STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS’ SUCCESS IN PLACE-BASED SCHOOLS

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STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS’ SUCCESS IN PLACE-BASED SCHOOLS

Josef A. Graham

BA, University of Connecticut, 1976
MAT, Fairfield University, 1980

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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in the
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STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS’ SUCCESS IN PLACE-BASED SCHOOLS

Josef A. Graham, EdD

Western Connecticut State University

Abstract

Place-Based schools are a viable alternative to failing schools, and are an essential tool in closing the American education achievement gap. This study assessed stakeholders’ perception of the value of Place-Based curricula using a qualitative, multi-case design with an ethnographic stance. The researcher examined how success was determined and measured for students who attended schools with Place-Based curricula. Measures of success were identified by analyzing results of stakeholder interviews and triangulated evidence from various sources. Framed through Situated Cognition and Critical Pedagogy theories, this study challenged the notion that success should be defined primarily as performance on standardized tests. Twenty-two interviews were conducted with mentor/supervisors, educators, and parents at three urban, low socio-economic status, maritime-themed Place-Based schools in the Northeastern United States. Analysis of these stakeholders’ interviews yielded themes that defined, assessed, and indicated stakeholder perception of student success. During the course of these interviews, stakeholders identified measures of success that focused on career and college preparation, attainment of real world soft skills, and sense of community. Triangulated data indicated that all sites had graduation rates exceeding their local urban cohort schools. Subjects saw the essential importance of sense of community to Place-Based schools, which is conspicuously absent in traditional underperforming schools. These community relations were complex: students interacting with students, students interacting with educators and supervisors, and students
within the entire Place-Based community interacting with the surrounding *place* community. The sense of community within a local *place* is considered more than just a byproduct of Place-Based schools; it is a hallmark of the mission to support students in becoming citizens of a functional democracy.
STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS’ SUCCESS IN PLACE-BASED SCHOOLS

Presented by

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2017
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have happened without the unwavering support from my advisor, Frank LaBanca. Frank always thought this was a good idea, offered insightful feedback, set high standards, and was an invaluable resource from start to finish. If it were not for Frank’s professional connections, this researcher might never have been able to access any Place-Based school for study.

Every conversation that I have ever had with Western’s EdD’s program director, Marcia Delcourt, was filled with her contagious enthusiasm. Marcy’s passion for helping teachers fulfill their dreams is evident in everything she does. Marcy’s tireless work ensures the success of this program.

Karen Burke, the voice of the humanitarian educator, introduced us to the likes of Kozol. Jonathan Kozol was, and is, a constant source of inspiration. Karen understands the true rewards and joys of teaching and the true costs of lack of education. Karen made late night classes interesting, inspiring, and fun. Karen and I have a common a love of cycling and are ever mindful to avoid 18 wheelers.

It is largely due to Jane Gangi’s influence that this study was purely qualitative. How ironic that a math teacher eschewed his beloved statistics in order to follow a path which yielded a much more meaningful, however soft, response. Jane and I share a love for the story telling of the likes of Studs Terkel, who was my role model throughout this study. Jane also made me appreciate the value, and need, for teachers to have a solid theoretical foundation for our teaching. Otherwise, we are just a bunch of folks, however well meaning, wandering aimlessly.

Nancy Heilbronner’s dogged determination to shed light on the accountability of statistics in order to achieve significance was truly impressive. Nancy’s stand as a survivor
motivated us to persevere despite many challenges and obstacles. During one late night class, Nancy summed up what many of us were experiencing “We all are just doing the best that we can.”

I am indebted to Diana Payne, Camilia Birlean, Laura Main, and all the other educators who graciously lent their time and expertise to me. Diana’s generosity and perspective were invaluable in not only formulating the concept of this study, but keeping it on track. Camilia’s audit not only verified my data, but gave me insight into clustering of the data that made sense. I remain blown away by the enthusiastic willingness of Laura Main to be my reader. Laura is a dear colleague and a wonderful friend. I will repay the debt that I owe to these wonderful people by taking meaningful action to forward American education as a result of this study.

For my fellow Cohort 4 colleagues, I owe all of you a debt of gratitude; I am a better teacher, and even a better person, for having known you. I am in awe of the collective determination and passion shown year in and year out. Every student contributed to me, to each other and to the EdD program that continues to be a beacon burning bright. I had the good fortune to experience only enthusiastic responses from virtually every educator who was willing to listen to me talk about this work. I remain inspired by educators like Art Sulzer and Murray Fisher, who think big and take on monumental tasks to spread vision of the wonders of maritime education.

I am grateful for Lori, my beautiful wife and life partner; she has shown tremendous patience. Lori has inspired and nurtured my passion to complete this project. I am sure I have more than one Mother’s Day and birthday to make up for because I was glued to my desk on those would-be special occasions. My children were always supportive and interested in my passion for making education more relevant. My wonderful friends Joe, Scott, Susan, Jan, and
Ronnie, who not only took rain checks on outings, dinners, and bike adventures, but were genuinely excited to hear the latest ideas to make education richer and more meaningful.

My parents, Betty and Joe, were lifelong educators who instilled in all their children the importance of learning. They created an academic environment at home, which inspired works such as this. I was ever mindful of my mother’s impeccable grammar as I labored through many edits. I hope to honor my father’s phenomenal problem solving skills by addressing the complex issues encountered through this work.

Lastly, I acknowledge my nephew Stevie, who during a late night talk offered a most inspiring gem of clarity. As I explained to Stevie how complicated addressing the complex issues of disparities in the American educational system and the appalling achievement gap were, Stevie simply stated, “Isn’t that what you’re supposed to do in a doctoral program? Address complicated problems?” … Yes, Stevie, that IS what we’re supposed to do.
DEDI CATION

“Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

This work was inspired by Natasha. She is a sweet, sincere 7th grader. Natasha’s eyes welled up with tears when I asked her to divide mixed numbers. Natasha hates math … always hated it … has never been good at it. And why shouldn’t she hate it? With no meaningful context, naked math is overwhelming to her.

Place-Based Education is validated by Irene. Irene loves math; she’s good at it. Math makes sense to Irene. When I asked Irene if she knew the formula for the volume of a sphere, she replied, “I don’t remember exactly, but I can Google it.” Pretty much, math makes sense to good math students; it doesn’t make sense to struggling students. Math, like so many other subjects we teach in school, makes sense to the Irenes, not to the Natashas. Place-Based Education puts everything in context; it is the great leveler of playing fields. Learning and meaning are not disparate constructs.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Teachers, parents, supervisors, and community leaders, as well as other educational stakeholders, have had a long-standing struggle to determine if all students are successful. Achievement level disparity between high socio-economic status (SES) white students, with the best resources, and minorities, who are less fortunate, is extraordinary. Kozol (2005) analyzed differences in student performance, as measured by standardized test scores, between these two groups; he stated that an achievement gap exists and this gap has been increasing at an alarming rate for the past two decades. Today, students in Connecticut are suffering the effect of the greatest achievement gap in the United States (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2010). It is estimated that it will take 100 years to remedy this deplorable situation (The Roadmap, 2012).

A myriad of fixes have been proposed and implemented to remediate this gap; these solutions have included interventions during the school day, after school programs, charter schools, and other alternative schools such as Place-Based schools. Place-Based Education (PBE) uses an educational curriculum with learning grounded in local phenomena and students’ lived experience (Smith, 2002). Place-Based education is a progressive form of education through which students use their own communities as both the source of authentic issues to investigate and the location for learning. Howley, Howley, Camper, and Perko (2011) established the importance of students having a reference point to make sense of their own education as a motivation for learning.

This study explored the Place-Based model of schooling and examined the relationship between students in schools with Place-Based curricula and success. This study considered if it might be more appropriate to measure performance in Place-Based schools by non-traditional
methods. Alternate measures of success might include employability, enrollment in post-secondary programs, or contributions to the community, rather than the more traditional achievement test scores.

Differentials in student performance on standardized tests between high achieving students and those students performing at unacceptable levels is only one factor that impacts the long-term success of children. Two factors that framed this study and guided the research were the identification of a variety of benchmarks of success and ways to assess those indicators of success. First, this study was designed to explore how success of PBE is determined.

Nontraditional, or alternative schools, provide learning environments that are different from traditional public schools. Charter, magnet, and virtual schools are typical types of alternative schools. There is no precise description of what constitutes a Place-Based or Alternate school in Connecticut: “The lack of a clear statutory definition for alternative schools and programs makes it difficult to establish oversight and evaluate the educational success of these programs” (Edie, 2014, para. 3). The Oregon State Department of Education defines an alternative school as “a school or separate class group designed to best serve students’ educational needs and interests and assist students in achieving the academic standards of the school district and the state” (Oregon Department of Education, 2013, para. 50). While state definitions of non-traditional schools may boast lofty rhetoric, in reality they serve to provide students who have few viable options with an alternative to the traditional system. Local Boards of Education:

identify enrolled children considered at-risk each year and develop a plan describing how the school board will meet their needs. School districts must provide programs for at-risk children designed to allow them to meet high school graduation requirements and are
directed to identify appropriate private, nonprofit, nonsectarian agencies in their area to meet these requirements (Martin & Brand, 2006, p. 11).

The second factor this study focused on was how success for students, especially those students who might be at risk, is measured. Performance of students who are unsuccessful in a traditional school environment may potentially be impeded by an outmoded curriculum that is perceived as irrelevant. The challenge of determining success was compounded when attempting to evaluate non-traditional school structures with Place-Based curricula. Place-Based school sites identified in this study were all in urban low socio-economic districts.

The results of this study determined PBE stakeholder’s perception of the value of Place-Based curriculum using a qualitative multi-case design with an ethnographic stance. It examined perceptions of success by determining how success is defined. Situated Cognition (Brown, Collins, & Dugid, 1989) and Critical Learning (Freire, 1993) theories served as a framework for the investigator’s definitions of success and measures of that success.

**Rationale for Selecting the Topic**

The effectiveness of school districts in the United States, whether they are affluent suburban communities or urban districts with student populations that are primarily of low SES, have been an ongoing concern. Stakeholders in these districts, including business partners, parents, community leaders, and educators, seek ways to increase performance and consequently the productivity of the workforce. Democracy itself depends on an educated population; Kozol stated “the right to speak is meaningless unless the speaker is capable of articulating his thoughts intelligently and persuasively” (2005, p. 242).

The prosperity of our nation depends on the success of our educational system. The United States educational system has created such a tremendous achievement gap that it is now
considered a threat to our national security (Klein & Rice, 2012). Standardized test scores may fail to adequately measure academic achievement of all students; this study considered the possibility of how an alternate education environment defined and measured success.

**Problem Statement**

The success of a student population, especially those in low SES groups, may not be assessed appropriately or authentically (Kozol, 2005). This researcher attempted to determine if it is possible to find a more authentic, holistic framework that the American educational system might use to evaluate the achievement of these students. Traditional measures, such as standardized test scores, might not be a valid gauge for these students.

**Significance of the Study**

Place-Based schools created opportunities for students to invest in the social and economic well-being of their communities in addition to becoming aware of societal concerns (Smith, 2002). Young people connect to the community schools, which results in improved student engagement and participation (McInerney, Smyth, & Down, 2011). This study explored PBE and examined measures that validate success of students.

Smith (2002) argued that the benefit of PBE is not typically apparent when using traditional standardized assessments “The primary value of Place-Based education lies in the way that it serves to strengthen children’s connections to others and to the regions in which they live” (p. 594). This may be in contrast to mainstream education’s assertion that traditional education prepares students to learn to earn; the primary goal of education is to get a job (McInerney, Smyth, & Down, 2011).
Definition of Key Terms

1. *Inquiry* is learning by questioning and investigation employing diverse ways to study phenomena in all subject areas (National Research Council, 1996). The learner is simultaneously doing and learning. “Inquiry requires imaginative, evidence-based solutions achieved through critical thinking and leads to a deep understanding of concepts” (Shore, et al., 2009, p. 141).

2. *Outdoor Education* is a curricular approach that provides meaningful contextual experiences in both natural and constructed environments that complement and expand classroom instruction. (Knapp, 1996, p. ix).

3. *Place*, as defined by Karrow and Fazio (2010), is organized into categories: natural, cultural, and ontological. Natural place is described as physical spaces, such as a community near a shoreline. Cultural place recognizes the social construct of a community; cultural place includes class, gender, race, and social order. The ontological category of place dictates a sense of experience of the natural and cultural categories.

4. *Place-Based Education* is based upon a curriculum with learning grounded in local phenomena and students’ lived experience (Smith, 2002). Students use their own communities as the source of issues to investigate the location for learning (Howley et al., 2011). The content is specific to the geography, ecology, sociology, politics, and other dynamics of that place (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000).

5. *Praxis* is the combination of reflection and action by students as well as teachers and the transformative impact of both on their world (Tyner-Mullings, 2012).
6. **Self-Efficacy** is a person’s confidence in performing well in a given situation. The more confident a person feels, the more likely he is to begin a task and persist despite obstacles (Starko, 2010).

7. **Success** is operationally defined for this study with supplemented standard measures such as student performance or student engagement to include employment, enrollment in post-secondary institutions, or other meaningful contributions to society.

**Theoretical Perspective**

*Situated Cognition* learning theory maintains that students learn through real life experiences (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). These learning experiences are facilitated using tools, technologies, and languages adopted by a socio-cultural group. Aligned with diverse learning styles, such as Gardner’s (2006) kinesthetic style, knowing is rooted in action and parallels individual and societal learning goals. Situated Cognition pedagogy styles create meaningful real-life learning experiences. Place-Based schools tend to have a dynamic curriculum, which often serves the kinesthetic learner well; field experiences are intrinsic to the course of study. Program design focuses on interactive cognitive apprenticeships modeled after real-life common experiences such as approaching climate change problem solving from the viewpoint of an environmentalist.

Coupled with Situated Cognition, Paulo Freire’s (1993) *Critical Pedagogy Theory* advocated for educators to create an *engaged pedagogy* as one that requires *praxis* of students as well as teachers. Theorist and activist bell hooks (Burke, 2004) championed this cause for student populations that were marginalized and discriminated against (Tyner-Mullings, 2012). The foundation of critical pedagogy is to maintain and reproduce equal and justifiable relationships, which result in power sharing across economic and social strata. Students are
taught to challenge the status quo of the diverse educational curricula presented. Tolerance and acceptance of alternate perspectives, such as that from minority groups, is paramount. Critical pedagogy practitioners recognize our educational system as conflicted and urge educators to become more deeply engaged in their instruction while manifesting the values, considerations, and change-agent philosophy that the Place-Based environment supports.

Situated Cognition and Critical Pedagogy theories combine to create a powerful viewpoint from which to inspire learning. Situated Cognition presents the mandate to provide purposeful learning opportunities. Critical Pedagogy theorists admonish educators to maximize learning experiences by concentrating on effective, rather than efficient, educational practices by focusing on inquiry.

Related Literature

One of its primary strengths is that it (Place-Based Education) can adapt to the unique characteristics of particular places, and in this way it can help overcome the disjuncture between school and children's lives that is found in too many classrooms (Smith, 2002, p. 593).

The review of literature produced few articles on PBE (Smith, 2002; Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). There was a scarcity of literature documenting the success of PBE curricula; past research was primarily qualitative in nature (Howley et al., 2011; Thomas, 2005). There was very little data on measures of success that documented alternatives to the traditional performance on standardized tests. This gap in the research, coupled with the need to find alternate instructional methodologies that improve student engagement and achievement, served as a mandate to complete a study such as this. An Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO) search using key words: Place-Based, student assessment, and quantitative study resulted in only one
The Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement identified Connecticut as unique in the nation because its achievement gap is the largest of any state. The Commission’s (2010) report, ordered by then Governor Jodi Rell, addressed this issue by listing a series of recommendations for improvement. Many young children of low SES were being deprived of the knowledge and skills they needed to be productive in today's economy. Without a skilled labor pool, it was difficult for communities to sustain a vibrant economy or attract and keep a vigorous business network. The Commission reported that for communities to cultivate high wage employment opportunities, that community must have a highly trained, well-educated workforce.

High school dropouts earn significantly less over their lifetime and are more likely to be incarcerated (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2010). This under-educated population is far more inclined to rely on government healthcare and other public services such as food stamps and housing assistance. Young people who fail to graduate from high school perpetuate the cycle of school failure because they are more likely to become teen parents and have children who also fail in the current education model.

Closing the achievement gap enhances the future prospects for students (Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, 2010). In turn, well-educated students can directly improve the local, national, and global landscape. This Commission on Educational Achievement made specific recommendations to create innovative schools to address the achievement gap problem. Place-Based schools are exactly the sort of educational institutions that can engage this neglected, disenfranchised population.
McInerney, Smyth, and Down (2011) advocated for PBE as an educational system that supports the ecological and social well-being of a community in their position paper. They were particularly troubled with current educational structures that stressed education solely for preparation to compete in a global economic market, rather than an academic curriculum, as its primary goal. They supported PBE’s critical perspective to explore meaningful local issues expanding to global affairs. They encouraged curriculum development to include financial, economic, and social concerns. McInerney, Smyth, and Down’s arguments suggested a measure of success that is broader than learn to earn.

McInerney, Smyth, and Down (2011) viewed PBE as a vehicle to create opportunities for students not only to learn about, but care for, the ecological and social well-being of their community. Participation in a PBE learning environment necessitated an intimate connection between schools and the greater community. They asserted that participation in PBE improved student engagement in schoolwork as well as participation in civic affairs:

PBE invests young people with a sense of agency, acknowledges them as producers rather than consumers of knowledge, enriches their education through hands-on, community-engaged learning, and provides them with relevant knowledge and experiences to participate actively in democratic processes and devise solutions to social and environmental problems. (p. 4)

Resor (2010) stated that PBE might be used to teach concepts in language arts, math, social studies, science, and other subjects across the curriculum. PBE increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to the community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens; She asserted that:
For the unit about the growth of industry in America in the late nineteenth century, a street of mansions built by the local industrialists might be selected by the teacher and historical society as the topic of study ... students might read histories or search for primary sources related to the original families who lived in the homes to reconstruct the late nineteenth-century sense of place ... goals are achieved: active hands-on learning, community involvement, and good citizenship through service. (Resor, 2010, p. 187)

Place-Based educators believe that education should prepare students to live and work to sustain the cultural and ecological integrity of the places that they inhabit. Place-Based Education provides students with the knowledge and experiences needed to actively participate in the democratic process (Woodhouse & Knapp, 2000). Many traditional educational systems propose that the primary goal of schooling should be to prepare students to work and function in a technologically advanced and consumer-oriented society. A curriculum which includes economics of place can explore local industry and sustainability in the context of a broader economic viewpoint.

Smith (2002) claimed that PBE can incorporate inquiry into curricula in a variety of ways; he presented a number of successful projects. Students explored cultural studies and developed new, rich connections with their community, especially with individual community members. Smith described a Social Studies inquiry-based project through which students explored actual journals that documented their grandparent’s experiences working in West Virginia coal mines. Another common PBE application was through nature studies; students were enthusiastic about addressing environmental concerns.

Other curricula had students pursue entrepreneurial opportunities through which they identified unmet needs in their community and set up business plans to address them. Typically,
PBE projects utilized real world problem solving in a way that traditional universal curricula could not. Smith contended that all PBE curricula are based upon a connection to the community. His research indicated that students overcame the disconnect between what they learned at school and what they faced within the real world: “Student ownership and engagement are much more likely to emerge when the students have had the chance to participate in the creation of their own learning agendas” (Smith, 2002, p. 593). Smith noted that students in these schools were successful even when measured by traditional standards-based assessments.

Gautreau and Binns’ (2012) mixed-methods study examined student \((n = 76)\) achievement when participating in a traditional versus an environmental Place-Based program. Performance results indicated that overall test scores on an end-of-unit test were not significantly \((p > .05)\) different between students enrolled in Place-Based and traditional curricula. Gautreau and Binns stated "student achievement did not appear to suffer because of it" (2012, p. 182). The researchers were not able to demonstrate clear academic gains because of PBE, but documented no disadvantages. In addition to comparing test performance between groups, this study also compared attitudes towards content and pedagogy for students in these two programs.

Gautreau and Binns’ second research question explored differences in student attitudes regarding Place-Based inquiry curricula compared to more traditional curricula. An analysis of their qualitative data results indicates a clear benefit to participation in an inquiry-based curriculum. While Place-Based programs are not necessarily situated outside of school buildings, an out-of-doors experience had beneficial effects on student emotions and attention. Participation in Place-Based programs demonstrated a positive connection to preventing obesity, depression, and attention deficit disorder.
Lewicki (2007) describes PBE as a powerful inquiry learning system with students immersed in their place of learning. “Open inquiry is active learning, and clear academic standards can keep a student focused” (para. 12). He described PBE as combining an inquiry and project-based approach within the context of projects rooted in the theme and location of the place. “Place-Based Education stands apart from project-based learning in that the community is often the project context of first choice. This feature enables students to pursue, with a passion, a project linked to their locality” (para. 3).

One of the major challenges for educators is creating successful experiences and assessing the effectiveness of those experiences. Standards-based assessments, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB)-mandated testing, may not meet the needs of their students or the community. Meeting standards for content learning is a reality, but educators cannot solely rely on these assessments to measure student success.

Howley et al.’s (2011) single case study was used to analyze the results of their research question “Which school and community dynamics support and sustain Place-Based education?” Data were obtained from interviews with educators, students, and community members. Triangulation was established by participant observation. The authors identified leadership by the principal, teachers’ varied practices, and a school culture invested in student inquiry as primary factors used to explain the school dynamics.

Although there was preference for progressive rather than traditional pedagogy, the professional climate of acceptance of varied teaching methods was evident. As a result of this acceptance, pedagogy in the school successfully blended traditional with Place-Based instruction. Teachers generally saw this blend as beneficial because the variety of instructional
approaches helped create a school culture that was sufficiently tolerant of differing philosophies to sustain the PBE curriculum.

Leadership by the Principal was clearly a critical component for the success of PBE. In addition to being relevant, the principal in this study insisted that curriculum needed to engage his students “We had to keep it exciting for them” (Howley et al., 2011, p. 226). With sufficient support, schools can indeed focus on PBE, not just tangentially to augment the curriculum, but as a critical component of that curriculum.

Methodology

Description of the research design

The researcher described the Place-Based education culture and its various characteristics focusing on definitions and measures of success reported about PBE students and graduates. This study explored definitions of success and measures of perceived success of students from schools employing a Place-Based curriculum using a qualitative, multi-case design with an ethnographic stance (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009).

The researcher included semi-structured, opportunistic interview questions (see Appendix B). This study focused upon the most common, person-to-person, interview type. A series of purposeful conversations were appropriate since behaviors, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them, cannot easily be observed or measured (Merriam, 1998).

Research questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How is success defined for students in Place-Based schools?
2. How is success assessed for students in Place-Based schools?
3. How do teachers, parents, supervisors, community leaders, or other stakeholders perceive success of students and graduates of Place-Based schools?

Description of the Setting and the Participants

Schools using Place-Based curriculum identified in this study were situated along navigable bodies of water in low socioeconomic urban districts. A purposeful sample in this research study included PBE schools located in the Northeastern United States. This unique environment and subject made the study of PBEs of particular importance.

Participants in the study were adults familiar with students or graduates of PBE schools. The participant pool included supervisors associated with Place-Based schools, administrators, teachers, and parents of Place-Based school students. A purposeful sample of volunteer adults who were of legal age and who were in contact with students and graduates of PBE’s were interviewed to ascertain their judgment of PBE success. Teachers, parents, supervisors/community leaders were the primary target sample; the researcher kept the option to add individuals or groups that might have enriched the sample if the focus broadened. A sample of 22 participants was purposefully selected from the communities involved with PBE schools and graduates.

The investigator selected five to nine participants in each of the three stakeholder groups: parents, teachers, and supervisors and community leaders. The researcher made every effort to interview a balanced number of participants from each site as well as each stakeholder category so that no one group or site was over or under-represented. Participants were oversampled to ensure a large enough sample to reach data saturation for this study.
Data Collection Procedures

The researcher formalized study partnerships with three identified Place-Based schools. After obtaining permission from the Principal or the director at each school, he or she solicited volunteer (e.g., teachers, parents, supervisors and community leaders) participants by using hard copy and electronic flyers that described the study. He solicited volunteers through professional connections, school administrators, and Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) to select participants for this study.

The researcher asked participants to complete consent forms (Appendix A) or obtained recorded permission during phone interviews. He set up one-to-one phone interviews with each participant. In addition to taking notes, the investigator recorded each interview, had it transcribed, and subsequently had the interviewee member check for accuracy. After receiving verification from the interviewee, the investigator processed the transcript.

Description and Justification of the Analyses

It has been challenging for psychometricians and those engaged in educational measurement to accurately describe and measure PBE success. Merriam (1998) stated that a researcher will obtain better data from interviews than by using less direct techniques when conducting qualitative research. Data from multiple sources were categorized and triangulated. Triangulation of data was achieved through sources (i.e., teachers, parents, employers, community leaders) and methods (i.e., interviews and document analysis). The researcher obtained State Department of Education data (Strategic School Profiles or state equivalent), newspaper and online articles, and information from Place-Based school websites. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, member checked, and coded. The coded data were analyzed for categorical themes. Themes were retrieved throughout a single case and across all
cases and were mutually exclusive. Themes were axially coded to determine overarching findings (Merriam, 1998).

**Reflexivity**

The researcher reflexively recorded his personal thoughts, observations and feelings about this study in a Word document. He considered how his educational background, experiences, race, gender, SES and other factors influenced this research. The investigator was aware of his personal biases and guarded against their undue influence on data collection, analysis, or interpretation. To facilitate reflexivity, the interviewer documented interactions, data collection and tentative interpretations during this investigation. This documentation was accomplished by using a reflexivity journal. The journal allowed others to provide multiple, alternative perspectives which could yield unique insights that might not have been considered by the researcher, thus providing a multi-dimensional perspective to interpretation of this study’s data (LaBanca, 2011).

**Trustworthiness of the Study**

Krefting (1991) noted a growing interest in qualitative research and the problems inherent to that research. She cited Lincoln and Guba’s (1986) concerns about lack of rigor in research and described a number of factors that will increase the trustworthiness of a study. Those factors include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility.** Credibility is established "when what the researcher presents describes the reality of the participants who informed the research in ways that resonate with them" (Conrad & Serlin, 2006, p. 413). Credibility was a primary concern to the researcher. To enhance the credibility of his research, the investigator was familiar with the phenomenon under study and used good investigative skills. *Triangulation* was an important investigative skill used to verify
data sources. The researcher incorporated triangulation techniques including coding and comparing responses of the various participants, analysis of Strategic School Profiles (or school equivalent), website resources and Connecticut Education Data and Research (CEDaR) statistics, and other indicators of success.

The interviewer established rapport with subjects early in the interview process and endeavored to make all participants feel comfortable during the entire interview. The investigator member-checked to ensure that he had interpreted the participant responses correctly. The researcher provided a detailed description of the subjects of the study, the setting, the script used in the interview process, and any incidental information or deviations from the script. Detailed notes and recordings were collected during the interview process; the interviewer asked participants to explain their responses, identify the emotions felt while interacting with PBE students, and factors that students might find motivating. To provide a rich description in a broad picture of the value of a locally based curriculum school, the investigator interviewed teachers, parents, supervisors, and community leaders who are associated with these schools.

Krefting (1991) stated that credibility is threatened when participants respond in ways in which they think are the correct ways. The subjects may respond in ways in which they perceive are the preferred social responses or they give answers that they think the researcher is looking for. To guard against tainting the responses of participants, the investigator kept the semi-structured interview questions as neutral as possible.

The interviewer conducted mock interviews with teachers and parents not included in this study. The researcher enlisted the help of peers as well as his advisor to review research techniques, script, and interpretation of participant responses.
Transferability. The findings of this study “should be applicable to another setting or group” (Conrad & Serlin, 2006, p. 414). The interviewer provided a detailed description of this study, setting, participants, script, and participant responses for any interested researchers to determine whether this case is similar enough to be relevant. The investigator enlisted the help of peers as well as his advisor to review his research techniques, script, and interpretation of participant responses to ensure transferability.

Since the reader of this study will determine its transferability, the researcher presented his findings in a cohesive manner that created a mandate to transfer these results to any appropriate situations. Conrad and Serlin (2006) stressed the importance of having a theoretical framework to organize data collection and interpretation. Within this theoretical framework, the researcher described how his findings are congruent with other research, confirmed an appropriate theory or outlined inconsistencies between this study and the existing body of knowledge.

Dependability. “Dependability involves accommodating changes in the environment studied and in the research design itself” (Conrad & Serlin, 2006, p. 416). The interviewer provided a detailed description of this study, setting, participants, script, and participant responses. To further enhance dependability, the processes that were used in this study were kept reasonably stable over time for the researcher, participants, and methods employed. The investigator provided a rationale for the qualitative research in a full description of methods used. The researcher was vigilant in his identification of any evidence that challenged the conclusions to maximize dependability.

The interviewer sought alternative interpretations to the information that the researcher gathered and selected research participants from various research sites to provide a better
diversity of subjects. Krefting (1991) suggested a code-recode process during the analysis part of this study. The interviewer enlisted the help of peers as well as his advisor to review research techniques, script, and interpretations of participant responses to ensure dependability.

**Confirmability.** Confirmability “is the concept that the data can be confirmed by someone other than the researcher” (Conrad & Serlin, 2006, p. 417). The most important safeguard is to provide a complete and rich detailed description of this study. This description included the setting, participants, methods employed, and script. The investigator highlighted any inconsistencies that might challenge this study. The researcher sought feedback from an independent auditor, peers, as well as his advisor to ensure that his biases did not unduly influence any conclusions drawn in the study. The interviewer gave every consideration to rival conclusions that might be suggested.

**Ethics Statement**

All participants were given written (Appendix A) or electronic consent to participate in the study, and were allowed to terminate their participation in the study at any time. Each participant received a cover letter and consent forms. All information obtained was held strictly confidential. The interview transcripts were coded by the primary researcher to ensure confidentiality. The coding of names, audio files, and transcripts were locked in a secure location in the primary researcher’s home.

Names were changed in all transcripts and subsequent written narratives, and any possible identifying information were excluded. The actual participants’ names were withheld from all other parties involved in the research, including advisors, peer reviewer, and auditor.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Existing evaluations of Place-Based programming show strong promise for improving student learning and community engagement, and closely related research has demonstrated that students who are engaged in real-world learning are more likely to succeed than are those who learn equivalent material from more abstract textbooks. (Powers, 2004, p. 18)

This chapter provides a background of related literature and research to contextualize Place-Based Education (PBE). A definition of Place-Based Education is operationalized, followed by an outline of PBE’s historical roots. Learning theories associated with Placed-Based Education are described with a focus on Place-Based Education’s role in the community.

Defining Place-Based Education

Resor (2010) stated that subject areas such as language arts, math, social studies, and science could be successfully taught when connected to the place where a student lives. PBE uses communities as a basis to explore these topics (Smith, 2002). With a relevant reference point, students are able to make sense of their own education (Howley, Howley, Camper, & Perko, 2011).

Gruenewald (2003) enumerated five dimensions of place: perceptual, sociological, ideological, political, and ecological. Gruenewald’s perceptual space involved an awareness and appreciation of our surroundings “The problem is that human institutions such as schools, governments, and corporations, have not demonstrated an orientation of care and consciousness toward the places that they manipulate, neglect, and destroy” (p. 624). Sociological space encompassed the social and cultural aspects of place making. Gruenewald made a connection between place and the cultural experience of that place; he offered examples of sociological
places such as shopping malls or “schools must provide opportunities for students to participate meaningfully in the process of place-making, that is, in the process of shaping what our places will become” (p. 627). Gruenewald aligned the ideological dimension of space with Critical Theory; he asserted that “if educators and students are to understand culture in the places where they live, they must explore the interdependent economic, political, ideological, and ecological relationships between places near and far” (p. 630). Social justice issues were addressed in Gruenewald’s presentation of political space which embraces a multi-culturalistic viewpoint of accountability. Politics and place are intertwined; he stated “politicized space suggests political roles for educators as mediators in the construction of culture, identity, and the places where they emerge” (p. 631). The ecological dimension of place was closely linked with PBE “Although ecological degradation is clearly a global problem, ecological issues can easily become abstractions from the immediacy of the places where we live” (p. 633).

Connections to social themes were frequently found in PBE literature, owing to its strong community foundation. Gruenewald (2003) stated that PBE is an educational revolution that re-engages students with culture and ecology. The labels Ecological Education (EE) or Environment as an Integrating Context (EIC) were often used interchangeably with PBE. For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused on perceptual and ecological foundations of place since PBE curricula are readily tied to those dimensions. Gruenewald’s sociological, ideological, and political dimensions influenced perceptions of place, especially when viewed through the lens of marginalized low SES populations.

Therefore, for the context of this study, Place-Based Education is defined using Smith’s (2002) five characteristics. Smith stated that phenomena immediately surrounding students serve as the basis of their curriculum. In Place-Based schools, inquiry practices are employed that
empower students to become creators rather than consumers of knowledge. *Students have a key role* in determining their curriculum and play an essential part in determining the course of their studies. Teachers act as *guides, coaches, and facilitators* of learning, rather than disseminators of knowledge. The last critical component of Smith’s definition is that the *boundaries between school and community dissolve*.

**History of Place-Based Education**

Nautical themed schools have existed in the United States since the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century. The first maritime-themed Place-Based school mentioned in the United States was of a nautical school for boys in Nantucket in 1828 (Correction History, n.d.). This Nantucket school was sponsored by a British naval officer. The first truly American nautically-themed Place-Based school for low SES boys was established on New York’s Hart Island in 1837. The school’s marine themed curriculum included “basics in seamanship, war exercises and steam engine operation” (Correction History, n.d.). The Hart Island School utilized a successful apprenticeship model. However, discipline at the school tended to be a bit heavy handed. Regrettably, the entire program was disbanded in 1842 after a rather unfortunate mutiny which resulted in “a court marshal (sic) at sea for him (the student mutineer) and two others, and the hanging of all three (students)” (Correction History, n.d.).

When Smith (2002) brought the Place-Based model back into national focus, he noted that PBE was not a new phenomenon. Smith observed that there were successful French PBE systems in the early twentieth century as well as Firefox PBE programs existing in Appalachia in the late 1960s (Resor, 2010). Firefox was a Place-Based project that gained national attention when, as part of the Rabun Gap Nacoochee School curriculum, students interviewed local inhabitants “produced magazines about local culture, written by students” (Resor, 2010, p. 185).
Beames (2015) reported that more recent PBE literature, referred to as Ecological Education, can be traced to the 1990s.

Smith and Sobel (2010) traced the philosophical foundations for PBE to Dewey. Dewey and Dworkin (1959) stated that a wall had grown between schools and the communities that supported them. PBE school models focus on mentoring connections with the community which dissolve the school-community divide. Exposure to local issues during mentoring processes offers students an opportunity to do meaningful work, which eliminates those barriers.

It is difficult to determine how many Place-Based schools exist in the United States today; many schools offer hybrid programs incorporating enriching PBE practices. David Sobel (personal communication, September 26, 2016) indicated that “It's not really a yes/no thing, but rather schools are more or less along a continuum of a place-based paradigm.” Sobel added that Place-Based schools often identify themselves using a variety of designations, such as Expeditionary Learning schools. When asked, Greg Smith (personal communication, September 26, 2016) replied that “I'd say that in Oregon approximately 15 schools are incorporating Place-Based approaches as a central element of their work with students.” Smith indicated that there was no statistical basis given to extrapolate the number of schools identified as PBE to determine the total number of Place-Based schools in the United States today. A challenge in identifying the number of Place-Based schools lies in the fact that incorporating Place-Based instructional strategies differs from an underlying philosophy that all curriculum and instruction is based on place.
Learning Theory Supporting PBE

Situated Cognition

The apprenticeship model often found in Place-Based schools is aligned with the Situated Cognition theory of education. Place-Based schools have strong ties with supervisors in the community who act as mentors. Students learn through real-life (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989) experiences as guided by their supervising mentors. The place connection is well-suited to the kinesthetic learning style (Gardner, 2006) as students typically engage in activities outside of the school walls; knowing is rooted in action and parallels individual and societal learning goals.

Lave and Wenger (1991) portrayed a community of practice in a nautical education setting. They described the procedure of learning naval quartermastering, an apprenticeship process. The naval quartermaster is a position responsible for the control of the critical operations of a ship. Lave and Wenger depicted the same condition of apprenticeship which occurs in Place-Based schools by stating “If apprenticeship is a form of education in which work and learning are seamlessly related, it is nonetheless a form in which the work and understanding of newcomers bear complex and changing relations with ongoing work processes” (p. 86).

Within a community of practice, there is a relationship among persons, activities, and the local environment. Relationships, such as those within PBE, develop over time with other adjacent and overlapping communities of practice. PBE learners move from legitimate peripheral participation within a community of practice which provides the “interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage” (p. 98). A Place-Based school serves well as a community of practice since students, teachers, and supervisors share their passion for a learning
curriculum focused around their *place*. These learning experiences are facilitated using the tools, technologies, and languages adopted by a socio-cultural group.

**Critical Learning Theory**

All three sites studied here had a population largely composed of low SES students. Critical Learning Theory (Freire, 1993) is especially relevant when studying these marginalized student populations. Freire spoke to social justice and equality which leads to both improved economic and social status. Place-Based schools studied here had a direct impact on both employability and economic status for their students. The curriculum of each *place* is created by invested educators together with their students, to develop diverse and meaningful curricula. The Place-Based school philosophy is well aligned with the *change-agent* concept inherent in Critical Learning Theory. *Environmental inquiry*'s curricular focus supports the integration of equity and economy by balancing approaches to promote comprehensive development of the individuals’ understanding, skills, and *attitudes* (Jacobson, McDuff, & Monroe, 2006).

The acquisition of cognitive skills and knowledge, which is a foundation of environmental inquiry, is expanded to develop understandings that will help to shape student environmental values (Palmer, 1998). With pedagogical foundations based upon Critical Learning Theory, ecopedagogy uses the constructivist framework to consciously assist students in developing a strong and enduring environmental ethic (Fien, 1993). Individual environmental awareness comes from the understanding that concepts, together with experience and concern, lead to action (Jacobsen, McDuff, & Monroe, 2006).

*Environmental literacy* can be defined (Monroe, Randall, & Crisp, 2001) as promoting awareness, knowledge, ability, motivation, commitment, and skill to address environmental problems and improve communication skills as a community. Critical ecopedagogy is a basis for
environmental inquiry which can support students’ development of cultural beliefs rooted in ecological concerns. Student Placed-Based experiences develop into relevant concern and subsequent action (Gruenewald, 2003).

Gruenewald argued that education should have a direct benefit on the social and ecological welfare of citizens and their community. “Critical pedagogies are needed to challenge the assumptions, practices, and outcomes taken for granted in dominant culture and in conventional education” (Gruenewald, 2008, p. 308). Since all school sites in this study were situated in urban locations with severely compromised ecosystems, PBE experiences allows students to learn about and take a stand for at the same time.

**Evidence-based Impact of Place-Based Education**

**Achievement.** Gautreau and Binns’ (2012) conducted a mixed methods study and found that student achievement improved in some areas in a Place-Based Educational setting. Their first research question was “What difference in achievement, if any, will a place-based inquiry curriculum have, compared to that of a more traditional curriculum?” (p. 171). The researchers measured student achievement by performance on content and inquiry competency using a pre- and post-test, and through student work artifacts created during the curriculum.

Three classrooms were studied: a traditional honors class ($n = 31$), a PBE inquiry-based honors class ($n = 22$), and a PBE inquiry-based academic class ($n = 23$). Science attitudes were measured using a Likert-based survey at the beginning of the school year and again after participating in this investigation. The qualitative data indicated a strong benefit to participating in Place-Based inquiry education. Attitudes toward science were superior in the Place-Based classroom. “Qualitative analysis of the pre-and post-tests show growth in ecology knowledge
for all three classrooms, with the Inquiry-based Academic Class (IAC) achieving the greatest gains” (p. 167).

This research was limited by small sample size and lack of valid and reliable measures on curriculum performance assessments. The authors did not specify the precise methods in which attitudes were evaluated. The authors admitted to “an additional limitation of the project is the decision to use two different teachers to implement the curricula” (p. 184). Even with these limitations, the authors claimed that “place-based inquiry curriculum, even when designed and implemented by a novice teacher can be at least as effective as a traditional one in student achievement” (p. 184).

Smith’s (2002) position paper noted that students in PBE schools are successful even when measured by traditional standards based assessments. He claimed that Place-Based schools not only enhanced student achievement, but strengthened the bonds between schools and the community. Smith stated “Students in each of these (Place-Based) settings have the opportunity to participate in learning activities that are both significant academically and valuable to their communities” (p. 592).

Resor (2010), in her position paper, reported that the Place-Based experience resulted in increased critical thinking and academic achievement. “It (Place-Based Education) facilitates the creation of engaged students, better future citizens, improve communities, awareness of preserving the natural environment, and higher academic achievement” (p. 185).

Lieberman and Hoody (1998) were definitive in their support of the academic benefit of PBE “Furthermore, schools that analyzed standardized tests and grade point averages (GPAs) found that EIC (Place-Based) students consistently perform better in terms of academic achievement than their traditionally instructed peers” (p. 19). They conducted a national study in
which they examined 40 schools. Four hundred students, as well as more than 250 educators, were interviewed. Lieberman and Hoody concluded that the connection to place also resulted in improved performance on reading, writing, math, science, and social studies standardized tests.

The benefit of PBE appeared to be especially powerful with low SES student populations. Switzer (2014) reported that these struggling students demonstrated an increased effort which benefitted their academic performance; Place-Based education “could play a part in combating the unusually low science proficiencies typical of low-income communities” (p. 57).

Members of the California Student Assessment Project (2000) conducted a study of the educational value of using Place-Based Education (EIC) for learning. The study compared 11 PBE classes with traditional classrooms. Control and treatment groups were matched by social, economic and demographic identifiers (specific demographic data was not available). Seventy-seven percent of the time, the participants in PBE programs scored higher than their traditional counterparts. The study authors claimed that statistical analysis was not possible because of the small sample sizes.

Table 1 shows the performance differential between PBE and traditional assessments as reported by the California Student Assessment Project (2000). PBE students performed better on standardized tests in language arts, math, science, and social studies. The authors claimed that PBE “significantly improve student performance throughout the curriculum and enriches the overall school experience” (p. v).
Table 1

California Assessment Project Summary of Paired Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Number Higher for PBE Students</th>
<th>Total Number of Assessments</th>
<th>Percent Higher for PBE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative (2010) reported Place-Based education “boosts student achievement and improves environmental, social, and economic vitality” (p. 2). The Collaborative, which was formed in 2001, evaluated 10 Place-Based Education programs. These programs included more than 100 rural, suburban, and urban schools in twelve states. The researchers conducted more than 1,000 interviews with adults (including focus group participants) as well as interviewing in excess of 250 students. Surveys administered to more than 900 educators and more than 2,700 students. The Collaborative members stated that they did a thorough document review and numerous on-site observations.

Researchers associated with the National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (2000) studied a wide range of students; the Foundation’s reported results from student performance in third grade, as well as from scores on the American College Testing (ACT) test for college admission. In North Carolina, PBE fourth graders reported a 31% increase in math achievement in just one year. All students at a Place-Based school in
Milwaukee passed the Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test. Typically, only 25% of Milwaukee public school students succeed on this test. The Foundation’s report included universally positive results in Place-Based schools “The scores of students who engaged in environment-based (PBE) studies almost always exceeded those of students in traditional programs” (National Environmental Education and Training Foundation, 2000, p. 3).

**Attitudes and dispositions.** Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, and Friedlander (2015) reported that student agency is developed when teachers can make curriculum meaningful and engaging. McInerney, Smyth, and Down (2011) described student agency as the state in which students are producers rather than consumers of relevant knowledge and experiences. Student agency is developed when students take responsibility for their own learning. They encourage teachers to “Strive to make lessons stimulating and relevant to the development of agency” (p. 10). Place-Based schools are focused on exactly that: a stimulating and relevant curriculum.

McInerney, Smyth, and Down (2011) were enthusiastic about their endorsement of Place-Based schooling “invests young people with a sense of agency” (p. 4). The authors claimed that students learn through a hands-on, community involved learning environment which provides meaningful knowledge and experiences. McInerney, Smyth, and Down (2011) stated that Place-Based learning supports students in becoming problem solvers and enables them to address environmental as well as social concerns.

Ernst and Monroe’s (2006) study focused on development of critical thinking skills at Place-Based (Environment Education) schools. In this *mixed-methods* study, the investigators interviewed 10 teachers from different treatment groups, as well as, interviewed or surveyed 400 students (391 students took the Cornell Critical Thinking Test and 392 took the California
Measure of Mental Motivation) in the ninth and twelfth grades that attended 11 Florida PBE high schools.

Two of Ernst and Monroe’s (2006) research questions considered if PBE ninth and twelfth graders “have higher critical thinking skills and a stronger disposition toward critical thinking than their peers in traditional instructional programs” (p. 432). Their third research question considered covariates’ (pretest score, achievement level, gender, and ethnicity) influence on critical thinking skills and disposition toward those skills. The last research question explored PBE program characteristics that might influence critical thinking skills and disposition toward those critical thinking skills.

The treatment in this study was participation in a PBE program. Quantitative measures included performance on the Cornell Critical Thinking Test and the California Measure of Mental Motivation. Each of the 11 PBE programs was observed at least once for from 4 to 7 hours. Interviewees were asked about the characteristics of their PBE programs. Interviews focused on success and participants were asked questions including “What do you consider to be the most successful features of your program” (Ernst & Monroe, 2006, p. 435).

Interviews were also conducted with 44 students from 10 of the 11 programs. Students were asked about PBE program curriculum, what they liked best about the program, and if they felt that they had become better thinkers or problem solvers. As indicated in Table 2, Ernst and Monroe reported “results are consistent with theoretical predictions in the critical thinking literature and previous studies on the efficacy of (PBE) programs … these programs can produce desired and valued educational outcomes” (2006, pp. 441-442). Ernst and Monroe’s published results demonstrated that treatment groups outscored the control group in each of the four testing situations.
The authors reported that Place-Based programs had a positive effect on ninth grade students’ critical thinking skills ($p = .002$). The researchers controlled for pretest score, grade point average (GPA), gender, and ethnicity for ninth graders. The experimenters also controlled for GPA, gender, and ethnicity of 12th grade students and concluded that PBE had a positive effect on their critical thinking skills ($p < .001$) and disposition toward critical thinking ($p < .001$).

Table 2

**Performance of PBE vs. Traditional Curriculum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Cornell Critical Thinking Test</th>
<th>California Measure of Mental Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9th</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to noting gains in student achievement at Place-Based schools, the California Student Assessment Project (2000) reported positive attitudes and dispositions attributed to PBE. Their report noted “reduced discipline and classroom management problems … increased engagement and enthusiasm for learning … greater pride in ownership in accomplishments” (p. v). These observations and traits contributed to the positive atmosphere at the Place-Based schools studied.
Gautreau and Binns (2012) reported on improved emotions and attention in a Place-Based environment. Student attitudes were measured using Likert-scale science surveys. They argued that when children do not connect to their surroundings in a Place-Based environment, they tend to suffer more from obesity, depression, and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Gautreau and Binns focused on the connection to place and connection to nature as having “positive effects on student emotions and attention” (p. 167). They also measured three aspects of student attitudes towards science: content, inquiry, and pedagogy. The authors stated that they examined positive and negative attitudes towards factual knowledge, attitudes toward defining science as a process of inquiry, and attitudes towards method of instruction.

In addition to the academic benefits described above, Lieberman and Hoody (1998) reported that a Place-Based climate improved student skills necessary for success. In addition, PBE was credited for creating an effective learning environment; they noted an increase in “enthusiasm and engagement, as well as a sense of pride and ownership, [students] work together to improve self-control and decrease discipline and classroom management problems” (p. 19).

**Role in and interaction with community.** There were many qualitative research articles documenting the social and community benefits of Place-Based Education. The Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative (2010) had a strong endorsement of the value of PBE “The findings are clear: place-based education fosters students’ connection to place and creates vibrant partnerships between schools and communities. It boosts student achievement and improves environmental, social, and economic vitality” (p. 2).

McInerney, Smyth, and Down (2011) discussed the PBE benefit on the social well-being of a community and how students explored meaningful local issues expanding to global affairs “PBE has developed around the need to bring schools and communities closer together” (p. 6).
They maintained that PBE encouraged young people to make connections between local issues and global environmental, financial, and social concerns. Powers (2004) agreed with this viewpoint and cited evidence that the hallmark of PBE is that students become active participants in their communities. Powers demonstrated powerful connections between grounding local PBE student participation in community matters and increased student engagement in academics.

Participation in meaningful PBE curricula was linked (McTier & McGregor, 2011) with improved employment within the community. Evans and Kilinc (2013) tied the PBE philosophy to Dewey’s work and indicated that the classroom walls created an artificial boundary between education and the community. Effective Place-Based Education “strives to direct students’ attention and experience to local culture environmental problems and the economy” (p. 272).

Smith and Sobel (2013) also grounded their work in Dewey and Dworkin (1959) and made the assertion that including students within community activities removes their sense of isolation:

by taking young people into neighborhoods, workplaces, agencies, and city council meetings where they can interact with adults and see themselves as fellow citizens with shared responsibility- not only to their own families and peers but also to the community as a whole. (p. 96)

Anderson and Gurnee (2016) referenced Dewey as well and stated that PBE enables students to assume the “rights and responsibilities of citizenship as authentically as possible: by doing” (p. 73).

supported the concept of connection to community in addition to addressing environmental concerns:

Students in each of these (PBE) settings have the opportunity to participate in learning activities that are both significant academically and valuable to their communities …

Even more significantly, these activities help students learn and do things that contribute to the well-being of others. (p. 592)

**Active participation in democracy.** PBE was viewed as an important factor in supporting a democratic society. Resor (2010) maintained that Place-Based students are encouraged to become active, contributing citizens. The PBE theme of *active* participation in democracy was a common one, as stated by Woodhouse and Knapp (2000) “One of the most compelling reasons to adopt Place-Based Education is to provide students with the knowledge and experiences needed to actively participate in the democratic process” (p. 4).

Russell-Ciardi (2006) believed that a primary goal of PBE was to inspire students to become involved in community action and to energize students into actions that created a better community. Key to both Resor and Russell-Ciardi, was the concept that PBE motivated students as a call to action. The ability of PBE experiences to engage students in political issues supports the Critical Learning Theory concept of *learning about* and *taking a stand for* at the same time.

**Benefit to the community.** Bartholomaeus (2013) studied the contribution to the community of authentic tasks in Australian Place-Based schools. He maintained that the authenticity of the PBE projects were critical “Literacy learning is promoted by engaging students in authentic tasks and, with a known audience, students have the motivation to create texts that are correct and effective” (p. 21).
Henness (2001) strongly touted the benefits of community development-oriented service-learning, a form of Place-Based Education. Henness stated that “It builds the capacity of students to become active participants and leaders in the community, and strengthens the capacity of the community to work together toward an envisioned future” (p. viii). In this study, Henness interviewed 145 students, teachers, program coordinators, school administrators, and community leaders. His research questions sought to determine if students’ human capital and social capital were enhanced through participation in community development-oriented service-learning.

Henness’ design called for a combination of survey and case study research; a purposeful sample was selected. The author developed his own instruments, which had the effect of diluting the data “With the exception of one trial run of the student survey, the instruments were untested prior to actual data collection” (p. 35). Henness also did not adequately address issues of reliability or validity; he stated “the level of measurement error is expected to be high” (p. 40). Henness’ work was included here solely because he makes the unique point that if PBE connections and projects are considered to be valuable to the community, then they are much more likely to be perceived as being successful. “Survey results found that rural students develop significantly more favorable relations with adult civic leaders and community organizations when their service-learning experiences pertain to high priority community issues” (p. vi).

Smith (2002) stated “the primary value of place-based education lies in the way that it serves to strengthen children’s connections to others into the regions in which they live” (p. 594). One such connection Smith referred to was the economic benefit derived from Place-Based schools. Due to the empowering nature of Place-Based Education, students participate in the
creation of their own curriculum. Smith claimed that often inner city residents believe that their economic welfare and job opportunities are outside of their control. Smith stated “a place-based education that links school learning to locally available occupational opportunities provides young people with the confidence and initiative they need both to remain in their communities and to be of service to their families and neighbors” (p. 591).

**Summary**

As an emerging educational model for instruction, there is limited research associated with PBE, especially research which is quantitative in nature. The preponderance of literature indicates that academic achievement is enhanced by Place-Based Education. Negative student attitudes towards education seem to be mitigated by a Place-Based Education approach. Perhaps the strongest benefit of Place-Based Education is the creation and strengthening of bonds between the school and community. As Place-Based Education becomes more prevalent in the national spotlight, students who are studying meaningful, relevant, and rich curricula will not only profit from increased academic achievement, but they will have emotional, as well as social, advantages.

Place-Based Education is an emerging educational model for instruction. Most of the literature reviewed by this researcher indicated that Place-Based Education positively impacts (a) academic achievement, (b) attitudes and dispositions, (c) role in and interaction with the community, (d) students’ active participation in democracy, and (e) the school’s role in the community because students learn about and learn to take a stand for at the same time. This researcher chose to create a theoretical framework based on situated cognition and critical learning theories. This study was devised to address the achievement gap of how these positive impacts are operationalized as success.
Therefore, the research was framed around the following questions:

1. How is success defined for students in Place-Based schools?
2. How is success assessed for students in Place-Based schools?
3. How do teachers, parents, supervisors, community leaders, or other stakeholders perceive success of students and graduates of Place-Based schools?

As Place-Based Education becomes more prevalent in the national spotlight, students who are studying rich, relevant, and rigorous curricula in their place will not only benefit from increased academic achievement and enhanced employment options, but they will have emotional, as well as social, advantages.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a discussion of the research design, researcher affiliations, sampling procedures, participants, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis techniques utilized.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. How was student success defined for students in Place-Based schools?
2. How was student success assessed for students in Place-Based schools?
3. How did teachers and administrators, parents, supervisors in the community, or other stakeholders perceive success of students and graduates of Place-Based schools?

Research Design

This qualitative study assessed stakeholders’ perception of the value of Place-Based Education (PBE) using a multi-case, multi-site design with an ethnographic stance (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009). The qualitative design was chosen because it allowed the development of a complete picture of how all parts of a system work together to form a whole (Merriam, 1998). This gestalt approach enabled the investigator to explore more genuine observations of human nature. Guba & Lincoln (1994) stated “Qualitative data, it is asserted, can provide rich insight into human behavior” (p. 106). There was a clear advantage to conducting a qualitative study since the participants in this project were observed in their natural environment with few, if any, manipulated variables (Krefting, 1991).

The ethnographic stance allowed accurate description of the social complexities of culture and various characteristics of Place-Based schools (Koro-Ljungberg, et al., 2009;
Krefting, 1991). The choice of studying Place-Based schools from the stakeholder’s perspective facilitated the creation of a database from which to discover cultural patterns. Merriam (1998) supported this assertion by stating “In fact, I believe that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledgebase and practice of education” (p. 1).

The researcher examined how success was defined, measured, and judged for students who attended schools with Place-Based curricula guided by considering theoretical viewpoints. These viewpoints allowed the investigator to observe and interpret results in a meaningful way aligned with the purpose of this study (Madison, 2005).

Data were triangulated by methods, including interviews, document analysis, and observations (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Triangulation of Methods](image)
In order to ensure the trustworthiness of this study, safeguards were used. Detailed below are the steps that were taken to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Affiliations and Biases**

The researcher was employed as a public middle school math teacher throughout the course of this study. The researcher realized that no matter how much time and energy he invested to help students achieve success, some students still struggled. He concluded that math just did not make sense for these underachieving students; there was no meaningful context through which they could decipher concepts that baffled them. He conjectured that if students had a framework within which they could learn topics that not only interested them, but were useful and related to each student’s experience, students could be successful.

The researcher enthusiastically pursued a doctoral program in Instructional Leadership at Western Connecticut State University and initiated this study in an attempt to contribute to the latest educational research. This study was undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements for that program. The investigator had a positive opinion of the potential value of Place-Based schools, but was not familiar with sites chosen for this study until the project began. This resulted in minimal researcher bias.

**Sampling Procedure**

There were five public Place-Based high schools in the geographical area that were considered for study. All five of the schools were considered as possible sites for the researcher to observe. These five sites were known to the primary advisor to this study as being categorized as Place-Based. Access to the sites selected for this study proved challenging. The researcher made multiple direct telephone contacts to all five sites in an attempt to gain access to five Place-
Based high schools in the Northeastern United States. The researcher spoke to the principal of Site 4, which was not used in this study, about interviewing at that site but was informed that the school was in a transitional period and he might do better to follow up in a few months. Subsequent contacts with that principal did not result in arrangements to observe that site. At Site 5 (also not used in the study), the researcher made a number of contacts with the secretary to the principal as well as with the Assistant Superintendent of that district with whom the researcher had a professional relationship; the researcher was hopeful about arranging research interviews. The researcher was able to make direct contact with one of the teachers at this site and had arranged a tentative interview with a teacher at that site. Unfortunately, permission was denied by the principal of this site to conduct the interview. Consequently, that site was dropped from the study. Ultimately, no direct contact by the researcher resulted in access to any site. Therefore, the researcher pursued an alternative gatekeeper strategy, with his advisor using his professional connections (Arcury & Quandt, 1999).

**Gatekeeper**

“Gaining access is a major concern in qualitative research” (Madison, 2005, p. 22). The qualitative researcher considered how to enter the setting in a manner that was appropriate and effective. The researcher remained tenacious; Bogdan and Biklen stated “Gaining access to school: be persistent. Often the difference between the person who gets in and the person who strikes out is how long and how diligently he or she is in pursuit (2007, p. 89). Merriam’s (1998) strategy of locating key gatekeepers who hold positions of power and respect that would be a source for referrals proved to be ineffective in this study. Since the researcher was not able to make connections with any gatekeeper at any site, the research was unable to move forward using that approach.
Professional Connections

The advisor to this study had a professional relationship with a teacher at Site 1 (Jules) and made contact with him on the researcher’s behalf. Figure 2 details the process of gaining access to that site. This process started with the Advisor to this study contacting Jules, who in turn contacted the director of Site 1 (Yolanda), ultimately resulting in the director granting permission for the study to proceed.

*Figure 2. Process of Securing Permission to Study Site 1*
As detailed in Figure 2, once the researcher secured permission to study Site 1, he engaged in 19 emails directly with the director of Site 1 to arrange a visit to that site, schedule an interview with her, and solicit contacts for teachers, parents, and supervisors at that site. The director of Site 1 assisted the researcher in contacting three teachers at that site, four supervisors, and the president of the Parent Teacher Student Support Organization (Beatrix). Beatrix, in turn, was helpful in soliciting three other parents who volunteered to be interviewed for this enterprise.

The advisor to this study also had a professional relationship with a former principal of Site 2 and made contact with him on the researcher’s behalf. That former principal did not participate in this study, but connected the researcher with the current principal of Site 2 (Trudi). The researcher was able to schedule a site visit, and ultimately an interview, with Trudi. Trudi arranged for a special needs student to give the researcher a comprehensive tour of Site 2. During this tour, the researcher obtained contact information for a Site 2 parent (Elle) and a supervisor (Mr. Blonde) both of whom later volunteered to be interviewed.

During a visit to Site 2, the researcher’s special needs student guide took him into a boat shop where maintenance on a vessel was underway. The boat worker was on a break and was observed eating his sandwich on a saw-horse. The researcher felt uncomfortable about disturbing the worker’s lunch, but the special needs guide persisted in engaging the worker. Ironically, the worker turned out to be Butch, a former teacher and supervisor at Site 1. Butch appeared to be enthusiastic about participating in the interview process and seemed to be passionate about his involvement with Site 2. As Butch spoke, he revealed that he not only was an instructor at Site 2, but was one of the founding fathers of that school; his subsequent interview was insightful. A hallmark of the Place-Based sites observed during the course of this
study is the incredible sense of community. It is that very sense of community that creates the space for a former educator/supervisor to assist at Site 2 to repair some damage to boats caused by a severe winter.

The sense of community at Place-Based schools was further demonstrated in the connection between a Site 2 staff member (Butch) to an instructor at Site 3 (Winston). Winston graduated from Site 2 and had been a former student of Butch’s. Butch offered to contact Winston on the researcher’s behalf. Winston assisted the researcher in arranging a site visit and was instrumental in making introductions to a number of educators and supervisors. Three educators and three supervisors from Site 3 were interviewed including the newly hired principal (Vincent) and one of the school’s founders (Mr. Cabot). Despite numerous attempts, the researcher was not able to solicit parents from Site 3 for interviews. After conferring with the project advisor, the researcher was encouraged to terminate the search for parents at Site 3 as the interview data collected thus far confirmed data saturation and he was able to paint a fully-descriptive picture.

All the sites recruited for this study had large minority populations. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) expressed concern about academic performance of minority populations and theorized that racism affecting education in America is considered normal and goes unnoticed. This study was not designed to address racial issues, however academic performance of largely minority populations at each school was noteworthy. Place-Based curricula tend to be aligned with Situated Cognition and Critical Learning philosophies. Situated Cognition (Brown, Collins, & Dugid, 1989) and Critical Learning (Freire, 1993) theories served as a framework for the investigator in his examination of stakeholder perceptions of Place-Based students’ success.
Participants

Ultimately, 22 individuals were solicited and agreed to participate in the study: nine were supervisors, eight were educators, and five were parents as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Interview Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Time (min)</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Winston Wolf</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringo</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jules</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jody</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trudi</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmie</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-Ren</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vernita</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Beatrix</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bud</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Orange</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Pink</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Blue</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Cabot</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Brown</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Blonde</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. White</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butch</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of this study, educators included teachers and administrators including the principals or directors of all sites. All but two parents (Bill and Beatrix) had children currently enrolled at the sites included in this study. Supervisors all had contact with students at the sites being investigated. Most supervisors assumed a mentoring roll and met with students to
facilitate the student’s off campus learning experiences. For example, Mr. Pink and Mr. Blue taught students nautical themed subjects including boat maintenance, piloting, sailing and navigation to students at a seaport near Site 3.

**Permission**

Both the researcher and the advisor to this study hold valid Human Subjects certificates through Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI): training modules for researchers who study human subjects. The researcher received permission to conduct this study through Western Connecticut State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. Participants were all adults of legal age and were asked to complete a written form agreeing to the conditions of an interview for this study (Appendix A). At the beginning of each interview, the researcher clarified that all interviews were confidential and that neither participant names, nor site names, would be made public.

**Instrumentation**

**Interviews**

Interviews were conducted with all 22 interviewees by telephone. The researcher used the Capital Typing transcription service to transcribe all voice recordings. Capital Typing provided documentation which confirmed that the service was certified as being completely confidential.

A semi-structured interviews process was followed for all participants (Appendix B). The semi-structured interview included 6 questions focused on the essence of the research questions: definitions, assessment and perceptions of success in a Place-based environment. Variations in the interview schedule were used in accordance with the type of subject: supervisor, educator, or parent.
Supervisors were initially asked neutral questions about graduates of the site they were affiliated, such as “Tell me about graduates from Site X.” The investigator then asked what was unique about student graduates from this site. The researcher queried about specific student characteristics that might prepare them for work, community service, or college preparation. Each participant was asked to be specific about student qualifications, including any unique problem solving abilities. Similar semi-structured interviews were conducted for educators and parents.

Observation

Naturalistic observations were conducted as part of site visits at each site. Fraenkel and Wallen (2002) described the process of naturalistic observation in qualitative research. They state that naturalistic observation techniques involve studying participants in their natural settings. The researcher did not manipulate any variable, just recorded, transcribed and analyzed statements made. Fraenkel and Wallen claimed that the entire insights obtained from naturalistic observation often serve as the basis for more formal studies. Observations were documented in a reflexivity journal.

Documents

Documents including school Strategic School Profiles, local Board of Education reports and statistics, site websites for information such as mission and vision statements, site survey results, news articles were collected and utilized to provide a rich, thick description of each site. They were used, primarily for descriptive purposes, and secondarily for triangulation purposes. Because the sites were both schools and programs and were located in two different states, there was inconsistency to the availability of specific types of documents. For example, Site 2, as a school, had a strategic school profile, but Site 1 was a program, and therefore, did not.
Data Collection

The primary source of data gathered for this investigation was the series of interviews conducted with 22 Place-Based stakeholders. Each interview was recorded on a secure phone line and transcribed verbatim. Secondary sources of data were state Department of Education reports such as Site 2’s Strategic School Profile (SSP), local Board of Education reports and statistics, site websites for information such as mission and vision statements, site survey results, news articles, and direct observations by the researcher at every site. The supplemental data served to triangulate the results.

Interviews

Twenty-two adults were interviewed to ascertain their viewpoints relating to the three research questions addressed in this study. Madison (2005) stated that interviewing is a hallmark experience of fieldwork research. In his original dissertation proposal, the researcher agreed to complete as few as 12 interviews. However, the researcher found that a larger sample added richness “The more cases included in the study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling in interpretation is likely to be” (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). This interview process allowed the investigator to gather valuable information with the assumption that participants answered truthfully.

Merriam (1998) advocated for the use of a “[s]emi-structured interview; this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (p. 74). A semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix B) was carefully constructed by the researcher and advisor (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998) for all interviews. Interview questions were formulated so as to avoid asking questions with multiple parts, yes-or-no questions, and leading questions. A secondary advisor
recommended changing a leading question “Do you think Place-Based students are successful?” to a more open ended, lay-friendly question: “Tell me about students at (Site X)” as many participants did not refer to their schools as Place-Based, in case the subject did not understand the terminology.

As shown in Table 3, interview times ranged from 10 to 57 minutes. The range for educator interviews was 10 to 57 minutes, with a mean average of 24.9 minutes. The range for parents was 17 to 38 minutes, with a mean average of 25.2 minutes. The range for supervisors was 12 to 57 minutes, with a mean average of 29.9 minutes. For the purposes of these comparisons and for data analysis, Butch and Bill were considered to be supervisors, rather than an educator or a parent since they qualified in both categories. Conversations and interviews with both Butch and Bill, as well as direct observation of Butch, confirmed that their roles were primarily supervisory.

The researcher employed effective questioning and speaking strategies in order to enhance data collection. Singer and Frankel (1982) stated that when the goals, objectives, and the nature of the study were explained to subjects, they were more likely to provide valid information. All interviewees were emailed written explanations of the study before beginning the interview. The project description was reviewed at the start of each interview; interviewees received assurance of confidentiality “encouraging confidentiality should improve your chances for informants to speak more freely” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 111).

The interviewer avoided lengthy pauses on the telephone, but allowed for short pauses and short interjections. In doing so, the interviewer can be perceived as more empathetic, warm, and genuine (Natale, 1978). Midanik, Hines, Greenfield, and Rogers (1999) reported that telephone subjects use strategies for retrieval of information such as anchoring and restating their
information. Probing (Merriam, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) was employed to create the most effective qualitative interviews. Participants were encouraged to use anecdotal stories to explain their ideas. The interviewer used expressions such as “Can you tell me more about …” or “Can you give me an example of …” to solicit further clarification.

Each interviewee was emailed a transcription of their interview to member check (Merriam, 1998) and was offered an opportunity to make corrections or edits. Through the member checking process, the qualitative study’s credibility is enhanced because data is reviewed by the people from which it was derived and asking them if it fairly represents their comments. Mr. Orange and Mr. White had a few minor edits, such as the correct spelling of the firm at which Mr. White was employed. One parent, O-ren, sent the researcher an addendum to her interview re-emphasizing her enthusiasm for Site 1 and her perception of how successful her son was.

Analysis of Data

Merriam (1998) described the unique nature of qualitative research; that uniqueness requires the researcher to judiciously pick through collected data to determine what is useful and what is not. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) explained that structural analysis is the process of examining data in order to discover patterns inherent in interviews. The researcher followed Gall, Gall, and Borg’s protocol of analyzing data closely in order to find patterns, constructs, and themes that can be used to characterize and describe the phenomenon being studied:

One of the most critical steps of interpretational data analysis is developing a set of categories that adequately encompass this and summarize the data. The researcher must decide what is worth taking note of in each segment of the database. (p. 467)
Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) defined category as “a construct that refers to a certain type of phenomenon mentioned in the database” (p. 467). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described a process of developing a list of coding categories after data have been collected. Sorting them is a crucial step in data analysis “You search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases are coding categories” (p. 173). A list of categories was created that seemed to recur in the recorded interviews; the interviewer then went through the interviews and made a spreadsheet of occurrences of those categories. That process soon became unwieldy and was abandoned in favor of an open coding process. The researcher then studied the 22 interviews collected for this study and identified each code that was mentioned (Appendix C). Codes were organized and axially categorized into a streamlined version of codes when insignificant subtleties were identified. From the codes, emergent, recurring themes that were mutually exclusive were created. An example of a recurrent theme found in this study was Sense of Community.

This researcher then followed Krefting’s (1991) recommendation for a code-recode process through which the investigator returns to the data after a period of time to recode the same data and compare the results. After completing this code-recode process, the researcher found that the original coding was fundamentally accurate. At this time, the interviewer was also able to merge some similar themes, such as Sense of Community and Nurturing Environment. The resulting compilation resulted in 538 codes categorized into 6 themes.

**Trustworthiness**

Merriam (1998) addressed the issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research. She emphasized the importance of the researcher following ethical practices. The quantitative
research concepts of validity and reliability enhanced trustworthiness whenever they were demonstrated. Merriam stated that internal validity is established if the research findings match reality. Reliability is achieved if the results of the research can be duplicated; if the study were repeated the same results should be found. There are four qualitative strategies (Krefting, 1991) that were adopted to support trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

**Credibility**

Credibility is established "when what the researcher presents describes the reality of the participants who informed the research in ways that resonate with them" (Conrad & Serlin, 2006, p. 413). Credibility was a primary concern to the researcher. Krefting (1991) stated:

The researcher’s job becomes one of representing those multiple realities revealed by informants as adequately as possible. Researchers, then, need to focus on testing your findings against various groups from which the data were drawn or persons who are familiar with the phenomenon being studied (p. 216).

Krefting’s concerns were addressed by the researcher in part when data were triangulated by methods and by sources (detailed above). Through these triangulation techniques, the researcher became familiar with the phenomenon under study and used good investigative skills. The researcher understood the value of establishing rapport with subjects early in the interview process and making participants feel comfortable during the entire interview. Madison (2005) declared:

[R]apport is the feeling of comfort, accord, and trust between the interviewer and interviewee. Being mindful of rapport throughout the interview is essential to helping to
create for the participant the feeling of being respected and of being genuinely heard.

Keep in mind that being a good listener is an art and a virtue (p. 31).

A detailed description of the study, the setting, and the script used in the interview process is presented in Chapter 4; participant identifiers were included to the extent that a participant’s anonymity is protected. Krefting (1991) stated that credibility is threatened when participants respond in ways which they think are the correct ways. The subjects may respond in ways which they perceive are the preferred social responses or they give answers that they think the researcher is looking for. The researcher enhanced credibility by following a member checking protocol.

To further ensure credibility, the researcher conducted mock interviews with a parent from an alternative school and an administrator of a high school with a technology focus, neither were included in this study. The researcher regularly enlisted the assistance of his advisor to review research techniques, script, and interpretation of participant responses.

Transferability

The findings of this study “should be applicable to another setting or group” (Conrad & Serlin, 2006, p. 414). A detailed description of the study, the setting, and the script used in the interview process is presented in Chapter 4 and as Appendix B, participant identifiers are included, to the extent that participant’s anonymity is protected, for any interested researchers. These are detailed so that they may determine whether this case is similar enough to be relevant to other situations. The primary and secondary advisors reviewed research techniques and the script. The primary advisor reviewed the interpretation of participant responses to ensure transferability.
Since the reader of this study will determine its transferability, findings were presented in a cohesive manner to create a mandate to transfer these results to any appropriate situations. Conrad and Serlin (2006) stressed the importance of having a theoretical framework to assist in organizing data collection and interpretation. Within this theoretical framework (detailed above), findings were described in a manner congruent with other research so as to confirm an appropriate theory; any inconsistencies between this study and the existing body of knowledge were noted.

**Dependability**

“Dependability involves accommodating changes in the environment studied and in the research design itself” (Conrad & Serlin, 2006, p. 416). A detailed description of the study, the setting, and the script used in the interview process is presented in Chapter 4 and as Appendix B, participant identifiers are included to the extent that participant’s anonymity is protected. Krefting (1991) stated that dependability “considers the consistency of the data, that is, whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subject or in a similar context” (p. 216).

A rationale was provided for the qualitative research and a full description of methods. To further enhance dependability, processes and methods employed in this study were kept reasonably stable over time for the researcher and participants. Research participants were selected from three unique research sites to provide a diversity of findings. Krefting’s (1991) code-recode process was implemented in the analysis part of this study. The advisor reviewed research techniques, script, and interpretation of participant responses to ensure dependability.

The researcher was vigilant in the identification of any evidence that challenged conclusions to minimize threats to dependability. Alternative interpretations to the information
gathered were sought. The researcher employed a reflexive journal to further enhance trustworthiness.

**Reflexivity**

Merriam (1998), Madison (2005), and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) cautioned the qualitative researcher to be aware of personal biases which may affect their research. “It is important to honor your own personal history and the knowledge you have accumulated up to this point” (Madison, 2005, p. 19). Madison further states that the researcher should be aware of how personal biases might influence the study, its interpretation, and application.

To compensate for possible biases, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) claimed that a reflexive process benefits research because “reflective analysis is a process in which the researcher relies primarily on intuition and judgment in order to portray or evaluate the phenomenon being studied” (p. 472). Krefting (1991) concurred with the concept of reflexivity so that the investigator analyzes himself in the context of the investigation. This researcher made periodic entries into his reflexivity journal and was also supported in the reflexivity process by regular conferencing with his advisor.

**Confirmability**

This important attribute of trustworthiness is safeguarded by the researcher providing a complete, rich, and detailed description of this study. Conrad & Serlin noted “confirmability is the concept that the data can be confirmed by someone other than the researcher” (2006, p. 417). Krefting (1991) maintained that confirmability “is achieved when truth value and applicability are established” (p.216). A detailed description of the study, the setting, and the script used in the interview process is presented in Chapter 4 and Appendix B. Participant identifiers are
included to the extent that participant’s anonymity is protected. Any inconsistencies that might challenge this study were highlighted.

Feedback from an independent auditor was solicited, received, reviewed and discussed as well as from the advisor to ensure that biases did not unduly influence any conclusions drawn in the study. The auditor who open coded, reviewed, and analyzed sample interviews from this study was an instructor with the McGill University’s Faculty of Education in the quality of Lecturer. Krefting (1991) suggested that confirmability is established when another researcher could arrive at similar conclusions if presented with the same data and research context. Every consideration was given to rival conclusions that were suggested.

Summary

Methods employed in this study were selected in order to portray an accurate sense of stakeholder viewpoint of Place-Based education success. Twenty-two stakeholders participated in this study; they were comprised of supervisors, educators, and parents. Stakeholders were solicited using a purposeful sample from three small to mid-sized urban public high schools with nautical themes in the Northeastern United States. All Place-Based high schools selected for this study had large minority populations.

All participants voluntarily participated in recorded opportunistic person-to-person interviews with the investigator. The researcher attempted, during these interviews, to explore the social complexities of Place-Based education at each of the three PBE sites. Each stakeholder spoke about his or her definition, assessment and perception of success at the site with which they were affiliated.

Transcripts were analyzed using a code-recode technique. An axial coding system was used to generate themes. The emergent themes were triangulated using both sources and
methods. The researcher participated in an audit with an independent auditor. The researcher was aware of trustworthiness concerns and took precautions to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Place-Based Education (PBE) culture and its various characteristics were described, focusing on definitions and measures of success reported by stakeholders targeting PBE students and graduates. Research questions were answered through analyses of individual cases, then a synthesis of all cases. Stakeholder interview results were analyzed and, using triangulation, compared with other relevant information and sources.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results obtained from the research study. The chapter starts with a description of each research site, to provide context. It is followed by a description of participants based on an analysis of each theme, disaggregated by supervisors, educators, and parents.

Research Design

The following questions were addressed in this study:

1. How was student success defined for students in Place-Based schools?
2. How was student success assessed for students in Place-Based schools?
3. How did supervisors, educators, and parents, supervisors perceive success of students and graduates of Place-Based schools?

These questions were answered through analyses of individual cases, then a synthesis across all cases. A detailed description of each site was offered to the extent that does not compromise that site’s anonymity. Descriptors for each participant were provided which also limited to protect their anonymity. Three groups of stakeholders: educators, parents, and supervisors, were interviewed in three urban school districts in the Northeastern United States.

Site Profiles

Stakeholders from three Place-Based high schools were identified to participate in this study; all were public high schools with nautical curricular themes. These schools were geographically located in close proximity to large bodies of navigable water; students and staff had ready access to a number of boats at each site. As seen in Table 4, the size of the student bodies at these schools were considered as being in the small to mid-sized range of public high schools.
Table 4

*Student Enrollment*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>439</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Site 1 is a half-day program; students are divided into two sessions.

Students at all three sites chose to enroll at that school; no students were assigned to any site by default. The selection process at each site differed, but some sort of active selection was required by the student, parent, or guardian. As shown in Table 5, each Place-Based site reported graduation rates exceeding the average graduation rate for that urban location by 15.4% to 30.9%.

Table 5

*Graduation Rates*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban (District)</th>
<th>PBS</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>97.0%</td>
<td>66.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>92.0%</td>
<td>62.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>88.4%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some subjects indicated that a factor in selecting one of these Place-Based schools was that they were perceived as safe schools. All subjects who spoke about school safety indicated that their site was considered safe. School safety claims were supported by multiple reports, each unique to that system. Site 1’s director conducted a survey which reported that one hundred percent of educators considered their site’s discipline program was effective and that they felt safe at school.

Unlike the other large conventional high schools in this district, Site 1 had no reports of violent crimes. Site 2 reported a total of 19 disciplinary issues, five occurrences associated with fighting or battery, none involving weapons. In comparison, Site 2’s complimentary two comprehensive urban high schools in this district reported more than 700 disciplinary issues on school grounds including 53 incidents of fighting or battery and one event involving a weapon. Site 3’s district report on safety stated that 84% of the students considered Site 3 safe, compared with an 81% overall safety report in that district. This common theme of the sense of safety was shared by all three schools, though evidenced by markedly different measures.

Stakeholders overwhelmingly reported that faculties at all sites were enthusiastic about their curricula and highly engaged with their students. One indicator of faculty job satisfaction was absenteeism rates. The Strategic School Profile (SSP) for Site 2 reported that teachers were absent for an average of 6.4 days in contrast to that state’s average of 8.6 days. The Department of Education overseeing Site 3 reported an average teacher attendance rate of 97%. Staff attendance rates were not available for Site 1. While low rates of teacher absenteeism may not be the only measure of teacher satisfaction, this indicator was often been used to reflect positive school climate reported by interviewees (Scott & Taylor, 1985).
Subjects at all sites stated that school administration was a factor in forming the environment that supported a Place-Based curriculum. As seen in Table 6, no administrator was in that leadership position for more than four years.

Table 6

*Administrator Tenure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 3a</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Site 3’s administration changed three times in three years.*

Place-Based schools included in this study formed strong connections with their community; each school had rich relationships with supervisors. An integral part of programs at all sites was some sort of marine industry connection. Staff members at all sites were actively involved in forming and nurturing relationships among various private enterprises and government agencies. These entities offered students marine based experiences including student externships. At Site 2, one supervisor had such a close relationship with that school that he eventually joined their teaching faculty.

In addition to marine-based connections, all schools indicated that they embraced parent involvement. All school websites clearly indicated connections with parent groups and contact information. All parents interviewed in this study reported a sense of mutual respect with teachers and administrators at their child’s school. Because of the nature of the different
institutions, descriptive data availability about student demographics and student performance as well as comparative data of in-district traditional schools varied considerably. Therefore, descriptive factors of sites are inconsistent here due to the availability of relevant indicators.

Site 1

Site 1 was a shared-time program, not a typical high school. Site 1 was not a diploma-granting institution, but rather a program to which students from an urban center and six sending local districts attend either a morning or afternoon session at this location. Students received additional instruction after their regular session if they choose to participate in an after-class program to receive college credit.

Site 1 had easy access to a large body of navigable water. The school had a 56-foot research vessel used for onboard classroom instruction, as well as demonstration of navigation and commercial fishing operations. There were a number of other smaller vessels available to the students for training and maintenance of the school’s aquaculture farm sites. Students were able to conduct experiments in chemistry, marine biology, and ecology. Students were also able to engage in commercial fishing.

Facilities. The single building at this site appeared clean and well maintained. In a survey conducted by Site 1’s director, 100% of the teachers agree, or strongly agree, with this observation (Site 1 Administrator Survey). Specialized laboratories and classrooms were observed that compliment the marine-related curriculum of the school. Facilities included a seafood science laboratory and retail food store, an aquaculture finfish/shellfish lab, marine construction shop, marine propulsion and electronics lab, and a computer-assisted design and drafting lab. Site 1 offered students from school systems in the greater urban region and surrounding communities the opportunity to “enhance the traditional academic high school
curriculum with a specialized emphasis on science and technology instruction as related to the development of aquaculture” (State 1 Department of Education).

**District schools.** This urban location had three other traditional high schools with enrollments ranging from nearly 1,200 to well over 2,000 students each. That traditional group had a median graduation rate was 66.1%, with a range from between 47.9% to 78.4% (SSP Site 1). Site 1 had a much smaller student body, slightly fewer than 500 students were enrolled. Site 1’s graduation rate, as reported by the director, was 97%.

**Students.** Students came from a major Northeastern United States city as well as six of its contiguous surrounding suburban communities. Students were screened by the administration based upon guidelines set by Site 1 faculty including degree of interest in aquaculture and probability of academic success, as measured by assessment performance. “The counselor will then decide on recommendation based on academic and attendance records as well as a strong interest in related fields of aquaculture” (Site 1 website). Applicants whose have successfully passed this screening were then interviewed by Site 1’s Recruitment and Guidance Office. Site 1 students were selected in a manner to ensure the student body composition was diverse characterized by those representing a broad range of social, economic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The stated intention of Site 1 was to encompass students who possess a wide variety of skills, talents and learning styles. Because Site 1 offered half-day sessions to students from seven communities, no special education support was provided.

**Discipline and respect.** In a survey conducted by Site 1’s director, 100% of teachers reported that this school’s discipline program was effective and that they felt safe at school. Every teacher surveyed also indicated “the atmosphere of the school encourages respect among students and adults” (Site 1 survey). The total number of disciplinary issues reported for the
district’s other three urban high schools (SSP) was 9,937. Included in this number of reported incidents for the other three high schools, were 20 incidents of violent crimes and 13 incidents involving weapons. Site 1 had no reports of violent crimes.

**Mission and vision statements.** The published vision that appears on this school’s improvement plan (SIP) stated “Our vision is to be a model for successful science and technology education, in a diverse environment, that is recognized for academic excellence, and fosters a sense of perseverance and autonomy throughout the learning process” (Site 1 SIP). Their SIP included a mission statement which declared “Our mission is to develop individuals who possess the skill to face and solve real-world problems by integrating creativity, resourcefulness, integrity and passion for learning to meet the needs of a changing world” (Site 1 SIP). Fifty-four percent of teachers surveyed indicated that they *strongly agree* that the vision statement was clearly communicated; the remaining 46% *agreed* with that statement (Site 1 survey).

**Program.** Students were encouraged to understand the critical interaction between science and technology in real-world situations. The focus on these real-world situations was aligned with their Place-Based philosophy. Site 1’s SIP stated “We believe that a rigorous, relevant, well designed curriculum will afford our students opportunities to think critically, integrate their ideas and be successful” (Site 1 SIP). Site 1 recognized the importance of creating learning experiences developed in collaboration with industry partners and have created a number of successful associations to that end.

**Staff.** There were 13 instructors and a guidance counselor on staff at Site 1. Every teacher, when interviewed, reported the morale to be high. A survey supplied by the Director of
the school indicated that one hundred percent of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that the staff morale was high.

Since this site was not a traditional school, the head administrator was referred to as a Director, not a Principal. Teachers surveyed reported unanimously that the administration encourages collaboration among teachers. The surveyed staff agreed or strongly agreed that the Director had good rapport with staff. The staff unanimously reported that the Director was a motivating leader.

**Philosophy.** The philosophy of Site 1, as displayed on the school website, indicated a belief in a supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to respect others, to work cooperatively, and be contributing members of society. The philosophy also dictated the belief that students must learn to be capable problem solvers, rational decision makers, and critical thinkers. The site’s published philosophy stated the school’s commitment to have the curriculum evolve to meet the needs of youth in a changing society.

**Parents.** Parents seemed to be very supportive of the teachers, administration and the philosophy of Site 1. In the school-administered survey to parents, 98% of parents surveyed reported that “the school environment supports learning” (Site 1 Parent Survey). That same percentage would recommend this site to children from other families. All parents interviewed expressed a strong Sense of Community; Site 1 had an active alumni site.

**School improvement plan.** Site 1 was not mandated by the State Department of Education to create a SIP because of its designated status as a program. However, the Director of Site 1 assembled a school committee to create a SIP which included a vision statement, a mission statement, and belief statements.
The SIP also listed the five Theories of Action (Appendix D), each with progress and projected completion dates. This plan focused on students becoming life-long learners, a rigorous curriculum, addressing student academic and behavioral needs, cultivating a professional learning community, and engaging in effective communication with the entire school community. The SIP identified needs, teaching strategies, and actions to be undertaken with designated person or persons held responsible.

Site 2

Site 2 had a specialized curriculum that focuses on the marine sciences and trades with a stated commitment to serve all students. This school strove to create an environment that cultivates a high degree of student interest and engagement in their studies. Site 2’s website asserted that it offers learning opportunities that challenge both traditional and nontraditional learners. This school claimed that it created successful experiences focused on graduation and fostering a culture, which nurtures the creation of life-long productive members of the community. The student body was diverse; pupils are enrolled from this urban center and twenty-one sending districts.

Site 2 had easy access to a large body of navigable water. The school had a research vessel capable for use as onboard classroom instruction. This vessel served as a platform for demonstration of navigation and commercial fishing operations as well.

Facilities. This campus consisted of five buildings; one was a modern structure built specifically as a school; the other four appeared to be shoreline buildings converted to serve as classrooms, labs, or boat-building and maintenance structures. Specialized laboratories and classrooms were observed that compliment the marine-related curriculum of the school. Facilities included a seafood science laboratory, an aquaculture finfish/shellfish lab, marine
construction shop, marine propulsion and electronics lab, and a computer-assisted design and drafting lab.

**District schools.** In addition to Site 2, this urban location had two large traditional comprehensive high schools with enrollments of 987 and 1,348 students, respectively. There were also six smaller themed high schools with enrollments ranging from 196 to 637 students. The smaller traditional high schools had a graduation rate of 54.9%; the comprehensive high school rate was 69.2%. Site 2 had a smaller student body, with nearly 330 students enrolled. Their graduation rate was 92.9%, which exceeds not only the city rate, but the state average of 84.8%.

**Students.** In order to enroll in Site 2, students must be certified to be in *good standing* at their sending school, demonstrate an interest in Site 2’s program, and participate in an interview with one of the admitting educators. As shown in Table 7, students were primarily low socio-economic status (SES); 53.7% of the student body was eligible for free or reduced-price meals. The information in Table 7 delineated the relative affluence, proficiency in English and higher percentage of gifted students compared to the district reference group (DRG).

Table 7

*Site 2 Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Site 2</th>
<th>DRG&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free lunch</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>80.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not fluent in English</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifted</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>DRG (District Reference Groups): districts in Site 2’s state whose families have similar socio-economic characteristics.
The Site 2 strategic school profile indicated that there were 48 students with disabilities; those disabilities included physical as well as learning disabilities. This report specified that 91.7% of Special Education students spend over 79% of their time with their non-disabled peers.

Table 8 indicates that the performance on SAT assessments for the year 2012. Site 2 students outperformed their peers in the other two traditional high schools on all SAT subtests. Table 8

*SAT Scores for Site 2 and Traditional High Schools in Site 2 City*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of Test Takers</th>
<th>Reading Score</th>
<th>Math Score</th>
<th>Writing Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District HS 1</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>363</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District HS 2</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discipline and respect.** There were more than 700 disciplinary issues on school grounds reported for the two, large comprehensive urban high schools in this district. These disciplinary issues included 53 incidents of fighting or battery; one event involved a weapon. Site 2 reported a total of 19 disciplinary issues, five occurrences associated with fighting or battery; none involving weapons.

**Philosophy.** The Site 2 faculty was committed to maximizing students’ ability and desire to learn. This school fostered a commitment to volunteerism through which students are further engaged in the learning process. Opportunities for learning were created through positive relationships between students and adults. Site 2’s administration pledged to support student
learning through “vision driven, data informed decision-making” (Site 2 Website). This institution’s website stated an intention to attain excellence by seeking perfection.

Site 2 claimed an obligation to support a young person’s ability to believe in themselves and have confidence to see themselves as having a place in the future. In order to fulfill this obligation, the ability to think critically, and problem solve effectively with fluency in all subject areas, was critical. Graduates used these skills and abilities in various pursuits after graduation in college or the work force.

Mission and vision statements. The stated mission was to create contributing citizens who can take their place in society and democracy. Site 2 was committed to becoming a learning community where students and faculty participated in a “highly engaging transformational learning process” (Site 2 mission statement) in order to better prepare students for an uncertain future. There was a stated spirit of professional cooperation and responsibility, which supported innovative instructional planning and reflection which enhanced student learning. Students engaged in authentic student-centered curriculum and assessment practices.

Program. Site 2 created an environment that develops skills in their students and ability for them to think critically and problem solve effectively. The curriculum included vessel handling and safety at sea, lobstering, aquaculture production, and nautical drafting. Unlike Site 1, students attending this school did so full time.

Staff. There were 46 instructors, and 1.5 counselors, social workers, and school psychologists on staff at Site 2. The faculty supported students in developing into productive citizens by enrolling them in college classes as well as providing externships in the marine science and technology industries.
Parents. Parents seemed to be very supportive of teachers, administration, and the philosophy of Site 2 enhanced by “timely and effective feedback to parents by staff” (Site 2 philosophy statement). The administration’s stated position was to be open to parent involvement through the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and encourage active participation by students in PAC sponsored events.

Parents had access to daily email communications and had the ability to express points of view regarding development of school policies, procedures, resource allocation, and curriculum. Community service projects were a vehicle for students and their families to take an active role in helping the community while students fulfilled the mandated community service hours requirement.

School improvement plan. Site 2 committed to engaging in becoming a learning community where students and faculty participated in a transformational learning process. Their express desire was to implement vision driven, data informed decision-making that would result in creating confident, contributing members of society.

Site 3

Site 3 enrolled approximately 440 students in a major city in the Northeastern United States; it was classified as a small public high school. This school’s website stated that small schools encourage students to take a larger stake in decision making, receive individual attention from teachers, allow for alternative assessments, and create an atmosphere which allows easy access to the staff.

Site 3 students came from a mixture of neighborhoods across Site 3 city. A major reason that students apply to this school was because of its focus on marine science and technology. Site 3 had direct access to a large body of navigable water.
Facilities. There were two buildings slightly more than one half mile apart at this site. It took students and teachers approximately 10 to 12 minutes to walk between the buildings. The main classroom building was newly renovated and appeared clean and well maintained. There were minor signs of vandalism; a plaque had been removed from a display describing a species of fish found in this locality. The second building was a boat shop and additional classrooms. This building was not in disrepair, yet it did not appear to be maintained as well as the first.

This site had approximately 16 boats available for educational purposes including a 47-foot buoy tender, a 40-foot open Navy launch, two 38-foot Hunter sail boats, and a number of smaller boats. Site 3 had a partnership with the tall ships schooner in a neighboring marina. Students were engaged in externships at this marina as well as other local businesses and organizations.

District schools. This large urban location supported nearly 500 other high schools; there was a tremendous range in student body size. Thirteen schools had enrollments exceeding 3000 students; the largest with an enrollment of nearly 5000 students. This city was home to more than 351 smaller theme-based high schools such as Site 3, enrolling fewer than 500 students (Site 3 City Review Ratings from 2005-2014, 2015).

Student progress in this high school was rated by Site 3’s board of education as good. Site 3 had a much smaller student body of approximately 440; their six-year graduation rate was 88.4%, exceeding the city average of 73%. The 4-year weighted graduation rate was 221.5% compared to the urban average of 197.8% (Site 3 City Review Ratings from 2005-2014, 2015). Weighted graduation rates took into account factors such as type of diploma granted, student age at time of graduation, and various disability considerations.
**Students.** Students in this urban center were chosen through a *limited unscreened* selection process (Frumkin, n.d.). The limited unscreened selection process was similar to a lottery model with preference in selection given to students who have attended an open house, fair, or an information session about the school. No grades, test scores, attendance records, or previous academic records were considered in the selection process. In order to be eligible for selection, students must rank Site 3 among their top 12 programs of interest by the application deadline.

During the researcher’s visit to Site 3, students seemed genuinely invested in their learning, some asking the host teacher for time to connect for extra help. Students in classrooms visited were observed to be on-task and focused on their lessons. The main focus in all classes on the day the researcher visited was preparing for state-mandated mastery testing.

The majority of students (53%) at this school were Hispanic; approximately one third were black. Nearly one quarter of the student body was classified as *special needs*. Sixty-four percent of the student population was eligible for free lunch.

Eighty-eight percent of the students graduated within 6 years as compared to the city average of 73%. Forty percent of students deemed *college ready* as contrasted to the city average of 33%. This school received the highest rating of *excellent* in preparing the lowest performing students for graduation in four years (Site 3 Quality Snapshot).

**Discipline and respect.** The Site 3 Quality Snapshot (2015) stated that 84% of students reported feeling safe in the hallways, bathrooms, locker rooms, and cafeteria. This statistic compared to the city average of 81%. Staff members that were interviewed reported that one factor that encourages students to attend Site 3 was because it was perceived to be a relatively safe school.
**Mission statement.** Site 3’s mission statement, as stated on their website, clarified their intent to “provide a college-preparatory education built upon … maritime experience that instills in students the ethics of environmental stewardship and the skills associated with careers on the water” (Site 3 website).

This site maintained that a marine environment provided an ideal platform for an excellent education integrating discipline and interdependence. The faculty was committed to creating opportunities for all students to attain their greatest academic achievements. A fundamental foundation for this site was the creation of business and community partnerships that supported the creation of relevant, on-water experiences.

**Program.** The program at Site 3 was grounded in a hands-on, inquiry-based learning curriculum, set in a natural marine environment. This school site stated the intention of improving student outcomes by stimulating “curiosity, critical thinking, and vision.” This institution prepared students for college through a rigorous study in English Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, and Science in addition to coursework in World Language, the Arts, Physical Education, and Health.

As sophomores, students enrolled in one of six Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs of study (Appendix E). Students spent part of the day with CTE, one period in either the morning or afternoon, and the rest of the day in academics. The CTE program included aquaculture, marine biology research, marine systems technology, ocean engineering, professional diving, and vessel operations. The CTE curriculum included real-world work-based learning experiences; students were placed in enriching employment partnerships that were essential in providing relevant on-water experiences. Each track led to industry certification in technology or marine science. This school supported rich,
rigorous, and relevant curricula aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Every effort was made to align nautical resources to support instructional goals to meet students’ needs.

Some students chose to further their education at local, state, or national colleges and universities. Other graduates chose employment on the water for further training. Graduates could pursue careers as captains, deckhands, or in other marine based occupations aboard local vessels. During the researcher’s site visit, two graduates were observed interning at Site 3, working with underclassmen or acting as teaching assistants in CTE classes.

Site 3 received a meeting target rating for College and Career Readiness, and a rating of exceeding target for Closing the Achievement Gap. A rating of proficient was given for How Interesting and Challenging was the Curriculum. The Average SAT score of 1342 placed this school in the top 20% of high schools in this district (Site 3 Review Ratings form 2005-2014, 2015).

Staff. There were approximately 35 instructors and a guidance counselor on staff at Site 3. The staff was divided into two groups: the academic class teachers and the CTE program teachers. Ten teachers were listed in Site 3’s directory as being assigned to the CTE program.

Philosophy. The stated philosophy of Site 3 cultivated an ethic of environmental stewardship. Students explored the protection, conservation, and restoration of the environment in a climate that inspired them to focus their educational activities toward achieving those ideals.

Parents. Parents appeared to be supportive of the teachers, administration and the philosophy of Site 3. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA), as indicated by the school’s website, met monthly with the stated intention to provide support and resources to the school for the benefit and educational growth of their children. They affirmed the desire to strive to develop a cooperative working relationship between parents and staff of the school through
parent participation at all levels. The PTA expressed a desire to provide opportunities and
training for parents to participate in school governance and decision-making.

**Subjects**

The researcher conducted interviews with 22 adult subjects. Nine of these subjects were
supervisors, one supervisor was also a parent, and another supervisor was also an educator. The
interviews of the two subjects that fit into multiple categories were coded as *supervisors* because
the supervisor perspective seemed richer and more objective than the other perspectives.

Interviewee pseudonyms and are coded as indicated in Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beatrix</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bud</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butch</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elle</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmie</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jody</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jules</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Blonde</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Blue</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Brown</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Cabot</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Orange</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Pink</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. White</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-Ren</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ringo</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trudi</td>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vernita</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winston</td>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yolanda</td>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Bill was a Site 1 Parent as well as a Supervisor

*b Butch was a Site 2 Teacher as well as a Supervisor.
Supervisors

Four of the supervisors were associated with Site 1, two with Site 2 and three with Site 3. Three of the supervisors had occupations in boat operations and maintenance. These supervisors supported students off site in addition to the PBE curriculum and activities offered at the school. Two supervisors, Bill and Mr. Blonde, had backgrounds in, and were employed at, two different governmental marine environment monitoring and protection agencies; the first supervisor’s area of focus was shellfish, the second’s was salt marshes. One supervisor was employed at a drinking water purification and supply enterprise, another supervisor was the founder of a non-governmental environmental watch agency. Two supervisors were involved in education as well as having marine experience. The first of these created a foundation that supported Site 3, the second was actively involved in educational consulting and college admissions, but also had experience with fish breeding.

Interviews from these nine individuals provided a valuable perspective of the success of PBE students. They were able to offer their opinions about the success of PBE students, identify factors contributing to that success, and describe measures of success for these students.

Educators

Nine educators were interviewed during this study. Four of the educators were at Site 1, two were at Site 2 and three were at Site 3. The researcher was able to interview the instructional leader at each site: the director of Site 1 and the principals of both Sites 2 and 3. The three educators at Site 1 were subject matter teachers directly tied to the marine-based curriculum. The teacher interviewed at Site 2 had also been a supervisor. He specialized in boat building, operation, and maintenance. The two teachers interviewed at Site 3 were both in the CTE program.
Parents

Six parents participated in this study. Five were parents of Site 1 students, of those five parents, one was also a supervisor. The parent-supervisor’s responses were coded as a supervisor. One parent from Site 2 was interviewed. No parents from Site 3 participated.

Theme Identification

Each participant interview was open coded. Through the open coding process, the researcher identified 537 codes derived from subjects’ interviews. These codes focused upon the concept of a Place-Based school definition of success, identification of success, and measures of success. From these codes, six major themes emerged. These themes are defined in Table 10.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College/Career Preparation</td>
<td>The focus placed upon preparing students for post-secondary academic or employment opportunities which are held in high regard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Characteristics</td>
<td>Student socio-economic status as well as personality traits such as: commitment, confidence, dedication, diversity, independence, leadership, maturity, motivation, passion, perseverance, responsibility, and self-discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Creation of supportive relationships among students and staff, the nurturing environment of the school, the essential role of PBE alumni, and contributions to the surrounding communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Educators</td>
<td>The extent which educators are held in high esteem by students, parents, supervisors, and fellow teachers, to the extent that teachers contribute to student success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real World</td>
<td>Connecting academic experiences, challenges, projects, and the consequences of those connections that have practical applications for the student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Student interest and focus on their academics studies, off site projects, externships, and the school community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11 indicates the percentages of each interview group that addressed an identified theme during their interviews. All but one interviewee, a teacher, spoke to the importance of Place-Based focus on College and Career as well as Student Characteristics. The theme of Engagement was the least mentioned theme by the interviewees. The researcher included this theme of Engagement due to the impressive demonstrations of student engagement he witnessed during all site visits.

Table 11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent Participant Group Theme Identification</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>Parent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College/Career</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Characteristics</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real World</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 12, the most frequently mentioned characteristic of success was the curricular focus on College and Career Preparation. College and Career Preparation was mentioned as an important factor by all interviewees with the exception of Vincent, the newly hired principal of Site 3. One hundred eighty-one of the 537 codes associated with interviewees focused on College and Career Preparation.
Table 12

*Theme Occurrences During Interviews*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Educator</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College &amp; Career</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Characteristics</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real World</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total of Themes</td>
<td>204</td>
<td></td>
<td>252</td>
<td></td>
<td>81</td>
<td></td>
<td>537</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13 lists each theme in rank order from most frequently mentioned theme (College and Career Preparation) to the least frequently mentioned theme (Engagement with the Curriculum). The Supervisor group listed Student Characteristics most often, both other groups listed College and Career Preparation most frequently. Sense of Community and Real World Applications were both mentioned 76 times.
Table 13

*Theme Occurrences Ranked by Participant Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Overall Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College/Career Prep</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Characteristics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Community</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real World Application</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of Educators</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**College and Career Preparation**

Twenty-one of the 22 interviewees listed College and/or Career Preparation as a key component of success of students in Place-Based schools. The only interviewee that was not able to speak to the value of College and Career Preparation was the newly hired administrator of Site 3; he was included in this study because of the perspectives he offered on other themes. The theme of College and Career Preparation was the most often overall mentioned contributor to the success in Place-Based schools. College and Career Preparation was mentioned by supervisors 23% of the total supervisor codes. With educators, this theme accounted for 46% of the total educator codes, and with parents accounting for second place at 23% of the total parent codes.

College and Career Preparation evolved through the development of curricular focus on college preparation. Examples of realistic expectations for college admission for students enrolled at sites are cited in their interviews. Included in this section, is a discussion of the challenges interviewees reported in creating a successful environment for these students. Since
all three schools in this study are marine themed, there was a focus on nautical careers. Interviewees cited many examples of preparation for and placement in the maritime industries. All three groups of interviewees described in great detail the advantages to graduates of marine-themed Place-Based schools for career entrance and college admission and their ultimate success in both college and in their careers.

Supervisor interviews focused on career readiness and obtaining *soft skills* such as teamwork and the ability to assume responsibility necessary for success on the job. Supervisors were much more likely than the other groups to speak about the value of externships for entry into employment and career advancement. A recurrent theme with educators was preparation for future whether it was college, private sector occupation, or military career. They often spoke about preparation for both career *and* college, not just one or the other. Parent interviews focused on the appeal to colleges of Place-Based programs because they were perceived by colleges to be unique, interesting, and valuable in preparing potential college students. While parents did not focus as much on job and career benefits, they did see the real-world application and diversity of the curriculum as an advantage to helping their children become successful. Parents primarily spoke of college admission advantages for their children.

**Supervisors.** Eight of the nine supervisors reported their observations of College and Career Preparation in Place-Based schools. Supervisors cited examples of College and Career Preparation 47 times (23% of their total codes). This theme was the second most often mentioned theme by that cohort, surpassed only by the Student Characteristics theme. Since Butch was one of the original founders of Site 2, he was able to give a unique perspective on the transformation of the school’s mission from supporting *at-risk* children, barely making it through high school, to the more ambitious focus on preparation for college.
Site 2 was a school established as an alternative for students who were in danger of dropping out of high school. A Site 2 supervisor stated “I don’t think we had a single student even, because of their family backgrounds, because of their school backgrounds, because of a combination of factors … even take the SATs, never mind go to college” (Butch). Butch continued to explain:

A typical student … well, but [sic] he didn’t go to college. His SAT scores, if he even bothered taking them, were probably terrible. So the school system, and the academic staff, and probably the superintendent in [Site 2] School District, will say: ‘Well, I’m sorry, that was a failure. That was a failure. He didn’t do any post graduate education at all. [Site 2], you failed that young man’. (Butch, Site 2)

The vision of Site 2 evolved to meet the changing needs of the inner city demographic population that it served. Butch clarified that “it’s only been [in] the last 10 years that there have been any kind of significant numbers of kids really going to college” (Butch, Site 2).

A prevalent theme mentioned by supervisors was that students who graduated from marine-themed Place-Based schools had an advantage over their peers who may have graduated from traditional comprehensive high schools, and certainly had a clear advantage over those who dropped out of school. “I think that the kids that are going, or graduating and going on to college have a better experience” (Bill, Site 1). They have “a heads up at a maritime college especially [if] they’re going into Marine Biology or Marine Sciences, they have a little heads up on it from the experience that they’ve gotten at [Site 1]” (Bill, Site 1).

Supervisors cited evidence that their students exceeded expectations for their typical socio-economic demographic. Interviewees noted that students live in social environments that may not be conducive to their seeking academic ventures “especially considering some of them
don’t come from necessarily the best home environments, the most privileged home environments, which is a huge detractor, I think, in finding success at a college or university-type setting” (Mr. Pink, Site 3).

Supervisors stressed the advantages that Place-Based schools offered to students in overcoming the challenges facing children who are brought up in cultures that don’t typically value education in the ways that higher SES communities might. A Site 3 supervisor recognized the disadvantages many students enrolled in his Place-Based school; he explained that “you’re essentially an outsider in college, which most of our kids are” (Mr. Cabot, Site 3). Supervisors spoke of the types of soft skills exemplified by a sense of teamwork and assuming responsibility that contributes to success that Place-Based schools fostered. Soft skills attained at Place-Based schools enhanced student qualifications for both college admission and career employment. These soft skills included such competences as the confidence to assume responsibility to pursue real life projects. Because of the genuine connected-to-place nature of the curriculum, students have a chance to assume real life leadership roles:

- opportunity to and the actual responsibility for leading the region’s largest ecosystem restoration project and participating directly as part of their school work, as part of learning skills that will help make them job and college ready, actually able to participate in and often lead. (Mr. Cabot, Site 3)

Mr. Cabot elaborated by explaining that these soft skills are essential for college success. A critical soft skill was the ability to assume responsibility, such as “the responsibilities that kids are given early on at [Site 3] are the kinds that help them learn the kinds of important soft skills that turn out to be super helpful for being successful in college” (Site 3).
The nature of the curriculum of Place-Based schools fostered an engaging environment in which students can easily concentrate on their academics:

I would say they're probably more successful because they're more focused when they go to college and beyond. They’re more focused on where they want their career to be. So I would have to say they're probably more successful. (Mr. Orange, Site 1)

Other supervisors shared the sense that these soft skills supported student success. “I would guess that the kids from [Site 1], they will go into a variety of positions; everything from ship’s captains and research assistants, on up to and through PhD’s, college professors, that kind of thing” (Mr. White, Site 1).

Supervisors presented realistic viewpoints that students set goals, and were supported in achieving those obtainable college and career goals. Mr. Blonde stated the students from Site 2 were being groomed for admission into “good schools and really good strong careers and so forth, but they’re not being groomed towards the Ivy Leagues” (Mr. Blonde, Site 2). There were many statements made by supervisors indicating that students were exposed to material that was more academically challenging than that of students who graduated from schools that were not Place-Based. Mr. Orange stated that “they [students] have some opportunities there that really when they get to college, they’re probably in entry level classes saying ‘What am I doing here?’, because they're already beyond that” (Site 1). There was a prevalent perception by supervisors that the students that they worked with were superior. “They’ve all been outstanding kids, and they’ve all gone onto college and I think have really successful careers in Science” (Mr. Blonde, Site 2). Some supervisors attributed success to the fact that the Place-Based curriculum was stimulating:
At [Site 3], the kids who try to matriculate into these different career and technical education the CTE programs are there because they have a genuine interest in what they’re doing. So you do see more of a motivation, more of a commitment, more of an interest in kind of being a part of these. (Mr. Pink, Site 3)

Every supervisor interviewed was directly involved with the maritime industry or marine environment monitoring and protection. They spoke extensively about the unique and rewarding careers that students from marine-themed Place-Based schools were afforded. Mr. Blue articulated his assessment of student success in the nautical industries “a lot of them go off to maritime schools, or end up becoming deckhands, or mates, or captains, even on local vessels, or go offshore” (Site 3). Mr. Blue detailed the direct link between the work students externing with him did, and their being prepared for a marine career. The following exemplifies experiences the students benefit from through which they gain a broad range of employment options:

They’ll be doing a maintenance project, they’ll be learning about things they need to do to get her certified to sail, going over checklists. They’ll be working on almost every aspect of ship maintenance that you can think of: woodwork, metal work, rigging work, things like that. From the very basic steps to … some of them take very advanced roles in that. And these are skills that you might get one of these skills or some of these skills on different boats in your career, but to start on a tall ship like [Site 3 tall ship], it is very, very conducive to being a master of all trades on any boat you go on in the future. (Mr. Blue, Site 3)

Mr. Blue stated that students definitely have distinct advantages for career advancement over peers that might not have graduated from a Place-Based school. These students were being prepared for commander positions on larger vessels; securing an advanced job placement such as
these had clear financial and career advantages “They're taking side jobs as crew on other ships and again, they're training on the huge ships as they go for officers, like the bigger tonnage than most people will deal with, dealing with boats this size” (Mr. Blue, Site 3).

The alliance with real world supervisors allowed students to enter externships, which are integral with their Place-Based experience. Mr. Brown’s supervision at Site 1 included externship experiences with students “that they have an interest in pursuing either as a career or as a field of study that they may go on into college” (Mr Brown, Site 1). Place-Based externships allowed Mr. Brown’s water quality research lab to broaden and enhance the traditional classroom instruction “they may do an internship [externship] with us as an augment of [sic] what they're doing at the school” (Mr Brown, Site 1).

Three of the supervisors had backgrounds in marine environment protection and water quality management; supervisors inspired students to pursue careers in those fields. Mr. Brown relayed how satisfying it was to him that students had become so accomplished and were inclined to do research in this field “We’ve had students that have come in contact with us that have gone into careers like environmental law and environmental planning or city planning, and actually also going on to getting their PhDs” (Mr. Brown, Site 1).

Since Butch was a fundamental influence in the creation of Site 2, he was able to give robust accounts of success stories. Butch understood that success could be defined in terms of being a contributing member of society as illustrated by the following quote:

Basically, he just started working on boats, the oyster boats. And he’s been doing it for the last 10 years and he got to be a captain of the boats, and is happy, and he’s married and he doesn’t have any children yet, and he’s paying his bills, he’s paying his mortgage, and he’s got a car. He’s doing fine. He has a beer occasionally with his friends and so
forth and he’s an adult, he’s a functioning, happy adult working on the water and he’s doing fine. (Butch, Site 2)

Butch’s description of how student challenges were met and ultimately how parents, the school, and the student combined were able to create a meaningful, yet somewhat intangible measure of success. His comments were robust, and a larger excerpt from his interview is included as Appendix F.

**Educators.** Seven of the eight educators interviewed considered College and Career Preparation an important indicator of success; this was the most prevalent theme mentioned by educators. Educators from all three sites verbalized the significance of this theme; they spoke about it 115 times (46% of their total codes). Evidence was presented by interviewees that graduates of Place-Based schools are successful because of the advantages both in preparation for college admission and entry into a career. In addition to perceived leverage in securing these post graduate opportunities, interviewees also spoke extensively about college success and career enhancement as a direct result of their high school experience. Educators reported that graduates had positive experiences in college level classes because of their Place-Based schools education. Similar advantages were evident for graduates in their careers; students were able to advance in their employment much more rapidly than high school dropouts or even graduates from traditional schools.

Yolanda, an administrator from Site 1, explained that it was integral to the program at Site 1 for students to create a blueprint for their post-graduate experiences. Interviewees described scenarios that demonstrated the natural extensions for Place-Based students from their work within the school structure to the outside place “They had a plan for what they were going to do; they weren’t just going to go out into the world and see what was going on” (Yolanda, Site
1). Trudi, an administrator from Site 2, supported this assertion that students plan for their future in order to ensure their success “they talk about their long-term post-secondary goals and what activities they’re doing in and out of school to support those goals and learning the skills they need to be successful in those schools” (Trudi, Site 2). Trudi continued to elaborate that a good deal of effort goes into this planning, stating “our students have really spent a lot of time developing a plan and doing interest inventories and figuring out what suits them best” (Trudi, Site 2).

Educator statements from all three sites were aligned in principle with Site 2’s mission statement “We envision graduates who can use these skills and abilities in any pursuit after graduation, whether a four-year college, or the work force” (Site 2 Website). Trudi’s remarks paralleled that school’s mission statement perfectly “Our students are being prepared so that they can go on to further education, whether it’s at a career in trade school, or at an associates program, or a four-year degree, or the military, to then pursue a career” (Trudi, Site 2).

Educators said that there was a unique focus on preparation for the future tied to the nautical themes at Place-Based schools. That uniqueness allowed students to target specific skilled maritime proficiencies that employers and colleges both sought “when they go to college and they’re working in labs, or they’re working in a boat shop, or they’re going to get a job, they’ve already done a significant amount of learning and growth in that area” (Trudi, Site 2).

Graduation rates from the three schools in this study far exceeded the average graduation rates of their geographical community. Site 2’s graduation rates typified the superior results of these schools “Eighty-two percent of that class [last year’s] was enrolled in a two or four-year college after graduation” (Trudi, Site 2). Because of the agricultural nature of the Site 1 program, the school was mandated by the State Department of Agriculture to complete a 5-year
follow up survey on their graduates. Yolanda reported that more than 94% of graduates from her site continued their post-secondary education; she stated “Of the respondents, I have 17 respondents, 16 of them went to college and finished a degree in five years” (Yolanda, Site 1).

Interviewees reported a high percentage of students enrolled in maritime related post-secondary institutions. The Site 2 principal said “our students apply to the maritime colleges. There’s Mass [Massachusetts] Maritime, Maine Maritime, SUNY [State University of New York] Maritime in New York, and then there’s Kings Point, which was a federal maritime program, the Merchant Marine Academy” (Trudi, Site 2). Students had already expressed an interested in nautical studies by attending these Place-Based Schools and left high school with unique experiences that colleges found attractive.

Yolanda discussed the readiness for college that she observed in her graduates. She relayed typical reactions that students shared with her or her staff. Yolanda stated that the preparation that students receive at Site 1 often included college level material:

They all say ‘That class really prepared me for college’, or the Site 1 College Experience program, which is another where they’re doing early college experience classes—it really, really prepares them for college. When they go to college, they go, ‘Oh, it was a piece of cake,’ because they already went through all that here. (Yolanda, Site 1)

The uniqueness of Place-Based curricula was enhanced by the specialized equipment that was available to students. Due to the distinct nautically related subject matter, schools obtain apparatus rarely possessed at a high school. Ringo (Site 1) illustrated the value to students of having this specialized equipment because students have become adept at using these tools and interpreting the results. The nature of PBE was to engage in relevant investigations and provide meaningful analysis such as that of seawater and other maritime related materials:
When they go on to their colleges and they’re working in the science classes, you know, they’re offered a special job in the labs because they know already how to use an FTIR [Fourier Transform Infrared Spectroscopy] or UV-Vis [Ultraviolet–Visible Spectroscopy] or ultraviolet-visible spectrophotometry. They know how to do HPLC [High Performance Liquid Chromatography]. (Ringo, Site 1)

The research being done at Place-Based schools was not only rigorous but was tremendously relevant. Educators reported that a good deal of their work was pertinent to current issues. In college, students are likely to continue the work they started in high school:

One of the students is working on extracting DNA samples of fishes from a variety of different environments to see if there’s any kind of genetic deviation … it becomes something that can become a stepping stone next year for them to continue their research when they get into college. (Jody, Site 1)

Both Trudi and Jody spoke of the residual positive effects of having a Place-Based education throughout the students’ college experience. Jody described situations in which graduates of her school had been exempted from certain college coursework because of their marine biology expertise gained from their experiences at Site 1:

They found that they had many more skills than the other students that were in freshmen classes with them, even to the point of view that a couple of them were able to take an exit exam and get a grade for a freshmen biology class that nobody else was able to do. (Jody, Site 1)

Trudi cited examples where students discovered that their high school coursework experiences far outstripped their college classmates. She compares the level of scholarship in some cases to that of graduate students. She stated “When our students, particularly in the sciences, let’s say,
they go to college they have done, already done, work that most grad students are doing. So they have exposure that other students just don’t have” (Trudi, Site 2).

A Site 1 teacher documented doctoral research that some of the graduates were undertaking. She described the impressive investigations that some students were engaged in “We have a lot of kids that have reached a really prestigious level in medical fields and in aquaculture research and marine biology” (Yolanda, Site 1).

In addition to preparation for college, educators described a parallel pathway for entry into employment. Because of the extraordinary emphasis on school and supervisor connections, students are engaged in externships that often ushered them straight into employment opportunities. A Site 3 teacher stated “We’re definitely providing them with what they can get out of it for being prepared for college. But then, we’re also providing them with internships [externships] that often times will lead to a job directly out of high school” (Jimmie, Site 3).

Statements from all educators interviewed for this study seemed to embrace the mission, vision, and core values of each site to ensure that their students are well prepared for their future. Interviewees explained that students are being trained for work in a nautical setting supported by the partnerships created with marine supervisors. A teacher remarked that “a number of students have been employed directly, just from the network that we’ve created for them of employers who know our students to be savvy about the maritime environment, savvy about being on boats, and can work with that” (Jimmie, Site 3).

Jody’s statement mirrored the Site 1 Mission Statement “Our goal is to enable students to meet rigorous academic standards through selected educational experiences that require them to work with technologies used by professionals in the maritime industry and aquatic research community” (Site 1 website). Place-Based students have exposure to real-world employment
situations that students in larger traditional high schools do not. At Site 2, a real world market place does more than mimic a business model; students have the opportunity to engage in authentic commerce. There was a successful fish market at Site 2 where students prepare and sell seafood that they had caught or raised in their aquaculture farms. The principal said “We have a small business entrepreneurship program where our students create their own businesses and sell their products and market their products. So, they are getting real hands-on experience that other students don’t get” (Trudi, Site 2).

The similarity of the maritime-related curriculum at all three schools created an overlap of certain marine based skills taught to students. Students were immersed in topics that prospective employers found desirable. Site 2’s coursework included essential marine skills embedded within the program “In sophomore aquaculture technology, they learn charting and navigation, the basics of Computer Aided Design, they learn knot tying, and they learn how to operate power boats, and operate our launch boats here” (Trudi, Site 2). Winston, an educator at Site 3, concurred with other educators’ observations that Place-Based graduates enhance their employability. Typically, high school graduates face the challenge of getting an interview for work in a field that they desire, a Site 3 teacher stated:

that they graduate from [Site 3] is going to definitely get them in the door for an interview in fields that are related to the CTE, but also sort of in the maritime industry in general. So if a [Site 3] kid might have been in the Marine Biology Research program, but if they want a job working as a deckhand on one of the water taxis or the shrimping boats in the harbor here, they’re definitely going to get an interview (Winston, Site 3).
Place-Based schools, in partnership with industry, offer real-world curriculum related externships. As part of their assigned duties, teachers at Site 2 maintain close partnerships with related industries:

One of the things all of our ASTE [Agricultural Science and Technology Education] teachers need to do is maintain industry contact, whether that is people working in the aquaculture industry or people in the marine trades or [sic]. So there are those connections that our students are making. And they can do internships [externships] and they do summer work experiences and all sorts of things that allow them to build job readiness skills so that when they leave us they know what’s out there and what they’re good at and have developed some of those skills. (Trudi, Site 2)

All schools in this study considered the school-industry relationships critical to student success. Similar to Site 2, Site 3’s mission statement “To provide a college-preparatory education built upon [Site 3 City’s] maritime experience that instills in students the ethics of environmental stewardship and the skills associated with careers on the water” clearly supports the intimate connection between PBE curriculum and beginning an environmental or maritime related career.

Jody described how a student internship with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) evolved into a full time paid position:

As a result of working in the NOAA labs in [Site 2 Community] for a year, she was offered an internship during the summer that was paid; she took the paid internship. She kind of got her foot in the door at NOAA and she’s now working as an Environmental Scientist for NOAA. (Jody, Site 1)

Ringo recounted a similar experience of one of his former Site 1 students who was able to secure employment while still in college. The student said “You know, they put me to work with
Employability was often mentioned by educators as a Place-Based benefit; Trudi’s comments supported that curriculum-employment connection:

We had a student who was in our mechanics program here, Boat Mechanics Program. He became a diesel mechanic and he’s now working on boats, but he’s working on diesel engines. We have students who become launch operators in the summer and then continue that into summers [continuing employment]. We have students who work at yacht clubs all over the coastline. (Trudi, Site 2)

Whether students enter the work force directly from high school, or they complete post-secondary educational experiences before working, they benefit from their Place-Based background. In addition to receiving preference in securing employment, the depth of relevant experience gained through Place-Based education had long lasting effects. Preferred positions that these students had assumed in the maritime industries are linked to higher salaries. An example of this was presented:

They learn some skills and they go on to these schools and … we have one kid in particular; he went to Mass [Massachusetts] Maritime. He is now working on the ships making big money, great schedule. But, you know, academically he was an average kid … at best. (Ringo, Site 1)

Jules described the accomplishments of two particular students who had secured employment in the marine trades. These examples demonstrate the breadth of possible employment opportunities ranging from sea-based petroleum mining to maritime engineering:
I have a graduate right now who graduated five years ago and he works on an oil exploration ship, that’s where he got his degree in commercial shipping and things like that. I have another one who was in the same class and he is doing naval architecture. It’s certainly a broad range under that marine-theme. (Jules, Site 1)

Jody, also from Site 1, offered up additional examples of employment benefits including the experience gained building boats in the shop at Site 1. An example was presented showing students able to secure higher skilled and better paying jobs at local fishing enterprises:

We’ve had some who has gone into the boat-building industry and that type of thing or have started their own small business, have gone into work with relatives that they had used as part of their supervised aquacultural experiences. So instead of just now working as a volunteer, or as a lowly deckhand for one of the shellfish companies, now they’re working in management-type positions because they worked their way up through the ranks. (Jody, Site 1)

Due to the nautical theme of the three sites in this study, students tended to become skilled sailors. Some graduates chose to serve in the armed forces, such as the Navy, Coast Guard, or with the Merchant Marines as their career choice. The Site 2 principal stated “We’ve had a lot of students who go on to different branches of the military, whether they’re going to go to the Coast Guard, the Navy, Air Force, Marines, or the Army” (Trudi).

Students acquired transferable skills at these marine-themed Place-Based schools; a teacher stated “We really want our students to be able to be successful beyond high school. They really need to master content and master skills and be able to transfer that knowledge to something else” (Trudi, Site 2). Trudi provided additional examples of how skills learned in her school translated into valuable post-secondary experiences for her students “We’ve had students
go to boat building schools. They have gone to the Landing School in Maine, or IYRS, which is the International Yacht Restoration School, which is in Rhode Island” (Trudi, Site 2). Some students were able to combine their entrepreneurial skills with their maritime acumen to create their own ventures. “We’ve had students who’ve started their own small businesses” (Trudi, Site 2).

Even some students who were not able to meet graduation requirements still attained a skill level which can be transferred to an improved work situation. Winston illustrated a case of a student who was able to use his transferrable skills as a marine technician. He relayed a scenario of a young student:

who is not going to graduate this year for sure, probably going to have to go to a different program to get his credits to graduate … he’s developed into an amazing mechanic. So, I don’t even know if he would still be in school if it wasn’t for the program. (Winston, Site 3)

All sites had some sort of mechanism to foster growth of employment skills. Every site embraced the philosophy related by Trudi as she described the Supervised Agricultural Experiences required of her students “The whole idea is that it supports the job readiness, skill development, [and] post-secondary planning that students need to be successful after high school, so that they are working on transferable skills that will help them beyond the school year” (Trudi, Site 2).

Site 2’s Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) program had promoted this skill development as outlined in the state agency guidelines for schools which that agency oversaw. The SAE as defined by Site 2’s state’s supervising agency detailed the benefits of this undertaking:
Conducting SAE programs has many benefits for the students involved; students can gain experience in agriculture and/or agriculturally related areas, earn money, achieve independence, advance in the FFA [Future Farmers of America], establish a background in agriculture and/or agriculturally related area, develop competencies needed for careers, develop a record of employment, gain self-confidence, learn to work with others, gain an understanding of the scope of projects, earn adequate income related to needs of students, and compliment home situations. (Site 2’s state regulatory agency’s manual)

This theme that educators spoke to centered on student preparation for better student choices for their futures. Educators cited examples of college, employment, or military career as shining indicators of success.

Parents. All five parents interviewed spoke about their perceptions of the value of College and Career Preparation to them and their children. Parents cited 19 examples of student Engagement (23% of their total codes) that they observed. This was the second most often cited of six themes identified in this study, surpassed only by their focus on the Sense of Community. Parents had a broader, less focused viewpoint of the value of College and Career Preparation. Their comments were largely limited to the experience that their child had, not generalized to other students or at other sites studied.

Bill speculated that the hands-on Place-Based theme encouraged students to apply their learning directly to their life work “I like the concept also that they’re using whatever they're doing, they're incorporating your math, your science, your history together in whatever they're doing, either boat building, or building a fishing rod” (Bill, Site 1).

A Site 1 mother, O-Ren, passionately endorsed how that program focused upon learning the life skills that would ensure a bright future for her son:
[Site 1] has been at successfully developing [Student] as he prepares for college and career; I’d give [Site 1] a 10 [out of 10]! [Student]’s experiences there have been varied and challenging and enjoyed [sic]. He’s much more confident having studied programs that mean something to him. Because of [Site 1], I think his personal development has given him exposure to a career path he might not have otherwise known or pictured. It’s obviously early to say, but the enthusiasm he is showing for the Maritime schools is all due to [Site 1], and I think a perfect career fit for [Student]. I will forever be grateful that we had the opportunity to have this school choice. (O-Ren, Site 1)

A recurrent theme with parents was the advantage that their children received in their attractiveness to colleges. Beatrix stated “They found it quite unique that a child takes that kind of focus” (Site 1). Vernita relayed the experience her son had with his college application process. She claimed that Place-Based schools are perceived as unique and valuable:

He’s gotten into almost every college. I am thrilled with the idea that they get to write this on their college application because it's something different than everyone else. The classes that they're taking and just the idea of going to this school, I think it sets them apart. (Vernita, Site 1)

Parents in the sites studied here also saw the extended benefit of PBE to enhance the ability of students to undertake more advanced work and be exempted from rudimentary coursework “his application to New York Maritime is going to show him to have some college courses already that are in line with the study down there (O-Ren, Site 1). Both Beatrix and Bud saw the advantage of the transferable skills learned at Site 1:
I think that not only the science and technology education she got there, but the real
world practical experience of living and breathing and being with people from all walks
of life. It’s huge in terms of being prepared for college. (Beatrix, Site 1)

Bud observed that his son had a rich experience in his exposure to a variety of
occupations in the marine industries. He stated:

He’s seen all these guys in kind of all different parts of the marine industry, from like
[sic] guys selling boats all the way to working, he would spend one summer on like [sic]
a tuna boat fishing and all these guys are struggling. (Bud, Site 1)

Bud saw the value to students in marine-themed schools; their real world experiences
showed them the realities of the difficulties and challenges associated with some marine
occupations, especially commercial fishing. It was important to Bud to know that his son might
now reconsider a career that might be onerous and may choose to go in a more prudent direction.

Elle summarized the sentiment of many Place-Based parents who perceived the real
world application, real problem solving focus as being an important ingredient of their child’s
success:

I think they’re more prepared to go into college or to go into service or even to go onto a
job because they’ve had to think things out. It’s not about getting the answer right or
wrong. It’s ‘What did you learn?’ (Elle, Site 2)

**Student Characteristics**

Twenty out of 22 participants indicated that characteristics of students were an important
factor in supporting student success. This theme was most often mentioned by educators and
frequently cited as an important factor of success by both parents and supervisors. The
operational definition of Student Characteristics for this study included the following attributes:
commitment, confidence, dedication, diversity, independence, leadership, maturity, motivation, passion, perseverance, responsibility, and self-discipline. Additional demographic attributes, such as socio-economic status, were noted by interviewees and are included as Student Characteristics. Evidence to support these characteristics as indicators of success were derived and triangulated from three sources: supervisors, educators, and parents.

**Supervisors.** One hundred percent of supervisors indicated that Student Characteristics were an important contributor to student success. There were 54 instances (26% of supervisor codes) when supervisors spoke of these characteristics during interviews. Each supervisor spoke to Student Characteristics and success; no other indicators of success were mentioned more often.

A characteristic of the student populations at all sites was demographic similarity. At every site, all students selected to enroll in a marine-themed Place-Based school:

First of all, they have to apply to the program, which means they want to be there, for it could be any number of reasons: they don’t like the school they’re in; they want to learn about [Site 1], their friends have told them and they think it’s neat, something that they'd like to try out. (Mr. Orange, Site 1)

A characteristic of two of the sites was a large population of special needs students. At these two sites, there was a continuum of abilities demonstrated by their student bodies:

Certain individuals that have an interest in topics that I work on and had them come up and work with me, do independent studies and such. And I’ve had four students from there and they’ve all been outstanding kids, and they’ve all gone onto college, and I think have really successful careers in science. (Mr. Blonde, Site 2)
Student motivation, as described during supervisor interviews, was taking action to complete intellectual as well as manual tasks even when the students might have felt challenged doing so. During interviews with supervisors, student motivation was a prevalent characteristic. “I think it takes a certain level of motivation to consider a program like this and to get outside your comfort zone” (Mr. White, Site 1). Mr. Pink stated “They have a genuine interest in what they’re doing. So you do see more of a motivation, more of a commitment, more of an interest in kind of being a part of these [sails]” (Site 3). Student passion was specifically mentioned by six of the supervisors during their interviews:

And I think they’re passionate about the topic, they’re passionate about discovery, and I think if you were to look at the kids, you’d probably see some of them might be out of the mainstream because we say ‘Oh, that person’s an oddball’, or whatever. But these students seem to be stepping to the beat of their own drummer and following their interest, following their curiosity, and not really caring what everyone else thinks. (Mr. White, Site 1)

The concept of responsibility was defined by participants as student behaviors consistent with what authority figures deemed necessary to fulfill academic obligations. Supervisors recognized the high degree of responsibility necessary for students to participate in Place-Based marine-themed programs, making supporting statements such as “So it’s up to them to really come up with solutions and be involved in the decision making process from start to finish” (Mr. Blue, Site 3). The theme of responsibility was especially prevalent in an environment where teamwork was essential. Mr. Cabot (Site 3) recounted a conversation that he had with a student from Site 3 in which the student stressed the value of taking on responsibility for the safety of the other crew members on her boat.
Self-discipline was observed as student perseverance to do what one thinks is right to overcome any obstacles to fulfilling the task at hand. Responsibility was closely related to the concept of self-discipline:

So, we go to the students, they come in and they set these experiments up, and then they kind of have to schedule their week around rating them and looking at and taking care of the plants and making the measurements and so forth. So, that’s kind of—they have to schedule that within their own schedule. (Mr. Blonde, Site 2)

Academic discipline may not have been a major student characteristic upon enrollment in these schools, but was evidenced as an indicator of success for students continuing in the program:

When the school first opened I think a lot of the kids from the sending towns thought that this school is going to be a place where they could go and just have a good time and to goof off. Well, they soon learned that that was not the case, and that they had to do studying. There was a lot of work involved in it and there was a lot of discipline. The kids weren’t there just to hack around and have a good time. The kids now want to be there. They don’t go there for a good time. They actually really want to be there. (Bill, Site 1)

Supervisors noted that determination was a critical student characteristic. Subjects reported determination as they observed students staying with various tasks to completion. Endurance was observed as students put forth whatever energy needed to achieve their goals. Supervisors noted that student determination and endurance especially in curricular activities at each site including being in boats out on open water:

At some points we had a little bit of rough weather and I’m pretty sure that all four of them might have felt a little queasy. But they all, despite that, pressed on and worked
with us and stood their watches like everybody else, and at no point kind of [sic] refused to get out of bed or do anything like that. They all were very committed to staying through the more difficult parts to the voyage. (Mr. Pink, Site 3)

Students at each of these schools were perceived to be unique in both their levels of maturity and their ability to persevere:

So they obviously have some motivation to be a part of these activities. But they’re all—they display a remarkable level of maturity for being 17- and 18-year-old kids. And it was actually wonderful to have these four students aboard. (Mr. Pink, Site 3)

**Educators.** Seven of the eight educators spoke of the importance of Student Characteristics as a measure of success. Educators cited the importance of Student Characteristics within the interviews 49 times (19% of educator codes). The eighth educator was a new hire and therefore could not speak to Student Characteristics because of his limited experience. He was included because of his status as an administrator; his contribution was a unique and very valuable perspective on predictors of success at his site. The only other indicator of success that was mentioned more often was College and Career Preparation, which was listed 44 times (18% of educator codes).

Educators often had unique perspectives on the characteristics of their students. Neither the Parents, nor the Supervisors, focused on demographics factors in the manner which educators did. A Site 3 teacher observed the effect of low SES:

So a lot of our kids, their lives are just not very stable, so I would say that that contributes to the fact that, it could be the kids move, could be that kids just don’t have a supportive home to just make it through, or whatever … but our graduation rate hovers around 80 percent so far of those that come in. (Winston, Site 3)
The Site 1 administrator described the challenge of surmounting the sometimes negative influences of other school age companions for a graduate of that school:

She and her peers really didn’t feel like they can do science, and it wasn’t their thing, it was not going to be their thing. And [sic] she’s gone onto such success and she’s really passionate about bringing that back to our kids saying ‘Look you can do science and you can do a lot of really cool stuff in science.’ (Yolanda, Site 1)

Another possible indicator of success of these types of programs was the improving quality of students enrolled there. A Site 1 educator remarked “The other thing that’s really good about our school is I’ve been there 10 years and I’ve seen the quality of our students get better and better every year” (Ringo, Site 1).

Recurrent themes of student passion were prevalent at each site, as exemplified:

We get evaluated by the State … they interview the students without the teachers around. And those evaluators always talk about how excited the students are when they themselves speak about the programs and when they talk about the school, when they’re asked, not specifically about their CTE program, but what about the school, tell us about the school, they speak very passionately about their Career and Tech Ed programs (Winston, Site 3).

Another teacher from Site 3 concurred, he stated “So the ones that buy into that, that really … see that bigger picture, I feel like they’re motivated … they get really excited about it” (Butch, Site 2). That same sense of desire to enroll passionate students was evident through the admission process at Site 1 as well. The Site 1 director explained “We’ll take a student who’s passionate about the programs that we have over a student who has good grades and doesn’t really have the passion for it” (Yolanda).
The dedication needed to support this passion is evident as articulated by Jody (Site 1), who said “I think that it’s just the fact that they want to be there.” Jules (Site 1) added “But she was just so dedicated to learning something … it was so amazing to her go through this process. I was blown away by just the sheer dig in your heels dedication”. Jules continued to say:

Somebody who is dedicated, self-motivated, somebody who tries to identify what exactly they want to pursue and then they go forth and pursue it. In terms of academics, it’s interesting that [student scores] will range everything from your straight A’s down to your C average kid. It all depends really on what that individual is all about. I would say our graduates are certainly very focused. That’s probably would be one of the really key adjectives as it is to describe our students. (Jules, Site 1)

While no supervisor specifically mentioned the trait of confidence, it was cited by educator Jules. He observed the development of confidence in his students as they progressed through the program:

I’ve had kids in the past who’ve come in and their confidence is just shot. They don’t have the confidence to answer questions, they don’t have the confidence to lead a group, they don’t have the confidence to do anything. (Jules, Site 1)

Jules continued to explain that the confidence levels increased dramatically during the course of the year in the Place-Based environment at Site 1.

Parents. Four of the five parents interviewed noted the importance of their children’s personality traits as an ingredient for academic success. In 11 out of the 81 codes (14% of parent codes) parents focused on these traits; no other theme was mentioned more often. Two of the sites in this study were magnet schools that lent diversity to the student body:
They sit in a classroom with children from all walks of life, all colors, all nationalities, ethnicities, all economic strata. They are literally sitting in a classroom which I would call what the real world appears to them once they graduate from high school. (Vernita, Site 1)

Commitment was observed through parents’ perception of value of their children’s investment in their education. Elle stated “You have to want to go there, there’s a chance you may be on a waiting list … So, maybe part of that is that these kids have something in common already, walking in the door” (Elle, Site 2). Vernita echoed the sentiment that students found going to school to be an enjoyable experience; she said “I just know that they’ve succeeded at school. They’ve liked school. They’re enthusiastic about school” (Site 1). Bud spoke of his son’s delight with his schoolwork and pride in his projects:

He loved it and he really gained from it because it was something that he was definitely proud of. Like rarely had he ever, and still to this day, he doesn’t really talk about anything he’s doing in school to anybody. But if anybody asks him about these boats that they’re building; you can’t get him to shut up. (Site 1)

Parents noted the passion they see in their children; one remarked about a focus “which is sort of really a personal passion of his. He’s actually just recently now that we’re looking at colleges; he’s really looking at New York Maritime and looking at going into the merchant marine field” (O-ren, Site 1). Beatrix observed that same passion in her daughter “She’s just entranced by anything marine, marine life, sailing. She loves science” (Site 1).

Three of the four parents who were interviewed at Site 1 observed the sense of confidence fostered in their children. A Site 1 parent remarked “But it definitely gave him like momentum and confidence and really helped him develop himself” (O-ren, Site 1). Vernita
concurred “it has given them a lot of confidence and feeling really good about themselves ... I just feel overall it has made him a better person” (Site 1). Bud stated that his son exhibited the same developing confidence. Bud claimed that “I tell you he gets a lot more confident. He got a lot more confidence out of the program” (Bud, Site 1). Elle tied the ability for students to think for themselves to the increasing confidence that parents observed “So, what I find is that the kids are very successful at independently thinking” (Elle, Site 2).

**Sense of Community**

Seventeen of the 22 interviewees listed a Sense of Community as a key component for success of students in Place-Based schools. The Sense of Community theme was the third most often mentioned contributor to the success in Place-Based schools, surpassed only by College and Career Preparation and Student Characteristics. A Sense of Community was the third most frequently mentioned concept by parents and educators. This theme and the Real World Applications theme both were mentioned 76 times.

A Sense of Community was observed in the school setting as well as through externships and student relationships with the neighborhood communities. Examples of Sense of Community included supportive relationships among students and staff, the nurturing environment of the school, the essential role of PBE alumni, and contributions to the surrounding communities. Since all three schools in this study draw students from communities beyond their neighborhoods, unique challenges are presented when creating a sense of community among children with diverse cultural, geographical, as well as socio-economic backgrounds. Subjects cited many examples of meaningful student contributions to society.

Supervisor interviews focused on how the sense of community was manifested through teamwork. Recurrent themes portrayed by educators included the sense of community within the
school as well as benefits to the community at large. Parent interviews contained reports of their perceptions as well as their children’s perceptions of Sense of Community. Parents did not seem to have many direct observations of community interactions outside of the school environment. Unlike the other two participant groups (supervisors and educators) in this study, parent comments did not include instances of student alumni returning to the schools. Only one parent spoke of the value that these students brought to the neighborhood communities.

Supervisors. Seven of the nine supervisors reported their observations of the Sense of Community in Place-Based schools. Supervisors cited examples of Sense of Community 31 times (15% of their total codes). This theme was the fourth most often mentioned theme by supervisors. Supervisors had a unique vantage point from which to observe and evaluate teamwork and Sense of Community. Since all the schools included in this study were marine-themed, supervisors had a chance to witness the ability of students to be good shipmates.

Not only did supervisors report instances of their observations of student Sense of Community, but some were able to provide detailed descriptions of their definition of the teamwork that embodied that Sense of Community. All sites had ready access to large bodies of navigable water and all programs included boating curricula. Site 3 was unique in that, in addition to more common powerboats, they had access to a tall ship. One of the tasks aboard the ship was teaching students how to set and furl sails “So, sail training isn’t about teaching kids how to sail. It’s about teaching them things like teamwork, responsibility, [and] confidence” (Mr. Pink, Site 3).

Mr. Blue observed an awareness of students from Site 3 that a sense of responsibility fostered community spirit. The perception that accountability was coupled with community created an atmosphere of pride in a job well done “A sense of you're not just doing it for
yourself, or for your own satisfaction of doing the job right, but you're doing it because you
know that someone else is depending on you to do it right” (Mr. Blue, Site 3). Students were
made aware of the paramount importance of the responsibility that they assume to operate boats
safely.

Mr. Pink offered a perceptive viewpoint about the connection between cooperative spirit
necessary to be a functioning community and the nautical nature of these sites:

Well, we have a saying on the tall ships [a sailing ship with high masts] … that we use
kind of internally when we talk about people being good shipmates and we use it all the
time. There are a number of people here at the [Site 3-affiliated institution] who have
sailed in different vessels in the tall ships a number of years. We have a great pool of
experience and we always talk amongst ourselves when we’re talking about somebody.
It came up a lot when I was hiring crew for [Site 3 tall ship] this winter and we always
talk about people, whether or not they’re good shipmates, and it’s kind of a nebulous
thing. (Mr. Pink, Site 3)

Mr. Cabot echoed Mr. Pink’s remarks about being a good shipmate. These are the types
of soft skills that were desirable in a nautical community and necessary aboard ship. These skills
are perceived to be critical ingredients for successful graduates. He detailed the complementary
role that externships have with Place-Based schools:

Soft skills that people have that make them good to work with, the kind of people you’d
want to have in your team … and these skills can’t be taught in a classroom. But in a lot
of ways, they can be drawn out and strengthened in individuals through participating in
tall ship sailing. I feel like you get some of the same types of experiences in like [sic]
Outward Bound type programs and things like that where you’re drawn out of your
comfort zone and you’re there with a group, all trying to accomplish a goal together … and those are the same. That’s how to solve problems, that’s showing up on time, that’s working together as a team. All these things, that whether it’s driving a boat on an oyster dive, or doing the scuba diving, or working on real life marine science problems, or helping the designer build a boat. All of those things that [Site 3] students are engaged in help them be more successful. (Mr. Cabot, Site 3)

Mr. Cabot further relayed a conversation he had with a Site 3 student. That young lady demonstrated a maturity and awareness of the connection between responsibility, relationships and success when she said:

Well, today I was just out on a boat with all my peers and there were 15 of us, and we were all responsible for each other’s safety. We all had something that we’re supposed to do. We all knew what our job was … and in order for the boat to actually function, we all had to do our job well, and we had to rely on peers whom we would otherwise have no relationship with, because we otherwise don’t think that we have anything in common. And these are skills that are going to make me successful, living in a diverse city in a diverse world. (Mr. Cabot, Site 3)

Mr. Pink offered the perspective that personal safety and the safety of the crew depended on teamwork. He described how typical, but essential, routine tasks aboard ship depended on a sense of common purpose and community “everyone needs to work together to get the sail set. I mean, our mainsail weighs probably close to a ton” (Mr. Pink, Site 3).

Supportive culture was frequently cited as a key ingredient of the Place-Based school. Supervisors observed a number of factors that contributed to the Sense of Community, as evidenced by this remark “So you come to a school like the [Site 2] that’s very supportive. If the
child has a problem, the school steps in. It’s not unlike umbrella parenting, it’s also umbrella schooling” (Butch, Site 2).

The nurturing environment that was created at each of the three sites included in this study was evidenced through the vivid description offered by Butch as he recounted a scene that occurred at the end of the Site 2 school year. Students had a difficult time transitioning back to their neighborhood communities, which did not offer the same sense of inclusion:

We had to organize the faculty and have two or three or four faculty members out on the curb the day after, and for a couple of days after, school ended in June and summer vacation began. In order to prevent the kids … because they kept coming [sic]. They wouldn’t stop. You can’t come today. Go away! Come back in September. (Butch, Site 2)

Butch portrayed this sentiment of belonging to the school community. All three sites reported remarkable rates of alumni returning to them:

Even after they graduate, not all of them obviously, but a good percentage of them, they keep coming back and they stay in touch with each other. It’s a small school. It’s a community. It’s a small community and they like that. (Butch, Site 2)

Mr. Brown indicated that the relationships forged with students from Site 1 had longevity. He spoke to his ability to follow his former students and their careers because they kept in communication with Site 1 teachers:

I think that if a student has a teacher they’ve looked on not only as a teacher, but maybe a mentor. Certainly, the relationship can develop where they want to keep in touch and want to share with us maybe their experiences of what they're doing either in their
academic life or their professional life. That they’ve gone on to higher forms. So, yeah, that’s not uncommon. (Mr. Brown, Site 1)

Students from Site 3, just like those from Site 1 and Site 2, had formed deep relationships and a Sense of Community. It was more the rule, rather than the exception, that they returned to help out to crew on Site 3’s boat. Mr. Blue relayed an anecdote portraying the progress of two of his graduates saying “I can think of two right off the bat that went off to go to SUNY Maritime University and they still come back to volunteer and help out on the ship” (Mr. Blue, Site 3).

Mr. Blonde, from Site 2, explained that the relationships formed between students and teachers were extraordinary. He did not keep direct contact with students, but was able to get updates regarding their progress through a teacher at Site 2:

The reason I can keep up with the students that are no longer working with me, is that they frequently come back to the [Site 2] to talk to the Science teacher and everything, and drop by. So I know that there’s still a strong bond between these kids after they’ve gone off to school and [Site 2]. (Mr. Blonde, Site 2)

Mr. Brown documented the systems in place to ensure that creation of a community-supporting network. He explained that the Site 1 administrator systematically cultivated the structure to create a Sense of Community “She's always got her attendants up looking for possible student-mentor type of connections” (Mr. Brown, Site 1).

The number of interrelationships among the parent, teacher, and supervisor stakeholders of Place-Based schools was striking. A Site 1 supervisor had also been a parent of a student at that school; he said “My son, I don't know if you knew or if [Site 1 administrator] had told you, but my son, he's 36 years old now, he was a graduate of [Site 1]” (Bill, Site 1).
With guidance from supervisors, students were able to make meaningful contributions to their local communities. Mr. White held the Site 1 students he had come to know in high regard. Through the course of studies at Site 1, students were able to become meaningful partners with the maritime community; Mr. White said “I would see the kids going into a variety of positions and I would see them most definitely making a difference in the world in terms of adding to the store of knowledge about the technology of Marine Science” (Site 1). Mr. Blue recounted his firsthand experiences of the positive contributions of Place-Based students “We're benefiting from them being around too, just by virtue of having this very positive energy” (Mr. Blue, Site 3).

Mr. White also saw the reciprocal relationship between students and the global community. He continued to explain that students could pursue their passions and become meaningful members of society. He felt that some of the student population would not be on a positive life choice track if it were not for programs such as Place-Based Schools.

I think these kinds of programs are very, very valuable to society in terms of providing a place for the student who wants more than just the mainstream experience, providing a place where kids can develop options and not forego options ... because you can go to [Site 1] and not give up your opportunity to attend college and university and that kind of thing. (Mr. White, Site 1)

Educators. Seven of the eight educators interviewed considered a Sense of Community an important indicator of success; this was the third most prevalent theme mentioned by educators. Educators from all three sites verbalized the significance of this theme; they spoke about it 31 times (12% of their total codes). Evidence was presented by interviewees that
graduates of Place-Based schools are successful because they value teamwork, supportive school environments, alumni contributions, and contributing to neighborhood communities.

While cooperative educations models did not need to be nautical Place-Based schools, the nature of marine-themed schooling requires a sense of being a good shipmate. The curriculum, by design, fostered student cooperation as explained by a teacher “I think a lot of my coursework involves collaborative work, working together as teams, and working with each other to kind of build a solution. So, there are often long-term projects and the students have to come up with solutions” (Jimmie, Site 3). Jules’ statements supported Jimmie’s observation that students develop into cooperative partners “By the end of the year … they’re instructing other kids on how to do things, how to problem solve within the group and everything” (Jules, Site 1).

Educator Jody described the nurturing environment at Site 1 which supported a Sense of Community. The Site 1 staff created a culture that fostered student success. Jody saw these relationships not only as a precursor to success, but a measure of success in itself, he said:

I think that we have a better success rate over failure rates from our courses than any of the other schools because of the fact that we don’t want the students to fail, because of the fact that we don’t stop pushing them, and because of the fact that we do build rapport with them so that, if nothing else, we can shame them into getting the job done. (Jody, Site 1)

That same supportive environment was reported at Site 2 and Site 3 “Part of having this very warm, caring community is we give our kids lots of chances and we don’t always … we’re not like so super strict about deadlines all the time” (Trudi, Site 2). Winston communicated a similar Sense of Community “So within the school community, you have a group of students that has a teacher or other staff member of the school kind of look out for them” (Winston, Site 3).
The administrator from Site 1 agreed with Jody’s perception that forming relationships with students was imperative. She said:

One of the things that I find really refreshing about being at a school this size is how well the teachers get to know the students and how comfortable the students feel approaching teachers when they have issues whether it’s personal or it’s academic. They feel comfortable talking to these teachers and to myself [sic] and guidance. (Yolanda, Site 1)

The same sort of nurturing relationships were reported at Site 2. The Site 2 administrator stated that there was a solid basis of trust between students and faculty. The Site 2 campus was spread out geographically; students needed to get to their assigned classes independently. This sense of liberty helped create a strong community spirit:

They have a tremendous amount of freedom. And so they have an ability to communicate and to manage their time that is, in many ways, superior to their peers, because they have to get themselves from place to place. Nobody is walking them. Nobody is policing the hallways and that we also really build that kind of independence and interdependence and community. (Trudi, Site 2)

A recurrent and powerful measure of the Sense of Community was evidenced by reports at all three sites included in this study of the high rate of students returning to campus after they had graduated. Ringo noted that students were enthusiastic about sharing their accomplishments “Kids come back to reconnect and report successes. Because when they come in they’re always excited to tell us” (Ringo, Site 1). Jody, also from Site 1, made a similar observation:

Many of our students will come back and they will tell us that even though they may have been unhappy with us while they were here, finding that we just had too high a
standard for them, much different from their home school, that it really did help them.

(Jody, Site 1)

Trudi made a direct connection between these alumni visits and a Sense of Community. She saw it as an indicator of success:

[Our] Environmental Science teacher organized an alumni speaker day where we had something like 30 alumni come back and run panels for our juniors and seniors to talk about the college experience, to talk about the world of work, people who are working … and that was just recent graduates. So we have students who really feel connected to us as a community and I think that’s a success point as well. And I think success is … I mean, it really depends on how you define success and how you compare success.

(Trudi, Site 2)

Winston reported the same phenomenon at Site 3 “We definitely have graduates come back and talk to us. We … currently have two graduates employed here at the school” (Winston, Site 3). He stated that during semester breaks, students not only come back to visit Site 3, but their Sense of Community inspired these students to help out with the current students:

A lot of maritime semesters [instructional period at a maritime college] just ended. And, for instance, last week we had, just in my program, I had four current college students come back and help out with class and help out with what’s going on the waterfront and so forth. So they definitely come back. (Winston, Site 3)

Teachers were aware of the importance of extending the Sense of Community beyond the campus to the local neighborhood. This observation echoed the remarks made by supervisors stakeholders as indicated by Ringo’s statement “So the students are encouraged to go out and
research and talk to other people whether in the building or outside the building for resources [and] ideas” (Ringo, Site 1).

Parents. Three of the five parents interviewed spoke about their perceptions of the value of Sense of Community on them and their children. Parents cited 14 examples of student Sense of Community (17% of their total codes). This was the most often identified of the six themes identified by parents. Parents’ viewpoints were focused on the nurturing environment that had been created. This Sense of Community was manifested by examples of students and staff caring for each other.

A Site 2 parent described her perception of a nurturing, supportive environment that her child experienced:

It very much is a family feeling from my experience. There was a child, that [sic] I didn’t know, who passed away and it felt like I like lost someone from my distant family. You know what I mean? It’s just definitely a better feeling of connection (Elle, Site 2).

That same sense of a nurturing, supportive environment for children was described by a Site 2 parent. She indicated that the Sense of Community extended far beyond the positive benefits of learning “I just know he really likes it there and that they really like him. I just feel overall it has made him a better person” (Vernita, Site 1).

A Site 2 Parent supported that same claim of a Sense of Community “I see family and I see everyone pulling for each other, and if you’re not doing well, there are repercussions” (Elle, Site 2). She emphasized the important role of faculty holding students accountable in developing a tight Sense of Community.

Because all three sites’ populations were drawn from an expanded geographical region, students were in classes with others who were from neighborhoods and communities different
than theirs. A parent commented “I think that’s a really neat part of it, that they meet kids from
tall over from [Site 1 city]” (Vernita, Site 1). Parents reported that whatever differences students
may have felt initially, those differences waned during the time they attended their respective
sites. This Site 1 parent explained “They learn to get along with one another. They help each
other out. They want to be there” (Beatrix, Site 1).

Parents observed that the experiences at Place-Based schools were contrasting to the
experiences in traditional comprehensive high schools. Because of the vast differences in socio-
economic status among the communities that students came from, Site 1 students who were more
affluent had opportunities to support other students who were from the inner city:

I would say that some of her classmates at [traditional] High School have never had to
help out a student in terms of just having something to eat in the morning before they go
to school. Let's say a kid goes to school and there’s no food in the house, so they don’t
have any breakfast to eat. Whereas let's say my daughter, I remember a couple of times,
would take some Granola bars with her and just give them to her classmates because she
knew that they were hungry every morning. (Beatrix, Site 1)

It was clear that there was a reciprocal relationship among the students of varying socio-
economic statuses. While more affluent students were able to provide food and supplies for their
less fortunate classmates, those same classmates were able to provide support in other valuable
ways. Beatrix’s daughter perceived that she:

got a better sense of the care of each other, to take care of each other, to help each other
out when they have a problem. And it could be as little as just having some food to eat in
the morning. And it could be just ‘Hey, I’ll help you. We’ll work this out together. We
can talk on the phone or text in the morning.’ (Beatrix, Site 1)
Vernita was aware of the value for Site 1 students to make connections with the neighboring community. These connections created the sort of school-community bonds that were the basis for academic as well as social success:

It’s just a unique opportunity for them and I think they go out into the community a lot with their projects and they have to speak to the public about their projects, so I think it just gives them a lot more great experience. (Vernita, Site 1)

**Value of Educators**

Sixteen of the 22 interviewees listed the Value of Educators as an essential component for student success in Place-Based schools. The Value of Educators theme was the fifth most often overall mentioned contributor to the success in Place-Based schools; it was rated higher than student Engagement. This theme was ranked as the fifth most frequently mentioned of the six major themes by supervisors identified in this study accounting for 9% of the total supervisor codes. This theme was the fourth most frequently mentioned by educators, making up 12% of the total teacher codes. The Value of Educators was the fourth most frequently mentioned theme by parents, accounting for 16% of the total parent codes.

The Value of Educators was expressed by observations that educators were hard working, dedicated, and caring. In addition to illustrations of dedication, personal interest, and concern, examples of the perceived Value of Educators included appreciation of their professionalism and inquiry-based teaching style. Subjects from all three sites held overwhelmingly positive views of educators and school administrators. In a sampling of the quotes that were chosen for this section, the word *love* appeared 10 times in reference to educators and the school environment. Parent-subjects cited many examples of the positive effects that educators had on the education and nurturing the growth of their children.
Supervisor interviews focused on how the importance of the school administration’s dedication, and skill set that they observed, demonstrated at each site’s faculty. Codes frequently mentioned by educators included their sense of enthusiasm and focus on creativity. Educators often stated that they held themselves to high standards. Parents tended to blend their appreciation of educators with the global acknowledgement of the school and its curriculum; parent comments such as “I love that school” were common. Parents had fewer concrete examples of teacher excellence but were the only cohort that unanimously included them as an essential component of success.

The administration of each site was included as educators in this section because each site was a small close-knit community. The environment allowed the dissolution of the typical boundaries between the teaching faculty and the school administration. Administrators at each site seemed much more hands-on in their interaction with the other educators and students than would be observed at a traditional high school. The Site 1 director was directly involved with the supervisor/mentoring connections for her program. The researcher observed the Site 2 principal interacting with students and faculty a number of times during the school day. The Site 3 principal was observed car-pooling with her staff and students; they all must take a ferry to Site 3.

**Supervisors.** Six of the nine supervisors reported their observations of the Value of Educators in Place-Based schools. Supervisors cited examples of the Value of Educators 19 times (9% of their total codes). This theme was the second least often mentioned theme by this group. At all sites, supervisors coordinated directly with the school administration, educators at those schools, or both, on a number of projects and externships.
Supervisor interviews contained no negative comments about the faculties of any schools involved in this study; interviewees made comments such as “The staff loves [Site 3]” (Mr. Cabot, Site 3), and “Everyone there [Site 1] is really committed to the student success ... there are no slackers there” (Mr. White, Site 1). Even when the interviewer directly asked if there were any improvements interviewees might suggest, the faculty and administration were never mentioned.

All supervisors’ statements that referred to administrators were glowingly positive. Supervisors seemed to greatly value the administrators that they worked with at each school “I think we definitely have to give a shout out to the administration because I don’t know how [Site 1 administrator] gets everything done that she gets done” (Mr. White, Site 1). Mr. Orange made a direct link between the administration’s efforts and the success at Site 1 “I would say she is 100% there for the students and really wants the school and the students to succeed” (Mr. Orange, Site 1).

At Site 1, the administrator was perceived to be a key facilitator for coordinating externships at that site. Site 1 supervisors interacted directly with the Site 1 administrator and commented on her vigor and resourcefulness. Supervisors indicated that the livelihood of the program depended upon the efforts of this administrator and her staff:

Well, I think [Site 1 administrator] is an energetic individual from what I've, you know, [sic] just the short time that I've got a chance to interact with her. She is certainly one that looks for possibilities where students may get involved. Maybe if she’s able to attract a board member or an advisory board member that has an interest, a science interest, in some area. She’s always got her assistants up looking for possible student-mentor type of connections. (Mr. Brown, Site 1)
Mr. Orange shared Mr. Brown’s sentiment; he stated “She wants what’s best for the students, and I think she’s succeeding” (Mr. Orange, Site 1).

Mr. Brown perceived the vital relationship between administrators and supervisors. These connections create uncommon opportunities for students to be in real-world learning environments. Mr. Brown described an upcoming cooperative venture through which students have an opportunity to tour a fishing and seafood processing enterprise, he said:

There may be some opportunities that we may do some joint stuff together. So, they’re going to be coming on a field trip with us. I think she’s kind of [sic] coordinating with her teachers [regarding] a field trip out here to [Site 1 neighboring community] to a commercial oysterman’s facility which we have a very close tie with. (Mr. Brown, Site 1)

Supervisors were aware of the tremendous workload and commitment that site administrators had assumed. The dedication of the entire staff was evident in their efforts directed towards creating opportunities for student success. A Site 3 supervisor observed that there was a high turnover rate of leadership at Site 3 involving three administrators within three years; he said “The reason it’s been hard to keep a great leader at [Site 3] is because it’s such a complicated place, because it’s trying to do so much for such a small school” (Mr. Cabot, Site 3). This same appreciation of focus on supporting the students was evident at all sites as stated by a Site 1 supervisor “The staff, not only teachers, but the other staff there, are very knowledgeable and very helpful” (Mr. Orange, Site 1).

Site 2 evolved from a school that had originally attracted a high-risk student population; many students were in danger of dropping out of school. This supervisor had been affiliated
with Site 2 for a considerable length of time and observed that there were a number of highly
talented educators on the faculty who were effective with this unique group:

We had so many special needs children and we were blessed, we had a couple of really
good Special Ed teachers, and a good department, and we built a strong department … so
that we tried hard to meet those young people’s needs, academically as well as socially.

(Butch, Site 2)

Teaching style was often mentioned as an ingredient contributing to success. All sites
had a heavy emphasis on student involvement in educational projects supervised by the faculty;
Mr. Brown indicated:

I know that when students are involved in projects, either a science project or an
independent study project, I know that the faculty, depending upon where that student’s
interest lies, I know they are very supportive of working with that student, maybe on a
one-on-one basis. (Site 1)

Supervisors reported that teachers allowed students to learn from their mistakes in their
problem solving process. Rather than being teacher-directed, students were encouraged to
conduct their own investigations. A Site 1 supervisor remarked that students developed their
own confidence in coming up with creative solutions “Teachers, they give the kids enough
leeway and space to try and come up with their own methods … and even though they may be
crazy, will just try it out, see if it works, or doesn’t work” (Bill, Site 1). That same sense of
allowing for healthy risk taking extended to the classroom beyond the school walls to the open
water. Mr. Cabot spoke about encouraging students to take on responsibility, which supported
their boating curriculum. Supervisors connected to Site 3 recognized that the faculty there
supported exercises that created a bond of trust between staff and students:
It takes some teachers who are willing to, and you know this is as a classroom teacher, that when kids are taking a little bit of risk is when they learn more. And so, it takes a teacher who’s willing to provide an environment that allows for some risks, but yet still safe … and a boat does that better than anything. A boat is such an amazing place to take risks, but with a great educator and great captain, to still be safe. (Mr. Cabot, Site 3)

Supervisors identified specific teacher characteristics that supported student learning and subsequently student success. These desirable teacher traits included a depth of knowledge that was universally present in classroom teachers as well as the faculty who supervised water related activities:

I know the captain of the boat, [Site 1 Captain], he came out and was introducing us to the plans for the new boat, the new [Site 1] boat. And his knowledge of boats and what's going to be the best working classroom was very impressive. (Mr. Orange, Site 1)

Supervisors made a careful note of the positive attitude and caring nature of teachers at all three sites. This nurturing environment was directly linked to supporting student success “Well I guess I think it's just the teachers, their attitude toward their students in fostering a good education there” (Bill, Site 1). Butch from Site 2 postulated that the climate even had an effect on state mandated assessment:

It’s such a nice warm family and we’ve got all sorts of resources where we’re helping kids all the time and the teachers are hovering over them and helping them, and helping them, and so forth, and so on. Now the student is successful and maybe even does better on some level of standardized tests. (Butch, Site 2)
Butch went so far as to theorize that teachers were pivotal in creating student success. He recognized the essential role educators had in shaping young people in a way that they became functional, contributing members of society:

Well, I guess the question is success to the [Site 2] faculty, now I can’t speak for everyone, but historically, success to a [Site 2] faculty member means you know the kid, you know all your students as individuals in September and you and your class got them to a better place in June. And as long as you could say that, in any way possible; socially, emotionally, just get the kid to a better place as a human being. (Butch, Site 3)

Educators. Six of the eight educators interviewed considered the contributions of teachers to be an important factor supporting student success; this was the fourth most prevalent theme mentioned by educators. Educators from all three sites verbalized the significance of this theme; they spoke about it 29 times (12% of their total codes). Evidence was presented by interviewees that Place-Based schools are successful in spite of the lack of focus on standardized testing. Educators put much more emphasis on being interesting and creative; students found teacher styles in these schools engaging. Ringo’s sentiment “I stay in my school because I love where I work” (Site 1), typifies the attitude of all educators interviewed for this study.

The Site 1 administrator immediately credited her staff for the culture of success that permeated her school. That administrator stated that Site 1 is often lauded for the wonderful work they do with kids; she shared “Every time that people tell me my school is so nice, or I’m doing such a great job, I’m like ‘No, you don’t get it. The people that are working with me are doing some fabulous jobs’” (Yolanda, Site 1). An atmosphere of mutual respect and admiration was evident at Site 1, a teacher there stated “All good schools start with good leadership” (Ringo,
Ringo clearly acknowledged the role of his director in sustaining the energy and inspiring her faculty to deliver a Place-Based curriculum in such an effective manner.

Yolanda was very aware of the need to establish an exceptional climate in order for PBE to flourish. She had observed teacher burn out at traditional schools when she had been a classroom teacher; she added “When I was teaching at a regular comprehensive high school, after about five years, teachers start to lose some steam” (Yolanda, Site 1). Every interviewee that mentioned teachers, administrators, or any other staff member, cited examples of their high energy and dedication.

Educators demanded the best from their students in terms of excellence in scholarship as well as integrity issues, such as meeting commitments. Site 1 faculty members exemplified a high expectations, high nurture philosophy that proved extraordinarily effective with students:

One of the things that we have always emphasized with them is a very high standard. We hold them to deadlines. We hold them to quality that we’re looking for and many times it requires them to train themselves to find out what’s wrong, to fix it, to revise, to talk to the teacher, which is something that most of them don’t like to do. We have a lot more interaction with them, I think, than the other schools do and it requires them to face up to what the problem is and to find out what the problem is, and to fix it, and that’s a really good skill when it comes to going out into the world, whether it’s college or whether it’s business. (Jody, Site 1)

Jody spotlighted the long-term value of developing desirable work habits for whatever post-graduate pursuits students may undertake. The schools included in this study shared a quality of an engaging curriculum. Ringo stated that educators were inspired to excel and had the flexibility to make lessons stimulating; he added “We have a good staff … We have the freedom
to make classes exciting” (Ringo, Site 1). Ringo further stated that the initiative to be creative is supported by his administrator who disregarded the prevalent obsession with performance on high stakes standardized testing.

Jules illustrated a striking difference between Site 1 and many traditional schools. Interviewees indicated that having longer instruction periods facilitated Place-Based learning. Teachers were afforded the time to develop place related activities that might have taken more time than traditional textbook activities. Interviewees felt that it was necessary for students to explore their curriculum thoroughly:

If a teacher is coming into an issue halfway through the class they don’t look at the clock and say “Oh my God, I only got five minutes left” they look at the clock and they go ‘Oh wow, I have 55 minutes left; I can really dive into this a little more in depth’”. (Jules, Site 1)

That enthusiasm for teaching and guiding students through rich learning experiences ignited a spirit of excitement. Students at all sites attended marine-themed schools by choice; they had an interest in the nautical subject matter that is shared by their educators. Even if students have not been performing well academically in the past, their success at a Place-Based school is supported. Jody stated “They [educators] will go the extra mile and there are many times that a student will come in whose maybe their grades haven’t been wonderful in their middle school. We try to pull in students first by interest” (Site 1).

The professional attitude among educators was demonstrated by their commitment to effective communication. Educators clearly supported each other in developing not only cooperative lessons, but in finding creative solutions to any student issues that might arise:
We are all experienced teachers, and if we are not experienced teachers and we’re first or second year teachers, we’re willing to listen to the experienced teachers and come up with strategies. We do a lot of talking back and forth with each other and a lot of sharing of strategies and answering questions. And gee, this kid did this to me … ‘Well, did you try this? … No, let me try that today and I’ll get back to you and see how it works.’ kind of thing. (Jody, Site 1)

Educators at Site 1 seemed to address problems as collaborative colleagues. That same cooperative spirit was evident in their interactions with students. When students are in a Place-Based real-world environment, there is no answer key. Educators are not expected to have all the answers and will refer students to an expert in the field that a particular student may be interested in:

Whatever we find that they require one of us has an expertise in that. So, if, for example, one of the students decides that they would like to do a research project when they get in to their senior year, in the [Site 1 College Experience Program], they want to do a research project that requires they use instrumentation. The teacher who’s teaching the class doesn’t know the instrumentation, but immediately sends the students to the instrumentation teacher, to the one who is in charge of the instrumentation, and he kind of takes the kid under his wing and becomes the mentor for that project. (Jody, Site 1)

Site 2 was fortunate to have a highly qualified staff as well; the Site 2 principal remarked “A lot of our teachers have labs that they work with so that our students get placed in like research labs, either at [University X] or University of [City], at the hospital” (Trudi, Site 2). Educators at all three sites demonstrated their strong commitment to creating successful experiences for their students.
Ringo explained that Place-Based educators fed off the energy generated by adapting to changes in their environment. They didn’t feel locked into a rigid, potentially ineffective curriculum. Ringo described a culture focusing on:

- a desire to get new and innovative. So, our school is not afraid of change. So, if we think there’s something new or something bigger or better that’s come along, you know, we’re usually readily adaptable. I mean our programming is pretty good. Our teachers are excellent. We got a lot of college professors that are on the staff, or retired ones—we have a good quality staff. (Ringo, Site 1)

Ringo described an almost magical climate that enabled a melding of creative, highly qualified educators in an innovative engaging educational setting. Trudi portrayed a similar environment at Site 2 in which educators crafted challenging, meaningful, and realistic learning situations. She gave an example “Same thing with sailing. There are no adults in charge of that. The teachers have set it up so students have an opportunity to learn” (Trudi, Site 2). These are some of the powerful learning experiences that parents referred to as well in their vibrant reports in their interviews.

Success at these Place-Based Schools was certainly dependent upon the intimate connections with resources beyond the school walls. Educators skillfully created close relationships with expert supervisors in related trades. The Site 2 principal clarified the duties of her staff, she stated “all of our ASTE teachers need to maintain industry contact, whether that is people working in the aquaculture industry or people in the marine trades or so there are those connections that our students are making” (Trudi, Site 2). These industry connections were paramount at all sites. Trudi elaborated that the necessary communication existed within the school as well as connections with supervisors “Our teachers do as much cross curricular
planning as possible and we’d like to do more of that, but it’s challenging” (Trudi, Site 2). Trudi appreciated the crucial importance that her greatly accomplished staff played in expediting learning:

It’s teacher facilitative learning. There is plenty of science and lecture and settings. You can set up for success and teaching them the skill that they need, but then it allows for our students to do the real hands-on research. We have a really talented teaching staff that allows our students to have that freedom. (Trudi, Site 2)

Every site appeared to be a tightly knit caring community. Not only did educators interact effectively with each other, they successfully established rapport with students:

One of the things that I find really refreshing about being at a school this size is how well the teachers get to know the students and how comfortable the students feel approaching teachers when they have issues whether it’s personal or it’s academic. They feel comfortable talking to these teachers and to myself and guidance. (Yolanda, Site 1)

The effort put in by the staff at every school was extraordinary in light of the demographics of their student populations. An educator at Site 3 explained “As a teacher, that’s my struggle to find a way to motivate those kids that are, they’re [marginal]” (Winston, Site 3). Winston’s point is especially poignant because the accomplishments described in interviews would be impressive for any community. The principal of Site 2 encapsulated this powerful Sense of Community bonding faculty at all three sites:

People in the district will say to me ‘Hey, you got any openings?’ And I’m like ‘You got to kill someone off because nobody leaves.’ It’s a great place … I could go on about the things that make us successful. (Trudi, Site 2)
Parents. All five parents interviewed spoke about their perceptions of the Value of Educators’ contributions to the success of their children. Parents cited 13 examples of the Value of Educators (16% of their total codes). For parents, this was tied for the third most often identified of the six themes described in this study. Parents’ viewpoints focused on the dedication and accommodations that educators made so that their children would be successful.

Parent comments were consistently complementary about both the schools studied and the staff of those schools. Most parent interviewees were less specific than supervisors, or educators, in their praise and chose to make general statements of commendation such as “I love that school” (Beatrix, Site 1) and “I've loved the teachers, loved everything about it” (Vernita, Site 1). Elle concurred with this globally positive viewpoint “I love the staff. I love the location. I love everything” (Elle, Site 2).

A supervisor from Site 1 was also a parent at that school. He added his unique perspective of how educators interact to create meaningful real-world projects with students. He explained a boat building project on which his son worked “He built the half hulls, you know ship models … seeing with him the experience that he had and the teachers there are just top-notch” (Bill, Site 1). Vernita described a similar boat building experience her son undertook which Site 1 educators supported:

He loves doing it. It's been so great … we spend the summers on the Cape, and so he found a former wood shop teacher up there who had plans for this boat and then he just approached the [Site 1] teachers to see if he could build it, and they said ‘Sure!’ (Vernita, Site 1)
Even though Vernita’s son proposed a project that was beyond what they were typically comfortable with, Site 1 educators stretched to accommodate this real-world experience because of the tremendous meaning and value it had for that particular student. These hands-on experiences were the hallmark of the Place-Based schools in this study. Educators were committed to designing projects that students valued. Students were allowed to learn from their mistakes. Bud related his account of how worthwhile this approach was for his son:

I think that because it’s very much a hands-on project, I get the sense that kids have to do a lot of stuff and the teachers in kind of both classes, the classroom staff and the tech classes, where they’ll let the kids make mistakes. You know, if they can’t figure stuff out, I think it’s very much about kids learning stuff on their own. So for him, it was good because it kind of put him in a spot where it’s like ‘Hey, you got to kind of do this stuff on your own and you got to figure stuff out for yourself. (Bud, Site 1)

Vernita noted her high regard for Site 1 was due to the nurturing consideration for their children by extremely competent professionals. She recounted her experience when she contacted her son’s teachers “When I’ve met the teachers I’ve just loved the teachers that they’ve had. They seem really interested in the kids. They seem [to be] highly qualified teachers” (Vernita, Site 1). There was a common perception that these educators were extraordinarily dedicated. Elle said “There are many teachers that put [in] endless hours” (Site 2).

Matching the tone of interviews with educators, parents perceived that there was a spirit of collegiality at these Place-Based schools. Beatrix tied this collegiality to supporting the creation of real-world experiences “Everyone wants to be there. They all work on problems together. And they're all working it out together. So, I think they get a real-world education”
(Beatrix, Site 1). Elle from Site 2 refers to that same supportive environment that existed at her son’s school. She referred to the comfortable feeling that permits students’ referring to their teachers by their first names:

Part of that family feeling, the connection, the first name things, the lessons they learned, they come out of the school with more self-confidence, being able to communicate better and they know that—teachers will just take time to talk to my daughter without being prompted. They are asking my daughter what she’s going to do. Even teachers that she had freshman or sophomore year will sit down with her and say ‘Well, what are you doing? What schools are you looking at?’ Like, ‘What’s going on?’ (Elle, Site 2)

Elle from Site 2 made a direct link between teaching at Site 2 and student success. She perceived that the real-world Place-Based experiences at her son’s school supported evaluative thinking and superior communication skills:

On the waterfront, I’ve had more than one teacher, so they go out on the water and then they would come back and evaluate what they did right, what they did wrong, what could they do differently to be more successful. It’s not just ‘All right, you’ve got an A for being on the waterfront, or a B.’ It’s making the kids, say like even the successful kids, ‘Why were you successful?’ So, I think that’s another example of the breakdown. I think there’s better communication. (Elle, Site 2)

Elle added her viewpoint about the systemic teacher connectedness. She believed that teachers found creative solutions which supported student success “Because of the teacher involvement, because they’re taught from the very beginning to think it out, I think those things make them all more successful in problem solving” (Elle, Site 2). Elle continued to make a strong connection between problem solving ability and her son’s long-term success.
Real World Connections

The theme of Real World Connections was the third most often mentioned theme contributing to the success in Place-Based schools by supervisors (42 occurrences) and was frequently cited as an important factor of success by parents, but was the second least prevalent of the six major themes noted by educators. Every supervisor spoke to the importance of Real World Connections. The operational definition of Real World Connections for this study includes the following descriptors: real world applications, experiences, problem solving, projects, and the consequences of those connections.

Supervisors. Supervisors noted that students were invested in their curriculum through real world design and production ventures; one supervisor said “They have the boat race where the students build and try the boat. The successes and the failures of building a boat, making it faster, making it safe, sleek” (Mr. Orange, Site 1). Students are exposed to opportunities rarely available in traditional schools. A Site 3 supervisor claimed “Students that we get from [Site 3], that are coming to the Seaport Museum are very heavily involved with our vessel operations, and ship maintenance, and sailing programs” (Mr. Blue, Site 3). Mr. Blue further delineated a clear link between real world activities and developing the confidence and responsibility necessary to excel; he stated that they “start these kids so young in direct leadership roles and not just taking classes aboard the ship, like some other tall ships do, but they're actually operating the ship; they are the crew” (Site 3).

Real world applications in Place-Based schools embed traditional subjects within their curriculum. Students are supervised at off campus sites in environments where there is an anchor for learning essential skills. A supervisor from Site 3 noted the connection between physics content and its application for students working on a marine vessel:
We teach them the skills they need to work on and to maintain the vessel. We teach them things like navigation. We teach them about the physics of the different blocks and pulleys and tackle systems that we use. So, there are components of math, physics. (Mr. Pink, Site 3)

Other activities involved the students’ developing innovative techniques to address real world energy issues. A Site 1 Supervisor remarked “these kids are inventing batteries made out of seaweed and there’s just these incredible minds coming out of the school” (Mr. White, Site 1). Marine life husbandry and management had direct applications to interest in the food industries. Bill shared his impression of the quality of Site 1 student production. He said “They raised the scallops out there and then they harvested them, brought them in, they shucked them. As I said, under sanitary conditions” (Bill, Site 1). Issues that are closely related to safeguarding food supplies became a focal point, students demonstrated that they “learn about what's going on in terms of the oyster growing out of the [Site 1 body of water] and some of the things that they have to be aware of in terms of harvest ability of the crop. You know, depending on water quality” (Mr. Brown, Site 1).

Closely tied to seafood monitoring and production are concerns about pollution: Mr. Orange stated “they understand the pollutants, what pollutes the water, how chemicals would affect the water, and things of that nature” (Site 1). Supervisor experiences focused on protecting clean water that occurred in natural surroundings:

Whether it’s in the water quality lab or in the stream monitoring eels as they migrate or setting up the experiments to see how to capture, how many eels that are going through, it’s hands-on. It’s real life experience that they wouldn’t get in a classroom. (Mr. Orange, Site 1)
Restoration of the natural habitat is a subject that supervisors valued and they shared this passion with students. These projects often presented leadership opportunities for students that may have substantial impact for their future:

They have responsibility for leading the region’s largest ecosystem restoration project and participating directly as part of their school work, as part of learning skills that will help make them job and college ready, actually able to participate in and often lead. (Mr. Cabot, Site 3)

Opportunities for students to be held accountable with real world consequences are part of the learning experience. When students were given adult responsibilities in a marine-themed environment, authentic ramifications follow; this is especially true aboard a boat. A Site 3 supervisor stated that consequences “could be potentially dire for every single person aboard” (Mr. Pink, Site 3).

**Educators.** Three of the eight educators interviewed illustrated specific connections between real world applications and student success. An educator from Site 2 noted the relationship between solving real problems on a marine vessel and students’ perseverance in addressing those challenges. Each Place-Based site was unique; real world experiences were, by nature, unpredictable. That same Site 2 educator cited an example in which students develop their problem solving skills because they have actual situations which required them to repair, fix, or troubleshoot issues that may occur with equipment and gear:

We try and bring it home to the kids as much as possible, that there’s reality. You can’t escape reality. You do something and then there’s either success or there’s failure and if it breaks and falls down, then you pick up the pieces, you put it back together again, and you keep on trucking and if it fails, well then you pull it back up together. You fix it
again and you keep on trucking. And if it fails again, well you keep on fixing it. To sort of just give them that reality thing. (Butch, Site 2)

Jimmie (Site 3) suggested the value of linking creative problem solving to the real world “They can see the work that’s being done at the docks. So, they see the physical work that’s being done. And their contribution would be to create an underwater vehicle that can monitor these things.” Trudi further highlighted the distinction between assignments that may seem disconnected from student reality to the purposeful task imbedded in Place-Based curricula:

Our students can use an Excel spreadsheet to manage data and publish reports that I can’t do. Our Biology students, when they do their experiments, they have to write up their results and show them with graphs and charts and all sorts of stuff. So, it’s not like they’re taking a computer class and learning how to use Excel with random data. They’re really using it for real research, which is, as an educator you know, when it’s about something you’re really involved doing and in doing it becomes really part of your long-term memory and not just something you’ve learned for a test. (Site 2)

Jimmie was invested in supporting inquiry learning in a Place-Based setting. He remarked:

Is there a way for us to use different types of [remote robotic] lights? Do different colors change the amount of what we can see underwater when there are so many particles in the water? Does the angle of the light change what we can see? Is there a way to maybe see with spectrums of light that we can’t see, like ultraviolet light and use cameras that are ultraviolet cameras and just see those images? (Site 3)

An administrator at Site 3, Vincent, proposed the possibility of focusing persuasive writing in Language Arts class to complement and support the curriculum that was more math and science centered; he said “They could be writing letters to advocate for the work that they’re
doing in CTE. Just like bringing both the academic and the CTE together and writing a curriculum that has that possibility of working together” (Site 3)

**Parents.** All parents noted physical attributes of the school that tied directly to the real world, but few went on to note the impact of those attributes. All three sites had a significant portion of their curriculum presented on *floating classrooms*. Many parents observed that much of the curriculum was delivered in boats on the open water, or that students were constructing boats. One Site 1 parent commented “There’s actually even a boat that’s a classroom and they go out on that” (O-Ren, Site 1). Another Site 1 parent remarked about the curriculum that was delivered on a vessel “In Biology, they go out in a boat once a week. Throughout all the different classes, they go out in a boat a lot” (Vernita, Site 1). Vernita went on to state the significance of delivering instruction in physics, chemistry, and biology outside the traditional classroom “using real life experiments right there” (Site 1).

The curriculum at each site included boat building and maintenance. Parents acknowledged the benefit of doing so, one remarked “amazing experiences of building a 20-foot boat or even those cocktail boats that they raced at the end of the year” (Vernita, Site 1). Parents were impressed with the school program and the accomplishments of their children, a Site 1 dad stated the students “actually built a small, seven-foot wooden racing boat” (Bud, Site 1). In addition to building and operating sea-worthy vessels, students were instructed in their maintenance and repair by “working on engines that eventually will go into boats or something” (Beatrix, Site 1).

Parents, as well as other stakeholders, appreciated the significant learning opportunity when there is no answer key provided for student projects. A Site 1 mother stated “It unfortunately didn’t work out extremely well for my son. The project he chose to do, didn’t
work the way he was hoping it worked” (Vernita, Site 1). Vernita stated that her son became aware of the natural consequences of his failed project.

For these students, learning happened in authentic contexts. They learned science and math by practical application of their content knowledge in the field, whether that was on a research vessel, fishing boat, estuary or dock. The learning environment extended beyond the traditional definition of a traditional brick-and-mortar classroom. Supervisors, teachers, and parents described *classroom* as any place, including the field, that students learning takes place:

They may get a better feel of their subject by the hands-on type of exposure that that school can provide. I understand that they might not have got, say just by a strict classroom setting you know, learning out of a book or on a blackboard. (Mr. Brown, Site 1)

**Engagement**

The theme of Engagement was the least mentioned theme contributing to the success in Place-Based schools. The operational definition of Engagement was based upon interviewee observation of student commitment to school related projects and programs. Engagement was identified by stakeholders as student focus on in their academic studies, interest in their school and off site projects and their externships. Engagement was mentioned 29 times during interviews. This theme was included here because of the robust quality and passion filled examples offered by supervisors (5% of the total codes), educators (4% of the total codes), and parents (11%of the total codes).

One example of student Engagement was involvement in restoration of the local ecosystem undertaken as a site project. While Engagement was listed the fewest times of the six major themes identified in this study (29 coded responses out of 537), the interviewees who did
address Engagement provided passionate demonstrations of Engagement. This passion was often mentioned by parents involved in the interviews.

**Supervisors.** Six of the nine supervisors reported their observations of student Engagement. Supervisors cited examples of student Engagement 11 times. At least one supervisor from each site spoke to the importance of Engagement. Mr. Cabot relayed a powerful example of the sort of Engagement that was prevalent in Place-Based schools. Since the schools in this study had large percentages of low SES students, achieving academic Engagement was quite often a challenge. He spoke directly to the type of Engagement that attracts high school students:

> Every city is next to a massively degraded ecosystem … and in all those cities there’s some small portion of society, normally a small group of rich white people, trying to restore that ecosystem … and then there’s [sic] hundreds of people trying to figure out how to engage high school kids … and it’s just that linking those two together, is just so exciting, because what if we can get those disengaged kids excited about their education because they’re given a responsibility and they’re learning job skills restoring their ecosystem. (Mr. Cabot, Site 3)

Mr. Blue concurred with the assertion that students become engaged in the types of projects and programs that they are experiencing. He perceived this not only as a predictor of success, but a measure of success as well; he stated “owning their experience there and doing it in their off time, their extracurricular time. Just trying to see this thing happen and taking pride and ownership in it, and I think that’s a good measure of success” (Site 3).

There appeared to be a reciprocal relationship between the supervisors and the students being supervised in that the supervisors reported that the vibrant students in their care energized
them. Mr. White indicated that he was inspired by the sense of student Engagement to foster his relationship with this Place-Based school “part of the reason I’m so supportive of (Site 1) is that these kids are so passionate about the work and they’re so engaged in it and like I say, it’s legitimate, genuine interest” (Site 1).

A supervisor at the same site as Mr. White further discussed the importance of the director of that site in fostering the Engagement of students. That supervisor stated “She is certainly one that looks for possibilities where students may get involved” (Mr. Brown, Site 1). This same Place-Based school commitment was also evident at other sites. Curriculum was developed to meet the needs of a specialized Place-Based student body. Butch said “if the kids didn’t like it, we tried to switch gears and figure out something that they did like so that they would get the same information, the same content and so forth, but in a different way, so that they would respond and come” (Site 2).

The diversity of mediums through which students were engaged allowed these Place-Based schools the ability to connect with their students even if students had diverse interests. Some students were engaged through design and construction of seaworthy vessels. Supervisors reported a high degree of Engagement when the students had completed their nautical projects; Bill remarked “To see these kids, they're so proud of what they built and they take it home with them” (Site 1).

Mr. Cabot realized that one of the best ways to restore an ecosystem was by engaging young people in it. Mr. Cabot described an ambitious project at Site 3 that had certainly immersed the students there. Mr. Cabot explained this multi-year project to restore the ecosystem that surrounds Site 3 “If kids are feeling more valuable and feeling more important,
then it’s easier to teach and train them” (Site 3). Mr. Cabot described the tremendous value to students and the satisfaction and sense of success they received from participating in this project. Connections between Place-Based school curricula and college success were evident. Since many of these students were from the low SES inner city, the pathway to post-secondary learning opportunities might have been challenging. Meaningful projects had a perceived near-term as well as long-term benefit by engaging students. Mr. Cabot stated:

Whether it’s driving a boat on an oyster dive, or doing the scuba diving, or working on real life marine science problems, or helping the designer build a boat. All of those things that [Site 3] students are engaged in help them be more successful at staying in college and solving the kinds of problems that come to you. (Site 3)

**Educators.** Three of the eight educators considered student Engagement an important indicator of success; they listed nine occurrences (4% of their total codes). All three of these educators who spoke about Engagement were from Site 1. A teacher at Site 1 explained the culture of the school that supported a curriculum that was engaging to students. He indicated that the past two directors at Site 1 set the climate of creativity, free from the restrictions of meeting the standards of state mandated testing, he stated that the director “really pushed us … to be creative and don’t worry so much about standardized test scores, but if you think something is cool, engaging, and pertinent, then add that to your lessons” (Ringo, Site 1).

Ringo further described the culture in which educators are given leeway within the state mandated common core standards to create curriculum that will engage their students. He explained “We have the freedom to make classes exciting. So, you know, not every day is going to be an explosion, but you know if you do enough of cool stuff every once in a while, it keeps them hooked” (Ringo, Site 1). Site 1’s director allowed the staff flexibility to invent lessons that
captivate the attention of their students. A Site 1 teacher claimed “we’re not driven to teach to the test; we’re driven to be creative and fun and engaging and make it challenging” (Ringo, Site 1). Jody echoed Ringo’s sentiments; he declared “I think the fact that they are interested in the curriculum is what gets their attention to come to the school in the first place” (Site 1).

Ringo remarked that part of the success with Place-Based projects was that students were given freedom in creating the parameters of their projects and the opportunity to set up a meaningful and productive timeframe within which to complete their tasks. Ringo said:

The kids choose their own project so they’re invested in them. It’s not just a project that takes a couple of weeks. These are projects that kids start at the end of August or September and they have to carry through to the science fairs—they’re in January. And then if they’re good they carry them further. (Site 1)

The director of Site 1 remarked about the incredible Engagement that was obvious in classrooms throughout her school. “It’s like that literally almost every day, which I consistently and am really pleased to see and I really have a hard time leaving the classroom when I see it because it’s a neat feeling to be a part of that” (Yolanda, Site 1).

Parents. All five parents interviewed spoke about their perceptions of their children being engaged at the sites being studied. Parents cited nine examples of student Engagement (11% of their total codes) they observed, this was the smallest number of the six major themes identified in this study. Vernita voiced a sentiment universally shared among the parents “They’ve liked school. They're enthusiastic about school” (Site 1).

Parents expressed the idea that these Place-Based schools nurtured the interests that their children brought with them. Many parents made similar observations of the Engagement their children demonstrated. One parent commented on their son’s interest in fishing “He has always
sort of shown an interest in the ocean in terms of really fishing. He’s kind of always wanted to fish and been a bit of a fisherman” (O-Ren, Site 1). Another parent spoke about her son’s interest in vessel construction “He loves doing it. It's been so great.” (Vernita, Site 1).

Elle suggested that students at Site 2 were apt to be engaged because of the supportive environment created there through which students are held to high standards. She indicated that the Place-Based environment is one in which students are “held accountable more for their thoughts and they’re called upon more to participate” (Elle, Site 2).

Summary

Data collected from multiple sources (supervisors, educators, parents, documents, websites, and site visits) and methods (interviews, internet searches, website exploration, document analysis, and follow-up clarifying discussions) were categorized to determine essential features of success. Based on the organization of data codes, six theme clusters emerged concerning perceptions about describing, identifying, and measuring success of PBE students.

College and Career Preparation was clearly very important to stakeholders interviewed during the study. This theme was the most often cited by all stakeholders. Stakeholders indicated that the PBE curriculum prepared students for either post-secondary educational or employment opportunities.

Student Characteristics described in the study included intrinsic Student Characteristics such as perseverance and motivation, and extrinsic Student Characteristics such as socioeconomic and demographic status. The environment of these Place-Based schools nurtured Student Characteristics that supported successful completion of the PBE curriculum. Students at all three sites in this study demonstrated that whatever characteristics students possessed when
they enrolled at these schools, those students became highly motivated and engaged in the curriculum both at school and in their off-site externships.

A Sense of Community was evidenced in student-to-student relationships, teacher relationships with students, and the PBE community’s interaction with the respective local communities. The combination of a Sense of Community with a dedicated teaching staff and nurturing administration created an environment in which students who, might be otherwise at risk, became very highly successful.

All interviewees held educators in high regard; their comments were coded under the Value of Teachers theme. This researcher’s visits to all three sites selected for this study confirmed the stakeholder impression the educators were enthusiastic about being their involvement with a Place-Based school. Educators were responsible for forming and maintaining connections with the surrounding communities to form successful connections and secure externships opportunities for their students. The parents group of participants were quick to acknowledge the nurturing school environment and the positive effect that environment had on their children.

Allied with the sense of purpose for students in their focus on College and Career Preparation, the Real World marine theme supported students with a curriculum that allowed them to investigate and gain experience with topics that were engaging to them as well as valuable to them for career or college preparation. All schools were successful in creating real world education focused on college and career planning.

This researcher was impressed by the high degree of engagement directly observed as well as the rich descriptions given by interviewees. At all site visits students appeared to be engrossed in the PBE curriculum. This sustained focus on academics contributed to the
successful completion of the curriculum and high graduation rates. Student engagement was reported by participants in both in school classwork and projects and as well as off-site activities and externships.

These themes directly relate to the study’s research questions. Success definitions were articulated by participants in four themes identified in this study, the Value of Teachers and Real World Applications were contributing factors to success rather than methods of defining it. All themes identified in this study were valuable in assessing and supporting student success. All stakeholders clearly expressed indicators of success for Place-Based students and graduates in their interviews as well as during the researcher’s site visits.

Within these themes were other factors contributing to success that fell under the overarching themes. Both parents and educators saw the focus on a problem solving oriented curriculum was essential for success. Supervisors and parents cited having access to specialized equipment to be an important contributor to the achievements that the students had accomplished. Parents mentioned the uniqueness of the Placed Based school program as a noteworthy factor; some parents made specific note that colleges were intrigued by the uniqueness of these Place-Based schools. Educators cited the inquiry-based curriculum as an important tool supporting accomplishments of students. Supervisors felt that student access to experts in the field was essential for success.

One stakeholder, a supervisor, made the insightful point that all stakeholders were contributing to success because in a PBE system they were able to make a difference in young people’s lives. Supervisors loved Place-Based schools, teachers loved Place-Based schools, parents loved Place-Based schools, and especially, students loved Place-Based schools.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

A multi-case qualitative study was conducted in order to examine the perceptions of the impact of Place-Based Education (PBE) on success of students. Twenty-two stakeholders at three Place-Based schools were interviewed during the course of this study; the stakeholders were in one or more of the following groups: educators, supervisors, or parents. All stakeholders were familiar with Place-Based schools and Place-Based students; no students were interviewed during the study.

The typical American school classroom follows a Common Core curriculum. This curriculum is often delivered without any connection to students’ real-life experiences (Ellner, 2015). The place in which the school is located is not used to support student learning. Low-SES urban students who struggle may not have a framework within which to make sense of the jumble of concepts that assault them. Therefore, underrepresented children in low socio-economic urban communities are often under-educated. The achievement gap between these children and our best-educated children has been growing at an alarming rate. The average graduation rate for urban students in the United States was a shockingly low 67.7% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016).

This study sought to examine the impact of Place-Based curricula and success (e.g., improved academic performance or other emergent alternative measures). Connections between meaningful interesting subject matter in local settings with students’ success, including, but not limited to, academic achievement were explored. Stakeholders participated in semi-structured interviews that lasted typically for approximately a half-hour; all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher used a code-recode process to identify patterns within each interview. Each group’s responses (educators, stakeholders, and parents) were examined to find
recurrent patterns within that group. The final step was to triangulate which patterns recurred between pairs of groups or among all three groups along with observations and supporting documents. The researcher then paired those recurring patterns with other measures of success. Those measures of success were triangulated with standard measures of success such as high school graduation rates and SAT performance in comparable urban schools.

The themes and patterns from interviews with supervisors, educators, and parents were triangulated with each other as well as through document analysis. Triangulation was achieved through sources including educators, parents, supervisors, documents, online websites, and government statistics. The researcher was further able to triangulate the data by direct observation of each site.

The purpose of the study was to address the following research questions:

1. How is student success defined by supervisors, educators, and parents in Place-Based schools?

2. How is student success assessed by supervisors, educators, and parents in Place-Based schools?

3. How do supervisors, educators, and parents perceive success of students and graduates of Place-Based schools?

**Major Findings**

There were six recurrent themes focusing on success that emerged from data gathered during this study. Stakeholders indicated that there were strong connections between success and Place-Based Education. This success was evidenced by acceptance into post secondary educational institutions, entry into careers that were aligned with the theme of the school, development of Student Characteristics associated with success, and creation of a strong sense of
community. The value of educators, participation in real world experiences, and engagement with the Place-Based curriculum were recurrent themes listed by interviewees as contributing factors to achieving that success. Stakeholder perception of success and indicators of success for each of these themes was defined and assessed by stakeholders.

In this chapter, each theme identified in this study is presented and aligned with current relevant research. An examination of how stakeholders defined that measure of success and assessed it is included. Stakeholder perceptions of each theme is described as well.

**College and Career: Post Graduation Pathways**

**Defined**

This study’s first research question sought to define success for Place-Based students. Stakeholders considered Place-Based students successful if they performed well academically; a culminating activity for a successful academic career was measured by graduation rate. No subject suggested that success was measured by standardized test results such as SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium), AP (Advanced Placement) or the SATs alone. Based on interviews, a primary indicator of success for Place-Based schools identified was that students were graduating and going to college or entering employment at an above average rate compared to local public high schools.

Stakeholders indicated that many students were employed in the maritime and maritime support industries including piloting, captaining, seaport or dock work, or employment in marine environmental protection or remediation agencies. Interviewees indicated that students and graduates of Place-Based schools were likely to be engaged in careers related to the theme of their schools. Students often participated in externships that served as entry opportunities into these nautical or related careers.
The second research question in this study addressed how success of Place-Based students was assessed. As indicated in Table 14, graduation rates of all schools included in this investigation exceeded the reported average graduation rates of the urban locality in which they were located. The researcher based these calculations on comparisons to an average of the comparative urban district high schools. Two of the three sites included in this study were in urban locations that had graduation rates that were below the United States’ urban average (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

Table 14

Comparison to Local Urban Graduation Rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site 1</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 2</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site 3</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A rate of 146% indicated a 46% improvement over urban school average graduation rate.

Interviewees considered graduation from high school a critical factor in achieving successful entry into college as well as enhancing employability.

Subjects, especially parent and supervisor stakeholders, spoke of actual student employment situations. A stakeholder cited an example of a student who, as a direct result of the externship process, became a deckhand and ultimately a captain at a local shipping enterprise. Stakeholders detailed numerous opportunities that were available to PBE students and graduates.
**Perceptions**

The final research question addressed in this study considered the perception of success by stakeholders. Powers (2004) and The National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (2000) suggested that the scores of students who were engaged in Place-Based studies regularly exceeded those of students in traditional programs. The qualitative data gathered from interviews showed that 21 of the 22 stakeholders indicated that College and Career preparation was a hallmark of Place-Based schools; graduation rates at those schools supported their perceptions.

A success indicator discovered through this study was the number of opportunities related to the maritime theme that students pursued after graduation. Theme-based schools were often thought of as institutions that were attended by curious students or students whose parents had an interest in a particular theme. It was a unique perspective that these schools had a profound impact on life and professional choices. Interviewees listed a number of specific examples of how students were pursuing marine-related careers.

Parents and Supervisors seemed especially aware of the proclivity toward maritime careers. Parents made observations about their children following passions to pursue the maritime industries. Parents reported that their children now had a much more realistic viewpoint about these careers; they reported that students realized that occupations such as commercial fishing can be challenging.

Supervisors remarked about entry directly into the maritime industries as well as through post-secondary educational maritime experiences. Supervisors related that many students pursued post-graduate studies at institutions such as SUNY Maritime University or Maine Maritime Academy.
Site 3 supervisors reported that Place-Based graduates come back to volunteer on ships at the local seaport. Supervisors also reported that graduates get jobs as crew on other ships; some were training to be officers on larger tonnage ships. These sentiments were representative of the perception that students who graduate from maritime themed Place-Based were drawn into marine or marine related careers. Since students from Place-Based schools studied here have above average graduation rates, they were in a better position for acceptance into those post-secondary institutions or entry directly into a marine trade.

Kozol (2005) claimed that themed schools in large United States cities have typically over-promised and under-delivered on both making their theme relevant and in academic preparation for any related career. In many instances, there was no authentic attempt to even align with the school’s theme. Kozol (2005) described the Paul Robison School for Medical Careers and Health Professions in the South Bronx. In such a themed-titled school, Kozol stated that students enroll with the idea of fulfilling a dream to become healthcare professionals, such as doctors or nurses. This school consistently ranked in the lowest level of the city schools with very few students being prepared for college or anything that might qualify them for a health care profession in any capacity. Kozol indicated that the likelihood of moving from the school into a medical career was almost nonexistent. In contrast, stakeholders reported that the Place-Based schools studied here fulfilled their commitment to a rich, rigorous, and relevant curriculum.

Place-Based Education, by nature, was based upon community involvement. Evans and Kilinc (2013) and Russell-Ciardi (2006) stated that there was a significant economic impact due to connections with the community; their research parallels those of this study. This study pinpointed a very specific economic impact: employment within a career related to the Place-
Based school’s theme. Evans and Kilinc as well as Russell-Ciardi suggested there was a political-social-economic aspect to the community involvement created by the Place-Based activities impact of PBE. McTier and McGregor (2011) observed that when students were interested in their studies, such as through a Place-Based curriculum, there was a positive impact on employment outcomes. Place-Based schools provided a diversity of courses that supported students in developing key skills and attributes necessary for a successful economy. Gruenewald (2008) clarified that while PBE students were prepared for market competition, PBE goals exceed education solely for employability.

The number one overall theme mentioned in this study was *College and Career preparation* as a measure of success. This finding was clearly supported by the conclusions of Kilinc (2013) and Russell-Ciardi’s (2006) regarding impact of PBE on the local economies. The results of this study also concur with McTier and McGregor’s (2011) observation that when students were engaged in their studies, there was a decisive connection with both immediate employment and enhancement of employability through pursuit of post secondary education.

**Student Characteristics**

**Defined**

Stakeholders identified Student Characteristics to include soft skills that were loosely defined and assessed. This theme was especially prevalent in the supervisor interviews. Student Characteristics included both demographic indicators such as socio-economic status as well as personality traits such as: commitment, confidence, dedication, diversity, independence, leadership, maturity, motivation, passion, perseverance, responsibility, and self-discipline.
Assessed

Since virtually all supervisors had vast nautical experience, they referred to student possession of soft skills as being a prerequisite for being a good *shipmate*. Collaboration as a soft skill was essential in supporting success in the academic world as well as in virtually any employment situation. Students learned the value of cooperation, such as when students at Site 3 were able to assume the responsibility of being a crew on a small vessel; securing the safety of all students as well as staff members on board.

Perceptions

Since a great deal of the Place-Based experience involves interacting within a mentoring situation, students were given an opportunity to develop their soft skills in that setting. This apprenticeship system was aligned with Situated Cognition Learning Theory (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). Students interacted with their mentors and peers in a *place* that gives context and meaning to the learning experience. That place, often a boat, provided an opportunity for students to be collaborative shipmates. A good shipmate was operationalized as the kind of person who would be socially conscientious and be willing to do things outside of what their job description in order to make something better or to facilitate resolving any issue.

Place-Based students demonstrate better behavior, attendance and attitudes than traditional students (Lieberman & Hoody, 1998). Attendance records at both Site 1 and Site 3 indicated superior rates to those of surrounding high schools. Behavioral records at all three sites indicate that the discipline at Place-Based schools was far better than that of traditional schools in those urban settings. Appropriate behavior and the reliability were soft skills necessary for success in employment situations.
Sense of Community

Defined

Subjects described their viewpoint of sense of community as the creation of supportive relationships among students and staff, the nurturing environment of the school, the essential role of PBE alumni, interactions with, and contributions to, the surrounding communities.

Assessed

Sense of Community for Place-Based schools included in the study was assessed in a variety of ways. There were supportive relationships among the respective staffs of the three schools included in this study. There were dynamic interactions between the alumni and PBE students and staff: alumni were observed by the researcher serving as mentors in order to support coursework at Site 3. A retired staff member from Site 2 was observed by the investigator volunteering at that school. Place-Based schools studied here had a rich and vibrant externship program with students interacting with mentors in the community. Students, through their externships, were engaged in various projects in surrounding communities, some of these externships morphed into full-time employed positions. These projects included service at a community seaport, participation in fishery investigations, and assisting in environmental and pollution control endeavors.

Perceptions

The sense of community was unique in that it was both a precursor to success as well as a gauge of that success. Seventeen of the 22 interviewees studied here spoke to the importance of the sense of community. Interviewees indicated that the value of community was a harbinger for a successful school experience and detailed illustrations where it was a measure of success. Butch’s example of a (Site 2) student graduate, who was formerly at risk, evolving into a
productive citizen, clearly represents a deep sense of community. Many inner city students came from a population where their peers did not develop into contributing members of society. Graduates of Place-Based schools were often stable, long-term employees; many in marine related industries. Supervisors described them as happy, family-oriented, financially responsible, contributing members of the community.

Russell-Ciardi (2006) described the link between Place-Based Education and students involvement in civic issues. She described these Place-Based relationships as having a positive social effect on the community. She made the point that through these community conscious programs, students gained a sense of tolerance and appreciation of community diversity. Subjects in this study, especially parents, commented about the advantages of these community-building relationships. Subjects spoke extensively about how valuable developing an appreciation of diversity was and how community-building experiences directly related to students’ success.

Smith and Sobel (2013) discussed the connection between Place-Based Education and building social capital. Bartholomaeus (2013) stated that students with positive neighborhood connections understood the value to their community and the responsibility to contribute to that community. They connected these social interactions with Dewey’s theory of education. Smith and Sobel stated that through community connections students have an opportunity to do valuable work. Relationships and trust was enhanced through these interactions.

Anderson and Gurnee (2016) made the case for citizenship participation inspired through various community service opportunities such as volunteering at a food bank or participating in nature studies such as those sponsored by organizations that partner with Place-Based schools. They stated that all schools’ had a responsibility to support students in becoming democratic
citizens. Anderson and Gurnee embraced Dewey's theories and philosophy of teaching democracy in schools, which had an obligation to support our students in becoming educated, viable participants in democracy.

Through Place-Based experiences, students became inspired to take action and develop into positive community influences (Evans & Kilinc, 2013; Gruenewald, 2008; Russell-Ciardi, 2006). As active citizens (Henness, 2001), students were challenged with opportunities to solve community problems. With these positive community connections, students forged meaningful relationships within their communities. Aligned with Critical Learning Theory, Place-Based schools provided for the education of citizens since students were encouraged to question the social order and practices of traditional social education (Gruenewald, 2008).

Mr. Brown, a Site 1 supervisor, illustrated the type of contribution that Place-Based students can make to the community. A community, whose water supply Mr. Brown monitors, did not have the financial resources to investigate a water contamination issue. Students working with Mr. Brown were able to identify and isolate a source of septic pollution that was contaminating a local water supply, allowing an agency to correct the contamination problem. When students were empowered to make a meaningful contribution to the community such as this, student citizenship was enhanced.

**Value of Educators Defined**

Subjects cited examples of dedication, creativity, hard work, and the spirit of cooperation embraced by educators as contributing factors to Place-Based student success. Place-Based administrators were noted to be energetic and effective. Because of the small tightly-knit nature
of the schools that were studied, the term educators included both teaching faculty and school administration for this study.

Assessed

Educators were credited with creating a safe, nurturing environment where students were encouraged to pursue their passions. Interviewees detailed instances of effective professional communication between educators and parents, between educators and supervisors, and among the educators themselves. Parents were especially appreciative of the positive effect that the nurturing environment at each school had on their children.

Perceptions

Interviewees at all sites held both administrators and teachers in high regard. Interviewee perceptions of the critical importance of creative, supportive leadership at Place-Based schools were evident. Sixteen of the 22 interviewees explicitly listed the Value of Educators as an essential ingredient for creating a successful school experience. This theme was more prevalent among parents, than it was with teachers or supervisors. Parents especially valued the supportive atmosphere created by teachers in each school.

Freire’s (1993) contention that educators created a socially meaningful curriculum in schools such as a Place-Based school was not a prevalent theme in this study. Interviewees indicated that invested educators, in collaboration with their students, did address many issues of social and environmental concern. However, interviewees did not acknowledge this particular focus.

Supervisors tended to concentrate on the value of the principals and director at all of the schools included in the study. That viewpoint is likely due to the condition that their interactions were more prevalent with administrators than with classroom teachers. The crucial function of
the administration in ensuring success at a Place-Based school was detailed by Howley et al. (2011). Howley et al. specified the key role of the principal in supporting school success.

When supervisors did make a comment about the faculty of each site, their remarks were enthusiastically positive. Supervisors noted the supportive role of teachers in allowing students to learn from their mistakes. Smith (2002) reported that in successful Place-Based schools, educators act as guides for student learning such as that described by Mr. Cabot (Site 3). Mr. Cabot spoke at length about how skillful educators allowed students to take risks, yet still kept other students in the school community safe. He credited this atmosphere as one in which the educators created an optimal learning environment.

Educators expressed a universally high regard for their colleagues. Teachers recognized the crucial role that their administration played in the school success. Because of the nature of the Place-Based environment at all three sites, teachers were allowed a great deal of latitude in developing a creative curriculum which best served the students. Educators at all three sites expressed the value of school climate, which held their students to high standards, yet allowed for a nurturing climate.

All parent interviewees cited the value of educators is supporting their student’s success. Parents were enthusiastic in their description of the school environment, quite often saying that they loved everything about the Place-Based school that their child attended. Parents seemed to be especially appreciative of, and cited examples, where teachers demonstrated a high degree of flexibility in customizing an individual project for their child. Examples were given of building boats endeavors and creating science fair-type projects.

Gruenewald (2003) stated that teachers took on the role of developing and delivering a curriculum in order to create opportunities for students to participate fully in the Place-Based
experience. Ferguson et al. (2015) and McNerney et al. (2011) suggested that teachers are essential in developing a course of study that is meaningful. The Place-Based curricula observed in this study were typically developed, modified, and enhanced by the educators at each site.

**Real World Experiences**

**Defined**

Place-Based students encountered real world experiences through their programs at school. Interviewees reported a myriad of connections with expert supervisors in maritime and maritime related careers. The entire nature of Place-Based Education was to create situations through which students can directly interact with their real-world place.

**Assessed**

All real-world experiences documented in the study were reported by subjects during their interviews. These real-world experiences often led to marine based employment opportunities and focused on various positions aboard ship such as deckhand, dockworker, pilot, or captain. Interviewees reported that some students pursued careers in environmental protection and related areas, such as water pollution abatement.

**Perceptions**

Supervisors were the most aware of the importance of real-world experiences. All supervisors spoke about it during their interviews; giving many examples of the sorts of projects that students undertook that exposed them to problem-solving situations. Students experienced real-world consequences of any risks that they might take. Powers (2004) presented research demonstrating that the real-world experiences such as those at a Place-Based school are superior to traditional textbook based instruction. Powers further stated that this instructional model produces students who are more likely to succeed.
Mr. Pink (Site 3) mentioned specific maritime skills such as navigation and learning the physics of raising a sail using blocks, pulleys, and tackle. Site 1 students had exposure to the monitoring of fisheries and were able to harvest fin and shellfish crops, as well as seaweed. Students learned the skills necessary to handle first food safe food handling and were able to maintain a store that sold fish and seafood products to the public.

Students at all three sites learned how to design, build, and maintain boats. The curriculum focused on real-world projects such as observing and maintaining a marine ecosystem. Students participated in the region’s largest ecosystem restoration project and monitored various types of marine and water pollution. Mr. Cabot (Site 3) maintained that students that were exposed to these real-world problem-solving challenges had a better chance at success in college or securing meaningful employment.

Teachers presented educational opportunities for students to experience real-world problem solving skills. Students were allowed to devise and implement solutions to the real world problems considered in class and experience the consequences of the solutions that did not work. Trudy (Site 2) made the point that students were using software tools to solve real-world problems. She gave the example of using Excel to sort and organize data related to a real-world research problem. Vincent (Site 3) spoke to the interdisciplinary value of using language arts classes to support efforts in environmental ecosystem restoration. He believed in the benefit of a persuasive letter writings to inspire action in people that may be empowered to support their projects.

Parents commented on their appreciation that their children had experienced much of their education actually on floating classrooms. Students went out in boats throughout the school year, not only to learn navigation and piloting, but also to experience firsthand marine biology as
well as pollution monitoring. Brown et al. (1989) supported statements that claimed value of situations through which students learn such as the real-life experiences such as those supervised by PBE mentors.

**Engagement**

**Defined**

Interviewees described engagement as enthusiastic involvement and commitment by students to their academics, school projects, off site school related activities, and externships.

**Assessed**

Engagement was assessed by interviewees through their observations of student involvement in various on campus and off site activities. The researcher also made direct observations of students engrossed in their activities at all three sites selected for this study.

**Perceptions**

Although engagement was the theme mentioned the fewest number of times, the researcher found it imperative to include it as a major theme since this theme both supported student success and served as a measure of that success. Subject descriptions and researcher observations of student engagement in their Place-Based Education painted a powerful picture of student success.

Smith (2002), Evans and Kilinc (2013), and Gruenewald (2008) stated that students found a curriculum, such as one that focuses on environmental concerns, to be engaging. The researcher observed a project undertaken at Site 3 through which students participated in restoration of a local compromised ecosystem. Students were observed by the researcher seeding oyster beds to filter pollutants from a local body of water. When the researcher inquired about the project specifics, a PBE graduate enthusiastically described the various types of pollution that
this ecosystem was subject to, student efforts to abate the pollution, and reverse its effects. Supervisors at each site commented on the high level of student engagement. Mr. Cabot (Site 3) reflected the passion of these students; he spoke about coupling disengaged low SES kids with projects designed to salvage degraded ecosystems in which these children lived.

Powers (2004) demonstrated that increased engagement encouraged students to become active participants in their communities and was directly linked to higher academic performance. Mr. Blue (Site 3) recognized that engagement was not only a precursor to, but a measure of, success itself. Supervisors reported their observations of student engagement in projects undertaken under their mentorship. Students were absorbed in projects that included water quality monitoring, ecosystem restoration, seafood harvesting, on-board study of navigation, seamanship, boat design, building, and maintenance.

The California Student Assessment Project (2000) reported PBE engagement and enthusiasm for learning were positively related to improved academic performance. The culture at each school, as reported by interviewees, was conducive to creating an environment in which students would remain engaged. McInerney et al (2011) stated that stimulating lessons fostered student engagement. Ringo (Site 1) explained how students’ choice of service projects supported their engagement. Participants reported that the administration at all three schools supported teachers in creating meaningful, engaging projects.

Lieberman and Hoody (1998) described a direct link between engagement and success in school. They maintained that a climate supportive of student engagement enhanced academics; noting that there were fewer classroom management and discipline issues. Parents universally remarked that their children were enthusiastically engaged in their studies. Parents coupled the idea of student engagement with the nurturing climate of the Place-Based schools. Elle observed
that Site 2 blended the high expectations with the mandate for students to become involved in their own education. All stakeholder statements were supported by Powers’ (2004) finding correlating engagement at Place-Based schools with enhanced learning.

**Learning Theory**

Subjects reported learning experiences that dovetailed with Situated Cognition Theory (Brown et al., 1989). This was especially evident in supervisors’ reports of a quasi-apprenticeship model of mentoring students in Placed Based school theme-related careers. There appeared to be less support for Critical Learning Theory (Freire, 1993). All interviewees in this study were adults who may have vastly differing theoretical viewpoints from that of the PBE students. Critical Learning Theory supports the concept that schools, such as the PBE sites included in this study, encourage students to *learn about* and *take a stand for* at the same time. Had students been interviewed, they might have presented viewpoints more aligned with Critical Learning Theory.

**Limitations**

The benefit of this qualitative design was that it allowed an opportunity to get a more complete picture of Place-Based phenomena. The educators, supervisors and parents involved in the study shared their first-hand experience, attitudes, beliefs, vision, and concerns about Place-Based Education. A distinction between a qualitative and a quantitative study was that the latter allowed the researcher to observe this Place-Based Education phenomenon in a natural environment; no variables were artificially manipulated.

The trustworthiness of this qualitative research was maximized by addressing Krefting’s (1991) concerns of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was maximized by conducting pilot interviews, keeping a reflexive journal, triangulating sources and
methods, member checking, consulting with the project advisor, and participating in a data audit. The researcher supported credibility by establishing rapport early in each interview process; he also asked numerous clarifying questions and solicited examples from interviewees when appropriate.

The researcher bolstered dependability so as to ensure consistency if the study were replicated. He accomplished this by giving detailed descriptions of the participant selection process, site descriptions, interview protocol, and data analysis. The researcher’s participation in a confirmability audit further enhanced the study’s trustworthiness. Confirmability was established to the extent that another researcher could come to the same or similar conclusions. The researcher honored alternative conclusions that were suggested further supporting confirmability.

The modest sample size \((n=22)\), omission of student participants, and the purposeful selection of subjects, challenges both the confirmability and the transferability of this study. A significant limitation to this study was the difficulty to generalize the findings to a larger or different population. The uniqueness of Place-Based schools may have also been a limiting factor.

When conducting qualitative research, the expectation was that the readers of the study must judge the transferability for themselves (Merriam, 1998). This researcher recommends that educators and/or policy makers determine if the findings of this study are appropriate to their unique applications (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
Implications

Educators

Lieberman and Hoody (1998) reported that PBE class experiences were characterized by decreased discipline and classroom management problems. Malcolm Gladwell (2013) described a chaotic traditional classroom situation. He claimed that if the teacher were to be doing something that was actually interesting, children would be engaged. Place-Based Education was exactly the sort of setting that Gladwell would consider as an interesting and engaging educational environment.

There has been an ongoing focus (Ravitch, 2010) on student performance on standardized assessments as a means of evaluating teaching and learning. The three sites included in this study exemplified the powerful potential of adopting a PBE curriculum to boost student performance.

Demarest (2015) described methods of implementing a Place-Based curriculum through local investigations. She explained how a Place-Based curriculum could work in real classrooms and offered a number of case studies to help teachers with the logistics of planning and overcoming challenges of implementing such a program. Demarest believed that every school should implement parts of PBE in their curricula. She acknowledged that there may be social, political, and financial challenges to such implementation. However, Sobel (personal communication, September 26, 2016) offered a compromise solution through which more schools can supplement traditional curricula with hybrid PBE programs.

Educational Policymakers

Mr. Cabot was one of the founding fathers of Site 3. He stated that every urban environment exists in a severely compromised ecosystem. Mr. Cabot maintained that there was
a vast untapped resource for addressing the issue of urban pollution while providing a basis for a rich and relevant Place-Based curriculum. Low SES marginalized children typically inhabit these compromised environments and could be a powerful force in addressing this critical issue.

The current study has shown that Place-Based schools can produce academic performances that meet or exceed those of traditional schools. Schools included in this investigation demonstrated increased graduation rates as well. These two issues, academic performance and graduation rate, were issues that plague many urban communities. An investment in PBE might have a tremendous benefit for both concerns. An increased graduation rate, and employment in maritime related industries, will surely have a positive impact on the community.

Summary

Through interviews of stakeholders at three urban low SES Place-Based schools, six major themes emerged that defined, assessed, and indicated stakeholder perceptions of student success. Those six themes identified in this study were acceptance into post secondary educational institutions or entry into careers that were aligned with the maritime theme of the school, identification of Student Characteristics associated with success, creation of a strong sense of community, value of educators, participation in real world experiences, and engagement with the Place-Based curriculum.

Interviewees indicated that a primary measure of success was the academic performance of Place-Based students. Indications of superior academic achievement were supported by triangulating published data, which demonstrated that all sites had graduation rates exceeding their local urban cohort schools. This researcher was unable to find other qualitative studies that
addressed the relationship between Place-Based Education, academic performance, and graduation rates.

Stakeholders cited examples of student entry into post-secondary maritime institutions as well as directly into marine and maritime related trades. PBE graduates’ entry into these career tracks exceeded what might be expected from a low SES student graduate. The maritime theme of the schools studied might have been a contributing factor to securing employment; it was unclear if this trend would have been observed in differently themed schools.

Soft skills, as defined and assessed by interviewees, included the sort of social skills that promote success in Placed-Based students. The nautical theme of all three sites included in this study promoted and rewarded the ability to be a good shipmate. Students worked together well and were receptive to mentoring by their teachers and supervisors; this mentoring relationship was critical in a situated cognitive educational system.

Participants spoke about the importance of a sense of community to Place-Based schools. These community relations were complex: students interacting with students, students interacting with educators and supervisors, and students within the Place-Based community interacting with the surrounding place community. The sense of community within a local place was considered more than just a byproduct of Place-Based schools; it was a hallmark of the mission to support students in becoming citizens of a functional democracy.

Mayrath, Clarke-Midura, Robinson, and Schraw (2012) stated that in today’s educational climate there is a focus on problem solving. Five educators spoke to the value of problem solving as a measure of Placed Based student success, mentioning that code 10 times. The researcher expected to see problem solving as a prevalent response in interviews with all stakeholders, but data did not support this.
Suggestions for Additional Research

Since this study generated emergent themes, a myriad of potential future research can be developed based on those outcomes. Additional research related and measured by each theme delineated in the current study can potentially provide a more in-depth understanding of PBE and successful PBE implementation.

The College and Career theme was robust, but lacked specificity of longitudinal outcomes of students. Students’ trajectory could be tracked in a long-term study. Two of the Place-Based schools studied here were located in a state that completes five-year reviews for certain Place-Based schools. Due to confidentiality concerns by the state, the researcher was not able to access these results from the state department of education. A different researcher may be able to develop or obtain this longitudinal data. Quantitative results for student assessment that were available seemed to indicate that Place-Based schools were successful from a student performance perspective. Researchers could further investigate graduation rates, performance on SATs, or other such standardized tests. Those results could be compared with peer results in students’ traditional districts schools.

Related to Student Characteristics, since the subjects in this study were exclusively adults; a suggestion for additional research might be to conduct both qualitative and quantitative studies with students. Students might report markedly different responses on some themes such as their description of Student Characteristics. If students were interviewed, it is possible their responses may be more aligned with Critical Learning Theories of education and might report more of a sense of environmental altruism as a facet of Place-Based Education. The adult viewpoints reported in this study were notably aligned with Situated Cognitive Theories of education.
Sense of Community, as a theme in this study, manifested in multiple ways, both within the school community relationships and to the connection to the surrounding environment. The partnership that developed as a result of PBE, suggest that students may develop a strong ethic related to the importance of place. However, this suggestion needs to be explored further and is well-suited to a critical theory lens. Future studies might explore the relation of students, and PBE to environmental activism or the community connections associated with the school.

For the Value of Educators theme, teacher attitudes may be a critical factor in determining the success of failure of a Place-Based system. Participants in the current study appeared universally invested in the success of Place-Based schools. Quantitative quasi-experimental studies of student engagement in PBE schools versus traditional schools may also be a valuable focus for future research.

Participants reported feelings of stress over the intensive investment of time and energy needed to maintain an effective curriculum. The present study did not focus on those stresses, the impact of the administration, or relationships among the faculty as a contributor to the school’s success. Further research could focus on the study of these relationships and dynamics within the teaching community.

Additional research related to the Real World theme may be warranted in investigating the challenges of implementing a Place-Based Education curriculum. While every indication was that Place-Based systems appeared successful, especially in low socioeconomic communities, there was some resistance to implementing Place-Based curricula. Designing and implementing an effective Place-Based curriculum requires an intensive investment of time and energy by PBE stakeholders. One might investigate the challenges in creating a PBE curriculum in certain geographic places. It appeared be far easier to implement a Place-Based marine
themed school on the Atlantic seaboard, than implementing such a system in a land-locked community. Future researchers might explore how educators could successfully establish PBE in any location.

**Engagement**, in its many forms, is a current priority of the educational system. By the nature of the quality and type of instruction students received, this study demonstrated that adults perceived students to be well engaged in their learning. Related to the theme within this study, engagement might be examined through an experimental or quasi-experimental study examining its domains in both the PBE environment and the traditional school environment.

**Conclusion**

All interviewees included in this study regarded graduates of Place-Based schools as successful. This was true whether or not they considered traditional measures of achievement, such as graduation from high school or performance on standardized tests, or subscribed to some of the alternate measures of success explored in the study. All participants expressed high opinions of Placed Based schools, educators, and students. All stakeholders interviewed in the study, or encountered during site visits to the three sites included in the study, were enthusiastically positive about their schools. Parents who were interviewed, or encountered at site visits, unanimously indicated that they loved the Place-Based schools that their child attended. Even parents, who were not intimately involved with their child’s school, indicated that they had high confidence in their respective school personnel.

Place-Based schools may be a partial remedy to the shameful achievement gap crisis in America. Place-Based schools included in this study were exceptions to the low performing educational institutions typical of low SES communities. Anderson and Sally (2014) theorized that there were *weak-link* and *strong-link* systems. There was a direct correlation between
opportunities for success in weak vs. strong linkedness. Gladwell (2016) states that education was a strong-link system. Gladwell offered the example of a $100,000,000 gift made by Hank Rowan to Glassboro State University, a small, modest school in Southern New Jersey. Gladwell stated that Rowan “wanted to start at the bottom and tries to lift as many people up as possible” (2016). Gladwell argued that $100,000,000 would have a far greater impact on the population than a gift of that magnitude going to a larger, prestigious university.

Rowan’s philanthropy had a powerful impact on struggling, often disadvantaged, students. PBE similarly had tremendous benefits for that same low SES population. The American educational system was only as good as our worst schools. Place-Based schools leveled the playing field; they give our least advantaged students the resources to become strong, high achieving members of American society.
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Retrieved from


Appendix A

Written Consent Form
I am a doctoral candidate at WestCONN (Western Connecticut State University) in Danbury, CT. Through an Instructional Leadership program, I am working on my dissertation entitled "Stakeholder Perceptions of Student Success in Place-based Schools". This study will investigate a relationship between students who attend or have graduated from Place-based schools such as Site 1 and success. I believe it may be more appropriate to measure performance in place-based schools by non-traditional methods. Alternate measures of success might include employability, enrollment in post-secondary programs, or contributions to the community, rather than achievement test scores.

This qualitative study will explore definitions of success by analyzing results of one-to-one interviews with stakeholders of Place-based schools. Stakeholders include teachers, administrators, parents, supervisors or other members of the community. I will make myself available to interview in person, by phone, Skype or any other means that is convenient for the interviewee.

Thank you for your support! I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have. I am including my contact information as well as my Advisor Frank LaBanca with whom you’ve already corresponded and WestCONN’s EdD program coordinator if you have any questions.

Site 1 is exactly the sort of learning institution that I am interested in studying. Your school exemplifies the sort of curriculum that will directly relate to real-life success. I will keep all identifying information including names of interviewees, students and the school name strictly confidential. I will not interview students or former students. What is the best way to contact you?

Researcher: Josef Graham, xxxx@gmail.com, (999)-999-9999 (C), (999) 999-9999 (H)

Primary Advisor: Dr Frank LaBanca, xxxx@gmail.com

EdD Program Coordinator: Dr. Marcia Delcourt, xxxx@wcsu.edu
Appendix B

Interview Questions
Interview Questions: Parents

1) Tell me about your experiences with Place-Based Education.

2) How has graduation from a school with a Place-Based curriculum made your child unique in his preparation for work/college experiences?

3) What specific characteristics of this educational experience make your child uniquely qualified for these post-secondary experiences?

4) In what ways does your child’s unique education background allow him/her to approach problems in ways that other students wouldn’t be able to?

5) Would you be enthusiastic about sending another of your children to (site)?

6) How successful would you say your child is? Why?
Interview Questions: Supervisors

1) Tell me about graduates of (site).

2) How has graduation from a school with a Place-Based curriculum made (student) unique in his/her preparation for work or community service experiences?

3) What specific characteristics of this educational experience make students uniquely qualified for work or community service experiences?

4) In what ways does (student’s) unique education background allow him/her to approach problems in ways that other students wouldn’t be able to?

5) How willing are you to supervise other graduates from (site)?

6) How successful would you say (student) is? Why?
Interview Questions: Teachers

1) Tell me about graduates of (site).

2) How has graduation from a school with a Place-Based curriculum made students of (site) unique in their preparation for post-secondary experiences?

3) What specific characteristics of this educational experience make students uniquely qualified for these post-secondary experiences?

4) In what ways do students’ of (site) unique education background allow them to approach problems in ways that other students wouldn’t be able to?

5) How successful would you say students of (site) are? Why?

6) If you had Magic Wand, what would you change about your school?
Appendix C

Code Clusters, Frequencies, and Code Definitions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Code Cluster</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College &amp; Career</td>
<td>Career pathways</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>PBE focus on career awareness and preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College pathways</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>PBE focus on college awareness and preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PBE school characteristics</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Systemic PBE attributes that enhanced student performance. Includes scheduling considerations and data driven curriculum modification to meet student needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specialized equipment and courses</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>The availability of unique (typically marine science) materials available to PBE students.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>PBE school focus on characteristics such as the curriculum rigor that enhance preparation for college or career.</td>
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<td>College/career pathways</td>
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<td>PBE focus on both college and career awareness and preparation.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Unique opportunities</td>
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<td>Unique opportunities present to PBE students that enhance college and career preparation.</td>
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<td>Theme</td>
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<td>Definition</td>
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<td>Academic performance</td>
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<td>Student achievement as measured by class grades.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Inquiry based problem solving as a contributor to PBE student success in college &amp; career preparation.</td>
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<td>Student Characteristics</td>
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<td>Discipline</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Academic and personal discipline and perseverance of the PBE student</td>
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<td>Student quality</td>
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<td>Stakeholder perception of the high quality of students enrolled at PBE schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Independence as a character trait; including critical thinking and problem solving skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivated</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Student personality traits such as confidence, passion, and motivation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diverse student body</td>
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<td>The geographic and demographic diversity of PBE students as these contribute to student success.</td>
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<td>Success</td>
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<td>Student focus on becoming successful in non-traditional means.</td>
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<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
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<td>Student self-awareness and appreciation of the opportunities presented in a PBE setting.</td>
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<td>Communication skills</td>
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<td>Ability of student to communicate effectively and work together cooperatively.</td>
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<td>Sense of Community</td>
<td>School community</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>The sense of connectedness and family among PBE students, educators, and supervisors</td>
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<td>Alumni return</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>PBE alumni returning to school to enhance connections or to offer service.</td>
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<td>Systemic PBE attributes that enhanced a sense of community. Includes scheduling considerations and a supportive school climate.</td>
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<td>Partnerships</td>
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<td>Connection to the Place-Based stakeholder community.</td>
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<td>Teamwork</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>The sense of being a good ship mate in a nautically themed environment.</td>
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<td>Benefit to the community</td>
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<td>The perceived value to the geographic community supporting the PBS.</td>
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<td>Nurturing</td>
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<td>The perception by stakeholders that educators are creative in developing an effective PBE curriculum and assessment strategies.</td>
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<td>The effect of leadership on the success of PBE students.</td>
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<td>Dedicated teachers</td>
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<td>The perception by stakeholders that educators are committed to the PBE curriculum, philosophy, and their students.</td>
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<td>Quality of work</td>
<td>Quality of teachers</td>
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<td>Teachers create an effective PBE learning environment.</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational</td>
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<td>The perception by stakeholders that educators inspire their students</td>
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<td>Real World Connections</td>
<td>Real world</td>
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<td>application</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
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<td>Unique opportunities as a precursor to student success</td>
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<td>Professional resources who are available to mentor and supervise PBE students.</td>
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<td>Business connection</td>
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<td>Partnership with real world community resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning environment</td>
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<td>Characteristics of a PBE learning environment that support success enhanced by student engagement.</td>
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Appendix D

Theories of Action
Theories of Action

Site One published their *Theories of Action*. They are included here to give a complete description of the principles upon which Site 1 personnel make choices for students:

- **Theory of Action Number One**: If we integrate STEM instruction across the curriculum, then our students will develop the essential foundations for becoming successful lifelong learners.

- **Theory of Action Number Two**: If we implement a rigorous cohesive curriculum, which is authored by teachers and implemented with fidelity using scientifically based instructional strategies, with an emphasis on the process of understanding new concepts, then teaching and learning will improve and student achievement will increase.

- **Theory of Action Number Three**: If we continuously analyze our students academic and behavioral needs and respond by cultivating emotional intelligence using the RULER (Recognize, Understand, Label, Express, and Regulate one’s emotions) approach that all students’ achievement will increase.

- **Theory of Action Number Four**: If we cultivate a professional learning community that all educators will be able to make decisions that effectively inform instructional practices and student achievement will increase.

- **Three of Action Number Five**: If we regularly disseminate vital information to families in the entire school community; then we will continue to generate enthusiasm for learning.
Appendix E

CTE Program of Study
CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION COURSEWORK

As sophomores, students enroll in one of six career and technical education (CTE) programs of study, which leads to industry certification in marine science or technology and includes a continuum of work-based learning experiences that extend student learning from the school classroom into a real-world, work-related context.

Aquaculture       Marine Biology Research       Marine Systems Technology       Ocean Engineering

Professional Diving       Vessel Operations       Harbor Class

Site 3’s Place-Based program is based largely on the coursework described in this Appendix.
Appendix F

Butch’s (Site 2 Supervisor) Interview
Butch, Site 2

Let me tell you another little quick story. I remember and this is a classic example, but it also represents we as a Site 2 and our approach to things and the message we deliver. I had a young kid who was in sophomore-junior year and he was really becoming a headache, a real problem, a real discipline, he was causing all sorts of problems. Fussing here, fussing there with peers and teachers and he was really becoming a problem. Well, we looked into the situation a little bit farther, he was from a very strict Italian family and I say that, because my wife is very Italian too, this is nothing that is—I’m not trying to be funny in any way here. But it was a strong family … mother and the father … and the father owned a family garage, a gas station that he did repairs also over in (Site 2 Community). And he had a tow truck and so forth and did all that sort of work. And the father had a nice business, ran a nice operation, basically a nice family, blue collar working class family. No apologies, didn’t need to apologize to anybody for anything. He ran a good business and fine. So the son basically has been working at the garage ever since he was 12 probably and has been driving for years, has been driving the tow truck and is doing fine. He’s a good mechanic, I know that. I’ve had him in the shop. He’s very savvy. He’s handy, he’s willing. He doesn’t mind getting dirty and so forth and so on. And so basically the kid is just saying, “All I want to be is just like Dad.” And Mom and Dad are saying, “Oh no, you want to go to college. No you’re going to college. You’re going to do better than we did. You have to better yourself. You’re going to college. You need to study. You need to study those books.” Well, the fight from home came into school. He just was struggling and the parents were beating him over the head and he was beating them back and we, the faculty and his peers and friends were caught in the crossfire. So in the process of working through all of that, part of that process among lots of different teachers at different times, was I had a conversation
with the Mom and Dad and I just said to them, as positively and as nicely as I possibly could, “Listen, obviously you’re good, caring parents. You’ve got a nice little house out there. You’re paying your bills. You’re doing all the right things at the right time. You’re fine. You’re doing rewarding work that society needs and so forth and so on. And so your kid wants to be just like you. And remember all those years when he was growing up, what did you want? What does any parent want of their child? They want them to be happy and responsible and independent. Remember that independent part? Well he’s 16 now; it’s show time. He’s expressing his independence and his responsibility and his adulthood. Is he being a bad worker at the garage? No he’s doing all the right things. He’s showing up early for work. Take it and run with it. So, he doesn’t want to go to college. It’s not the end of the world. Let him do what he wants. He can go to college later if he wants. When he wants to learn something, there are ways. You don’t need to go to Yale in order to educate yourself and improve yourself. There are certification programs. There are licenses that you can get to get yourself in a better position. It ain’t all about the academics college.
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Dissertation Registration Form

Student: Josef A. Graham

Dissertation Title: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS' SUCCESS IN PLACE-BASED SCHOOLS

Dissertation Committee Members: See attached Dissertation Approval Page

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