# Goals and Expectations of Continuation High School Students Transitioning to Postsecondary Education

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## Abstract

**Background:** Students at a continuation high school (CHS) attended an occupational therapy program to acquire life skills in preparation for their transition from secondary education. Most of the students who participated in the OT program planned to pursue a postsecondary education (PSE), but the CHS students encountered many barriers in negotiating the requirements of PSE. Discernment of these barriers encountered by the CHS students may enable the occupational therapy practitioners to better prepare the students for PSE.

**Method:** This was a qualitative phenomenological study based on analyses of interview data. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with eight CHS senior students and five CHS graduates with the aim to explore the students' beliefs and knowledge regarding their transition to PSE.

**Results:** The CHS students consistently reported PSE to be essential for successful adulthood but were unable to describe basic PSE entry requirements and processes. The students did not report concerns regarding their intellectual aptitude for PSE but reported entrenched negative behaviors, particularly truancy, as potential barriers to success. The students acknowledged responsibility for their successes and/or failures without blaming either others or the social environment.

**Conclusion:** It is recommended that OT interventions focus on guiding the students to access knowledge of the PSE process and set realistic personal, education, and career goals with incremental action steps leading to goal achievement.

## Keywords

Continuation high school students, Postsecondary education, At-risk students, Transition

## Cover Page Footnote

## Credentials Display

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Part of the American dream is achieving success by completing a college education (Grubb & Lazerson, 2004). Additional education after high school yields higher earning power, and a college education is considered a social marker of lifetime opportunity (Breton, 2013; Kena et al., 2015). Postsecondary education (PSE) is increasingly regarded as the primary path for transition after high school, and preparing for PSE is often the main focus of high school students (Ingels, Glennie, Lauff, & Wirt, 2012).

Academic preparedness (Ou & Reynolds, 2008; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013; Wintre & Bowers, 2007) and a realistic PSE plan (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999) contribute to students' successful enrollment in PSE. The path of a successful PSE requires that students gain access to an institution of higher education, negotiate the process of PSE, and complete curriculum that supports their career objectives (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

High school students preparing for PSE require effective academic skills, such as "study skills, self-management, time management, library skills, note-taking, and test taking skills" (Gajar, 1998, p. 389). The skill of self-management deserves particular attention. The ability to self-discipline, a self-management skill, has been found to be an important predictor of both successful academic performance and continued attendance at a PSE institution (Robbins, Allen, Casillas, Peterson, & Le, 2006). Self-discipline in the context of PSE includes academic engagement and participation. These behaviors require adherence to academic rules, such as arriving to class on time and completing assignments (Finn &

Rock, 1997); putting forth effort in academic activities (Robbins et al., 2006); regulating learning to master academic subjects (Caprara et al., 2008); and applying self-monitoring strategies (Perry, Hladkyj, Pekrun, & Pelletier, 2001).

To secure a successful educational path, students need the skills to explore occupational opportunities, assess individual interests and skills, set realistic educational goals, and make action-oriented plans to pursue PSE (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Students who successfully develop a PSE path are thought to acquire the necessary skills from their families and the schools (Taylor, Doane, & Eisenberg, 2014; Venezia & Jaeger, 2013).

Transitioning from high school to PSE may be particularly challenging for continuation high school (CHS) students. A CHS provides assistance to students at risk of academic failure by reconnecting them to education (Smith & Thomson, 2014; Sussman, Rohrbach, Skara, & Dent, 2004; Velasco et al., 2008). Since 1919, CHSs have been offering a high school diploma to California students who are aged 16 years and older, have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not completing their schooling (California Department of Education, 2015). Originally designed to provide a flexible schedule for working students, CHSs now primarily serve as an important drop out prevention strategy and assist students who are deficient in the academic credits required for their grade levels (Velasco et al., 2008). In 2010, almost 70,000 students enrolled in 499 CHSs in California (California Department of Education, 2015). Students in CHSs score substantially

lower in measures of academic performance (e.g., the Standardize Testing and Reporting Program [STAR] and the California High School Exit Examination [CAHSEE]) than students in regular or comprehensive high schools (Velasco et al., 2008). Students enrolled in CHSs are more likely to be racial and ethnic minorities who are of a lower socioeconomic status. They also are more likely to speak English as a second language, engage in documented risk behaviors (e.g., substance abuse, violence, and truancy), live in foster care or with someone other than a parent, and have moved multiple times from school to school (Elder, 1969; Sussman et al., 2004; Velasco et al., 2008). Family and school resources that support the formation of a realistic PSE plan for students in regular high schools may be absent in the lives of CHS students.

Occupational therapy (OT) supports students with special needs to participate successfully in secondary education and prepare for transitioning to postsecondary activities and adulthood (Copley, Turpin, Gordon, & McLaren, 2011; Gangl, Strecker Neufeld, & Berg, 2011; Juan & Swinth, 2010; Marczuk, Taff, & Berg, 2014; Passmore, 2004; Paul-Ward, 2009; Spencer, Emery, & Schneck, 2003). Whether working with students with disabilities, or who are in foster care, are refugees, or have experienced a disconnection from school, occupational therapists play a unique role in recognizing and addressing barriers that impede the students' full participation in meaningful occupations, such as pursuing PSE. The occupational therapists who serve students in a CHS through the Occupational Therapy Training Program (OTTP), a community-based organization, are particularly aware of the

students' overwhelming desire to pursue PSE. This study explored the perceptions and experiences of CHS students through one-on-one interviews with CHS senior students planning a PSE and CHS graduates enrolled in a PSE institution. Although exploratory, the study sought to understand how and if the interviewed CHS students had acquired the needed skills to pursue PSE: developing a realistic educational plan and academic preparedness. This study is intended to inform OT practitioners who assist CHS students transitioning from secondary education to PSE.

## Method

This study is part of a research project focused on understanding the role of the OTTP, a grand-funded community-based service provider to students at a CHS in San Francisco. This portion of the study addresses the knowledge and beliefs of the CHS students transitioning to PSE. A qualitative research method of face-to-face interviews was used following approval by the appropriate Institutional Review Board (IRB). The interview data explored the perceptions of the CHS students.

### Setting

The study was conducted at a CHS in the San Francisco Unified School District. Average enrollment in the CHS was 245 students with approximately 45 senior students. The CHS curriculum follows traditional course work emphasizing mathematics, science, and languages with the objective of high school graduation. Keeping students in school is a continuing goal, and attendance is required for students to earn school credits. The educational team consisted of the principal, school counselors, and teachers

(who also assume the role of student counselors). In addition, a number of community-based organizations, including the OTTP, provide services to the students on-site.

The OTTP provides a life-skills training program to the students at the CHS. The program is operated and directed by occupational therapists and includes living skills training, vocational assessment, mental health services, case management services, and assistance in planning the transition to adult roles. Specific college entrance skills (e.g., college admission tests, academic preparation, college selection) are not standard program content. However, the students are provided with assistance to plan and pursue personal career and educational goals that may include PSE.

Enrollment of the CHS students in the OTTP was approximately 45 per year during the research period. The OTTP participants were referred by their teachers, counselors, and/or the school principal from all four grade levels based on subjective assessments of who would benefit from OTTP participation. The OTTP staff interviewed the referred students who had provided the written consent of their parents or guardians prior to enrollment in the OTTP. The OTTP classes occurred in two periods each school day for 10 weeks during the regular semesters and 6 weeks during the summer semesters. The students earned academic credits by participating in the OTTP.

**Participants**

The inclusion criteria for participation in the study were: (a) CHS graduates or graduating seniors, (b) current or prior participation in the OTTP, and (c) attendance at or a plan to attend a PSE institution. The OTTP staff recommended students who would be most likely to participate as interview subjects. The recruited students were contacted by the principal investigator (PI) to participate in the interview. Of the 22 potential participants scheduled for interview, eight CHS senior students and five college students participated in the interview.

The study participants were 17 to 22 years of age (mean 18.7). Five were females and eight were males. The participant ethnicity was Black (n = 8), Asian (n = 2), Hispanic (n = 2), and White (n = 1). Two of the participants had spent time in juvenile hall; seven of the participants lived with a single parent, a sister, or an aunt; and one of the participants lived in a group home. Five of the participants had special education status with an Individual Education Plan at the CHS. Among the college students, four were attending a community college and one was attending a private university.

**Data Collection**

The participants were interviewed individually in private at the OTTP office or at the CHS and asked open-ended questions designed to elicit their views of PSE. Prior to the interviews, written consents were secured from all of the participants and from the participants' legal guardians when indicated. All of the participants were further informed of the purpose and the process of the interview and the study to obtain final consent. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted in the form of a dialogue. The PI was the sole interviewer and directed the flow of the conversation and maintained the focus on the topic. The PI was an independent investigator who was not an OTTP staff member and who did not provide services to

the participants. Data collected from the participants included general demographic information about the participants and their responses to questions focusing on (a) their beliefs about how to pursue PSE and (b) their perceived opportunities and challenges associated with PSE. Each participant was interviewed for approximately 30 to 60 min and given a small incentive at the end.

### Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The PI used the qualitative data analysis approach described by Brinkman (2013) and Gibbs (2007) to code the transcribed interviews. The transcriptions were read repeatedly to identify emergent themes. The data were then further analyzed to focus on the participants' perceived opportunities for and barriers to the pursuit of PSE. The final theme development approach is inductive and nomothetic by coding repeated patterns and identifying the commonalities and differences of behaviors, concepts, and experiences of the two student groups (Brinkmann, 2013; Gibbs, 2007). Quotations are attributed to senior students and college students only by category in order to maintain confidentiality.

### Results

Four major themes emerged from the interview data. The participants (a) recognized the importance of PSE but lacked basic information about PSE admission, (b) were confident in their intellectual abilities and hopeful for success in PSE, (c) feared potential failure caused by their history of disengagement from school, and (d) assumed full responsibility for their academic successes and/or failures.

### The Importance of PSE but a Lack of Adequate Information

The participants endorsed the statement that PSE is the only path to achieve career goals and improve a person's financial prospects. The senior students commented that attending college also meant becoming smarter; acquiring the skills to communicate and behave intelligently; reaching a higher social status; and becoming a strong, sophisticated person. A participant stated: "I'm thinking that if I go [to college] and do what I have to do, probably finish, get a good job, depending where my major will be, will get a good job, make good money, pay my bills."

Another senior student whose career plan was to become a building contractor expected a PSE to improve his English proficiency:

> If somebody would put me down because your English is bad, I would be really like, just put down because I know it's bad too. So I want to improve my skills. There's rank in construction…you go from holding a stop sign (to) spray and then like dust and so on…but (English) would help me if I were to be a higher rank like a foreman or start your own business.

Most of the senior students did not elaborate on their plans for college, despite enthusiasm about PSE. When asked to describe their future plans, the senior students frequently lost eye contact with the interviewer and appeared restless. The career goals the senior students identified were contractor, massage therapist, fashion buyer, business management, child development specialist, realtor, actor, and biotechnologist, all of which, according to the students, are attainable by going to college.

The five college students spoke more readily than the senior students in the interview. The college students discussed their PSE experiences and career plans and were in general agreement with the senior students regarding the goals of PSE attendance. One college student commented:

> I'll be able to have a better education. It's going to help me, my future, what kind of family I'm going to have, what living conditions I want to be in. It's going to help me get the job that I want. It's just going to help me get all the things I need and want.

Most of the senior students and all of the community college students planned to transfer to a university. However, most of the participants were unable to articulate the differences between the university and the community college, the degree that they would earn, and how long it would take to complete their education. A senior student who wanted a career in biotechnology described her PSE plan:

> I gotta finish high school, then I gotta go to college, do all my requirements… English, math, language, and computer. I gotta do a four-year college, but I'm gonna go to two year and then transfer to Berkeley… because there's a lot of people say that there's a lot of different kind of branches in Berkeley, there's a lot of Mexicans, Latinos.

A senior student talked about pursuing a career as a massage therapist. He was considering whether to attend a private technical college, a state university, or a major prestigious university but could not differentiate the appropriateness among these educational options. When asked what classes he needed to take in PSE to become a massage therapist, he stated "medical." He also explained that PSE would provide him "experiences like CPR, vital signs, and blood pressure." He was unable to differentiate between a four-year and a two-year college and planned to attend college for one or perhaps two years. He appeared bewildered to find out that it takes four years to complete a bachelor's degree and commented: "So if you leave before the four years, you don't get a degree?"

The female university student who planned to become a physician stood out as the only participant who articulated a thought out PSE plan. She was taking pre-medical school classes and seemed conversant with the application process and the requirements of medical school. The community college students identified their career goals but were unable to describe how to achieve them. One community college student who stated an interest in accounting commented: "I think I need to get a bachelor's degree or something like that, of either science or something like that, so I can actually get into accounting as a job."

A community college student who was employed part-time in a social service office and planned to become a social worker was not sure of the academic major that she needed to pursue when transferring to a four-year college. When asked about how she would prepare herself for the career as a social worker, she commented:

> Well, you know, I guess I'll be "undecided". I think if I go to school, I'll be prepared. But I have noticed that other professional people that have those

positions. I can relate the work that I do right now with their work. Once I have a certificate or degree, I can do that work.

Both the senior students and the college students expressed hope for a better future through PSE, but most had not thoroughly thought out how to achieve their occupational and educational goals.

**Success in PSE**

The senior students expressed confidence in their abilities to be successful in PSE. They attributed their poor performance in high school to their own rebellion against the confines of the high school environment. They described college attendance requirements as flexible. Students in college are not "hovered over" by their teachers and no one calls a college student if he or she does not show up to class. College students can choose the schedules that best suit their habits and lifestyles. It is up to the college students to do all of their schoolwork. The belief of autonomy was especially appealing to the senior students who described looking forward to being emancipated from the restrictive mandate of high school. The senior students suggested that they would be more motivated to study subjects that are self-chosen and which interest them. Moreover, the senior students indicated that since they have to pay for their PSE, they will regard the education as more valuable and will be more motivated to work hard in order to succeed.

One senior student described his beliefs about going to college: "It's up to you to make the choices. Like they ain't going to force you to come…or if they tell you to get a book, you have to buy it for yourself, you know." Another senior student acknowledged the autonomy associated with attending PSE and the importance of taking responsibility for learning: "Going to college is your own thing. You could leave when you want to or do the work if you want to, and when you need help you gotta go talk to the professor, and that's the only way you're going to get help on your projects and everything."

The senior students recognized the prior academic failings that had lead them to the CHS and acknowledged that more effort would be required of them in order to succeed in college. They also expressed motivation, hope, and confidence that they would be more willing to work hard in PSE. One senior student commented: "I'm going to overwhelm myself and be a 4.0 student, but I'll make it there and I'm going to soak up everything that they have to offer for me." Another senior student commented: "I will go to class, do my best and try and work is what I have to do to get my college [degree]."

The senior students also spoke of their beliefs that colleges, unlike high schools, teach real-life work skills and knowledge that is relevant to jobs, with opportunities to practice these work skills. A senior student commented on the work-related college education in the form of an internship: "Not only in the classroom but you even might have to volunteer to go to somewhere else and … work, but then you're not getting paid … but learn what you do." Another senior student who planned to become a childcare worker thought that his career goal would keep him on track in college. He commented: "that [career goal] will really keep me going to school because I want that degree…kids are always going to be there."

The college students described the college classes as equally difficult or more difficult than high school courses but reported increased autonomy. They had begun and experienced higher education, and they recognized the demands and the relevance of PSE, which requires serious efforts from them. One college student commented:

> Even though I don't like English… I have to take English and I wanted to take it so I'd learn how to write essays. Because you got to write a lot of stuff down in life, so people can always ask you to write like a little theory or a thesis or something.

Another college student commented: "You have to go the extra mile… because no one's going to do your work in college. You have to be really disciplined and do everything."

**History of School Disengagement Leading to Potential Failure**

The participants clearly understood that the objective of PSE is to pursue a successful career, and that PSE success requires hard work. However, these students also identified potential barriers to college success. A majority of the participants acknowledged financial limitations as one barrier, but that did not deter them from pursuing PSE. The participants identified available resources, such as financial aid and other college assistance programs. According to the senior students, their high school teachers and counselors had been telling them that if they wanted to attend PSE, there is money available to pay for their education.

All of the participants appeared confident in their financial resources and their academic ability to achieve eventual college success.

However, these participants also described their fears of not being successful because of a history of disengagement from school. The behaviors associated with school disengagement were identified and described by every participant as a major potential barrier to college success. Each participant labeled his or her school disengagement differently, but the common terms were laziness, messing around, not focusing, not doing homework, being with the wrong crowd, distractions, no encouragement, and hanging-out too much. Above all, the fear expressed by all of the participants was: "I won't want to get up to go to school".

This fear of school disengagement is derived from the participants' past experiences. One senior student commented: "The whole freshman year, I even went to summer school and my fall semester I was still a freshman. I would go to school, but I wouldn't go to class." Another senior student discussed his difficulty learning in class: "I felt like I never got anything out of it, I try my best to listen, and I sit there, and still it just closes out my ears." This participant also reported having difficulties getting up in the morning for school and described himself as lazy. Another senior student who self-described as making good grades at the CHS talked about his past experience:

> There have been many occasions when I wanted to give up. It's just that I'd wake up at 10:30, 11:30, 12:00. School was already over. And then I got into the habit of just waking up late, and then going to school late, and my transcripts, you can tell.

The participants frequently described their friends as a major distraction. A senior student described how peer pressure and her personal needs steered her away from school: "I tend to let others pull me in a direction … just knowing that I can have somebody there that would just chill with me or whatever, it would pull me away from my studies." A college student who talked about her continuing struggle between studying and going out with friends commented: "So something stopping me from [going to school], I think if you get side tracked, … wanna have fun on the weekend a lot. So going out is one thing that would make me tired and lazy and just not focused." Another college student explained how his learning disability affected his interest in school: "I wasn't really into school, since I was little. It just wasn't me, because I'm ADHD. I'm into math, I'm into writing stuff. But when it comes to science and all this other stuff, I just don't even bother going." Another college student described his distaste for high school:

> I didn't like being in high school, and I didn't like that setting. I just didn't like being there and just wanted to get out… it didn't even really matter to me, you know, having the high school experience. I thought I would just make it up in college.

**Taking Responsibility**

The participants took responsibility for their self-identified negative behaviors. Many of the participants, both senior students and college students, acknowledged the support and positive contributions from their families, friends, teachers, and the OTTP staff in their academic experiences. Neither the senior students nor the college students identified any factors other than their own behaviors that could have contributed to their academic challenges. One senior student summed up a sentiment that was shared by all of the participants:

> No one can tell you not to go to school. No one can tell you not to get that job or that type of stuff. But I feel like the only thing that can keep me from not succeeding is yourself, because you are your own person. No one can hold you down but you. And there is nothing in the world that can.

None of the participants attributed their precarious academic performance in high school to their personal environments. However, in their interview narratives, the participants described various environmental factors that could have negatively impacted their lives, such as a single-parent household, limited financial resources, minimal parental involvement in education, multiple high school transfers, and unsafe or unstable living situations.

**Discussion**

Despite prior academic difficulties, the participants aspired to PSE, a common trend among students transitioning to adulthood (Bates & Anderson, 2014; Grubb & Lazerson, 2004). From a more practical perspective, few of the senior students knew how to find appropriate educational opportunities or had considered how to achieve their career goals. Both the senior students and the college students were vague about what it takes to achieve their career goals. Many of the senior students had not earned sufficient academic credits for high school graduation or taken the steps necessary to pursue PSE. Even the college students were mostly lost

as how to navigate their career paths and unsure of the next step in the PSE process, even though they had been enrolled in a college with an identified career goal. Without adequate knowledge of the higher education process and career entry requirements, students are often unable to construct realistic plans to pursue their goals (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Moreover, the participants were not aware of this lack of knowledge and therefore failed to recognize it as a barrier to PSE success. The senior students considered limited financial resources as the primary obstacle to PSE, but believed this obstacle could be overcome via student loans and financial aid.

The majority of the participants described their fears about not showing up to school as an obstacle to PSE success. Although the participants did not use the term truant to label their habits of "not making it to school," truancy, defined as failure to attend, accurately describes the participants' self-identified behaviors. The fear of truancy affecting future success was uniform among the participants, but the factors contributing to truancy were unclear and varied. Demographic factors that are often associated with truancy are low socioeconomic status, a single parent household, special education status, and belonging to an ethnic or racial minority (Barry, Chaney, & Chaney, 2011; Henry, 2007; Teasley, 2004; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Willson, 2007). Students who are truant also often exhibit risk behaviors, such as substance abuse, school disconnection, sexual activity, and violence (Barry et al., 2011; Guttmacher, Weitzman, Kapadia, & Weinberg, 2002). These risk behaviors were not

reported in the interviews but deserve further investigation.

The participants in the study were fearful that truancy could ultimately defeat their long-term goals of pursuing a successful PSE. Truancy has been found to be the leading cause of high school drop out and academic failure (Black, Seder, & Kekahio, 2014). It is likely that the CHS students' history of poor school attendance contributed to their low academic standings. Moreover, chronic truancy also carries the financial impact of reduced job prospects, lower salaries, and higher unemployment (Black et al., 2014).

**Occupational Therapy Applications**

OT can play a unique and effective role in assisting CHS students transitioning from secondary education to pursue PSE. The current literature indicates a limited use of OT in supporting high school students with special needs transitioning to adulthood (Mankey, 2011); therefore, a more vigorous advocacy of OT services for this student population may be necessary. By assisting CHS students to succeed in their pursuit of PSE, occupational therapists may consider the two major obstacles that are identified in this study: a lack of knowledge about the PSE process and the potential for truancy-related academic failure.

Students who have realistic goals and plans to pursue a PSE will more likely achieve success in PSE and in career acquisition (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). Schneider and Stevenson state, "Teenagers whose educational expectations are consistent with their occupational aspirations have aligned their ambition with reality; they know what type of job they want and

how much education it will require" (1999, p. 23). Schneider and Stevenson believe that students must be guided to assess accurately their individual interests, abilities, and resources in order to develop a realistic educational plan aligned with the desired career goals. In addition, having accurate information regarding the duration, the academic requirements, and the behavioral expectations of the PSE needed for a specific career may help the students set achievable career goals. Once a student identifies a realistic career goal, he or she still needs to map out the necessary action steps for goal achievement.

Having a clear knowledge of self and the path to achieve desired goals often improves the chances for success (Leondari & Gonida, 2008; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). The concept of "possible selves" may promote the participants' self-awareness leading to generating realistic and achievable goals and subsequent outcomes (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Possible selves are defined as a representation of self derived from a person's past experiences projecting to his or her future possibilities. The possible selves consist of a set of hoped for, expected, and feared future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Applying this concept to the study, the participants hoped for a career path through the pursuit of PSE. They were confident and expected to navigate successfully through the educational system in order to reach that eventual goal. However, they expressed fear of potential failure in the future due to their past truant behavior, which may persist in PSE. Leondari and Gonida (2008) found in their study that high school students overwhelmingly regarded attaining a career as their hoped-for self,

and that the most reported feared self pertained to personal states and characteristics, such as drug user and being unhappy, consistent with the expressed sentiments of this study's participants. More recent studies also found that students who were knowledgeable of their possible selves with a clear self-concept and identity were more future oriented and academically engaged (Erikson, 2007; Landau, Oyserman, Keefer, & Smith, 2014).

Exploring occupational interests and setting realistic and achievable occupational goals are the foundational skills of occupational therapists. CHS students may be guided by occupational therapists to better define their possible selves through explorations and engagement in meaningful occupations, including IADLs, leisure and play activities, and work and education. Matching the students' personal interests, abilities, and potentials to possible vocational options would enhance CHS students' commitment to PSE and eventual success (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Sussman et al., 2004). In addition, CHS students can be guided to explore and access community resources that would support and pave their way to PSE, such as vocational counseling and volunteer opportunities (Hynes et al., 2010).

Occupational therapists guiding students in setting achievable personal goals, especially career and educational goals, and mapping out pathways with small incremental milestones to goal achievement may provide the students with a realistic sense of purpose, which could mitigate factors leading to truant behaviors—the feared future self. Realistic goal-setting that leads to specific planned behaviors has been found to be

effective in achieving intended goals and outcomes (Bates & Anderson, 2014; Dishman et al., 2006). Incremental successes toward achieving personal goals could be an important ingredient in solidifying the students' desires to continue academic engagement and minimize truant behaviors. Achieving a short-term goal of getting to school on time by using the strategy of setting an alarm clock at night may subsequently lead to achieving a long-term goal, such as successful completion of a college course. Moreover, incremental successes also provide the students with a sense of hope. Hope has been recognized as a psychological strength that can predict an adolescent's subsequent life satisfaction and outcome (Lagacé-Séguin & d'Entremont, 2010; Marques, Lopez, & Mitchell, 2013). Having hope for the future may affect a student's desire to expend effort to attain future goals and increase the chances of the student reaching these goals (Levi, Einav, Ziv, Raskind, & Margalit, 2014; McCoy & Bowen, 2015). Further efforts to determine the factors underlying student truancy may be necessary to assure effective interventions.

## Limitations and Implications for Future Research

A major limitation of this research is the small sample size of 13 participants who were current and past students of one CHS. The sample size and the single CHS site for data collection pose significant limitations to the study in terms of generalization of the outcome. However, the common voices shared by the participants in their experiences of pursuing PSE are consistent with many students who are transitioning to PSE. Future studies exploring underlying factors leading to the students' truant behaviors would

further inform occupational therapists for developing effective interventions. Despite the students not acknowledging environmental factors influencing their habits and routines in pursuit of PSE, the potential socioeconomic barriers affecting occupational justice as experienced by the students deserve further study.

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