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Supporting At-Risk Student Success: Incentives and Accountability Matter

by

Jordan Sell

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Sociology

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Supporting At-Risk Student Success: Incentives and Accountability Matter

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Portland State University 2015

Special thanks to:

Brandon Weaver, Norah Lehnhoff, Steve Curley,
Shawn McMahon, Christian Swain, Stuart Smith,
Beth Burczak, Deborah Peterson, Martha Heard,
David Wolf, and Bob Liebman

Abstract:

This comparative case study aims to understand the contrasting graduation rates between Benson Polytechnic High School and Roosevelt High School in Portland, Oregon. I chose Roosevelt and Benson due to their similar reported demographics. Roosevelt reports 76% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch and 69.6% classified as non-white. Benson reports 69% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch and 71.4% classified as non-white. Even with their similar demographic makeup, Benson boasts an 87% graduation rate in the 2013-2014 school year and Roosevelt reports a 53% graduation rate in the 2013-2014 school year. Using theories put forth by sociologists I can begin to create a broad understanding of student success as measured by graduation rate. I address the question of what model benefits students in poverty and how that model can be applied on the federal scale. Using data from the Oregon Department of Education, Portland Public Schools, and in-person interviews I can begin to understand how theories explained differences in graduation rates.

Key words: (Portland Public Schools) (High School Graduation) (Accountability) (Initiatives) (Student Involvement)

Specific Aims and Intentions:

The goal of this paper is to lay out options for administrative level changes that will affect long-term student graduation rates in schools with traditionally at-risk populations. One aim is to answer the question of whether or not the polytechnic model would be able to help support student success if applied in traditional high schools. Sociologists debate the importance of extra learning opportunities, school services, accountability, and incentives for student success. By looking at two schools with similar reported demographics we can focus on the programs in place that affect the graduation rates. I intend to emphasize the importance of strong relationships within schools that lead to incentives and accountability within the student population. Using the two schools as case studies we can get an in-depth understanding of how theories can be applied in reality among at-risk populations.

Introduction:

In the United States we think of ourselves as individuals that can succeed, when provided access to education. When looking at macro-data we can see that there are trends that form depending on certain factors. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, an “at-risk” student is in reference to a student that is more likely to fail or drop out of school than their peers (NCES; NELS:88 1992). “At-risk” students typically are categorized below one or more of the following circumstances; single parent household, homeless, over-age for their grade, repeating a grade, history of poor grades, frequently changing schools, frequently absent, history of behavioral issues, mentally or physically disabled, low socio-economic status, English as a second language, or of racial minority status. For the purpose of this study, I will be using racial minority status, English as second language (ESL), students with disabilities, low-socioeconomic

status, student attrition, and student homelessness as measurable variables reported by the Oregon Department of Education and Portland Public Schools. For statistics that do not have reported data I will rely on interviewee reports of these factors. Title 1 funding for economic disadvantage is another indicator of an at-risk school; Roosevelt receives Title I funding.

Consider this hypothetical student to see the reality that statistics and theory try to convey. A Latino 8th grade male, Sam, looks out the window of his classroom at George Middle School located in North Portland. Earlier in the week he attended a school assembly where school counselors came from Benson Polytechnic High School to tell his classmates and him about how great Benson is and what things he can do if he goes there. He hasn't thought much of his future, but he begins to think this might be a good idea. He really likes cars and an automotive program was introduced. He is a minority student in a predominantly minority neighborhood, which means there is a community for Latino or Latina kids like him. Listening to the counselors stirs something inside of him that is somewhat foreign. Benson does not rely on grades or essays for admittance, but instead a lottery system that was put in place to give every student an opportunity to get in and succeed.

Sam applies and only needs a signature from his parents before turning in his application. His parents are glad he is taking incentive and leave the decision up to him, which is good since he is at the age of pulling away from their support. Sam's best friend has a sister that went to Benson and loved it, so he is even more driven to get in. Sam hopes he will get in, since he has heard that his friends do not like Roosevelt, his neighborhood high school. Unaware of the statistical standing of both schools, Sam is able to make a choice about his future.

Getting into Benson is a big deal for any student; only 250 students are accepted each year due to district caps in place to prevent Benson taking all students from neighborhood

schools driven enough to apply. The student intake has dropped by 100 students each year since 2011 (Manning 2013). Once students get into Benson, however, they are not automatically guaranteed success. What expectations are in place for student success? What challenges do students face? What view do staff members have on the subject? I chose to do case studies of Benson and Roosevelt to account for what success really is and how it comes about.

I chose to pursue interviewing as a medium for data collection in the hopes of getting a personal touch on the issues surrounding the schools. Through connections at Portland State University I was able to get in contact with various people involved in one or both schools. Nora Lehnhoff was one of the first people I was able to get in contact with and who was able to provide me with other connections through her time in social service at Roosevelt High School. I chose to speak with Brandon Weaver in order to get a sense of the SUN program he ran, which served as one of the models for student success. Steve Curley and Shawn McMahon are both special education teachers at Benson and have a deeper and more personal view of student life and administrative challenges within the school, as they are exposed to the same student groups over the full four years of high school.

Case Introduction:

When looking at only the graduation rates of Roosevelt High School and Benson High School there is a striking difference. Benson's graduation rates are at or above the district average, which shows that Benson is achieving at the same rate of affluent schools in Portland. Table 1 in the appendix shows the graduation rates of both schools over four years.

Roosevelt High School is a neighborhood high school in North Portland that pulls from surrounding areas, which happen to be traditionally impoverished and predominantly minority

status part of Portland, Oregon. According to Portland Public Schools, Roosevelt is a high school with 79% of the student population falling under qualifications labeled as underserved, which includes racial status, SpEd (qualifies for an individualized education program [IEP]), LEP (Limited English Proficiency), and Free by District Certification (Measure economic status through free or reduced lunch qualification). Roosevelt also has a racially diverse student population.

Benson Polytechnic High School is a technically focused magnet school that is publicly funded. Benson is not a neighborhood school, and therefore accepts applications from any neighborhood and uses a lottery system to select students; per No Child Left Behind Act's requirements, which requires a lottery system in place for magnet and charter schools. 68% of Benson's population qualifies as underserved. Like Roosevelt, Benson has a diverse student population.

Table 2.1 and table 2.2 in the appendix show the similarities in racial makeup of the two schools, and reveal differences in Asian and Latino populations between Benson and Roosevelt. Benson has a higher percentage of Asian students, while Roosevelt has a higher percentage of Latino students. Compared to Benson, Roosevelt has a higher percentage of underserved students, but both have high rates compared to the district average shown in tables 3.1-3.3 in the appendix.

Other traditional focuses of statewide statistics are funding and student-to-teacher ratios. Looking at funding per student and student to teacher ratios is a typical measure used at the federal and district level to gauge what kind of focus schools gives individual students. Benson spends \$6882 per student per year and has an average class size of 25.2 students per one teacher. Roosevelt spends approximately \$7004 per student per year and has an average class size of 23.3 students per teacher (Portland Public School's School Profiles). Looking at these numbers it ap-

pears that Roosevelt is slightly favored through budget and class size, and it would be expected that it is doing better than Benson based on these statistics. Unfortunately for Roosevelt this is not the case. Roosevelt has a higher rate of disadvantaged students and therefore their margin of benefit does not reflect their slightly heightened funding and lower student-to-teacher ratios.

Lower graduation rates are associated with lower persistence in school. Table 4 in the appendix uses Portland Public School's school profiles to describe data on student enrollment. Student attrition, which refers to students leaving school over the four years and potentially enrolling in another program or school, is not counted as a dropout (Curley Interview 2015). Over four years Benson's student enrollment within a single cohort drops by 32%, which shows a high attrition rate. These percentages are not reported in the graduation rate, and are not widely known, allowing the assumption that Benson is far better than Roosevelt to persist. In reality Roosevelt's student enrollment for a single cohort over the four years only fluctuates slightly in comparison and ends up with 12% more students than they started with as freshmen. Roosevelt shows no attrition and actually gains students over the four year, painting a very different picture than Benson's high attrition rate. Benson has more difficult courses and ability to have students leave if they aren't doing well. Roosevelt is a neighborhood school that serves as automatic placement for students within the neighborhood. Benson is more likely to get away with student attrition because students must apply, and if they are unable to reach the academic standards they are eligible to go to their neighborhood school or an alternative program within the district. Steve Curley points out that when students are not doing well at Benson they are recommended for other programs in order to promote success as well as Benson's graduation rate. It should be noted that this is a single cohort, and does not reflect every cohort, but due to data availability this cohort was available to track over the full four years of high school in each school.

Student attendance varies between the schools, with Roosevelt showing a higher absentee-rate. Betsy Hammond of the Oregonian defines absenteeism as students that do not attend 10% of school days over the course of a year (Hammond 2014). Absenteeism is a major issue within the Portland Public School System and can serve as an indicator for dropout. Students who miss a lot of class are more likely to fail and therefore drop out over time. Table 5 in the appendix uses data from the Portland Public School District website that shows the absentee rate over the four years, relating that over time Roosevelt's absentee rate rises while Benson's stays about the same with a slight decrease in the senior year.

A final measure to note is an important one, which is the amount of students qualified under Title 10 of the No Child Left Behind Act. According to Martha Heard of Portland Public Schools Homeless Program, Title 10 is applied to students that fall under the category of unsheltered, sheltered but unstable household, in transitional housing, living in a motel, couch surfing, or doubling up by staying in the house of someone else due to economic hardship (Heard Interview 2015). Students that fall under title 10 are simply considered homeless, and are identified by referral by someone in the school. The students that may qualify are evaluated and over time are qualified as Title 10 to begin receiving help such as transportation, basic needs, and can receive other resources that can help provide housing, meal programs, and health services. Title 10 does not have allocated funding, but is required of all schools by the federal government, regardless of need. Benson has 11 students formally classified as Title 10 enrolled, which accounts for about 1% of the student population. Roosevelt has 65 students formally classified as Title 10, which accounts for 7% of the student population. Roosevelt has a higher percentage of Title 10 students, which are some of the most at-risk students due to their unstable living conditions; the high number of Title 10 students means that those students are higher-need. According to Bran-

don Weaver of the SUN program within Roosevelt, the number of students that are formally classified as title 10 do not properly reflect the true number, and some kids fly under the radar due to their appearance of being stable (Weaver Interview 2015). A few of those interviewed indicated that closer to 20% of students could be classified as Title 10, but without formal documentation this is based on what has been seen and heard (Weaver Interview 2015; Swain Interview 2015; Lehnhoff Interview 2015).

A final note is that Benson is a polytechnic high school, which means that in addition to traditional high school academic programs, “majors” exist to provide technical training to students throughout their high school careers. Benson offers programs such as electrical, mechanical, nursing, and graphic design to students that they focus on heavily within their last two years of high school. Another unique aspect of Benson is that because it is a magnet school students must apply to the school, which means that those who end up getting in typically start out “driven”. According to Shawn McMahon of Roosevelt, the majors programs within Benson are smaller than typical classes and have a stronger sense of community to them; the students stay within the same majors courses through their last two years of high school in tight groups (McMahon Interview 2015).

Theoretical Approach:

Why is dropping out such a big deal? *Finishing High School: Alternative Pathways and Dropout Recovery*, by John H. Tyler and Magnus Lofstrom, focuses on the costs of student dropout and summarizes that not only are students that dropout less likely to be successful, but they also have a negative affect on society as a whole and can account for a yearly loss of \$36 billion dollars per year (Tyler and Lofstrom 2009). Dropouts are also typically come from at-

risk populations and helps add to low social mobility, which refers to changes in socio-economic status based on social and economic achievements or changes (Tyler and Lofstrom 2009).

Tyler and Lofstrom identify five key characteristics schools should meet to counter the high dropout rate of at-risk students. First they lay out close mentoring and monitoring of students, much like the strong teacher-student relationships mentioned by England et al. and implemented by Coach Swain of the Roosevelt football team and Roosevelt's majors programs (Tyler and Lofstrom 2009; Swain Interview 2015; England et al. 2008; McMahon Interview 2015). The second suggestion is case-management of individual students, which differs from the previous suggestion through implementing stronger relationships and closer attention to student academics, which Swain offers to his football team through mandatory academic support (Tyler and Lofstrom 2009; Swain Interview 2015). Another suggestion is stronger student support, which is unlikely for students that come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or even homeless students (Tyler and Lofstrom 2009). Experimental or vocational approaches are another suggestion, which squarely describes Benson's polytechnic approach to learning that keep students involved through their focused majors (Tyler and Lofstrom 2009; McMahon Interview 2015). The final suggestion is rigorous student support, not only of the academic kind, but also basic social services, as exercised by Lehnhoff during her time at Roosevelt and Swain's sustained support (Tyler and Lofstrom 2009; Lehnhoff Interview 2015; Swain Interview 2015). Each of these suggestions applied to an at-risk population could help increase academic achievement and social competency to yield higher graduation rates.

Former social worker Nora Lehnhoff, laid off due to budget cuts by the district, interacted with the most at-risk students within the school. Lehnhoff points out that Roosevelt is a high school that has a significant portion of students in underserved groups, and therefore faces social

and economic issues that other schools do not typically face. Students that are in underserved groups typically do not have the same at-home resources as traditional students, which often has negative affects on their academic achievement due to the lack of support. When looking at what underserved students look at, it has been said over and over again that they look like normal students, but below the surface they are often hiding other issues that can affect their performance as a student (Lehnhoff Interview 2015).

Christian Swain, the football coach and career counselor at Roosevelt, points out that his students often have at-home issues that affect their performance as students and as football players. Swain goes out of his way to help out his students, but can only help as much as his students let him. Swain is a fierce supporter of his students and has a broad group of kids within the football program (Swain Interview 2015). The football program that requires students are passing a certain number of classes, but these program requirements still aren't high enough to ensure graduation, which Swain takes up on his own (Swain Interview 2015). With Swain's devotion to his students, it is not hard to believe that his football team has a graduation rate of 92%, which is 58% higher than the school-wide graduation rate of 53% (Swain Interview 2015).

Why is Swain so successful? He has built long-term committed relationships with his players that he has been building over the past 7 years that passes down through the cohort based on respect. Swain has built a sense of pride that keeps students involved in the program, and therefore can demand higher academic standards and a focus on graduation, which he claims is his number one goal as a coach. Swain provides an excellent example of a strong relationship between students and a strong mentor figure that creates incentives and accountability. Swain's high academic standards are not an easy task, and he is determined to get his students all he can in order to help them succeed. Swain is not pulling this off on his own, as 85 students collective-

ly involved in football is a massive task. Swain has 15 assistant coaches who create a stable family relationship between football and the academic demands of his students. Swain is also aware of the student needs outside of school and tries to keep his students' basic needs met in order to help them succeed, such as helping them find a coat for winter through whatever services he can find (Swain Interview 2015). Swain's team is an example of success in a school that is considered unsuccessful.

Michelle M. Englund, et al. (2008) find that non-parental student relationships have strong positive affects on student success, as measured by grades and graduation rates. According to this study, a strong positive relationship between teachers and students can yield a supportive, caring, and responsive student reaction that yields a higher likelihood that the student will aim to be successful (Englund, Egeland, and Collins 2008). Students with positive teacher relationships are seen to be more socially competent and therefore gain support from other adults to succeed academically (Englund et al. 2008). Swain and his team are an example of strong teacher-student relationships that yield a higher rate of student success. Swain creates a space for his students to succeed and by keeping his expectations high and holding his students accountable through the incentive of staying on the team and pleasing him. Using the football team model of strong positive relationships it is recommended that students and teachers form positive relationships through smaller classes and more social support that yields trust (Englund et al. 2008; Swain Interview 2015).

Further support for Swain's claims focus on programs outside of traditional academic requirements that create further incentives for students to stay within school (Harris 2009). Harris suggests that programs such as tutoring, homework help, job training, arts, and sports are excellent sources for student engagement (Harris 2009). Harris points out that students that partici-

pate in these programs are more likely to be prepared for life beyond school and can help communities in the long run by creating well-rounded citizens (Harris 2009). Harris' claims can be applied to both Roosevelt and Benson. Harris points out that through these programs the affects of poverty are reduced through student engagement, increased relevance to academic content, and supportive relationships between students and adults (Harris 2009). Benson's technical programs act as expanded learning opportunities according to Harris' definition, and act as an example of success. Swain's football team at Roosevelt is another example of success using Harris' definition. Harris' work is supported by both schools, and if more widely implemented may have more positive social outcomes.

An excellent study by Robert B. Pittman, *Social Factors, Enrollment in Vocational/Technical Courses, and High School Dropout Rates*, show the importance of small class sizes and focused classrooms. Pittman talks about how the content of technical programs, like at Benson, are not why the school is successful, but instead the reduced class sizes and personal attention from teachers within vocational programs (Pittman 1991). Pittman also points out that athletics have a similar affect to technical programs, as shown by Swain's football team (Pittman 1991). Pittman summarizes that vocational-like programs that have smaller class sizes and more individualized attention promotes strong relationships, promotes school involvement, and adds value to obtaining an education (Pittman 1991). Pittman's study is helpful in separating the success of technical programs and the student involvement aspect that technical programs support. Roosevelt does not offer technical programs, but small classes with individual focus could offer some of the benefits that technical programs promote. Within the majors programs at Benson, the classes are smaller and more focused, fitting into Pittman's model.

Benson's programs are in place to give students job skills that they can use throughout their lives, but according to special education teacher Shawn McMahon, most students do not pursue the fields they focus on in high school (McMahon Interview 2015). Students at Benson are not guaranteed to enter their major's workforce, but instead the majors serve as an additional incentive for students while they focus on their traditional school work (McMahon Interview 2015). Students enjoy majors programs and find a sense of community, because their classmates typically stay together over their time in high school (McMahon Interview 2015). However, majors are not the whole explanation for Benson's higher rates, not all students are academically successful and often are recommended to alternative programs. Steve Curley, another special education teacher at Benson, points out that the school has a high attrition rate, which shows a different story of success that includes interventions of students that are not succeeding in school (Curley Interview 2015; McMahon Interview 2015). Alternative programs are in place which raises the graduation rate of Benson, as the lowest performing students are filtered out before they can be counted in the final graduation rate.

In the article, *The Fourth R*, by Mary Beth Celio and Lois Leveen, early identification of at-risk students and dropout likelihood are key in preventing dropout. *The Fourth R* aims to create a better set of indicators for dropouts that do not simply rely on race, ethnicity, or family income, as many of those that fall under the typical factors do graduate (Celio and Leveen 2007). This article is based on Portland Public Schools, and therefore very applicable to this study. Celio and Leveen look at the main reasons why students drop out, such as credit deficiency (Celio and Leveen 2007). Lehnhoff touches on the issues with social promotion, which refers to students advancing in grade with social cohort instead of by credits, and argues that by allowing for social promotion students are promoted and end up not having enough credits by the time

they reach the finish line; accounting for a large number of graduates (Lehnhoff Interview 2015). Lehnhoff, Leveen, and Celio all agree that falling behind in course credits increases their likelihood of dropping out, especially while in freshman year, as it sets an expectation of a student's success (Lehnhoff Interview 2015; Celio and Leveen 2007).

If students fail at Benson, credit recovery is heavily encouraged, and if students do not make attempts at recovering those credits it is suggested that they pursue an alternative option before their senior year (McMahon Interview 2015). For students at Roosevelt there is also pressure to do credit recovery, but there are little alternative options and less strong teacher-student relationships that can alert the school of students that are falling behind (Weaver Interview 2015; Lehnhoff Interview 2015). Weaver runs SUN school, which is Students Uniting Neighborhoods, an after school program focused on various clubs and programs. At Roosevelt SUN is run as an after-school program with specific aims to help students academically and socially through club involvement (Weaver Interview 2015). Weaver's program is optional for students and without regular incentives and accountability it is obvious that students do not take as much advantage of the programs in place as they should.

Weaver's program fits into the parameters mentioned by Harris through expanded learning opportunities, but without incentives and long-term accountability through relationships his program does not have the significant positive effects expected of it. Swain's program offers an example of success differing through the incentive of playing football and the accountability he holds over his team through their academic success. Swain's football program, like SUN is optional, but also not available to the full student body as a form of rigid scheduling between practice and school.

Benson students have the “drive” of applying to school, which acts as incentive for getting into the school. Students are held accountable through their majors program and academic success, which could account for the higher success rates. Roosevelt students do not have the same “drive” because they are going to Roosevelt as automatic placement. Roosevelt cannot be successful in the same way Benson is due to the nature of a neighborhood school, but action toward a different model around similar principles could yield higher rates of achievement at Roosevelt. The models of Benson and Roosevelt have different stories of success, and both have areas in need of improvement.

Findings:

My strategy of using interviews to deeply understand school statistics made me aware that though they have similar reported demographics, the student populations vary. Roosevelt’s culture of low-income and higher rate of homeless students creates a needier population that often lacks basic resources. Roosevelt is not heavily focused on basic needs, which hurts the school’s graduation rates with many students falling through the cracks. Expecting student academic success is immoral when students do not have food at home, or even a home at all. Roosevelt must first address the issue of students’ basic needs, and not only those that go as far as to formally qualify. Stronger student-teacher relationships, as mentioned by the studies above, would foster more focus on student needs before focusing on student achievement. If students’ basic needs are met, they are more likely to succeed, and by pushing stronger teacher-student relationships a culture of accountability will increase as well as the incentive of keeping that relationship in tact. In summary, students need food, shelter, family, stability, and other basic needs, which affluent students take for granted.

Swain's football team is already an example of this, but stops short when it comes to those that cannot or do not want to try out for football. By creating a culture of meaningful relationships through mentorship and accountability, students' self esteem and motivation will rise. Benson already embodies this idea through their majors program, but also has the advantage of receiving students that have gone out of their way to apply. Benson and Roosevelt are far more different from what was originally expected, but still can offer one another ideas for success. Benson lacks the academic support, such as the SUN program, that the other neighborhood schools receive, like Roosevelt, and would probably benefit from having academic support programs in place to help lower the attrition rate. Roosevelt could use more social programs instead of academic programs, because the expectation of academic success is not realistic with social issues in play. The Portland Public School District must acknowledge the issues of low-income and homelessness at Roosevelt and push for political and societal changes to help prevent students coming in with acute disadvantages.

By creating further expanded learning opportunities (ELO), as introduced by Laura Harris, Benson and Roosevelt would be able to address the issues they face with student attrition and dropout respectively. One version of an ELO would be a homeroom that would require that teachers meet twice a week with a set of assigned students from a single grade; they would stay with the same student group throughout their four years at the school. By splitting up students and keeping them within one group throughout their time in high school, students will have a community headed by an adult that is held accountable for their students and is incentivized by strong relationships. Students would be accountable to their assigned teacher, and be incentivized by respect and a long-term relationship. The idea is that this type of ELO would include relationships, incentives, and accountability as a starting point for promoting student success.

Benson would benefit by keeping students accountable with incentives from the beginning and by enforcing student achievement that will eventually reduce the high attrition rate. Swain's team is an example of an incentives program with football as a payoff for doing homework, with Swain keeping track of the students and holding them accountable through strong long-term relationships. As pointed out by Englund and Pittman, strong student-teacher relationships are beneficial to students and foster accountable relationships that lead to student success.

This study should be used to understand the current standing of Roosevelt and Benson and apply this research to help create policy to support student success. Ideally programs will be set up to provide mentorship for students that create incentives and accountability through strong positive relationships. By providing ELOs for students a sense of community will be created and a one on one relationship would allow for more attention to individual students. In cases of great student need a positive relationship would create a sense of trust and will yield more reaching out. Teachers holding students accountable through the strong relationships will give a greater sense of belonging within the school. Students that are highly at-risk often fall under the radar, but with relationships and trust their teachers will be held accountable through their relationships. By creating this sense of accountability some of the negative affects of at-risk status will be reversed and more caring and incentives learning leading to student success.

In summary, Benson's model is flawed and would not be successful when applied to traditional high schools, like Roosevelt. Benson's model holds some aspects that are successful, such as focused major classes and stronger teacher-student relationships. Benson's attrition rate is troubling and shows that they are not as successful as they may seem. Roosevelt does not have the same alternative school options in place that Benson's attrition rate accounts for. Roosevelt would benefit from major-like programs for students on the basis of individual focus, but

would not benefit from Benson's model as a whole. Both schools have issues that must be addressed in order to be truly successful and counter the affects of student poverty and preparation.

Strengths and Limitations:

One major limitation of this study was not having over-time data that would allow us to know whether these programs I identified are making a difference. Access to student data and the lack of time to do a longitudinal study of students at these schools was another limitation. The changes in district programs and policies that have not been in place long enough to see the long-term effects on cohorts over time. It is unrealistic to expect immediate affects, and therefore it is difficult to create meaningful work over a short period of time using already-existing data. Student individuality is a limitation that creates disconnection between statistics and reality, and creates a margin of error that is impossible to close without in-depth relationships with each student.

I wanted to spend more time at each of the schools and speak with students about their experiences. As Roosevelt is going through so many changes there is a lack of resources for outside interviews or even school visits. My hope would be that in the future I could spend time in each of the schools to understand the culture and how the classroom interactions look. I can make assumptions about students' interactions, but without first-hand evidence, this is left up to statistical analysis. Another main limitation is the variation within the public school system on measuring graduation rates and charter school programs on the federal level. There has been a lot of transition within the administration and district that has lead to a murky state of useful resources, especially with allocated funding and where it is being channeled.

Future Research:

Future research would be creating a more in-depth analysis of these two schools and looking more closely at programs that provide mentorship within the schools, such as drama and sports within Benson. A long-term study would also provide more information about student attitudes and how policy changes affect students in the long-run. A survey of more schools would allow for this study to be more widely applicable, ideally within other cities or states. A national focus on schools with low graduation rates could use these ideas to create a program to promote high graduation rates and overall student success. Implementing the use of advisories or similar programs would allow for examples of success and could be done within schools where there are already lots of changes, like Roosevelt. A deeper focus into the causes of at-risk populations and societal issues would provide a deeper approach to student success based on factors that are outside the reach of the public school system. Students without basic services, or even those with the bare minimum, are unlikely to succeed and must have their basic needs met before they can be expected to perform academically at a rigorous level.

Appendix:

Table 1: Comparison of Graduation Rates Between Benson Polytechnic High School and Roosevelt High School - 2010-2014

Table 2.1: Student Racial Demographics Benson Polytechnic High School—2013-2014 School Year

Table 2.2: Student Racial Demographics Roosevelt High School—2013-2014 School Year

Table 3.1: Percentage of Underserved Students at Benson Polytechnic High School - 2014-2015 School Year

Table 3.2: Percentage of Underserved Students at Roosevelt High School - 2014-2015 School Year

Table 3.3: Percentage of Underserved Students in Portland Public School District High Schools - 2014-2015 School Year

Table 4: Number of Students Enrolled in Benson and Roosevelt High School Class of 2013 Student Cohort - Numbers Shown Over 4 Years of Single Student Cohort

Table 5: Percentage of Student Daily Attendance at Benson and Roosevelt High Schools - 2013-2014 School Year

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