Planting the Seeds of College and Career Readiness in Preschool

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

It is well-documented that in 2020, 65% of all jobs require further schooling or training beyond high school.[1] This may include specialized vocational education, military service, or professional preparation programs that may not require a 4-year university degree but do involve a significant amount of training, study, or apprenticeship experiences.[2] Therefore, it remains critical that children develop the requisite skills and personal motivation for college and career readiness. Yet, the negative effects of poverty can be one of the greatest barriers to students' attainment of post-secondary success.[3]

When educational achievement of the American citizenry is examined, the disparities are significant. According to Hanushek et al,[4] the achievement gap between children living in poverty and those from higher-income families has failed to close over the past 50 years. These authors assert that achievement inequalities between students' educational experiences and their socioeconomic background should be addressed through targeted policies and practices aimed at this disparity, particularly the need for high-quality teachers working with disadvantaged students.[4] Despite attempts to close these achievement and opportunity gaps, children who are born into low-income families often remain in the bottom two-fifths of the income distribution as adults.[5] Guilfoyle[6] argued that college and career success begins during preschool and reports that the first educational experiences young children receive are crucial to their future success. Early childhood educators must then be equipped with resources to assist young students in envisioning the broader goals of college and career readiness to help them develop their "college-going identity".[7]

The long-term educational goal of attending college may seem like an obvious aspiration for children growing up in families from upper or middle social classes. However, this quintessential goal may not be a fundamental concept for students coming from underprivileged backgrounds. When a child is young and impressionable, families influence the development of their educational values and inspire their overall academic development. In fact, Dubow et al [8 (p243)] reported that the "beneficial effects of parental educational level when the child is young are not limited to academic achievement throughout the school years, but have long-term implications for positive outcomes into middle adulthood." Many families rely on schools not only to educate their children, but to encourage and motivate them toward college attainment or professional

career pathways. Educators then have a responsibility to develop strategies that allow students to explore options for post-high school education and ensure rich opportunities for lifelong learning and future goal setting. The changing nature of today's global workplace demands that students develop the college and career readiness competencies necessary for post-secondary success.[9] However, according to Adams,[10] more than half of all students in public schools in the United States, especially those from underrepresented minorities, do not meet the readiness benchmarks to attend college.

Rural communities have both unique and complex identities.[11] Schools in rural areas tend to be strongly connected to the community and typically have positive and supportive school cultures.[12] Even though rural communities share many positive attributes, they also face significant challenges, such as poverty, shifting demographics, educational accountability, school consolidation, and the effects of economic changes. [12,13] Williams and Mann[14] explained that many rural communities have high rates of concentrated poverty, especially among African Americans. Research data supports the idea that access to high-quality early educational experiences can be leveraged to improve the post-secondary outcomes for children starting at an early age.[15]

How, then, can these challenges be addressed so more students from lower income or rural populations aspire for career readiness beyond high school? For parents and children to see purpose in their daily educational tasks, they must trust that the work is meaningful, understand that they are not toiling in vain, and know that post-secondary success is attainable. Additionally, some students growing up in poverty may not embrace the dream of going to college or may develop an attitude of hopelessness about their academic future.[16]

The developmental approach to understanding readiness for post-secondary experiences asserts that there are many social, emotional, and cognitive factors that influence individual decisions and outcomes.[7] One effective process identified by Bouffard and Savitz-Romer[7 (p41)] is the development of students' "future-oriented identities." While there are many strategies that may affect this identity development, the current study was designed to investigate the following research questions: 1) How have the core beliefs of the No Excuses University (NEU) framework influenced the participants' perceptions of future educational opportunities? 2) How has the NEU framework impacted the overall culture of achievement at the research site?

Literature Review

Traditionally, college and career readiness proficiencies were directed toward the development of core academic skills. However, other abilities, such as soft skills, critical thinking, motivation, and technological expertise can also influence student's chances of reaching their full potential.[2] Conley[17] noted the 4 keys to college and career readiness: 1) cognitive strategies, 2) content knowledge, 3) learning skills and techniques, and 4) transition knowledge and skills. These last 2 keys may especially affect students from families and communities typically underrepresented in higher education as they transition to life beyond high school.[17] Consequently, students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may require supportive systems and programs to overcome barriers and help them obtain equitable access to positive post-secondary experiences.[3]

To uphold the school's mission of ensuring that children from low-income families or students at risk of delays receive high-quality early education,[18] the leadership team at the research site intentionally employed the theoretical framework of organizational culture to positively enhance the school's philosophy. As Schein[19] explained, the ethos of an organization relies on the perceptions, values, interactions, and expectations of the group. By adopting a framework focused on future-oriented success, the nonprofit preschool sought to purposefully influence the beliefs of its faculty/staff, parents, and students by offering opportunities for cultural evolution. The belief that all stakeholders provide unique contributions to the organizations' culture is an important component of this transformational work.[20]

NEU provides support by instilling a "culture of universal achievement" for all students.[21] The NEU framework, originally conceived at the elementary school level, is intended to support students, their families, and the school by building a culture of college and career readiness.[21] NEU is a nation-wide network of schools unified in the conviction that all students have the right to be academically successful and well-prepared for college and/or professional careers if that is the path they choose. Its founder, Damen Lopez, who had a vision of what might be done to enhance student performance,[22] launched NEU in 2004.

Founders of the framework believe that for children to embrace their own potential and develop a hope-filled future story, it must become *their* personal dream and not be a goal that is simply handed to them or forced upon them. NEU explains that for this seed of hope to take root, it must be planted early and watered often.[22] Therefore, college readiness is not a topic relegated solely to high schools; in fact, experts believe that high school may even be too late to begin implanting the goal of attending college.

The model encompasses 6 distinctive systems: a culture of universal achievement, collaboration, standards alignment, assessment, data management, and intervention.[23] When schools exhibit a well-developed culture of universal achievement, every member of the school's staff believes that each student is capable of meeting academic standards and that the school has the power to make this achievement happen.[21] As they collaborate around the core beliefs, schools align their standards as a team, plan for assessment, and manage the data. Eventually schools pursue data-driven interventions for academic achievement and begin implementing social and emotional interventions for their students. The NEU movement has influenced schools, school districts, students, and families through the belief that every child deserves the opportunity to be educated in a way that prepares them for college and professional careers.[21] This model has influenced the lives of more than 150,000 students in 22 states and continues to receive national attention.[24] Table 1 breaks down the 207 schools participating in NEU network at the time this article was written.[24]

Table 1: NEU Network of Participating Schools [a]

	Early Childhood	Elementary School	Middle (Intermediate) School	High School	Academy	Others (K-8 School, Preparatory School, etc.)
Number of Schools	1	157	20	7	9	13
Total	207 Schools					
[a] Data adapted from the No Excuses University Network of Schools.[24]						

Curry noted the 2 overarching beliefs that the NEU framework is based upon: 1) "Every child has the right to be educated in a way that prepares them for college or post-secondary training that leads to a living wage career, and 2) It is the responsibility of the adults in the school and community to create and maintain exceptional systems in order to make this a reality".[25] These belief statements, communicated through the NEU framework, reiterate that all students need a plan for their life after high school, whether it be military service, vocational trade school, or a specialized training program.[25] This future-oriented message is then embedded throughout the daily routines of the school.

To transform the school culture and implant the idea of attending college, NEU schools are encouraged to hang college pennants and teach university songs and chants to connect students to a specific university or

college. According to Schein,[19] displaying artifacts, one of three levels of an organization's culture, is a highly visible practice. The next level of organizational culture conveys a deeper meaning through addressing the espoused beliefs and values of the school. This level of social validation is noted as an expectation of the way things are done within the school culture.[19] The third level of an organization's culture has to do with the underlying assumptions of the work being done in the organization.[19] Muhammad [26] further demonstrated that college and career readiness is not only about strategies or programs, but also includes expectations, attitudes, and the underlying culture of beliefs. NEU encourages schools to offer their students the possibility of attending college by nurturing the hope and then creating exceptional systems to ensure that their dreams become reality.[23]

A review of literature on this topic unearthed 2 studies investigating the implementation of the NEU framework in elementary schools. One is Devor's study on the creation of a culture of universal achievement through implementing the NEU framework.[27] To identify how academic qualities are developed in students at an early age through a healthy college-ready culture, Devor[27] examined teacher and principal perceptions of how a culture of college and career readiness is achieved at the elementary school level, noting that staff members' belief that every student can succeed was the dominant characteristic for success. Devor[27] concluded that early exposure to the ideal of attending college would support students as they continued throughout their school experiences.

Another study conducted by Alonso[9] investigated trends within NEU's 6 exceptional systems and their relationship to student academic achievement. Alonso pointed out that research on college and career readiness had most often been conducted at the middle and high school levels; however, her study investigated the impact of the NEU framework on student's academic achievement and social behavior at the elementary school level. She found that promoting college and career readiness through the NEU approach had a positive impact on students' reading and writing scores and on their social behaviors. Alonso concluded that these 6 systems helped to address the academic achievement gap between elementary students from diverse backgrounds, especially children from low-income families.

Ayala[28] reported that the first elementary school in Texas to implement the NEU framework was San Jacinto Elementary, an under-performing school in Amarillo, Texas. After learning about the framework, the school's administration implemented the 6 exceptional systems identified by NEU and in 3 years the school went from being labeled unacceptable to exemplary by the state education agency.[28] The founders

of NEU share that their goal is to revolutionize public education one school at a time.[28]

While a few research studies have been conducted to examine the influences of the NEU program at elementary schools, no formal studies were found that investigated the use of these structures in preschools. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to discover how the core beliefs of the NEU framework have influenced the participants and the culture of achievement at one nonprofit preschool.

Context of the Study

Within the local public-school district where this study was conducted, 68.5% of students are classified as economically disadvantaged [29]; therefore, finding ways to positively enhance the educational outcomes for children of poverty is a critical need for this community. At the research site, 80% of families are considered economically disadvantaged and receive either free or reduced meals. The average annual income of families at the school is reported as $27,482 (Jill Goodrich, M.B.A., email communication, October 20, 2020)[30]. Breaking this cycle of poverty and building a strong foundation of high-quality early education has been a foundational goal of the school for over 50 years.[31]

The research site, one of only two early childhood programs currently accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in this southern US rural city, seeks to embody the principle that each family and child is unique and deserves high-quality early education. As part of the accreditation process, the school must uphold the 10 NAEYC program standards to ensure high quality. These standards purport that childcare facilities and preschools are some of a child's first communities and thus have the important responsibility of encouraging life-long goals and aspirations.[32] To promote this ideal, the administrators and leaders of the target school investigated ways to accomplish this goal and discovered the NEU framework.

In 2012, as NEU was expanding throughout the country, the leadership of the nonprofit preschool wondered if a preschool could become an NEU campus? They questioned if preschool was too young to start planting the seeds of college and career readiness. They did not think it was, so through dedication, hard work, and partnerships, they seized the unique chance to positively affect the lives of young students and their families by becoming the first preschool in the country to become part of the NEU network of schools.

In June of 2012, 8 teachers from the preschool, 2 campus administrators, and the executive director attended the Turnaround Institute in Dallas to learn more about the NEU approach. At this institute, teachers discovered ways to develop these future-oriented concepts in the minds of preschoolers. From helping young learners understand the different levels of education and the symbolism associated with colleges and universities, these educators began to envision other ways to jumpstart future-oriented dreams for the students and families they serve. These teachers agreed that the NEU approach was a good fit to enhance the longstanding history and philosophy of helping children achieve their full potential. Therefore, in the fall of 2013, the school in the study became the first NEU preschool, outside a public-school system, in the United States to implement the framework.

Sharing the vision continues as information about NEU is disseminated through parent orientation meetings and is regularly included in handbooks and special brochures. NEU is part of the new-employee orientation and is a topic that program development specialists work on with new teachers joining the faculty. Every 2 years, team members attend the NEU convention to learn new strategies.

Methodology

This research study used a mixed-methods case study design to explore the participants' perceptions of the influence of the NEU approach at a nonprofit preschool program located in a rural hub city. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie[33] pointed out that both quantitative and qualitative research can be useful in educational research and a mixed-methods approach allows researchers to benefit from the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of both. This design was selected to collect both objective quantitative data through the online surveys and subjective qualitative data through informal discussions and semi-structured interviews. Including survey data allows for replication of the study in other settings, while the open-ended nature of the questions, follow-up discussions, and face-to-face interviews helped describe the lived experiences of the study participants in more detail.[34] Analyses of both data sets enhanced and enriched the conclusions drawn from this study.

Participants

The research site school serves an average of 150 children per year from ages 0 to 5 and provides affordable, high-quality early childhood education for children from many low-income families. The purposeful sample for this investigation included faculty/staff members, parents of the preschool students, and young students attending this program. Participants included 18 preschool faculty/staff members, 37 parents, and 31 preschool students. Adult participants responded electronically to questions through an online survey. Preschool students were asked to respond to survey questions in a face-to-face interview at the school with their parents by their side.

Data Collection

The research team recruited adults by sending letters and email messages to potential participants who were at least 18 years old, letting them know that they would be receiving an email containing a link to the informed consent form and survey questions. The school posted information about the research study on the school's Facebook page, on its website, and in its newsletters. School administrators supplied information to families and faculty members via email messages, announcements, notes, and flyers. After notification, the potential adult participants received a link to their specific survey questions. After opening the link, they were able to consent to take part in the research and submit their survey responses electronically.

Surveys for faculty, staff, and administration asked participants to provide information about how they first learned about NEU and provided a venue to share how the core beliefs of the NEU program have influenced the culture of achievement at the school. Parents were asked to reflect on how the NEU philosophy has affected them and their families and were encouraged to suggest ways to improve the NEU program at the school.

To collect data from the preschool students, research team members visited the school and asked parents if they would give their permission for a researcher to ask their child questions about the NEU program. After parents gave verbal permission, they read and signed the informed permission form. A researcher then asked the young student if they were willing to answer a few questions. They were then prompted to share their ideas and perceptions of attending college and their future plans using the approved protocol questions. Some children eagerly answered all the questions. A few young students were comfortable answering questions at first, but then changed their minds; others answered by whispering their responses to their parents, who relayed the

child's answers to the research team member. The brief student responses were recorded, transcribed, and entered into the Qualtrics online software system to be analyzed alongside the adult participant data. Data collection took over a semester to complete and yielded 86 completed responses.

Findings

Adult Faculty/Staff and Parent Survey Analysis

The faculty/staff members and parents were asked how they had learned about the NEU program. The results of the survey showed that 83.9% of the parent participants and 93.75% of the faculty/staff had learned about the NEU approach from the school or through their local school district. When they first heard about the NEU initiative, 92.9% of parents and 86.7% of the faculty/staff members were excited about the idea and 83.3% of parents believed that the NEU philosophy was positive. Overall, the adult participants perceived an increase in conversations about college with their children as shown in this comment made by one participant: *"One thing that I have seen personally is my own children talking about college. They never say 'if' I go to college, they always say 'when' I go to college"* (Faculty/Staff Participant 8). One faculty member noted that the NEU framework reflects the school's motto: *"[NEU] is a great fit with our motto of "Good Beginnings Never End"* (Faculty/Staff Participant 11).

Findings revealed that 56.5% of parents believed knowledge about college and career readiness would be helpful for their child's success later in life. Additionally, 17.4% of the parent participants felt as though the NEU philosophy would better prepare their child for college and 13% believed that these attitudes could provide positive educational opportunities in the future. Parents said they more often talked about college and career goals at home in response to receiving the NEU information. In addition, 72% of the parent participants responded that their children seemed to be more interested in going to college because of their participation in these activities. For example, parent participant 5 responded, *"We talk about him going on to kindergarten and how each year he will learn different things";* while parent participant 3 described conversations with her son by saying, "*We talk about what college he wants to attend to become a doctor."*

Data revealed that 53.8% of faculty/staff believed that NEU principles could help students value their personal strengths and validate how they might use their strengths in the future. Furthermore, 46.2% of the faculty/staff participants credited the NEU program with helping students learn that higher education is attainable and is one way they could achieve long-term goals.

Regarding suggestions to improve the NEU program at the school, 39.1% of parents responded that the framework was good just the way it was, while 26% of parents suggested improved communication with parents about the NEU framework. Some suggested that vocational career education be added to strengthen the approach. Faculty/staff suggested more assistance in helping students achieve short-term academic goals, additional guidance in providing motivation and hope to students, and further information about different college or career choices.

In general, 44.4% of faculty/staff members responded that the NEU program was a positive influence on the faculty/staff, and 33.3% agreed that the program provided a positive influence on their children. Overall, 77.7% of the faculty/staff participants believed the NEU approach has helped create a positive school culture that promotes college and career readiness.

Student Survey Analysis

Student responses were examined to find out about young children's beliefs about college and/or career choices in their future. Even though the responses were brief, their ideas were clear. In response to a question about their thoughts on college, 75% of students responded positively and 70.8% of the child participants said they were interested in going to college. Examples of their responses included: *"Going to college is cool"* and *"I think I am going to do it!"* (selected child participants).

Most student participants agreed that going to college would offer some benefit to their life, including making money (32.5%), developing knowledge and skills (22.5%), and fostering friendships (12.5%). Approximately 45% of students responded that their teacher encouraged them to go to college, and mentioned a variety of career choices for what they would like to become when they grow up such as a firefighter, police officer, doctor, veterinarian, or teacher. Interestingly, 70.9% of students responded that family members of theirs had gone to college or graduated from college.

Discussion

The findings from this study suggest that preschool is not too early to begin shaping students' identities for future success and developing the self-efficacy skills to seek out post-secondary opportunities to fit their unique interests and talents. This can be accomplished by creating a culture of college and career readiness; providing ongoing training and support for faculty, parents, and students; and addressing the ongoing challenges of implementing this framework.

The Culture of College and Career Readiness

Helping students and families embrace the importance of post-secondary success is one purpose of the NEU message. By facilitating students' development of self-efficacy skills, they may become more willing and able to take risks and persevere to reach college or career goals.[7] To cultivate this identity, students must understand and believe that a myriad of college opportunities or career paths are open to them.

The NEU message of universal achievement can influence the college- and career-readiness culture at a school. Communicating a philosophy that upholds educational achievement and lifelong learning for all not only influences the students' futures, but this positive and motivational message can also encourage the adults in the school to complete their post-secondary education or seek ongoing training opportunities. Exposure to the positive message of universal achievement helps motivate students, teachers, staff, and parents to seek or complete educational opportunities.

Ongoing Training and Support

Preschool leaders may benefit from these research-based findings when making decisions on training their faculty and staff about college and career readiness concepts. This understanding can be beneficial to in-service educators working in the field of early education and teacher educators preparing the next generation of early childhood educational professionals. NEU provides one model for improved communication about the development of long-term educational goals for all students. Whatever framework or model is adopted, we assert that cultivating ways to motivate young preschool students and their families toward long-term academic achievement is both worthy and attainable.

Across the country there is a need for high-quality, well-trained teachers in schools serving at-risk and diverse populations. Both in-service and pre-service educators at all levels must be taught to honor cultural diversity and uphold equity in their classrooms. Providing well-

developed methods of support for addressing these sensitive issues can give teachers confidence as they fight some of the negative outcomes of generational or situational poverty. As Kaiser and Rasminsky[35] [(p21)] explained, "Equitable means ensuring that you consider each child's strengths, context, and needs and provide all children with the opportunities that will support them in reaching their potential." The NEU framework is a resource that can aid educators in helping all children explore possibilities and accomplish what they want for their unique futures.

The data reveal that the faculty and staff at the school may benefit from additional and more robust training and support to articulate the NEU message more clearly. High staff turnover and limited time to train new staff members may affect this implementation. When staff are hired, the leadership team must train them on many procedures and sometimes there is not enough time to fully explain the NEU framework. Therefore, developing a strategic employee onboarding process is critical to this work. Having a consistent orientation process can provide better support for new employees and lead to more coherence in programming.

The research study provided parent participants with a venue to express their opinions and provide input and ideas about the NEU framework at the preschool level. The findings show that parents appreciate positive and motivating messages being dispensed to their students. However, only 17.4% of the parent participants reported that the NEU philosophy would help to better prepare their child for college, and only 13% believed that these attitudes could provide positive educational opportunities in the future. These low percentages may reveal that parents may not be hearing the message consistently or do not have a clear understanding of what the culture of universal achievement can mean for their children. Since the majority (80%) of families at the research site are economically disadvantaged, the parents may not currently have the capacity to envision college for their child. London[36] explained that many immigrant families or first-generation college students often have identity conflicts when balancing the expectations of their traditional family role and educational advancement.

Untold Challenges

While the findings from this study shed light on several positive results from implementing a framework for college and career readiness in a preschool setting, the results did not address the questions, resistance, and ongoing coordination of implementing this program. As a rule, early

childhood educators have not traditionally focused on the concept of post-secondary educational readiness. In fact, some may argue that it is not developmentally appropriate to include college readiness as a learning objective in preschool settings. Therefore, early childhood advocates may dismiss this concept as something unimportant to the early learning community. However, we must continue to encourage educational advancement and achievement at all levels. In a faltering economy, helping individuals advance their education to create economic stability within their families is a valuable message to convey.

While initially sharing ideas about the NEU framework with the preschool faculty and staff of the research site, the program administrators and leadership team had to address several concerns and respond to ongoing questions from their staff. One critical misconception that needed clarification was the concept that the "no excuses" message is meant as a reminder for the adult facilitators in the field of education, and is not targeted at the children or their families.

When the NEU initiative was first launched at the preschool, the majority of faculty and staff members did not have college degrees and this caused some to feel cautious or inhibited when they were asked to talk about college or post-secondary plans with students and families. Table 2 provides information about the educational levels of the faculty/staff at the time of the research study along with current statistics.

Table 2: Research Site Faculty/Staff Educational Background [a]

Educational Level	Spring 2018	Fall 2020
Master's degree	9%	7%
Bachelor's degree	16%	15%
Associate degree	9%	24%
Child development associate (CDA) credential	24%	15%
Working on degree or credential completion	33%	22%
High school diploma	9%	17%
[a] Data provided by the research site Executive Director (Jill Goodrich, M.B.A., email communication, October 20, 2020)[30]		

The most notable increase can be seen in the percentage of faculty/staff who have completed an associate degree. As a result of the NEU message promoting education as a pathway out of poverty, there

has been an increase in faculty/staff at the research site who have become interested in pursuing or continuing their educational goals. Several faculty members were inspired to begin a degree program, while others were motivated to complete an associate or bachelor's degree. All current administrators, directors, and supervisors at the research site have an associate degree or higher. Through their ongoing efforts, the school continues to support the community-wide effort to break the cycle of poverty through education.

Initiatives and supportive communication over the past 7 years have helped develop a clearer understanding of the NEU goals. The preschool teachers now embrace the potential benefits for their students, while exploring ways to embed the concept that *every* child, regardless of their background, deserves the opportunity to be prepared for a future that may include college if that is the path they choose. The current expectation for preschool teachers is for them to have an earned college degree or to be actively pursuing a degree in the field of early childhood education. Program directors must consistently share this expectation with prospective employees during the hiring and interview process.

Other challenges affecting the ongoing implementation of this or any program initiative are the increased standards from regulatory and accrediting bodies and the time needed to implement and document the mandated requirements. In this environment, the focus sometimes shifts to the immediate requirements, and some of the higher ideals may become overshadowed. Addressing this challenge requires that we remain focused on the principles that contribute to the long-term mission, values, and goals of the organization.[18]

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study is subject to a few limitations. One limitation was the small sample size. The researchers realize that a larger group of participants and more robust quantitative data would make the findings from this study richer. Since NEU has been implemented in many schools across the nation, the research could be extended to determine the influence of the NEU program on the stakeholders and the culture of achievement at other NEU schools. Additionally, this study was conducted in a rural area; therefore, the findings may not generalize to urban areas, where there are more programs that focus on post-secondary education, so replication of this study in a large urban area would be beneficial.

Out of the 6 distinctive systems outlined in the NEU framework, this study documented the influence of the "culture of universal achievement" and "collaboration" systems. Hence, we recommend further research to investigate strategies focusing on the other NEU systems, which would include collecting and analyzing data regarding standards alignment, assessment, data management, and intervention requirements in early childhood education.

Conclusions

Findings from this study suggest that preschoolers are not too young to begin understanding college and career readiness skills. Even the youngest 4- and 5-year-old participants were able to explain the benefits of attending college due to their exposure to the tenets of NEU. Acknowledging that developing one's self-identity as a "college goer" takes many exposures and ongoing dialogue, Mattern et al.[2] [(p10)] pointed out that students need to receive encouragement and positive feedback "early and often." Therefore, preschool is not too early to begin planting and tending the seeds of college and career readiness.

The "Culture of Universal Achievement" is a belief that "each student is capable of meeting academic standards in reading, writing, and math, and that the school has the power to make that opportunity a reality."[21] The system of "Collaboration" validates that purposeful and action-oriented collaboration can reap great rewards.[21] Collaboration was noted in this study by the data collected from the various perspectives of participants. Findings were verified by the faculty, staff, administrators, parents, and students. By embracing these systemic beliefs, schools can shift the negative cycle of poverty to a cycle of achievement for all students.

Even though there are many challenges to overcome, the culture of college and career readiness can permeate the preschool environment to motivate all stakeholders to attain post-secondary success. Positive and intentional efforts to build a culture of success communicates that all individuals of any age or background can be well prepared for a promising and bright future.

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