, but I was behind in other areas. We just had more credit hours than other people our age.

Well, after Butler-Armstrong, my mom asked me up until like three months before Fall semester began, "Tosh, have you figured out a school?" "No." "Did you figure out what you're gonna do?" "I guess I'm gonna do Biology because I don't really know what else to do right now. The best way to describe it was wandering. I was just wandering around. I knew it was gonna come to me eventually, but at that time it was frustrating. Because I got my degree in General Studies at Henry-Hall, I didn't know what was going to happen when I got to my four-year school, especially if I wanted to get my degree in Biology. Looking back, I really should have gotten my two-year degree in Biology and it would have been an easier transition.

I finally decided on Savannah State, where I attended for two years. I kind of wish I would have picked a better school though. They be playing. At first, when I applied for housing at Savannah State, they placed me in Freshman housing and my mom had to come and tell them, "No, my child is a junior," and they were like, "Yes, but she's 18." Again, my mom, "Yes, but she's a junior, so you need to place her in upperclassman housing." That was one interesting experience. Another was when it came to financial aid. Something happened when I was filling out my FAFSA, but we ended up fixing it, because at first it was like I owed money. I had a student bill; but after we fixed my Financial Aid, it relaxed the situation. I didn't owe any money. Everything was covered, everything. That was about it with the issues.

Because Biology was the only class I took in high school that I was confident that I could do, I chose that as a major. Physics was hard, and although I was good in Math, everybody else wanted me to major in Math, so I didn't even wanna do it. I liked Math, but to see numbers for the rest of my life would not be okay. So, I was like, "Yeah, Biology is easy for me. I understand it." Then I got to Savannah State and I was like, "I don't like this at all."

I decided that I didn't like Biology. I can't see myself working in a lab for the rest of my life. I cannot do it. It kind of goes back to what I said about wishing we had those classes at Butler-Armstrong for those students that were really interested in a specific field. That could have helped tremendously, a class where we can actually try out things and see what we like and what we don't like, so at least we'd have an idea of where we wanted to go; especially for those that wanted to get their degree in something specific after Henry-Hall College, that could have been useful, because I was one of the ones that was completely clueless.

That social awkwardness was a recurring theme as well. I don't know about everybody else, but for me, transitioning from Henry-Hall College and graduating high school to Savannah State, it was like, "Who do you hang out with? Who do you talk to? Do you talk to either people that are in your age group or do you talk to people that are in your classification and have them tell you, like, "Are you sure you're 18?" They were looking at us like Freshman-Juniors, which meant we were basically Juniors by classification, but we were Freshman by age!

When I got to Savannah State, you already know what I wanted to do. I was just

trying to party and I didn't need that. Being away at college, you didn't have no parents to answer to, nobody to tell you when to do something, when to go someplace, and what time to get up and go to class. It was just freedom. I think that freedom took a lot of people and kind of turned them upside down mentally, because it was all they ever wanted. It was fun, but it was real easy to get sidetracked having all of that freedom.

At twenty-two, I have a whole new outlook on what peer support is now. Granted, I don't keep in touch with a lot of people that we used to hang out with at Butler-Armstrong, but at least we knew we had each other's back at the end of the day. For real, the same friends I had in my 9th grade year, with the exception of like two because one left after 9th grade and two other friends left after 10th grade, I pretty much had the same friends from 9th grade to 12th grade. It was like going to Butler-Armstrong made it easier to know who your real friends were who had your back. And because I had those friends that were goal oriented, and wanted to graduate, and wanted to go to school, and wanted to get degrees, and wanted to go to class, I was straight.

I didn't have friends that skipped class every day. I needed people that were going to go to class every day, who were like, "You know you got class in five minutes," because we all had the same classes and we all walked up in there together. We all helped each other study, especially when it came to Economics. Students in there were like, "Oh, you got them notes? I know you got the notes. We about to sit here and study these notes, and we're gonna pray to Jesus that we graduate, and that we come out this class with at least a C or better."

So it was overwhelming when it was pure freedom. It was like you went from this



environment where it's like a small group of you guys and you guys were confined to four walls for the first two years, and then confined to this other campus for the last two years, to this massive place that was the four-year college experience. On top of that, you were growing up as a teenager and not being able to do as much as you could have done if you were 18 or so years old. Going to Savannah State, it was like, "Yeah, you're probably not somebody I should hang out with because I'm so used to hanging out with those that had a good head on their shoulders, that actually wanted to go somewhere."

Eventually I left, prior to completing my degree, and I've just been working ever since. It seemed like after I left, Savannah State just went downhill. It's like real life started happening. It started getting real violent and everything. So yeah, I'm glad I left before all of that started happening.

I still wish I could rewind and redo a different college. I should have listened to my aunt and went to a "White school" or at the very least, a different HBCU. Maybe I should have went to Agnes Scott, because I got accepted, Mmm-hmm. I thought, "Yeah, I'm gonna go to Savannah State because it's cheaper."

After my college experience, I worked for a company run by my best friend and former Butler-Armstrong alum, Charlene. It was fun. It was really fun. The company ended up closing down because one of the clients was hell bent on not paying his bill; like, he owed a lot of money and that money could have helped a lot of people. But he just wasn't trying to pay it, so they had to do what they had to do. But while I was there, I learned a lot.

I learned that field of specialty was something that I could see myself going to

school for, something interesting. I thought, Mass Communications or Publicist. Well not so much a Publicist, I would like to gear more towards radio. I kind of thought being on the radio would be a really interesting job. I think it'd just be fun. They sound like, even though I know it's work and everything, they really be having fun on the radio, so I kinda picture myself doing that for the rest of my life.

My goal, when I get the chance to go back to school, is to major in Mass Comm. and get an internship at like a radio station on campus. And then, I want to minor in English if I can, because I really enjoy English and Writing. That way if I ever want to retire, I can be an English teacher or something, I could do that with a degree. Hopefully, I get to finish my Bachelor's degree before my life is over. Hopefully, I get to do it. Even if I don't get to do it now, I would at least like to do say that I completed my Bachelor's degree at some point.

I'm still trying to figure out what I can use my Associate's degree for, because I really don't know. I personally didn't go through this, but I know there was a couple of Butler-Armstrong students who tried to get jobs after they graduated; and people, instead of looking at their credentials, was looking at their age and were like, "Yeah, you might not be old enough," or "You might not be mature enough to work this job," even though they have the Associate's Degree to prove it, especially my best friend, Charlene from the Class of 2012. She had the hardest time. She would tell me all the time, "I don't understand. Like, I have the Associate Degree," and even though she now has her Bachelor's, she's like, "Now that I have my Bachelor's degree, they're still looking at my age. They're still looking at me as a just a young, little 20 year old that don't know

nothing.” So, it's like what can you do?

Despite some of the minor setbacks with some aspects of the school, I would still recommend it to others. At the end of the day I can say that Butler-Armstrong was cool. If you're a potential student and trying to do football or basketball, please don't waste your time at Butler-Armstrong. If you're the type to get straight A's, but you're into other stuff like music and art and all the extra stuff, then Butler-Armstrong's probably not the place for you, because although you'll thrive, you won't feel like you got the full experience. Don't do it, because you'll hate yourself for not doing what you honestly wanted to do with your high school career.

It felt real good to walk across that stage at Henry Hall and get that Associate's Degree, knowing that you were one of the youngest students in the gym receiving that honor, but it was hard work. I think getting high school credit in high school is for those that are really ambitious and really goal oriented. You should have goals like, "I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna get what I need to do.” If you do attend Butler-Armstrong, please stay focused!

It's so funny what people do find out that I graduated with an Associate's Degree and a high school diploma, they're like, "Oh, you must have really went to a smart school.” And I'll be like, "Yeah, you didn't go to Butler-Armstrong. You don't know Butler-Armstrong like I know Butler-Armstrong. You had to have been there in order to really understand what Butler-Armstrong. It wasn't just academics. We went through life in Butler-Armstrong. Butler-Armstrong was a completely different world from everybody else; and nobody's gonna understand unless you was there.

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix U

*The Charlene Experience: Metaphors and Analogies*

Charlene interviewed Wednesday, August 5, 2015 at 5:30 p. m.

*Charlene arrived virtually punctual, as usual. She was coming from a heavy traffic area to participate in this interview during the week day. We greeted one another with a hug at the door. She had been a close mentee to me at a point in her life; and although we don't talk often, I still hold a special place for her. One of the first things I noticed was her engagement ring. I must admit that I knew to look because she shared previously that she was getting married in the near future.*

*She wore a navy blue and white A-line dress which was accessorized by a silver and white watch and diagonal rectangle earrings and a pair of studs. Her make-up was naturally beautiful with an emphasis on her eyes, which accentuated her rounded face, along with her straight bobbed hair.*

Here is Charlene's story...

I wanted to go to a School of the Arts that I didn't get into. But I refused to go to a regular high school, and so Butler-Armstrong was my option. I tried to do whatever I could to make sure I didn't have to go the regular route. I went to a private elementary school that went all the way through the sixth grade, then I went to a Theme Middle School, and then before that I was at an annex, a school that they had housed in another Middle School. To go into a regular high school just wasn't an interest for me.

I liked extracurricular, but it really wasn't my focus. My mother's biggest thing for me was making sure I got everything I could possibly get from a teacher; and in big

environments, that wasn't really possible. But I made sure that I had those extra relationships with my teachers, particularly my math teachers, and other subjects that I knew I got bored in fairly quickly.

Butler-Armstrong, I think it's beneficial. It was a little different. It was a little shell shock from the environment that you expected to go into. Initially, it was real relaxed. It was a newer school so everybody was kind of feeling their way around. When I started in 2008 we were under, the Dr. E administration. So we had Dean E and Dean R as our Principal and Assistant Principal, respectively. They were there at the conception of the school, so they had a certain attachment and understanding of the way the process worked. They knew where and what stage the school was in at that point.

I think our connection to Dean E was her visibility. We were new to the building and new to the program. We were like deer's in headlights. But from the very beginning, we had that bridge program right before freshman year started, where we met on Henry-Hall's campus and got to meet everybody and things like that. But from that very moment, you felt her commitment to the program.

I guess it could be my educational background, but I can understand where the passion comes from. From the very beginning, that school was something that she believed in. She walked into it with a passion for it. It wasn't like somebody who got assigned to a job. It was somebody who picked up something that nobody else wanted, and did it, because it was something she believed in. Nobody ever realizes how far that will take you. But it took that first interest, that inkling of genuine curiosity, to take something like that much farther than it could ever be imagined.

All of the administrators that were there were there from the very beginning, so their perception of the school was genuine. And it may have been a little deeper than it should have been, because it was like having your child, you know what I'm saying. They were the parents of the school.

And in 2009, we got a new principal. I think she came into the school with a misconception of what we were. It was so noticeable when Dean E wasn't there because her commitment to the program was so deep. Then, when we got somebody who was completely detached, you noticed. It was like going from your mom to a babysitter. You noticed. I was like, "This is not who I'm used to. This person is just here because I'm here and I can't be here by myself. It's a job to her."

She was walking into a school full of essentially nerds. We were a group of really young, small kids. We were like the runt of the litter. We weren't rowdy. We were nerds that just wanted to go to class. "Leave us alone." We didn't like to talk to people. We cliqued to each other. It wasn't like we had a bunch of big groups, either. You go into traditional high schools and you've got the jocks, you've got the nerds, you've got...No, we were that one section out of the traditional high school that nobody talked to.

She came into our school as if we were a large formal traditional school, with disciplinary problems. She immediately created a tension amongst the students; nobody really wanted to be bothered. At one point, I mean, now I'm sure this was wrong, I could go to school in sweatpants and house shoes and nobody would bother me. I was going to class. My teachers would talk to me and we didn't have any issues. Then, as the structure kicked in, it was a little difficult to conform. You start the program one way, real

comfortable. You've got this set of administrators and everybody is used to each other. You create this family environment; and then, you implement new people and new protocols, and things change. Things get a little uncomfortable. All of a sudden my mother's got to buy blazers that I'm never gonna wear to class. I have to have this particular skirt because she picked a new pattern. My shirt has to change because the logo color, according to her, wasn't appropriate.

I assumed that it was because we were in the county building, so upstairs were all of the county administrators and things like that, and she felt like when they walked through our floor, it needed to feel pristine. We could never grasp the concept that she was operating with. We felt like, "You are trying to prepare us for college;" well, you don't walk down a college campus and see uniforms, or see people walking literally in single file lines from lunch. It's a relaxed environment. It's a supportive, but relaxed environment. She created a militant environment, so it was genuinely a complete flip in the emotional climate in that building after she arrived.

Her structure of the school, like I said, was extremely militant. You came to school and everybody looked the same, everybody sounded the same, and everybody moved the same. And when you went into the college campus environment, you were getting an arena of cultures. It was people coming from different states, different backgrounds, different educational levels, different professional levels, and you didn't really get that in the high school environment that she created. It was high school! She might as well have just dressed us all up in orange jumpsuits and marching around. Literally, 'cause if you walked in there, that's how it looked.



My class took it a little differently because we started with one group and finished with another. We were successful in that we had that initial nurturing from those who conceived the program, so we understood what it was supposed to be. But that fact also created the distance between us and the new administration, because we're like, "You weren't here. You don't know me. You just popped up. You want to change everything about the program that we essentially helped build." We were the test study, getting it right, and learning new things; now you're telling us that we're wrong for being who we are."

But initially, the program was conceived by people who generally cared. And to this day, I can call and not have any issue reaching them for conversation or just a listening ear. But at the time, you could definitely walk into that building and see the divide. To this day, you can go in there and see those who have been there from the beginning, and know who's new. And it's just by the feel. Those who were there originally, give off this maternal and paternal vibe to you when you walk in, and the new ones just feel like regular teachers that you've walked past at any other school.

As far as the curriculum went, it was extremely advanced. They made sure that you had what you needed to understand; and if you didn't, they gave you everything they had to make sure you understood. Oh, I could go on that for days about the academic support I received from the teachers at Butler-Armstrong. It didn't matter what the subject was, there was always a teacher there well beyond the time they should've been, to help you. I had teachers that would spend hours with me after school to make sure I understood something. I had teachers from different subjects working with each other to

make sure that, not only were we learning, but that we weren't overwhelmed by the total magnitude of the individual courses.

I had teachers who were concerned to the point to reach out to my parents about where I was in their class, and also, tell my parents how they could help me. They understood the advanced level of the material they were teaching us and they understood who they were teaching. In life, you can't work with anyone or anything, without knowing that. You have to be aware of what you're dealing with and who you're dealing with, and they did. And because they cared, they took the time to genuinely grasp those concepts.

A memorable academic experience for me would have to be in Professor TB's Physics class. She had every class this big project. The class before me had to build a roller coaster. My class had a choice. We could genuinely do what we came up with. I had classmates that did music rap songs about Physics and I decided to do a cookbook.

You know that show; I think it's called, "Good Eats with Alton Brown," on the Food Network. He's a little strange, eclectic chef, and his entire show is designed around the science behind cooking. So that was me. That's what I wanted to do. My mother was a chef and so that's what I chose. When I tell you I struggled through that entire project, I just could not wrap my mind around the science part; and she decided that, instead of watching me struggle, she would let me help others on their projects. So my project was helping other people figure out what they couldn't quite understand about theirs.

So yeah, I guess I was trying to overachieve at something that I genuinely just thought was interesting, so instead of me potentially failing that project, she saw my

strengths and decided in turn, that I could assist others where they were lacking. So if it was trying to figure out how to display the graphics for their particular project, or how to take their concept and put it on paper, or for those who did the music, how to actually promote that particular aspect of their project, I was there. I guess that explains why I do what I do today.

I guess it Butler-Armstrong was kind of like dealing with your parents. Growing up, you knew your mother was going to push you to the end. You knew she knew what was right for you, but you hated her through the process. With Professor TB, it was genuinely like that. She understood that her subject was hard, but she taught it at that level of difficulty, because she wanted the next level to be easy. When you got to Chemistry on the college campus by yourself, she wanted to know that you weren't intimidated by that teacher that may have had an accent, and didn't quite explain that concept the way you wanted them to.

She wanted to know that you weren't going to be intimidated by being in a class with a subject that you were completely foreign to, because she brought that aspect into her class too. So once you got to the end you realized, "Okay, she cares." And she always showed that at the end when it came to that project, because she was like this is the end, so I can show them that I do care. I'm gonna support them. This is where I'm gonna help them." Watch me fix it. Here, try this, Do something different." But she always let you kick yourself in the butt a little bit. She kicked our butts too! She did. She made you struggle. She let you make your own mistakes. She helped you fix it, but she made you fix it. It made getting to the next level, less intimidating. I think that was her point.

Every teacher I had, cared about me personally. I mean, I've been able to sit in classrooms while teachers didn't have a class, and just cry. It could literally be about boyfriends, but they genuinely cared. I mean, I spent hours upon hours in your office, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, just talking about random things, creating a relationship beyond teacher-student, it was mentor-mentee, it was mom-daughter, and it was different.

Professor P sat in his classroom with me, several times, and genuinely just talked about extracurricular, personal stuff. He watched me cry. He may not have said anything, but he just let me have that space. He let me have that moment. There were plenty of Math classes I didn't go to. There were plenty of days when you were walking from a class yelling at me 'cause I wasn't in N's class, where I was supposed to be.

I mean, teachers like Professor P had no filter when it came to talking to me. I think his being real with us, made us stronger individuals, because we knew everybody in the world was not going to be lollipops and cotton candy. Some people are gonna tell you like it is and not care that you're 15-years old.

Now, he might've had an unorthodox approach to doing that. There have been plenty of times when he said some things that I'm sure could have got him fired. But the fact that he didn't care, made you realize that he did care. Like his lack of concern for having a filter, made us realize that he cared about telling you the truth, and he cared about what you learned and what you understood.

There were plenty of times when he would come in the room and say, "You know we had a staff meeting and talked about how much we hate you people." We were like, "Okay, I hope you didn't say that. But his ability to just be himself – silly and express

about his personal life, and things he's gone through in his past, it made it easier to go through the early college experience, because you felt like you were dealing with a person, not a teacher or somebody who was hired to deal with you. You were dealing with a person who had struggled in life, somebody who had found their way to success, and somebody who was concerned with your success.

I think it also made it easier to go through the college experience, because you felt like, "Okay, this person's my teacher; but they gonna get my struggle when I come back to cry. When I have a question, they're gonna understand, okay, this is where they're coming from, because this is everything else going on in their life. This is how I answer this question, because this is what's going on in her family. I can't dismiss this cry for help because I know what her parents are going through."

My parents were going through, I guess we will call it, a pre-divorce when I was in high school. My teachers understood that. So when my mom had to come up to school, it was for nothing less than an emergency because they understood that she had to deal with her. And when her child comes to school and isn't talking to anyone, "We know why and we're not going to push her for answers. We know she knows the answer to that question, so we're not gonna stress her out, because we understand what's going on."

I've had teachers genuinely just hang out with me, outside of school, non-academic, completely irrelevant to the traditional atmosphere that we were always in; football games, shopping, things like that. We have spent many an hours together.

I had several teachers that were awesome. You, Tequila Braelynn Melodee in particular, made being in a non-traditional school, extremely easy. You tried to create a

traditional aspect of high school for us, like the dance team. That was something that I would've definitely wondered about after school if I had never had the opportunity to do that, I would have regretted going to that school.

Professors like, FSU, who taught me African American history. I think without him I would have definitely had a narrow perspective on things. He wasn't a traditional teacher. I mean he did crazy, crazy stuff. People would fall asleep in his class and wake up and he'd be standing above them on the table, literally standing above them, with this big stick, ready to bang on the table because the front of them were metal. They had like these metal legs or something and he had this, like broomstick. He would bang on the table, but he would wait. He would quietly creep up on the table and would literally be standing above your head, ready to bang until you woke up. But he made you learn! He had a unique way of forcing you to engage in the environment. When the climate changed that process adjusted slightly, um, because of the new teachers that we had, but for the most part it was still familial.

In addition to wonderful faculty, I also had plenty of memorable social experiences on Butler-Armstrong's campus. I was the captain of the dance team, so that was as sociable as I could get in that environment. We tried to create the traditional experience with that. I don't know if we were completely successful, just because of our limitations with the environment, but I think we created that comradery and the whole feeling of like a college sorority, with the whole sisterhood and earning our place and things like that.

We did have a school song and to this day, I think I still know the song. I might

not know all the moves to the dance, but I think I could still pull out most of them.

Oh boy. Let's see.

[Singing] "Butler-Armstrong", "Butler-Armstrong" Knights, [snapping] was it, or future is so bright. A college education is just a few years away. Thanks to all the help and support from Bill and Melinda Gates [Singing together] So hurry your future is waiting as a "Butler-Armstrong" a "Butler-Armstrong," Knight. Do, do, do, do, do. So hurry your future is waiting as a "Butler-Armstrong", a "Butler-Armstrong" Knight."

And so when we graduated, it was extra verses, but I ain't gonna even go there.

The day Ms. Braelynn Melodee left was a sad day. I'm thinking it definitely had an impact. Your leaving had an impact on everyone, even those who you may not feel were close to you. We definitely felt the impact of your not being there, particularly at graduation time. When it was time for us to walk across that stage and the person who made it all work wasn't there, it was like, "Oh man, this sucks."

I think the biggest issue with everyone was that the person who caused the change, the drastic change in the climate in that building, did it with no remorse. She did it because she had no intention of becoming familiar with the environment. She wanted to create her own vision and you can't really do that. Great businesses become great because they have a wonderful leader that walks in and understands what they're walking into. There's also good businesses, where the leader comes in and makes their presence known.

The new leader was the catalyst that prevented that school from being what it could have been, because she had a roster of students that would have done whatever it took, and she could have cared less. Yeah, it was her fault. She broke it.

Prior to going to the college, we might've taken two or three visits to Henry-Hall College, but not too many. They were extremely supervised like a field trip. It was essentially a field trip, but it felt like a field trip. You bus 30 kids on a big yellow school bus and drop them off at the front of a college campus, so you instantly get off the bus feeling like a baby. You walk into this big pond, off the little magic school bus, and you're just in a cluster of a bunch of 15-year olds. So the people around you are looking at you, like a stain on a shirt, like, "What is going on? Why are all these kids here?"

Then, they had events on campus, like I remember the day they did a health drive, and they were giving out condoms. They gave condoms to everybody. And as we were leaving the campus, the ECHS faculty were collecting our condoms before we could get on the bus. It genuinely negated the entire experience!

Now I understand from an administrator's perspective why that had to be done. I understand that yall had wonderful intentions, but you kind of negated the feeling of nostalgia we were supposed to receive walking on that campus and understanding the culture. I knew it was difficult. There was no right decision in that instance. Either you give them the full experience or you remember they have parents you have to talk to when they get back. But we didn't really get the whole opportunity to be a real college student during that visit.

Some people took classes early to try to acclimate to the environment. It should have been a requirement to take summer classes, but parents had to come out of pocket for it. People in my class did that. They definitely did that. I took two or three summer courses myself to make sure that I could graduate on time. I wanted to specialize my



degree; everybody else was getting a degree in General Studies, but I got my degree in Psychology, so I wanted to make sure I could graduate on time.

There was maybe 10 of us that might've started in the summer. Most of them were boys who participated in a special program. But for the class as a whole, we had that one week, that was the "Dose of Reality" week, but you cannot learn a culture in a week. So it was just us; and I think that's why my class stuck together the way we did, because there was a lot of us that went over.

I actually think that I was over prepared for the college coursework at Henry-Hall. After we took the Compass Exam, the entrance exam for Henry-Hall College, that places you into the course level you start at. Now, by us being in high school there was a certain course level we had to start at regardless. And I guess I missed that memo because when I got into College Algebra, I literally contacted, Ms. Gina and I was like, "Ms. Gina, did you put me in the wrong class?"

I took two math classes at Butler-Armstrong, then walked into the college math class at Henry-Hall, and genuinely felt like I had accidentally been placed in a remedial course. I didn't understand it. I was in class with people of various ages too because of the campus we were on. People were asking these questions and I'm like, [claps hands] "Maybe you should start over. Maybe I'm in the wrong place." And all of my friends were like, "What is going on? Did I not do good on that test? Wait, I saw my scores what is going on?" We were literally confused.

And then, for those who went on to Pre-Calculus, we had the same confusion in that class. Those who went past Pre-Calculus to regular Calculus, they thought Calculus

was much easier than Pre-cal. I took Statistics instead of Calculus; and that's where I felt like, "Okay, now I'm in college." I felt like my teacher was genuinely challenging me at that point, but I had to get through two math or three math classes to get there.

And so I guess to come back to the point, I definitely felt like Butler-Armstrong prepared us to go to the college level. I think it was just a matter of us decreasing our ego to genuinely just understand what was really going on. 'Cause from our perspective it was like, "I saw my test scores; you cannot tell me I'm supposed to be in this class next to this 75-year old man who keep asking them what is X. You can't. You can't do that. I don't understand.

The alphabet don't change, so for you to keep asking, "What is X?" throughout the entire hour and fifteen minute class made me really question myself. I could understand you are all salt and pepper (gray and black hair). I get it; but I'm still confused.

Our teachers at the college were supportive though. They knew who we were, so they understood that additional assistance may have just been required. Our class did pretty good with getting comfortable with our teachers, too. We also had our teachers at the high school campus to support us academically. They might have not been there physically, but they were still there for us, serving as tutors after school. So most the time, we would shuttle our way back to Butler-Armstrong and get assistance with homework. They had new classes and everything, but were still allowing us to take up all of their time. Like, "You're going to help me figure out this Chemistry, 'cause that professor don't speak English." That was how it was and we did not have to beg for it

either. They made it easy and comfortable.

My class didn't really struggle as a whole. I mean, we had those few who needed academic assistance, but we helped each other. We had study groups. We spent a lot of time together outside of school, off campus, aiding each other. Like, I had a particular friend who struggled in one particular subject we all knew, despite the fact that we might have been at a different level than she was, we made sure she didn't fall behind. That was our friend. That was our family. We weren't gonna let her stand next to us and fall. That wasn't us.

We had an hour in the middle of the day where we had to go to tutoring. What was so funny about my class, is that the same habits we had on the high school campus, were the same habits we had at Henry-Hall. My particular peers were my backbone. Our class had a support system what genuinely cared about each other. We had to make sure that we were all okay. My friend's wellbeing was my wellbeing. If they were failing, I might not have been failing my class, but I might have been failing as a friend.

When it came to graduation type of things, we had Ms. Gina. Ms. Gina was our on-campus advisor. She helped us get scheduled for classes and made sure that the classes we had, lined up with high school graduation requirements. She also aided us in making sure we had the correct courses for specific degrees we wanted at Henry-Hall. She made sure we got our transcripts and that our applications for graduation were in so we would be able to walk. Any issues we might have had with teachers, we could talk to her about too. But the biggest thing for her was making sure we were in our courses and doing well in our courses. She made sure we weren't failing; and if we were failing, that

we were getting assistance. She was more so emotional support for us if we were ever having issues with teachers or classes. We could go sit in her office and talk about it, and she would help us figure out alternatives.

I think she was effective at what she did but my class in particular, was pretty independent. So when it came to scheduling classes, we did a lot of that ourselves and sent it to her to schedule in the system. She would just advise us if something was wrong or if we couldn't quite take that course yet.

Socially, oh man. No, we were not prepared for college, because we were training for college in an environment surrounded by people our age, people on our level. I can't really say we had much as far as social support, not other than people lending us their ears; because nobody can genuinely aid you in that social transition. You just gotta get in there and figure it out. We went into the college experience and had grown men and grown women, old men and old women, and people who had no clue who you were and where you were in life. Then had those who thought it was hilarious that you were there and they kind of downplayed your success because you were younger than them. I guess it was kind of a defense mechanism, them being 22 and you're 17, at the same level. But for us it was like, "Look, I'm here. I earned my spot. I'm gonna work twice as hard as you; don't discount me."

I was a part of the Student Government, so I forced myself to be more social because I felt like that was important. I started as a Secretary and then became the Vice President of the SGA. I was also the COO of their Jag organization, an events group. The Vice President and the COO was one position; I was also the one person that brought

both organizations together. I never left campus before 10:00 p. m., ever.

Since I didn't get that type of experience in school, I just could not miss out on that opportunity. It was a gift and a curse because I was extremely active and had a chance to deal with a lot of different people. But a lot of people didn't respect me in the position I held. So, I had a lot of friends who were definitely older than me, and some days when I was talking to a 25-year old male friends, their friends would walk by with those comments like, "You better be careful talking to that baby!"

So you get those comments and it's a little nerving because you feel like you're fighting to be there. You earned your place. You're intelligent. You're independent. You also think, "I'll probably go farther than you; but because of your ignorance, you cannot see that." That whole social climate, for those who cared, I think was the biggest struggle. For those who didn't care we had each other and that's all that mattered.

Our class also did this thing where we cliqued together. We tried to spread our wings and make other friends, but successfully blending into the social arena on that campus was a little difficult because of our age. We struggled to be viewed as equals. Everybody knew that we were intelligent and I guess that was a little intimidating for some, but as far as where we stood in life, they made sure we knew we were the babies.

Being female jumping into the college experience, was especially challenging. College boys to high school girls was shell shocking. You get out there and you're, as a high school female, provocative and curious, all of these things. Then you've got these grown men that you find attractive that are remedial in comparison to where they should be in life. They don't care, you know. They're 22 and 25 years old and you're built like

you're 22 or 25 years old, but you're 17 years old. But by you being curious, you don't care.

I think easing us into that environment would have worked a little better. When we went that week, we spent a lot of time learning the buildings and things like that; but we didn't really get to interact with the students that were there. There should have been some form of a program or something that we could've gone through to make the social transition easier.

I think allowing the students to spend more time getting used to the people, was critical. We started Henry-Hall Fall semester, like everybody else does.”Why isn't the summer spent acclimating students to that environment, not just educationally but socially? These are the people who... This is who you go to when you need to talk about this. We got to interact with the Butler-Armstrong” students that were already on campus, but not with the Henry-Hall students who were naturally there. We needed to kind of merge into their environment, because it was completely different than the environment of the Butler-Armstrong students that were already there. They grouped together themselves.

The Legacy Class of 2010 did do a “Dose of Reality Week” with us; but after we got on campus, they were nowhere to be found. You get there and take these classes with people who have been there two semesters, or three semesters; and to them, it's their campus. Here you are, coming in here like the little kid. It's like walking into New York City and you're standing in the middle of Times Square, looking up at all the big buildings. That's literally what it does to you. You're like the little fish in this big pond;

and all of these sharks are around me. But they didn't know, my bite was just as big as theirs. I just had to be able to get up there to them.

Also by it being a college atmosphere, the structure's a lot more lax. You have a counselor on campus, but she's in her office. Nobody's watching you do what you do. Skipping was one of those things we did when no one was watching. In the beginning it was a high where you're just like, "I'm gonna be 15 minutes early to every class" and we were, 15 minutes early every class. If we had the intention of being on time, we were on time and early. But if we didn't feel like going, oh, about five minutes before class, we're like, "Are we gonna go?" We're gonna stroll real slow, but we was always on time. If we was going, we was on time; but if we weren't going, nope.

We definitely had those who skipped classes. It wasn't major. I mean, I can definitely admit to not going to all of my classes, but what I can say is that never hindered me from being successful in our classes. I think by us skipping and still being successful in high school, made it easy to skip and pass in college.

We were very strategic in the classes that we skipped, at the times that we skipped them, and at the season we skipped. It was probably like mid semester when nobody's worried, "My teacher's going to miss me." We had teachers that sent us notes and I think it was that whole boredom factor that would kick in. "Why am I sitting here, I'm drawing pictures." I had a lot of that; sitting in class, phone on record, really trying to force myself to pay attention and it being physically impossible. So I think that was the biggest cause for our skipping.

Just so you know, we wouldn't skip during finals. We didn't skip at test time. You

knew it was test time 'cause you couldn't find anybody around. Everybody was either off in a study group or in class. Skipping should not have been acceptable, but it didn't create an issue for us academically, for the most part. We knew our limitations. We knew when to stop and where to not get caught.

After leaving Butler-Armstrong I had interest in going to several schools, which I received offers from. Colleges, depending on who you apply to, are going to question your credits because you're just getting your high school diploma, and you have your Associate's Degree. They want you to give time to their university too. They need to know you will have sufficient experience their program, before they're gonna accept your credits. University of Miami told me I had to wait another year before I could apply and transfer as a Junior; when essentially, I was what, two, maybe three credits off from being a full fledge sophomore, according to them. It didn't make sense for me to wait an entire year and transfer as a junior. NYU wanted me, but didn't want all my credits and New York Tech wanted me, but had the same issue. Lastly, I applied for Harvard as well. Harvard had the same issue not wanting to accept all my credits, and I didn't feel like I worked for those credits, so that wasn't an option for them not to be accepted.

That's something that nobody explained to us when we first started; that we were gonna have difficulty getting into programs that we wanted to, despite the fact that we are extremely educated, highly advanced, and overly motivated."I took all of those classes and did all that work and you not going to take all 64 of these credits; somebody's going to take these 64 credits!"

So since Georgia State was close to home and they had a great Psychology



program for me to continue with, I assumed it was going to be right for me. I didn't have any issues with Financial Aid. I didn't have any issues with them accepting my credits. It was also a T. A. G. (Transfer Admissions Guarantee) school which meant it partnered with partner with Henry-Hall College to take all of your credits when you graduated with an Associate's Degree, no questions asked. They figured out where to put your credits in order to make them count. So places like Kennesaw State, Georgia State, and Troy University were all of Henry-Hall's credits; so my whole degree counted. But if I had chosen to go with someone who reached out to me, I'd of definitely had an issue.

Two of my Butler-Armstrong classmates ended up at Georgia State with me, Qua-Way and Ni-di. I didn't have an interest in social, but Na-di made me go to a homecoming event with her. I think Butler-Armstrong created this studious perspective on things where you're like, "I'm here 'cause I'm going to school. I'm not trying to get into all of this other stuff. I'm going to class." I guess it kind of creates a prude in you where you're like, "Who cares about all of this stuff? I didn't have it before I don't need it now." I'd rather be somewhere else. I've noticed, and it could be because of my personality, most of my friends are the same way. Most of my female friends weren't really social on our separate campuses. And I think it was partly because we were all separated. Most of my class is the same way. We might hang out. We might go to a movie. We might go to a hookah-bar, maybe. We go hang out at donut shops; but you don't see us going to clubs. A few of us have joined frats, but you can obviously see that the frat life is not what they consume themselves with. That just wasn't us.

I'm not gonna say the severity of the program, but the realness of that program really put things in perspective for you. It was like, "If I don't do what I have to do, I'm gonna lose this chance. And so you kind of just live your life like that; and after a while, it becomes who you are. You get out of school and you're like, "Why? Who cares about all of these organizations? I wanted to pledge. Well, I thought I wanted to pledge and I got to campus and was like."I don't have time to play nice with you people for you to invite me to your sorority. I just don't have time for this. I don't care if you like me. Can you come to my house and recruit me?" That was my perspective. If not, I'm just gonna go to class and come home.

I think Butler-Armstrong created who I am. I think it made me more comfortable with being who I am. I think we were a group of nerds that went into the school and they made it okay to be us. Butler-Armstrong made it okay for me to accept who I was as a nerd. As somebody who wasn't into all of that extra stuff and as someone who just wanted to read history books. I wanted to go to math class and wasn't bored. I think being in an environment with a bunch of people like me, created a comfort with myself.

I got my Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from Georgia State. I have gone on to launch a career in marketing. Due to Butler-Armstrong, I got an internship that has turned into a career for me. I am looking into going back to school to get my MBA in International Business. I'll probably return to Georgia State next fall for my business degree.

I'm getting married. I get married in October, and to this day, Professor A is invited to my wedding. So you know these people have impacts on your life when five,

six years after the fact you can partake in this experience with me. Things like that are what made Butler-Armstrong special. I have built lifelong friendships. But I think the biggest thing I can, I guess, thank them for is the opportunity to really explore my options.

I started out wanting to do Physical Therapy, but through the experiences with people at the school, I learned what my strong suits were. I wanted to do Pediatric Physical Therapy and help little kids recover from things like cancer and amputation. But I realized I wasn't strong enough for that. But people like TB, forced me to deviate from my plan way back then and it caused me to learn where my strong suits lie. I can now do something that I love to do.

Because of Butler-Armstrong, when I got out into the world I didn't care if people looked at me like I'm strange. I'm 21-years old, with two degrees, and I own my own business. I'm getting married and, "You are doing what?" Going through and enduring that process made it comfortable for me to come out on the other side. And I'm like, "What? You can, you can deny me because I'm young, but you will never knock my success."

I think when you look back, you can literally see the stepping stones of what you were supposed to be doing, in the midst of all the things you thought you were right for. I guess that's why they say you, "If you want to make God laugh; give him your plans." None of this was planned, but this is how it all happened and I think I'm grateful. I don't think I would have been here without Butler-Armstrong because it created a sense of independence. It created an awareness of myself. So, if I had gone to a traditional school,

I would have got out at 18-years old and been trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. I also would have been thrown into this world where everybody expects me to act like an adult, but I still think like an 18-year old. I was thrown into a world where I had to navigate. I had to learn how to think for myself. I may not have had all the answers, but you know where to start. It will forever be a valuable experience.

I can definitely point out the flaws, but they're never going to be bigger than the benefits. I'll always be able to see through the fog and focus on what I got from it. I think the environment on the high school campus should definitely mirror the environment on a college campus much more. I understand we are confined by the four walls of a building and may not have the ability to create a campus environment, but the freedoms should definitely be implemented more. You are going to come out a 17 year old college sophomore, essentially, going to Butler-Armstrong” and you're going to enter a world where everybody's going to question your status in life because you are two years younger than you should be. You have to be prepared for the life that comes along with that.

Regardless, if given the opportunity, I would choose Butler-Armstrong all over again. Why? Because I feel like it shaped who I was who I am as a person. I feel like the experience was invaluable. I would advise it to anyone, but I feel like there's a little information that everybody needs to know, that most people don't going into it. I think it's a great concept because it gives you a leg up on life in an extremely competitive economy. There are people in communities who could only dream of going to college. Nobody's mom, nobody's grandma has ever gone to school and I have the opportunity to

do it, at no cost to me. More importantly, it's okay if I don't go all the way. At the end of the day, if all you get is a high school diploma, you got more than a lot of people did; and for them to present the opportunity to get a degree, in a society where everybody's trying to figure out how to pay for one, it's ignorant not to take that opportunity. I do think it's something that should be handed out to a very select group of people. Not everybody is prepared. There's pressure and there's stress; but essentially, there's no requirement for you to soar. You just open my wings and they'll help you fly.

You get an opportunity that most will never have.

Why not? I think it hinders you a little bit when you get out, when you try to enter the workforce or higher education. It hinders you in that you are trying to enter an arena where everybody expects you to look one way and you look extremely different. The workforce is going to look at you a little strange. It's going to be difficult getting a real job, which you expect to be able to get with an Associate's degree, and so it presents a challenge trying to advance.

Butler-Armstrong today, even though the old Principal who changed the climate is gone, it's still different. The tension isn't as strong, but you definitely notice the difference. I can walk in there and nobody there knows me. I mean, there are teachers who know me, but I walk in there in my business suit and everybody's like, "Who are you and who are you here to see." I'm like, "Well, I'm an Alumni." I guess it's that ego that kicks in and it's like, "I was here before you. Where did you come from?"

But you can definitely feel the difference. It's not what it's supposed to be. It's supposed to be a familial environment, a learning environment; it's supposed to be a

school rich with opportunity and driven by curiosity. You walk in there now and you can tell that it's not special anymore. You can walk in there and speak to the students and tell they definitely adjusted requirements. It's not a group of students who may have been struggling elsewhere.

It's not a group of students that you can obviously see potential in. Now, I'm not saying it's a bunch of remedial kids or a bunch of superstars; but there's no dynamic. It's like, "I think I see special." With our class or with the original classes, you could walk in the building and say, "Okay, that kid is really quiet" or "Hmm, that kid laughs really loud," or "That kid clings to that person a lot." You can walk in now and it just looks like a regular school where everybody's dressed the same.

The way you can tell the difference is that our class ate, slept, and breathed that building. We were there all day and night, in and out. If we weren't in class, we was there. Now you couldn't beg us to come back. Like, particular teachers have to ask us to come back and we have to find time to do it. B and A have to request our presence on that campus for us to show up.

For my class, those who graduated and walked with me, we were one. We were essentially seamless. We had our problems, but to this day we are still that way. As far as the class before us, 2011, they were close, but they were nowhere close to each other as we were to each other. We had our friendships with them too, but our friendships amongst each other are years strong.

As far as from us to the Legacy Class, I can maybe count on one hand how many friends I have out of the Legacy Class. But from us to the class below us, we made sure

they knew we were there. We understood where they were because we were there when they came in. We understood what administration they came in under, so their perception was a little different. We had to experience both eras of leadership; they only had one, so we understood that effect on them as well. We tried to play the big brother big sister role as much as we could. To this day I still have, what we call freshmen, 'cause to us they were freshmen. To this day, I can still pick up my phone ask me any question.

Unfortunately, they will never know what it was like to day, “This man was like an older brother to me; or this man did not care what I thought, what I had to say, or about my foolishness, but he cared about me. Or, this woman, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, was like my other mommy. They're never going to get that opportunity. It's just different school.

Just because it can't be that school, doesn't negate the opportunity the school provides. I would advise current/future ECHS students to really give it a chance. I completely understand, that when you're in it, it'd like being in the storm. All you see is the storm, but you have to realize that the sun is going to come back out. You are going to see all of the benefits of it, but you have to give it a chance. You have to be comfortable with the process and you have to build relationships.

Take it upon yourself to find those people who are willing to support you, because it takes more than one person to make that experience successful. Find those who will encourage you not to stop and not to give up, because you get those moments where it's like, “I've got all of these tests at the same time. All these professors want eight-page

papers and they all want something different.” I don’t think the teachers are talking to each other like they did in our day. Our teachers made sure we weren’t overwhelmed, so you have to find a way to cope.

Find someone who will pick you up where you fall, but force you to make that change and make that difference. But I think the biggest thing is building those relationships to aid you in finishing. Don’t stop, what’s the point? It’s a waste of time if you start and don’t finish. It’s so easy to finish. I mean, the process is hard, but when you look back over it, it’s so easy to just do it. It’s just a matter of you saying “Yes” or “No. Am I going to succeed for myself or am I going to deny myself something because I’m afraid.” It’s really just making a choice, “Are you gonna do it or not?” And if you do it, go all the way!

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*



## Appendix V

*The Walter Experience: Sounds of Sacrifice*

Walter interviewed Friday, August 7, 2015 at 6:15 p. m.

*Walter arrived rather late for his interview. He said that he was trying to give me time to get off of work. When he arrived, he had a young woman with him, his girlfriend, who also sat in on his interview. His back was to her the entire time and she was as quiet as could be. He is much smaller than I remember; I guess that is from all of the practicing he does in the outdoors. He is also so much more vocal. He used to be sort of shy and withdrawn. Even though, he talked to me, he still had a quiet spirit. Walter wore an ash red shirt, black pants, black Nike Tennis shoes, and white socks.*

Here is Walter's story...

I was originally at Sumpter County Schools Early College. I stayed there for a year. It was a great year. My family had some situations that made us move back to Atlanta and I found out there was another early college program there. So I tried, instead of going to a regular high school, to get back into early college when I got here, and this was the one.

At my previous early college, the whole high school was actually on the college campus. Yep, so I got to take one college class my freshmen year. They do the same thing as Butler-Armstrong, test you and make sure you're ready; but they don't send you two years later, like Butler-Armstrong does. You'll actually be doing both, taking college classes and high school classes at the same time.

My Butler-Armstrong experience was interesting, to say the least, because I was

coming from South Georgia. So it was a new crowd of people, and it was full, which was different from what I was used to. One major difference was that I'd just come from an open - college campus and suddenly, I was back in a high school building. But I think it was a good experience. I met a lot of new people, learned a lot of stuff, and I got an Associate's degree out of it too. I'd say it was a pretty great experience!

My few months at Butler-Armstrong, I experienced probably the most interesting social incident I've had in my life. The person that I was dating at the time had a stalker and I had to deal with him...At first it was kind of cordial and then it got bad, which led into mediation, and finally, to a place where I just had to deal with it until it was over.

I'd say some of the work was actually very challenging; well sometimes it was the teacher and sometimes it was the work. I guess the most demanding thing would be the work the teachers gave us. Oh my god. I just think it was "death work."

Butler-Armstrong's work was so horrible, it would leave you up at night, like, "How am I supposed to do this?" Sometimes, I would break down doing that work. It was hard. I'd be up like a little kid until like 2:00 in the morning, trying to finish the homework. It worked out because when it came to End of Course Testing, they weren't challenging, because the stuff that they gave us was so hard and so bad on the brain that we were prepared when it came time to perform. It was just like pulling it out of the bank and putting it on the paper, like, "Wow, this ain't hard at all."

Even though the work was hard, we got support from the teachers. They were on us like white on rice. They would stay on us about our work, which was great, even though we wouldn't have had that in college. That's a whole different experience. But in

that situation, they were always on us, like, “Are doing your work? There is a test coming up, are you prepared? Have you done your work for it?”

It also helped that I spent a lot of time there, even when I wasn’t on campus. I would go back to the school a lot and the teachers would always be there to help if I needed it. So it was like having a private tutor all the time, which was very helpful.

I’d say my most memorable academic experience at Butler-Armstrong, was working with Professor TB. It was after an assignment with Professor C, our Spanish teacher at the time, before he left. We had did a project in his class which required us to do songs in Spanish. A bunch of us had did rap songs. Come to find out, I was good at what I was doing with the music. I love music. When Professor TB saw that I had that talent, she was on me about it, “Okay, when are you gonna do some music for my class? When are you gonna start making raps and whatnot?”

At the time, I couldn’t really do a lot for Professor TB. I was working a lot with Professor A. I had to take her 9<sup>th</sup> grade class my first year there, because I missed that course at my other early college. They were gonna give the course to me the next year, but it turned out, I had to go ahead and take it. She was a great teacher and she was a great friend. She would help me with science and she would talk to me. I did a lot of work with her. A lot of the music projects I did, were in her class. Just working with her through the music, was a memorable experience. I would even work with some of her other students on their projects.

Back to Professor TB, I ended up doing a lot of other stuff with her instead of music, like working with the superhero and King Tut projects a lot. So I wasn’t exactly

doing music, but I was around helping out.

When I did start working with Professor TB on music one semester, before I even had her as a teacher, it was pretty memorable because I was learning stuff, just by making music. I was learning because I would have to look up like, “Okay, what rhymes with insulate?” Hmm. That's something new. I didn't know that, but hey, it rhymes. Let's write that.” It was fun.

Professor TB, she's too much. Too much! That was probably the one lady, besides you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, that I will never forget in life. She was also a pain in my butt.

The funny thing was that I never really knew her. Since I was taking a ninth grade class at the time everybody else had her, everybody was telling me, “She's horrible. She's horrible.” But whenever I saw her, all she knew me was, the music man, the man who could help her with the music. So I was helping her even before I had the class. She treated me okay then.

Then when I had her class, she was a whole new person. She was like a demon wearing a purple dress. But she was like the greatest teacher ever because I learned so much from her class. I did so much for her class. She still has projects that I did. She still has the game I made for that Physics superhero project. Like, if I was to go up there right now, she would show me that project. I did so much for that lady and she did so much for me. It was just a great teaching experience.

Other than TB and Ms. A, I'll say there was you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee. My favorite story with you was just coming to your office and talking about band in general, because you actually liked music, so it was nice having someone I could be a band nerd

around. So that was great.

I am glad that I had that bit of fun with Professor TB, because there wasn't enough to do at Butler-Armstrong. It was just strictly academics. There were no music classes, no basketball teams, and no football. We did have the dance team, started by you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, but that was it. That was the best thing we had. We had little clubs, but they were academic. For someone like me, that can get really bad, really quickly. I really don't, I'm not gonna say that I don't like school because I know I need it, but I don't like it strictly academic. I like having fun with what I'm doing.

I was actually a special case at Butler-Armstrong; not only did I transfer from another early college, but I was the only student in the school at the time, that actually did outside activities at another Emerson County school. So I wasn't in the same situation socially as the other kids, because I would go to a whole other high school when the day was over to interact with a lot of different people.

I was in marching band at MGHS. They knew about me because my sister was in the band at that school too, before she graduated. So when they found out I was coming up here, they said, "Oh, we want you here. We know your parents. We know your sister. We know you have a good work ethic. The way it worked out, since I was gonna go to Butler-Armstrong, rather than any other high school, I would not have been able to do what I did, but because Butler-Armstrong didn't have a band program, I got my band experience there basically. It also helped that my Graduation Specialist, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, went to high school with the Band Director at MGHS and she made a phone call. In the end, it all worked out. I spent a whole three years in the band, so that was

great, especially since I want to major in music.

I had a small downside in the end at the senior night game. The MGHS seniors were able to come down on the track and walk with their parents. Unfortunately, I was the only senior in the stand just watching, because I wasn't actually a MGHS senior. I was a Butler-Armstrong senior, so I had to fly under the radar. Also, I couldn't be drum major because I didn't go to the school. But I wouldn't change it for anything. It was a great time.

I got most of my social experience from over there. Now, as for at the school, I wouldn't say that that school would have prepared me as much. But, there was a lot of things we didn't have at the time, so I know I wouldn't have talked to a lot of the people that I did talk to if it wasn't for that unique experience.

I mean the teachers did their best to make it fun and they did their best to talk to you, but socially, all you had were the kids in the class or the teachers at your school. And the school was so small, that you literally knew everybody in school by the first week, by the end of the first week. So socially, we saw the same people every day and it just didn't help you to meet other people either, because you were just stuck in your little circle or in your little square, in that case. We had that one hall and nothing else, nothing else on the other side, but a restroom.

Once the time came to transition from the high school to the college, I was prepared for the college coursework. I'd say it was easy 'cause most of the stuff, I'd seen before and I knew it. If I didn't know it, I knew somebody who did. Most of Math and Science, especially the earlier courses like College Algebra and beginning Chemistry,

were basic stuff. Of course, when it got more complicated, it was like, “Okay, this is new;” though I didn’t have too much to worry about.

My favorite professor at Henry-Hall was our philosophy, Mr. Tibido. I had his class with Mike, one of my friends while I was at the early college. We were very close. He was a great professor because he would interact with me and Mike. Because it was a Philosophy class, there was a lot of questions. We would be the ones in class who would come after him and he would come right back at us. There would just be a lot of arguing; well, I wouldn’t say arguing, I would say a lot of debating, of course.

So, him and Professor Sawn. I don’t know the politically correct term for this, so I’m gonna say he was from the Middle East area. He was our Political; Science teacher. He used to say he hated the Butler-Armstrong kids because we would always be there and we would always know stuff. So, he’d be like, “Y’all always know something, don’t you, Mike?” But we’d be in his class and we’d be able to answer a lot of his questions, but everybody else would not. He was a cool teacher because he was down-to-earth. He told us about how he used to be a DeeJay.

One of my favorite assignments was when he asked us to pick five songs and find the political meaning behind them. I think that paper is somewhere on my old computer, but that was a great assignment because you found a bunch of different songs and you were thinking, basically in another sense, about what else the song could be about. So of course that was great for me because it was another music project, just in another subject. So that was great.

Socially, because of the lack of social activities, I wouldn’t say Butler-Armstrong

did the best job at preparing us for the college; although Henry-Hall wasn't that hard or difficult to adapt to. When I got to Henry-Hall, it was weird because you would like to think, "Okay, this is college," but of course it wasn't a four-year college; but it was college nonetheless.

You would have thought it'd be a little different or something from Butler-Armstrong. The most difference I saw was more computer labs and open space. Besides that, it just looked like a giant high school. It was a bunch of people doing what they had to do. It was just people, trying to get some schooling somehow, someway, and the environment was just chill, relaxed, and I was used to that. You also had older people and a lot of cars, of course.

Socially, it was just college classrooms and meeting new people. I mean that, meeting new people was gonna happen anywhere. The hardest part was just meeting new people because we don't meet a lot of new people every day at Butler-Armstrong, but that's just something you gain over time anyway. So I would say, as far as getting ready for college, Butler-Armstrong did a pretty okay job, for the college it was attached to, so...support at the college looked different from the high school. The Counselors are always gonna be in place, but I wouldn't say that there was a set place you could go if something was wrong. That was a personal decision to seek help. Like, when I felt like was stressing out or I couldn't handle the college anymore, I came to you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee. You were always that person that would tell us, "If something is wrong, you can tell me or you can come talk to me." Of course other people would do that, but you were one of the people that offered mostly. Sometimes I went to the library and just



chilled out there. But as far as just, “Hey, this is a place you can come to talk; no, there was nothing really set in place.

We did have Ms. Gina. I cannot forget about her! Ms. Gina was another you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee for Henry-Hall. She was a nice lady. She helped me out a lot. Her main thing was to keep us on track, make sure we were doing our work, and basically keep reminding us, “Hey, you are not college students. You are still in high school. Don’t act like a high schooler, but remember that you still got a lot more to do before you can graduate from high school.” She would basically remind us to watch our crowd and not act our ages, in some cases. But she wanted us to remember that we were still in high school, in other cases.

For me, she was very helpful. She would contact the teachers if I couldn’t. Because she worked for the college, she was that person we would go to like, “Hey, I’m having a problem with this class, “or she would go and talk to a professor if it was a bunch of students coming to her about things they didn’t like or they were all having a problem with. Even if they were all just getting bad grades, she would go to the professor and just find out what was going on. She would also give us feedback from the teachers about what we were doing.

So she was great with that type of support. She was always there, for the most part, in her office, if we needed to come to talk her. She would always help us with our schedules and whatnot. And she was also that person, when we weren’t at Butler-Armstrong, that we could come talk to about what we were going to do after Henry-Hall. She would say, “There's gonna be more opportunities. There's more college out there, so

what are you gonna do after this is over? She's great people.

The most memorable experiences with her were our conversations about the HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). That was probably the greatest thing, because she would always ask me questions about why I wanted to go to an HBCU. She was like, "What's the appeal? Why? I don't understand. I mean you could go to another college. You can go here. You can go there." She wasn't downplaying my choice; she was just asking me why not somewhere else? It would be a nice experience just telling her, "Well, I want to go here because I like band, basically." So telling her about the band world and whatnot was always a fun experience for me.

Not everything at the college was perfect. We did face some challenges. A challenge I faced was time management. There was a lot more openness when you weren't in a high school environment, when you have to be there at a certain time, and if you're not in class by that time, you're considered tardy. If you weren't in class at the college, they could tell your parents and your parents will get on you, so and so forth. It wasn't like that at Henry-Hall.

When you got to a college environment, first of all, you were responsible for getting there, most of the time. You either took a bus or you got a ride, but you were responsible for getting there. That's number one. Number two, the teachers don't care about you, not like that. They don't care if you come or not. They're gonna teach whether you go or not. So if you're not there, it's up to get that lesson. You can't go to the teacher and ask them for the work you've missed, unless it was a really good reason. You just missed it and that's you.

Yes, people skipped class. I was definitely one of those. I wouldn't say that I skipped a lot, definitely not as bad as I do now. The teachers really are not on you about being in class. Back then of course, there was a few classes, I felt like, "Oh well, I guess I don't have to go today." I had done my work or something or I knew we were not gonna really talk about anything. My favorite was, "Oh, this is too early. I want to get some sleep."

I mean, you remember that at the time, we were in high school. We had to be up sometimes as early as 6:00 in the morning and then stay all the way through the day. Most of us wouldn't get home until later because we stayed at the school waiting for our parents. So if you're saying that instead of going to class, you're gonna go catch a nap, then okay. Cool. Most of the time I would go out and get food. Sometimes I would just be out chilling. But most of the time, it wasn't even skipping class; it was just coming later.

Now for me, in some classes, I did notice that my absences were starting to hurt me because I wouldn't know anything. Sometimes I would walk in the class and they would be taking a test. I was thinking, "Dang, I didn't even know we had a test. I don't even know what you talked about the last two classes." That would hurt. Basically, Henry-Hall was about getting your independence straight.

Of course I pulled it together, but for some of my peers who enjoyed skipping class, who enjoyed the college experience more than actually getting a college education, it hurt a lot because it made the program look bad. Instead of them being in class, they were upstairs in the Student Center all day. I would say, "Why? Why weren't you in

class?” They were not only wasting an opportunity, but they were also making it worse for everybody else who came after them.

Now it looked like the early college kids didn’t come to class. The early college kids weren’t good students. A lot of them even flunked out of early college, just from the simple fact that they didn’t go to class. So for some, yes, skipping really hurt. For those who knew, “This isn’t gonna happen every day. I’m not gonna do this every day,” they were okay. A lot of kids didn’t skip class at all. For those who pulled it together, like me; no, it didn’t hurt them as much.

For the most part, my peers made the early college experience fun. It wouldn’t have been an experience at all if it wasn’t for them. I will say that. A lot of times in high school, you you’re your four years of high school with them and you don’t ever see them after you go to your certain colleges. At Butler-Armstrong, the same peers who you’ve grown close with over the past two years, one for me, they were coming to the same college as me, probably even taking some of the same classes, which is kind of why I say that it was just like going to a bigger high school. But it made it fun, because you still had your friends with you, to do all the stuff you wanted to do. And since both of you had more time to do it, that made it more fun, more enjoyable, like a traditional high school feel, even though it was college.

When you left, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, there was a disconnection...a giant skid mark. Then after my class left, who was pretty much the last class to really bond with you and Ms. Gina, it was just awful. There was really no bridge after that.

Currently, I’m at Jackson State University. After I graduated, I went there. This

will be my fourth year, my senior year. I went there for Music Education. Originally I was on a half academic, half band scholarship; but currently, I'm just on a band scholarship and Financial Aid. I'm done with the long hours. At first, I had to take like 17 hours per semester or more because, first of all you have to have 15 hours to be on scholarship anyway, but as freshman, music majors have to take additional hours towards major courses.

We are losing majors every day. When we came in my freshman year, about half of my class, even know we were small, were music majors and they are not anymore. People think being a music major is easy. They're like, "It's just music." No, it's not. It's worse. It's worse than you think! Only me, and either one or two other students since our freshmen year, has been going through Theory course like it ain't nothing. We have not missed a period. We have made it through every single one, without ever having to take it over again.

I am also in the Marching Band. I was on the dance committee for two years. My second year, I was kind of one of the head members of the dance committee, I guess. Last year, I wasn't really doing much. I was just in the section. I did have one of my arrangements played by the band. I actually got one played the year before, but it was in a dance routine mix. This year, I actually got a song played in the band and I'm hoping to get more played by the band. Hopefully I can get moved to the student arranging staff, soon, with a little extra work.

I am sick of the band though. I'm sick of it. I'm so sick of it! I told them after this year, I'm done. I'm never marching again. In high school, it was fun. Now, it's cool. There

is just a whole world you would never know about. There's a whole world that nobody knows about. It's a whole culture and there's so much that goes on. As far as being a band member it gets bad, but because you're in the band, you're also what you're critiquing. I don't want to be, per se, the person critiquing the band. I just don't want to be the person that you can say anything bad about. I want to be the person making it better. I would to make my band, the band to beat. That's why I'm doing what I am doing. That's why I'm a music major, because I want to be a band director, so I can be that person to have that band on a certain kind of level.

I'm in my fourth year, as far as school goes. I do have another year. Hopefully I'll be getting out of there Spring of '17. The liberal arts advisor says that they can't work with our schedules because they are so complicated apparently. I have my own place. I had two jobs this summer. I'm basically working my way through college. So that's what I've been doing.

One roadblock that I experienced with the transition to Jackson State from the early college is financial related. Currently, I'm trying to get enough hours to be considered a full-time student. That's because I have no more classes that I can take, for the simple fact, I transferred in with about 54 hours of the credits. I also had an Associate's Degree. Turns out, those were a lot of empty classes I took instead of taking the music or education classes, like I needed. Don't get me wrong, they counted towards the core credits I needed; but since I already took them, I can't take them again to have a full load, and some of my music classes are only offered during certain times of the year. Even more frustrating is the fact a lot of them required pre-requisites, so I am really

limited in what I can take. So I'm struggling trying to get 12 hours because there are no more classes that I can take. That's what's hindering me right now.

One thing I would say about the early college experience, that I would have liked to change, was the opportunity to take courses in the Arts. For me personally, especially since I'm going to school for music education, I would have preferred something in the arts; maybe a music class, maybe a chorus class, or something. You couldn't even take those classes at the college. There came a time, closer to graduation, when I wanted to start taking classes for my major, but Ms. Gina, well her name was Ms. Gina at the time, informed me that I would have to take those types of classes myself, because the Accel grant did not pay for them. But I didn't have any money to do that. Looking back, that was what I needed to do in order to avoid the position I'm currently in.

Despite my concerns, if I were to make that decision again to attend Butler-Armstrong, I wouldn't change it. Back then, there were plenty of times where I really wished that I went to MGHS or somewhere else, but I cannot take back the early college experience. It was a great experience. I met a lot of great people. I met you there, Ms. Braelynn Melodee

When I went to my four-year university, even though I was no longer with the crowd that I had become a part of, being in a college classroom and being around college professors, felt better. It felt better because I knew better. I had a lot more experience. Also, the work that I did at Butler-Armstrong helped me when I got there too. It helped me realize that there were easier ways of learning or easier ways to do some of the assignments, because of the way that I handled some of the assignments at Butler-

Armstrong and Henry-Hall. Even socially, where I feel like I might have been deprived me a little bit; I have a social experience now, so it's okay. I wouldn't change it.

Here are my feelings about earning college credits while still in high school. I actually know a bunch of real high schoolers who had real high school classes. The way I see it, after we got our foundation in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade at Butler-Armstrong, it was just a matter of expanding off of that. Little trinkets were added to science, so it was like, "Okay, this is Earth Science now. There's space. There's Astronomy. There's Calculus. There's this. There's that. All of that was supposed to help you when you got to college, right?

We had the basic knowledge, and when we went to college, most of us got our Associates Degrees. There were people who were there, who had never been to college; older people who were coming to Henry-Hall, who couldn't do. They couldn't do what we did. So that's the way I see it!

Another benefit of college classes were that I felt we had more of a personable teaching experience versus at a traditional high school setting where someone was trying to teach us information so that we could pass a test or so the school could get the money that they needed. Henry-Hall professor teachers, unlike traditional high school teachers who teach to keep their jobs, taught you the stuff they wanted you to know. It was the sentiment that, "Yes, you're gonna need this later in life, so these are some things you might need to know right now. This is something we personally think that you can use later in life." So I feel better about college credit versus staying in a regular high school.

Getting me out of my shell was basically the biggest impact Butler-Armstrong



had on me. At the time came there, I had lived in a whole other place for five years. I was just beginning to break out of my shell there, when suddenly; I was getting thrown back into something that I was supposed to already know. I lost friends. Most of my friends had gone to different places. I don't even know where they went. I was like, "I'm too young to even have friends move." All of my childhood friends were gone. After getting back in my shell, Butler-Armstrong afforded me a new place to, well, get out of my shell, again.

And not only that, a new person came out of that shell, somebody that had learned. In a regular high school, I guess my circle probably would have been a lot bigger. I know people now who are talking about their friend circle being too big. There's too much going on. But since I didn't have that traditional high school experience, I know better. I learned to keep my circle small. I also know that it's, okay to do that. I don't need all those people in my life. So, it helped me realize that maybe I'm not meant for a big picture world, but the picture that I can fit in, I'm definitely gonna hop in on that one. So that's what I say came out of that experience.

If I could give the newbies any advice it would be, "Find something else to do." I don't mean for that to sound bad. Academics is all fine and dandy, but unless you're going to be something like an engineer or something that requires you to have all of that knowledge, in the world that we're living in now, a lot of that just doesn't mean a lot.

Find something else that works for you, something that you like that isn't strictly academic, and go after that. Find a niche to keep you occupied and focused, so ECHS won't drive you up a wall, because it is gonna get hectic; it's gonna get crazy; it's gonna

be stressful, and it's gonna feel like you're paying bills. Look, I'm paying bills now and it feels the exact same way!

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix W

### The Alexis Experience: Free Spirit

*Alexis interviewed Thursday, August 13, 2015 at 6:20 p. m.*

*Alexis arrived later for her interview. She actually texted me at the time she was supposed to be there, in order to ask me if we were still meeting. I mentioned to her mother earlier that day that I would be interviewing Alexis later. Alexis' mom actually was the one who brought and was also who asked her to text and confirm our meeting, which I thought was very odd.*

*Alexis wore a turquoise tank top and jean shorts. Her hair was braided and she had it adorned with a red scrunchy (hairbow). She had flower stud earrings in her ear and an additional stud near the top of her ear. Other jewelry included her gray, black, and white stone necklace, a silver necklace, a brown bracelet, a blue rubber bracelet with the word, "PERFECT" in orange letters, and three rings. She also wore an additional hairbow (black) on her wrist. Black Tennis shoes served as her footwear.*

Here is Alexis' story...

Whew, man. I did have fun. It was just the whole uniform thing that caught me off guard. I wasn't aware of that; not until I filled out all of the paperwork and my mom told me. I also didn't know there wasn't gonna be no activities or nothing, so I prepared myself for that. I thought the work would be more challenging, though; but it really wasn't at all.

Because of how small Butler-Armstrong was it was a lot more drama than needed, definitely. Everybody knew all of the school gossip, even the teachers. I mean, I didn't

care who I was friends with. I didn't care who you people talked about, but because I was cool with a lot of people, everybody pulled me in to the gossip. Like, "Hey, I heard so-and-so did this. So-and-so did that." And you was like, "Dang, I'm their friend too. Hmm."

Academically, the work was actually easy to do, but the workload, how much we got in one week, I wasn't prepared for that. So, getting everything done was the challenge. We had like two things of homework from every class, plus extra stuff. That was a lot of work for one day. It did get easier after a while, so it was cool.

All our teachers were willing to help. They were cool. If we needed help, we had tutoring, so that was good. They were more like, "You guys know where the classroom is." They would stay after school or, if we told them ahead of time, they would make time for us then. Everybody was supportive, Mr. P., Mr. B., Ms. Braelynn Melodee (the researcher), Dr. T., everybody.

Dr. T., our Counselor, was supportive, little Dr. T... she was a real help. I was in the Butterfly Club she had. To this day I still got the paper and everything. I'm not gonna even lie, she brought me out of my shy zone. She was really good support for people who was going through a lot of stress, especially from the school. If we had any problems with faculty or staff, of course we would go to her. So when the Assistant Principal, JS started pissing me off more and more, to the point where I was like whatever, Dr. T told me to just come one day. I was like, "Fine, I'll stay after school, for one day. I went and I was said, "Okay, I'll come back," and I just stayed in there ever since.

She'd be like, "Okay, what's the problem?" She'd put things in perspective for

you. She'd try to get us to understand that the person we were having an issue with may have had a reason for doing what they did. She would also try to get us to realize the repercussions created because of the decisions we made.

Then of course you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee, were supportive; especially during dance team. Some of my best memories at Butler-Armstrong was when I was on the dance team. I especially remember when either Keion or Charlene were picking our individual line names for all of us and telling us what they meant. That was so much fun! I loved dance team. I miss dance team. I still got my shirt hanging up in my closet. We had fun and we made friends through the dance team too, because half of those people I didn't know

I told Dr. T. about my line name. She was like, "You got 'Flash Flood'. Did they tell you what that means?" I said yeah. It was our own little taste of sorority life and I loved it. That was the only "sorority" I was gonna ever be in. [laughter]

And then Mr. P was, one of those teachers that you see in, you remember, School Days? I promise you I loved that movie. Yeah, he reminded me of one of those teachers. When I first walked in his class, no lie, during the whole summer program, I sat in the back with my hood on the whole time. I was like, "I'm gonna listen to him, but I guarantee I know everything that he's talking about and I'm gonna fall asleep." Well that's what happened; but sure enough, he didn't let me go to sleep though.

After having me in his class a couple of times, he ended up being my homeroom teacher. How about that? He was like, "Stop treating yourself like you're stupid. I know you can do the work, just get it over with." When teachers tell you that, you be like, "Eh,

whatever;" but it hit me with him, and I was like, "Man, he's right. I'll just get it over with." But his class was fun. We had deep conversations in his class. It was deep, very deep. He was a cool teacher though.

I even enjoyed Math at Butler-Armstrong. One memorable experience that I have was in Algebra II class, with Ms. Portugal. She was trying to get us to figure out this super long equation. Mrs. Portugal wasn't the type of person to look inside the book. She was like, "No, we're gonna work this out together." She had everybody take apart of it, "You got this. You got this." Of course she left me at the end. I was like, "Come on, I'm ready." We had to do it by ourselves first, so when the answer she got was different from everyone else's she was like, "Wait a minute. What's going on?"

A couple people did have her answer, so I was like, "I'm gonna work this out one more time before I show her my answer." I kept getting the same thing. So after she couldn't figure it out, we broke it down one more time, then it came to my answer. She was like, "So why didn't you just tell us the answer?" I said, "You're the teacher, so I was thinking you were right." It was hilarious. I felt pretty awesome after that.

As far as the administration, the Assistant Principal and Principal, were not supportive so much; they were just lurkers. I had been in ISS (In-School Suspension) for who knows how many times, little thing because me and Dr. JS didn't get along so well.

Once we got over to the college, I was really shocked because it sort of seemed like I was taking the same classes from Butler-Armstrong all over again. In fact, Butler-Armstrong was a little bit more challenging. I knew that material already. I knew how to do everything. Butler-Armstrong had prepared us well. The one class I struggled in,

Chemistry, I actually went back to Ms. A for help that class. I really just went back to the school for everything. I didn't really stay at the college for help or anything. We were prepared for the workload too. At first it seemed like it was lighter, but then it became just about the same.

When we first got in our college classrooms it was weird. It was some people, older than me, who didn't catch on so quick. I felt really bad having to explain something to somebody that was like 40. I'm not even gonna lie. I didn't want to seem like that butt hole that was like, "Dude, if I can catch on, so can you." I didn't want to feel that way. But it's like I did just come out of high school and they've been out of high school. There were actually like two or three people that I was helping out in class. One was Ms. Ilene, who was in my statistics class.

Socially, no were not prepared for the ratchetness. The Henry-Hall people were something else. One of our classmates, Bree, ended up going to college with us, but she was in Gateway. The people that she hung around in Gateway were a mess. We made friends with them too. Everybody was cool. They were a lot older than us due to the nature of their program being mainly for drop-outs.

Another issue at the college was that Butler-Armstrong students were skipping class. I was like, "Who? I got people watching me." Forreal, I do admit to skipping class a little bit, on a couple of occasions. I ain't gonna lie.

My friends, my homies, provided a lot of support for me at the college, like I'm so serious. I had those people like Deejah and Nate that were very encouraging. They was

like, “You know how to do the work, just do it already and get it over with.” Then I had those people I wanted to hang around all the time and have fun like them, too.

The bigger influence was probably from the people that I wanted to be around all the time, but I knew what I had to do, so I put that in perspective. My dad didn’t graduate, neither did my mom. I was gonna be the first person to graduate and I didn’t want to let nobody down. I didn’t want to be one of those people with unused potential, because I knew how to do the work. The adjustment from high school to college was still in progress though.

At Butler-Armstrong we had teachers who would extend due dates for us, because of something that happened. But in college, when I forgot to turn in some work, the teacher was like, “I don’t know what you want me to tell you because I gave you a date and you should have had it on this date.” So it was like, “Okay, this is not Butler-Armstrong no more.” I thought to myself, “You’re slipping.” That also gave me perspective. Being around a lot of older people too, I was like, “I don’t want to be 40 getting my Associate’s again, [laughter] so I’m gonna need to step up [laughter] or something.

We also had Ms. Gina as support at the college. Ms. Gina was that person who said, “Come to my office and we’ll talk about your grades. If your grades are good, they’re good. If your grades are bad, we’ll try to figure out something.” She made sure that everybody stayed on track with their studies, and not really getting lost trying to get involved college life; just really trying to focus on graduating. She put us in our classes too.



I remember begging for Pre-Calculus and she said, "I think you should take Statistics." She thought it might be easier for me. I looked at her and said, we're gonna see how this class gone end up. Well, I failed statistics, because I'm really bad at Statistics. I did like the teacher, just not the subject; so when it came time for me to take a math class over again, I wasn't given the option by Ms. Gina to take Pre-Calculus, only to take Statistics with another teacher, I was like, "Just give me statistics. We're gonna retry this again." And I passed it.

I guess she did what she had to do, but like if we went to her for moral support or whatever, she was, I promise you, every time I went to this lady's office, "Have you been studying?" I'd tell her, "Somewhat. I mean I'm more of a doer than a studier, [laughter] and she's like, "Maybe if you study more, you'll do better." Again, "I'm more of a doer, so what can I do to pass this class, besides study? Her next option, "Well, did you try to go to the school, and see if anyone there can help you? That was my only other option, so yep, that's what I did.

She did suggest the Learning Center and I did give it a try for Statistics, but it still didn't click. But when I went to Ms. Portugal and the new teacher, I think his name started with an R, at Butler-Armstrong, they were actually kind of helpful. The Learning Center people were good, but they were the type of people that did everything for you and didn't really explain it. Then they would say, "Okay, you can try this one." I'm like, "I don't know where I messed up at though." I just watched you do it and the understanding seemed perfect. So I ended up going to the Learning Center really just to do projects or type papers, stuff like that.

Eventually, I went to Gateway. Yes, the same Gateway I was talking about earlier! Gateway was almost like Butler-Armstrong. It was all in one little building, well one floor, just like Butler-Armstrong, and basically they prepare you for the college workload but taking it step-by-step on how to get it done. They had a Learning Center, just like we did and a support system, just like we did. I mean there was really no difference.

I had to leave Butler-Armstrong, well Henry-Hall, because of my GPA. I know that when I was in Butler-Armstrong I was getting in trouble so much, and it affected the work I was turning in. Of course tests and stuff weren't any better, so when I got to Henry-Hall, I was doing better; but it wasn't good enough to stay in the program, because you have to have a certain GPA in order to stay in the program.

Me and my mom had a talk and before I got any deeper into a hole. I had two options; one was if I got kicked out, I was gonna have to go to McHS and two was if I voluntarily left, I could go to Gateway. Luckily Gateway was housed at Henry-Hall College too, so I would still be in the same atmosphere as before. I also knew my friend Bree was in Gateway as well, so I just slid into Gateway, with a fresh start, so that I could get my GPA up and get my diploma.

Actually by the time I graduated, my GPA was a 3. 2. When I first tried to transfer to the Art Institute of Atlanta. , they thought it was a problem taking the credits because they were high school credits. I was like, "Check again, there's an extra page." They called up to the school to make sure the credits were transferable. In the end it worked out good because they took the credits, overall. Not all of them, but like Math, English, you

know, the core credits.

It is really going well. Actually, after taking a couple of classes, they wanted me to test out of classes I didn't want to take it and it actually made my GPA go up. Right now I have a 4.1 as my GPA, or something like that. It was really cool. Due to my learning style, this school helped a lot, because we have to do everything. I am in there Audio Engineering program. It's so much fun over there. This is my second year and I should be graduating next summer.

It was so funny, because Ms. Illene, the older lady I used to help at Henry-Hall, how about she ended up going to my art school? She got an Associate's Degree in Business and she's going to the Art Institute for Culinary Arts. She wants her own culinary business. She actually noticed me when we had a Critical Thinking class we had to take. She was like, "Iris, I know your voice from anywhere." I was like, "What's up?"

I am grateful for my time at Butler-Armstrong because it kept me from doing bad stuff like drugs because I had too much work to do. It helped me really stay focused on life, really; because now in school, I get all my work done first. I stay after school until like 10:30 p. m. and have to ride Marta all the way home late at night, [laughter], but I get my work done. So that's all that matters.

Because of Butler-Armstrong and those longer papers, I can tolerate my classes like Music Business, which irked me so bad. That class taught us what the industry is like and how we are gonna make money; but not without knowing all those contracts and everything. That class killed me, with that 15-page essay, but I passed it.

At first, I didn't really see it as a big deal to earn college credits while in high

school. I guess you could say I had cold feelings about it. It was one of those things like, “But why, I'm only in high school? I didn't know anything about college credit until they explained it to me when I actually got to college, because in high school, you are just worried about, “Damn, I gotta graduate.”

Once I got to Henry-Hall, they was like, “Okay, you have this much college credit and you know it transfers to whatever school you want to go to. That's less classes you have to take when you get there, plus, you get the credit towards your degree.” I was like, “Okay. This sounds good.” When you actually look at it, I mean, to each its own; but how many people can say that they got college credit while they were in high school? That's what's up. That means I got less work to do when I go to my four-year college.

If given the opportunity, I would choose Butler-Armstrong all over again. I would because it got me out of my fun zone and made me really like focus on what I really need to do. Band had been my number one focus before that. I had the high school band experience planned out since the sixth grade, no, the third grade actually, because I was in band since then. I was gonna get a band scholarship and go to Morris Brown. Then my mom was like, “Butler-Armstrong doesn't have a band.” But I mean, I still would go back because I liked the challenge of it, mainly with the administration.

My main suggestion for improvement would be making sure the authority, like the Principals and the Assistant Principals, know what they're getting themselves into. They really need to have their whole business thing together because I don't really think JS or Orbouie were prepared enough for that school. They had traditional school backgrounds. I actually think the AP was judging me because I lived in the McHS area.

She thought, about me, “She's one of those people.” I’m like, “No, I mean I live around there, but do you see any other McHS people running around here yet? No.”

At the college, it would have helped to have people in the Learning Center dedicated to Henry-Hall students, because their people were mainly there to help people that were already at Henry-Hall. They don’t really know about Butler-Armstrong or anything like that. Maybe even if a couple of people could have come from Butler-Armstrong, over to the college a couple of times, that would have helped us understand better, because we knew how Butler-Armstrong taught us.

Overall it was a good experience for me. I would tell the current/future early college student, “Get the work done first. Don’t worry about drama, because I know there’s always gonna be some in that little box. Just stay focused on the work. You got plenty of time to chill.

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix X

### *The Keion Experience: Responsibility*

Keion interviewed Wednesday, July 29, 2015 at 5:00 p. m.

*Keion was the very first person to respond to my request for participation in this qualitative process! He was very enthusiastic about participating. Since Keion's tenure at Butler-Armstrong, he has had a sibling to graduate from the school; moreover, he has returned to choreograph the dance team which I founded years ago, of which he was a member.*

*Keion had a nice haircut. He wore a black tee-shirt and jeans, with sunglasses atop his head. He had a very nice watch on his wrist as well.*

Here is Keion's story...

Butler-Armstrong wasn't my first choice. My first choice was to go to my home school, but my mom kind of pushed me to go here because of the opportunity that it had for me to graduate with my Associate's Degree and my high school diploma. It had its ups and its downs, you know. I would say because it started off as an experiment. It felt like, "We gone see if we can get these kids in college at the age of 16, graduated with their Associate's degree." The goal was to get the Associate's degree; but if not, you came out with college credit.

Ninth grade and tenth grade were good years. Tenth grade was my best year. I was popular, you know. Everybody knew my name. The experience that I had, was a great one.

The support was also great. I knew that I could always go to my professors when I

needed to ask a question or to understand certain things. Allow me to explain, we never referred to our instructors as Mr. Duh-duh or Mrs. Duh-duh, they started us off saying Professor, so that they could get us acclimated to saying Professor Duh-duh when we enter the college environment. Little changes like that helped us prepare for the transition to the college in the very beginning.

Socially at Butler-Armstrong, I felt that they could have did a lot better as far as making us feel more like it was a regular high school. Because they always pushed the academics, and I understand that school is for school but you know, we kind of missed out on things that regular high schools had to offer, like activities. You had certain counselors or people trying to work those things in, but I felt like our experiences would have been a lot more better, if socially, we had more of a normal feel.

We had extracurricular activities, just not as many as traditional school settings. We had the Mock Trial Team which started my Tenth Grade year, so 2010. Then we had the Dance Team, of course. We had a Literary Magazine, little things like that that did make up for those personal-social experiences.

Speaking of the dance team, we had a really big change to occur at Butler-Armstrong right before we transitioned to Henry Hall. When I think of that school, I think Ms. Braelynn Melodee, you know? Ms. Braelynn Melodee and Professor B, people like that. She was there for my ninth and tenth grade year, but she left my eleventh grade year. Everybody truly missed her, like, "Where's Ms. Braelynn Melodee?" Things were good until she left. Then you saw everything kinda just fall apart. So you realized the load that she took on to make the school more functional. When she left, you had all

these other teachers, like, “How do you do this? How do you do that? What’s going on?” When she left everybody else had to pick up the slack.

She was also my dance team coach. She started my love of dance, ‘cause I always loved to perform. I did the step team in middle school and elementary, but then I was introduced to dance in ninth grade and ever since then, I’ve danced. She was very influential in planting those dance seeds; but also influential in my ninth and tenth grade years, making sure that the school had a great flow.

At first I wasn’t gonna be able to go to Henry-Hall College. It had to do with a petition to get admission; I can’t necessarily remember. I feel like maybe it was something with my mom, some taxes, or something going on with that which cause me not to be eligible to be a part of the institution or take classes there.

Eleventh grade, is when I first started at Henry-Hall College as a fulltime student. The first semester was rocky; but after I got used to the whole process, it got a lot easier. Our first semester going in, we had to do a combination of eight hours between the Writing Lab, and Math Center, and the Learning Center, which the whole school had access to. If you didn’t, you had consequences. Additionally, we also had our support back at the school with the professors where we could ask some questions. They also always pushed us to have relationships with our professors at the college, so that we could use them. They really did trust that us as students were really going to come to the college and take care of business, doing what was asked of us and what we signed up for.

I will tell anybody that early college was a lot harder than other schools because of them just trying to prepare you for what was next, so they kinda overcompensated.



You never knew what you were really getting yourself into until you got there. So, the professors, the curriculum, everything, was very rigorous.

Whether I was in their class or taking classes at the college, I knew that I always had them as tutors and people who would give me advice. The support system there was great. At one point they were bringing in new teachers, so I really didn't get to know them, but the teachers that I was comfortable with and that I knew, I used them to their fullest advantage.

One of those people for me was Professor B. He was a very cool professor. He was also very respectable. You know it's hard to respect some of these teachers these days, but he was a teacher that demanded respect without having to say anything. He was always willing to help. He was always saying, "How's it going over there?" He was interested in us and he was interested in me. You know, I felt like he was kind of like a father figure to me. I just met my dad two years ago, so every way I could find a father figure, I always tried to take advantage of it. I don't necessarily know if he knows that I saw him as a father figure, but I always thought of him in that way because he took the time and energy into being a great professor and teacher. So, always having approachable professors who you could talk to, not just about school but about what was going on at home, was invaluable. Some of the other students didn't necessarily feel that way.

The only thing that Butler-Armstrong maybe didn't prepare us well with, was time management. That's just because you were in a structured environment at the early college. So when you go to the college, you know you only have two classes a day, three or four at the most. But if you only have two classes in a day and those two classes are in

the morning, you have your whole day to do whatever you want. You can go to sleep. You can go eat, all day. You can decide to do your homework and study or not do your homework and study. It was the time management that I think was a problem for a lot of people. I don't necessarily know how they could have helped us with that, just because Butler-Armstrong was a high school, and I guess they do have guidelines as far as the structure of the school, compared to the college.

I know we had some professors who'd be like, "You gotta use your time wisely," but you can't really explain that to someone. It's more so you kinda gotta go through it and see, "Okay well, that semester, when I think about it, my problem was I didn't use my time wisely. So this semester, I know what I have to do to make sure I get to where I wanna be."

That year, our supervision at the college was just the liaison who worked at Henry-Hall, even though she served as a conduit between both institutions, Butler-Armstrong ECHS and Henry-Hall College. She kinda brought 'em all together. She also notified Butler-Armstrong what was going on at the college.

For me personally, Ms. Gina was very effective. She was very helpful in making sure that I got into the college. She was actually the one we went to when I was having the residency issue and I guess she had it handled from there. I know that I could call her up or go to her office, and be like, "Look, this out of place, duh-duh-duh. What do I do for that?"

She was really cool to talk to as well. She kept up with us, making sure that we were still in tune with the early college campus, knowing what was going on over there,

and not out of the loop. I can't remember if it was every week or every month, but we always had a meeting, early in the morning. The whole class had to attend. If you didn't attend it, was as problem. We would go and she would bring us scholarship opportunities, she would also let us know about some of the issues that had been brought to her that we needed to fix.

In some meetings, she would bring in some of the twelfth graders that were at the end of the early college journey and they would give us their advice on certain professors, certain classes, what do to, what not to do, study groups, things like that. But she always made herself available and was concerned that we were successful at the institution. Some people didn't like her, but some people did. I liked her, you know. It was really just her.

We had our share of challenges at the college. My best friend, Tuck and this guy named Moses had a situation. Of course at that time, social media was a big thing, still is. But he called her out of her name using social media, so it got to be this big ole thing because she felt disrespected. She was mad and she wasn't the type of girl to sit back and do nothing. So one day I walked up to the student center and she was all up in his face, ready to fight. It was her and him, and I mean, this guy was huge! You could tell she ain't scared of no man, 'cause he could have really have thrown her if he wanted to.

I guess he handled it correctly because he went to Ms. Gina, the college liaison; only he didn't tell her what he had done to initiate it. He told what she did, which messed up her chances of running for prom queen, which she wanted to do. So she felt that that was very unfair. But, it was just a big ole commotion. I think they called the cops and

everything.

I don't think that the school could not have done anything to prevent an instance like that; not necessarily, because you can't always plan for situations like that. You never really know what's going to happen. I really felt like it was nothing that they could really do after the fact. So, unless you got a snitch amongst you, those types of things cannot be prevented and could only be helped by maybe, additional security.

You had instances where students didn't go to class; in fact, a lot of people skipped class. I ain't gonna lie, I was one of 'em; but it wasn't a frequent thing for me. Some days, I probably was like, "I don't feel like going so I'm not gonna go," but I always made sure that I was straight for that class. If it was a class that I got a C in, I worked my butt off for that C. I made sure to do what was necessary to succeed. Time management was another thing, though.

As I said before, the biggest thing was the time management, students not really using their time effectively. Then they'd get mad at why they got an F or a D on a test and coming out with C's in a class."Well, you were skipping class. You was doing this. You was doing that. You know."

Another issue we were experiencing at the college was, as far as the females, the attention from the older guys. I'd be like, "You hang around him and you ain't going to class. You doing this, you doing that. You need to get it together." They're getting shown that attention from the older males, and it was a sidetrack, a distraction for them as far as school was concerned.

The guys had a different problem. They hung out in the gym. At the early college,

we didn't necessarily have a gym. We had a Wellness Center that didn't even belong to us. But, that gym at Henry-Hall was a big distraction for some of the guys. It was going into the gym before class, then looking at the time, saying, "Oh, I'm fifteen minutes late already, so I'm, I'm not gonna go. I'm just gonna finish this game." For others it was the card table. They played cards every day, all day. Some people's distractions would be periodical, while others would never go to class.

The people who would go to school every day and not attend one class, they didn't make it out. 'Cause you have to stay on top of your stuff when it comes to things like that. And you would think that people would know, "I'm still in high school, even though I'm in college at the same time. You could tell they didn't necessarily think about the future consequences that would result from their actions, whether it was a low GPA for high school purposes or the fact that you were building and ruining your own college transcript. Getting F's and D's, you starting off bad. You wasting money. That's what it was. Some students really didn't take advantage of the opportunity. And when they didn't, they got kicked out. I looked around and they were gone.

My senior year, Butler-Armstrong ramped up the support at the college. They instituted more supervision, due to situations like those I was talking about. First, they had supplemental instructors. I think that's what they were called, but they were there to help us. They were cool too, you know. They weren't mean people. They would come to Henry-Hall College during the day. They already knew where our hangout spots were, so they would just kinda sit in the cafeteria and watch us to see who was going to class. Everyone already kinda knew who the early college students were because we all used to

hang out in this one spot. They also had all our class schedules and knew where the classes were, so we would be in the middle of class, looking out the window, and see them standing right there, looking to see if we were in class.

Social preparation for the college was a totally different thing. I wouldn't say we were prepared for that. Just knowing that they had to prepare students who were 14 or 15 year olds, to be fulltime college students, knowing that they have home problems, issues with finding out who they were, and those kinds of things; I'd have to say those things were not addressed.

Me personally, I had been helping my mom take care of my brothers and sisters for a long time. I'm the oldest of seven from my mom, so I was mature going off into the ninth grade. So going to college in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade at the age of 16, was nothing for me. I'm a people person naturally. I don't necessarily know if that set me up for the social part of the college, but as far as making friends with college students that were older than us, I didn't have a problem with the concept. It's just that the school never really encouraged that.

I already knew what was asked of me. I knew what I had to do because, with me being an African American man, I already knew that I had to work two times harder just to make it out there. So I wanted to take advantage of everything that I could that would help me to make it easier for myself when I did go to those post-secondary institutions. Everybody didn't think like that. If they had a whole class of me, it would have been so easy; but they didn't. They had the lazy ones and the ones who didn't wanna go to school. That's where the issues were present that had to be worked around.

Thankfully, I've never been the type to fall for peer pressure. You want to do those things like some students, but you know better. They got involved with smoking and things like that. It was something called the Vortex at Henry-Hall. , and that's where everyone would be smoking, not smoking your marijuana or things like that, but smoking cigarettes. It would be right outside the library. Students being exposed to things that could have possibly effected them. Everybody kinda looked to me for guidance because I was the class president. They would ask, "What's going on at Butler-Armstrong ECHS? What's going on with the dance? What's going on with this? What's going on with that?" So my peers didn't necessarily influence me to do anything bad. If anything, it was the weak-minded who got affected by all the stuff that was happening on the campus.

I only became affected when members of the class messed it up for everybody else, when it came to the certain things. It was a situation where we couldn't be at the student center up top, on the second level where they held their meetings. It was a nice place where we used to just sit and chill. But because students were being disruptive, loud, and not caring about what else was going on that affected everybody.

Senior year was a little rocky just because of the amount of classes that I was taking and the responsibilities that I had at the school and at home. I also felt like senior year was the senior's year; instead, I felt like the administration at the time just kind of threw us aside. Everything was last minute. No one broke things down for us. It felt like we were cheated out of our senior year. As it was already, every year things changed; whether it was the uniform, the curriculum, so it felt like our class was always the first class to kind of experience the changes that directly affected us. We made it through

though. Overall, it was a good experience. It had its downs as far as the people in administration, but I was just happy that I graduated, so I guess it was alright.

Well, after I left and graduated, 'cause I graduated with my Associate's degree, I took a semester off and then I was like, "I gotta go back to school," 'cause that \$7.25 job that I had at the movies was not working for me. So, I started at Georgia State University in Spring 2014. I think that it was extremely hard to get into Georgia State at one point, but now it's kinda become one of the most diverse schools in the state of Georgia. Now they're widening their reach because they're merging with Henry-Hall College; so it's about to become the – the largest institution in the state of Georgia. So, I don't know if I'll still be known as a Henry-Hall College Jaguar or whether both of my degrees will now come from Georgia State. So, we're gonna see.

The moment that I heard about the merger, I immediately thought about the Butler-Armstrong ECHS students because it's like, "Is it going to be the same? Will there be still be fulltime college students 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade year because there are some schools that actually have dual enrollment with Georgia State University, Washington and Carver in Atlanta, but they don't receive their Associate's degree. So it's kinda like, will these students have the same opportunity now that this merger is gonna happen?

It was a smooth transition. I mean, there was a problem with financial aid, but it was nothing. It was more so I had to send a form in to make sure that everything was straight. I was accepted as a transfer student. They took all my credits, which is why I'll be able to graduate so early. Hopefully in December 2015 I will be graduating with my Bachelors of Science in Criminal Justice.



The only difference was that it is so much bigger and had a lot more people. The classroom sizes are bigger. The Criminal Justice professors are all great. Georgia State is the largest research institution in the state, so all of my professors have done research work for top law firms. They know their stuff. They're very well-rounded, and they're really, really interested in seeing their students persevere.

Beginning August of 2015, I'll be interning for the Georgia Innocence Project. They relook at cases where people have been wrongfully convicted. A lot of those cases are times where the justice system was very prejudiced. It's still very prejudiced now, but in these cases you can see the prejudice in black and white, on the paper. So, a lot of these alleged offenders charged in the 60's 70's and 80's were innocent, but they were put in jail because of their race. It seems like they were the scapegoats. I'll be going in and looking at those cases and trying to poke holes in them to see if we can get the cases reopened and these innocent people eventually exonerated.

Pursuing a Law Degree is also a possibility for me; but right now, I kinda wanna get acclimated to the system. Hopefully, I can use my degree, because I am a Jehovah's Witness, I can serve at Bethel in their law department, working to for religious rights because a lot of Jehovah's Witnesses are persecuted around the world. So hopefully, I can have an influence in helping that cause.

Butler-Armstrong had a big impact on my life because I'm looking at where I am now, I'll be 20 years old with a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice; and what I could have, if I would have go to my public high school. I would just be starting my junior year in college. I came in as a junior at the age of 18, whereas somebody else came

in as a freshman at the age of 18. I would also be packed with way more loans than I have now. I think, right now, I'm only 10 or 12 thousand dollars in debt, which is nothing compared to 40 thousand. That's a remarkable thing, especially being an African American male in the South. It's something that I can truly be proud of and say, "I accomplished this!"

That is why, no doubt, like without hesitation, I would attend Butler-Armstrong if I could make the decision all over again. My momma wouldn't have to force me this time. Just because you are around more of a family environment. It is a school, but then it's not. You make really good relationships with people that can really help you. In a way, I'm still there. I now coach of the dance team. I still see some of the same professors, so it's just good for me to be in that environment. And the opportunities that have opened up for me are just remarkable. So, if I could tell any other student to choose early college over their public institution, I'll sell it to 'em. And if they don't want it, they just being stupid.

The main suggestion that I have is, when running an early college, and instead of thinking like an administrator and Principal or teachers and professors, think as the students, you know. The students are sacrificing a lot with not being at their traditional home high schools, where they could be playing basketball or football, dancing on the dance team, cheerleading, and all of those things that could possibly be ways for them to have free rides to go to four-year institutions.

Know that a lot of students are talented. I had a friend who danced on the dance team for her home high school while at Butler-Armstrong, and there was another guy

who played in the band at his home high school and got a scholarship to go to his four-year institution while at the early college. There are little avenues like that they don't make known to students. It was kinda like you gotta kinda play around with it at first to see if it's possible or not to do something like that, but with them, we saw that it was possible.

So, just making sure that, whatever you have at a traditional school, it's ten times better at the early college, because the students are sacrificing a lot, and taking a lot more on their plate than at traditional high schools.

And then, um, also just focusing on, you know, academics is the first priority, but also making it feel more like, you know, the students, um, you know, make it a fun environment because even though school is school, school don't have to be boring. School can be fun. It can be in the classroom. It can be, you know, you know, we gonna do this this week, we gonna do that next week. Just making feel more like a family environment. Because, the advantage of having a small institution like an early college is having more of that family feel because everybody knows everybody, so taking advantage of that.

Getting college credits while in high school is not hard. It's something easy to do, if you set the student up the right way. With the right support system at the high school level, when they go to the college level, it'll be easy. It's such a great opportunity for students to not have to waste time. Why waste being 18 and 19 doing something you coulda did at 16, 17? It doesn't make any sense, especially if the opportunity is there. I could see if the opportunity wasn't there, and you just had to go about it regularly, but I

mean, it's here and it's the best thing, you know? It had its challenges, but nothing prevents it from being a great opportunity. Anybody can do it if they put their mind to it.

The Early College Initiative is something that doesn't need to just be in certain areas. I wish it was in every school because of the opportunities that it gives people. And it's crazy, because you have some students who really don't want to go there. Their parents make them go, but they don't really see the advantage of being at an early college and taking full advantage of it. I was one of them. I didn't necessarily take full advantage of it; because if I did I would have a full ride (scholarship) now, if I would have taken it more seriously. Now I did take it serious, but more seriously as far as pounding myself for great grades. I'm an A-B student, but I made some C's. I think I even came out with one D. I never made an F.

If I would have just known what I really was getting myself into, how I really did save a lot of money, I could have saved so much more money and time. I would have definitely come out with all A's. I woulda been tired, I woulda been crying, but I woulda came out with all A's, knowing that advantage, the greater advantage it would have been with me pushing myself that hard. But I still came out on top, so it's all good.

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*

## Appendix Y

### *The Mikal Experience: Big Shoes to Fill*

Mikal interviewed Wednesday, August 4, 2015 at 5:35 p. m.

*Mikal arrived fairly punctual for her interview with me that afternoon. We met right before she was to go to her mother's house, Mama Tosh, where her sister Tosh also lives. Mikal was not very talkative. Although I enjoyed speaking with her, it was rather difficult to pull responses from her. She has always been sort of an introvert, except when she is on the football field dancing on the 50 yard line. Even then, there is a quiet force present. Mikal wore a gray metallic tank top with peach colored straight leg pants. She wore curly locks that day. To accessorize her look, she wore stud pearl earrings, a necklace with a pendant and black nail polish. She had a hair bow wrapped around her wrist and her make-up was beautiful!*

Here is Mikal's story...

My time at Butler-Armstrong was a good experience. I liked it. My first few days of high school were actually spent at RHS though. They had me waiting in a gym for days on my schedule. I was like, "Wait a minute. I already see where this is going, so I'm going to do something different." I was familiar with Butler-Armstrong because my sister, Tosh, had graduated from there in 2011, so I decided to come there.

When I first got there was a lot of pressure because my sister came through. She was very smart, so as her sister, it was like I had to be smart. I had to kind of live up to her reputation. I had a lot of pressure, especially from my mom. She was like, "Your sister went through; so if she could do it, you can do it."

Teachers provided academic support. We had tutorials and then we had homeroom, which was sort of like tutorial that was helpful. We even had some of the people that were current Henry-Hall students to come back on Fridays and help us with those courses too. It definitely prepared me for college.

I honestly don't think I received personal/social support from the early college faculty and staff. I mean they were all cool people, but you couldn't really get personal because they were still counselors and teachers. So yeah, it was strictly academics.

Well, I had you, Ms. Braelynn Melodee. You were the first memorable adult I had there. You were very supportive, especially on the dance team. It was like everybody's favorite thing to do. You were personable. You weren't just a straight Counselor, you were, I don't know how to say it, but we could relate to you.

Dr. T was another one. She was very helpful too. You all were like on the same page. I don't know, yall were both like down to earth and, like, cool. I remember one time I was crying. I'm not going to explain why I was crying, but I was crying. I went to Dr. T's office and I was expecting her to tell me what I wanted to hear, but she told me what I needed to hear. I was kind of upset, because I was like, I didn't want to hear that. But that's what I needed with the situation that I was in. She was basically like, "You got to let it go. Get over it. Stop crying. Suck it up," basically. It ended there. I sucked it up and kept it going.

When I transitioned to the college, I was prepared academically. Our counselors were also very good at keeping track of our grades and how we were doing, so we would be eligible to move forward when the time came.

I liked Environmental Science. That was my favorite class at Henry-Hall and I hated science. My teacher, Professor Z, was really cool. I loved her because she related things to personal life, which helped understand things better. She discussed what you're doing at home and how that could be affecting your health. She made real-life examples. It was just real personal and that was good.

People were trying to give it their best, but a lot of people struggled with the course load at Henry-Hall, I would say. It wasn't hard, but it was a lot of work. At the high school you were trying to get to college and at the college you were trying to get your degree in two years. So it was very vigorous. The work wasn't hard, it was just a lot piled on you at one time. And since it was the Early College Academy, they expected the best from you.

At first, I didn't really know what I was getting myself into, socially. I wasn't prepared for the college environment in that aspect. Being around a whole bunch of people that were older, way older, was something I wasn't prepared for.

For most people, the freedom got to their heads. They stopped going to class. The freedom definitely got to a lot of their heads. There's no one that tells you to go to class or do your work. It's a bunch of new people and new faces there than you had at the high school. A lot of them interacted with the wrong crowds, like with the Gateway group. I think Gateway was some type of alternative school. There was a lot going on. It really was, but some people were able to focus. Some people weren't. Some people just couldn't have cared less. I did see people fail, unfortunately.

Fortunately for me, a lot of my peers greatly improved my experience at the

college, especially Deejah. She was like the one go-to person for everything. It's hard to explain. It's like when you have friends that are doing good, it drives you to do good, in other words; and if you have friends that are not doing anything, then it's sort of like a bad influence. My friends were the good friends because I choose not to hang around positively un-influential people.

One challenge with our transition, I would say, was after we got to Henry-Hall we kind of lost connection with the actual high school. There was a lot of broken connection there. I mean, we came back on Fridays to meet with the teachers and all that, but we still was lacking that support from the high school. That was like the biggest thing. They could have been more supportive with checking on us, because after we got to Henry-Hall, it felt like all we had was Ms. Gina.

Like, that's all we had. Ms. Gina was basically our Counselor. She told us what classes to take, when to take them, and if we would be on track to get our degrees or graduate in general. She even made sure we were doing well in our classes and helped us with getting the right textbooks. She made sure we had the resources to be able to get through Henry-Hall. She was really helpful, because I would have been lost. I really would have been lost. She was cool and very effective.

I went to a lot of events at Henry-Hall. One was this little Fall Fling. It was in the gym. They had inflatables and other games and stuff. That was pretty fun. I was also a dancer for RHS, my home school. I was truly unique in that aspect because nobody else did that. We went to one of their games and I was like, "I want to dance," and my mom went over to the coach and the coach said, "Tell her to come to try-outs." I went to the



try outs and I made it. I think that they had to get it approved by the county or they had to do something funky. It wasn't like I could just go and do it. So that's how I ended up having that unique experience. So when I made it, I decided to do it. I had the best of both worlds.

I think the pressure of not having any sports or other extracurricular activities got to a lot of people too, because we had just mainly academic stuff. I mean we had dance team, but it wasn't like a regular high school dance team. We had Mock Trial, I don't want to say, "Not the fun stuff", but we had like the book worm, nerd stuff, and not really any fun activities. So a lot of people was like, "I should have went to my home school. I could have been a cheerleader," and stuff like that. That lack of outlets may have affected how they did at Henry-Hall.

After leaving Butler-Armstrong and Henry-Hall I transferred to Clayton State University. At least I thought I was going to go in as a transfer, but I still needed to go through the process as if I was a freshman. So technically I was a transfer, but I still needed to do the orientation and turn in my high school diploma, my credits, ACT test scores, all of that.

I hate telling this story, but my very first day there I had the wrong courses. I went into Biology class and you know how they introduce you? You stand up and introduce yourself. I was like, "Well, my major is education." It was education at the time until I changed it. The teacher said, "You're in the wrong biology class." I was like, "Really? My advisor put me in this class." So after that class I went to my advisor and she was like, "You were in the completely wrong class." At that point I was just like, "I don't

even want to do it. I don't even want to be an education major." I don't know what got into me, but I didn't want to do it anymore.

So that whole semester, I only had three classes. Two were education classes and one was a critical thinking class. So after that semester I said, "Instead of changing my major, I'll give it a try for this whole semester," and for that whole semester I still didn't like it. I was like, "I cannot do education. It just is not for me."

Second semester comes around and it's time to make our schedules. This time, I had a new advisor. I don't want to say that me and this lady got into it, but we did. She looked at my number of credits and was like, "You're a junior." So in my head I'm thinking that she has the mindset that I know what I'm doing already, but I really don't. So I'm e-mailing her saying, "Okay, I need to sit down with you and make my schedule for next semester." She's like, "I only have meetings through e-mail. I don't sit down with my students."

I'm like, "Only through e-mail?" I'm still telling her that I personally need to make an appointment to meet with you, because I don't know what I'm doing. I don't know how to log into the system, create my classes, look up the class schedule, none of that." So, finally, I e-mailed her and I copied the president of the school. I said that I needed to speak to somebody, because I don't know what I'm doing. It was at least 20 e-mails back and forth with me trying to meet with her, because registration was coming up and I needed my classes.

So I finally met, me and my mom, and I explained to her that that was my first year there. I had just graduated from high school and I did not know what I'm doing. I

didn't know anything about the system or anything." I was completely clueless, and I didn't know anybody at the school either. I think I was the only one from Butler-Armstrong that went to Clayton State. She was apologizing. She was like, "I'm so sorry." She made my whole schedule from then until graduation.

I don't know if she felt threatened or whatever, because every time I registered for my classes, something was wrong. She made the schedule out until December 12<sup>th</sup>, but every time I tried to register, something is wrong. My mom thinks she just doesn't like me because I e-mailed the president on her. She thinks that she messed up my schedule on purpose and I think so too. I don't talk to her. When I have something to turn into her I just put it in her mailbox. I don't email her. I do not communicate with her. I actually go to the other man, just because of that first experience. After I e-mailed the president, she e-mailed me and was like, "You don't go and e-mail the president about me. That's not how you get recommendations," and stuff like that. I even ended up having a class with her and I guess she remembered my name. She's like, "Oh, you were the girl who was in my office." I was like, "Yeah."

As far as activities, I did dance at Clayton State. I danced for two years. I decided not to dance this last semester because I have a lot of senior classes and internships, so I won't have time. But it was a good experience. There's another society called, Fashion Society. That's where I did the fashion shows and stuff. I decided not to do any extracurricular activities this last semester.

People, used to be like, "What school did you come from?" I just be like, "I went to Butler-Armstrong." They're like, "What?" I'm like, "It's an Early College Academy. I

hated explaining the Butler-Armstrong program. It's just a long process. I wanted to say, "It's a school where you get your degree;" instead, I say, "Just don't worry about it. I went to Butler-Armstrong."

I am now in my last semester at Clayton State University. I graduate December 12, 2016. I'm excited to get finished. I am getting a Bachelor's in Health and Fitness Management. I am on the books now because I need 225 internship hours to graduate *and* I have zero. So I am interning all semester, eight hours a day, at Benchmark Physical Therapy. The future goal right now is physical therapy, so I plan to get my Masters in Kinesiology. I was thinking about taking a break after I get my Bachelor's because I've been in college since I was 15. I'm thinking about it, but I don't think I'm going to take a break; because if I stop for a semester, then there's no guarantee I will go back. It's going to be tough, but I'm going to get it.

I don't know if I could make the decision again, if I would attend Butler-Armstrong. I honestly don't know. That's a hard question. I mean it really was a great opportunity. I'm leaning more towards yes than no, but I really don't know.

I think it's a good idea to earn college credits in high school in general. You know, most high schools have dual enrollment where the kids just take some classes. We were pushed to get a degree, which was much harder than taking one or two classes. I kind of felt like the point of the program was to get a degree; so while it was a good idea, it was definitely tough.

I can say that striving for that Associate's Degree made me want to be more successful. It also makes me want to work hard to get more degrees. I'm already young,

I'm 20 about to get my Bachelor's Degree already; so being younger, but getting things that older people get, is a good feeling. I was 17 when I got my Associate's Degree.

Hopefully I'll be 25 with a Doctorate. Hopefully. That's the goal.

To current/future Butler-Armstrong students I would say, "First off, if you don't think you can do it, don't do it. If you don't want to go to Butler-Armstrong, don't go to Butler-Armstrong. That's the worst being forced into something, rather than wanting to be there. That's going to make it harder on you to get good grades and stay focused.

The other thing, of course when you get to Henry-Hall, don't lose your head. Don't go crazy. You may see a lot of your classmates give up, going through the process. They may just get tired of the workload because it is very hard. It is a lot. Still focus on your school work. I guess, just try."

\*\*\* This narrative was participant approved through the Member Checking process. \*\*\*